

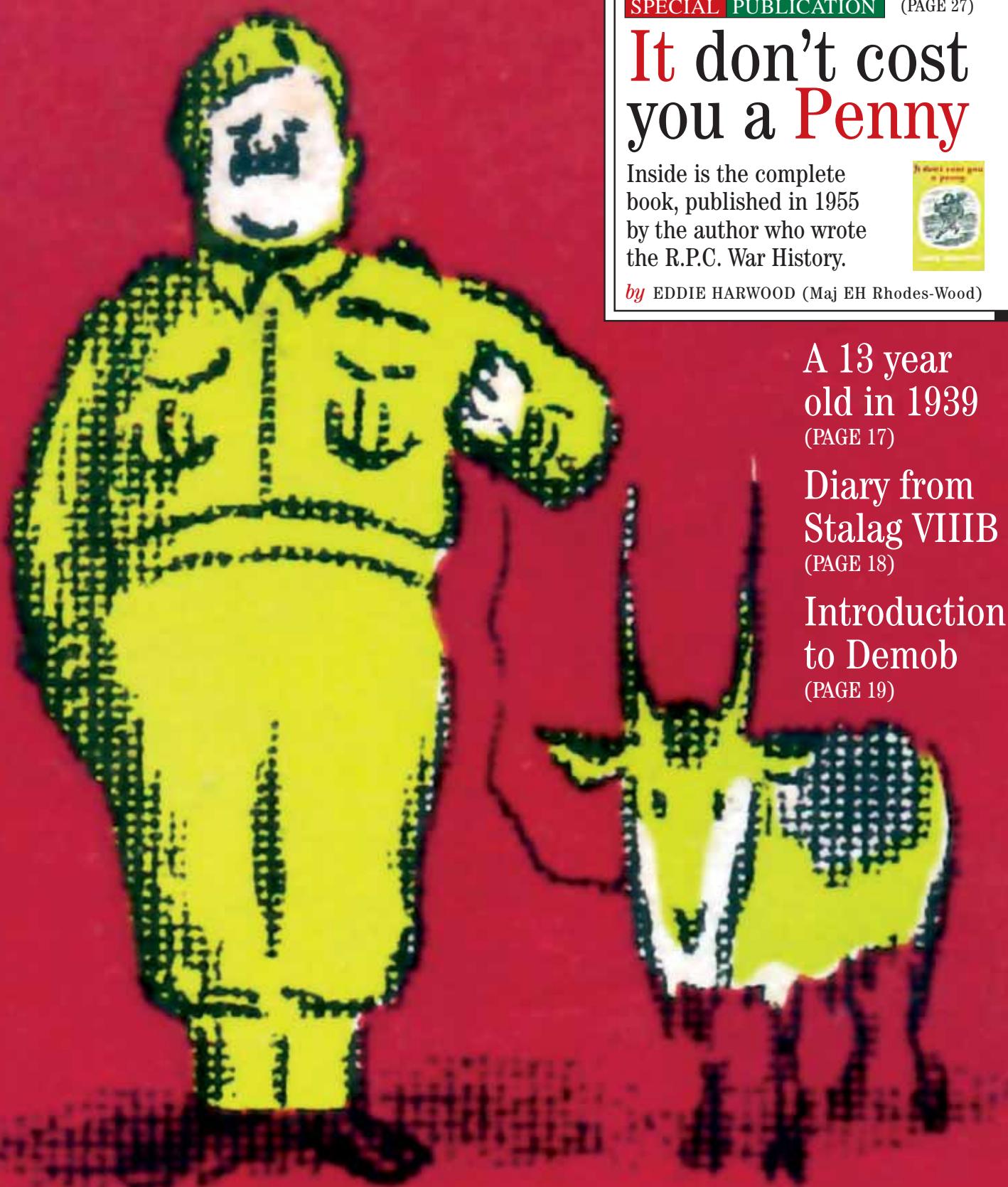


The Newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

# ThePioneer

OCTOBER 2007

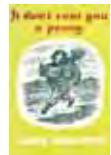
[www.royalpioneerkorps.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneerkorps.co.uk)



SPECIAL PUBLICATION (PAGE 27)

## It don't cost you a Penny

Inside is the complete book, published in 1955 by the author who wrote the R.P.C. War History.



by EDDIE HARWOOD (Maj EH Rhodes-Wood)

A 13 year old in 1939  
(PAGE 17)

Diary from Stalag VIIIB  
(PAGE 18)

Introduction to Demob  
(PAGE 19)



# The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

# SHOP

Please send cheques payable to  
RPC Association with your order...

Royal Pioneer Corps Association,  
c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC, St David's Barracks,  
Graven Hill, Bicester OX26 6HF



**New Corps Tie**  
A new tie is now available from HQ RPC Association, although keeping the same pattern the new one contains the Corps Badge on the blade of the tie.  
**£7.50**



**Blazer Buttons**  
gilt on brass, engraved,  
6 small and 6 large **£22**



**Cufflinks**  
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**Cufflinks**  
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**Seasons Greetings Cards**  
x10 **£2.50**



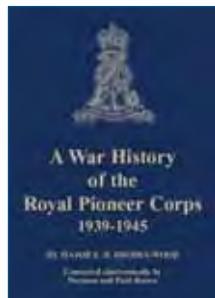
**Wall Shields**  
hand painted **£20**



**Wall Shields**  
85-93 badge **£20**

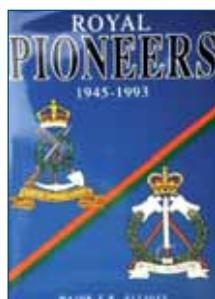


**Blazer Badge**  
silk & wire **£7**



**"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"**  
by Major E H Rhodes Wood

This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of **£11**



**"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"**  
by Major Bill Elliott

The Post-War History of the Corps was written by Major Bill Elliott, who generously donated his work and rights entirely for the Association's benefit. It was published by Images, Malvern in May 1993 and is on sale in the book shops at £24. **£10**



**Blazer Badge**  
silk & wire **£7**



**Photograph CD's**

The Association has a large number of old photographs taken over the years. They are now available on CD's (each CD contains approx 400 photographs).

- They are:
- Named, partially named vol. 1
  - Named, partially named vol. 2
  - Unknown
  - Reunion Weekends
  - WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club
- £2 per disc**



**Blazer Badge**  
silk & wire **£6**



**Bronze Statue**  
why not order & collect at  
Reunion Weekend to save  
postage  
**£60 + £5 postage**

# Editorial

The Reunion Weekend is now over (thank goodness!) for another year and once again I must thank 23 Pioneer Regiment for their work in making it another success. Although billed as a 'small event' because of the deployment of the Regiment it is pleasing to report that we had an attendance of over 200 'Old & Bold', many who had travelled great distances to attend. Examples are Frank Lyle who travelled from Dublin, Paddy Ennis from Northern Ireland and many from Scotland, Cumbria, the North East and as far south as Cornwall. Details of the weekend are shown on page 4.

With this Newsletter I am enclosing, as usual, Christmas Draw raffle tickets (unless we have been requested not to enclose them). It should be noted that we have increased the price of each ticket from 50p to £1 but have also increased the prizes accordingly. The first prize is now "One Thousand Pounds" so the winner receives "A Grand for Xmas". Please try to sell your tickets, however, if you feel you are unable to sell them please inform us and we will not send further tickets to you. The Derby Draw made a net of profit of just over £2,000 which, although less than last year because of 23's deployment, helps the Association to do its work. The results of the draw are shown on page 7.

You may notice that this Newsletter is larger than the previous 6 issues, the reason for this is that we were beginning to build a reserve of articles waiting publication, we hope you enjoy it. We always welcome articles from members, you must have something worth reporting from your time in the Corps.

We are still enlarging our photograph library and recently found many photographs of pass-out parades at Northampton, unfortunately only half of them state which Section and date of pass-out. Nevertheless they will shortly be issued for sale on CDs when copies have been made. If you have photographs why not lend them to us, we will return them within one week. If possible please write on the reverse the date and names.

Once again following the distribution of the April Newsletter some 45 envelopes were returned 'Gone Away'. Until we hear from these members with their new address they will be lost to the Association. Happier news is that we have made contact with many members who we have not been in contact with for many years. We have also this year recruited 22 new members, three of whom are World War II veterans who did not know of the existence of the Association.

It is hoped in the next few months to update the website ([www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk)), this will include a list of members both active and lapsed and may jog peoples' memories.

The back and inside back pages show Christmas cards over the years issued by various Companies, and two Labour Corps cards. With this in mind may I wish all members of the Association a very Happy Christmas and a Prosperous New Year. Let us make 2008 a year with record attendances at Association functions especially the Reunion.

Finally, once again may I ask you to do your utmost in selling Christmas Draw tickets.

*Norman Brown*



## Front Cover

'It don't cost you a penny' book by Eddie Harwood (Maj E H Rhodes-Wood), with illustrations by Sillince (of Punch) depicting the brilliantly funny Eddie. Published 1955.

# THE ROYAL PIONEER CORPS ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER

## CONTENTS | OCTOBER 2007

- |       |   |
|-------|---|
| 2     | The Royal Pioneer Corps Association Shop  |
| 3     | Editorial / Contents                      |
| 4-7   | Past and Future Events / News Articles    |
| 8-9   | Letters to the Editor                     |
| 10-11 | Book Reviews                              |
| 12-13 | No Labour No Battle                       |
| 14-15 | Quick Visit to Monkton Farleigh           |
| 16    | The Title "Royal"                         |
| 17    | A 13 Year Old in 1939                     |
| 18    | Diary 1945 from Stalag VIIIB              |
| 19    | Introduction to Demob                     |
| 20-21 | Extracts from "The Record" 1917 / 1918    |
| 22-23 | Photos from Passout Parades               |
| 24-25 | Photo Gallery                             |
| 26    | Distribution of Association Newsletter    |
| 27-43 | Complete Book "It don't cost you a Penny" |
| 44-45 | Minutes from 2007 AGM                     |
| 46    | Lost Trails / Last Post / Obituary        |
| 47    | Pioneer Corps Christmas Cards             |
| 48    | Labour Corps Christmas Card 1917          |



# Past Events



## ► FOUNDERS DAY

### Royal Hospital Chelsea 7 June 2007

Mr & Mrs I Dewsnap and Mr & Mrs N Brown attended Founders Day at the Royal Hospital Chelsea on 7 June 2007. To watch these Old Timers march (in step!) was an honour, the oldest on parade was a sprightly 92.



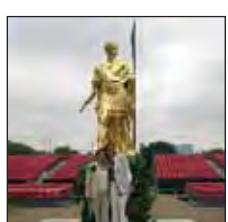
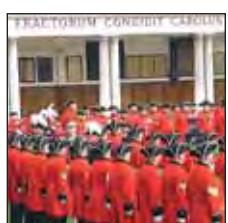
There are currently 303 In-Pensioners in the Royal Hospital. The oldest In-Pensioner is 102 and the youngest 56. The average age is 82 years and 4 months. 206 In Pensioners fought in the Second World War. They also include survivors of the many campaigns that took place between the World Wars and after the Second World War.

It was pleasing to see our sole Pioneer In-Pensioner, Mr M Hull, on Parade. It must be admitted that he marched well even the RSM commented afterwards that "He was the only one in step!"



The following is a list of awards for gallantry, outstanding and unusual service held by In-Pensioners:

- 5 Members of The Order of The British Empire
- 1 Distinguished Conduct Medal
- 5 Military Medals
- 7 British Empire Medals
- 4 Mention in Despatches
- 1 Naval General Service Medal 1915-1962
- 7 Indian General Service Medals 1908-1935
- 3 Indian General Service Medals 1936-1939
- 9 General Service Medals Palestine 1936-1939
- 142 1939-1945 Stars
- 2 Atlantic Stars
- 10 Africa Stars 1st Army
- 20 African Stars 8th Army
- 28 Africa Stars
- 10 Pacific Stars
- 22 Burma Stars
- 19 Italy Stars
- 68 France and Germany Stars
- 148 Defence Medals
- 206 1939-1945 War Medals
- 22 Korean Medals
- 28 United Nation Korean Medals
- 40 General Service Medals Palestine 1945-1948
- 1 General Service Medal South East Asia 1945-1946
- 1 General Service Medal Bomb and Mine Clearance
- 50 General Service Medals Malaya
- 7 General Service Medals Near East
- 9 General Service Medals Arabian Peninsula
- 3 General Service Medals Brunei
- 9 General Service Medals Borneo
- 6 General Service Medals Radfan
- 19 General Service Medals South Arabia
- 10 General Service Medals Malay Peninsula
- 20 General Service Medals Northern Ireland
- 14 African General Service Medals (Kenya)
- 1 General Service Medal Rhodesia
- 14 United Nations Medals Cyprus
- 1 South Atlantic Medal
- 1 Polar Medal
- 3 Imperial Service Medals
- 1 King George V Jubilee Medal
- 2 King George VI Coronation Medals



- 11 Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medals
- 4 Queen Elizabeth II Silver Jubilee Medals
- 4 Meritorious Service Medals
- 105 Long Service and Good Conduct Medals (Army)
- 1 Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (Royal Austrian Air Force)
- 3 Long Service and Good Conduct Medals (Police)
- 1 Long Service and Good Conduct Medal (Rhodesia Police)
- 25 Territorial Army Efficiency Medals
- 2 Service Medals Order of St John
- 1 Voluntary Services Medal
- 2 Croix de Guerre
- 1 Sierra Leone Independence Medal
- 2 Federation of Malaya Medals
- 2 Oman Medals
- 2 AS SAMOOND (Oman) Medals
- 1 Nigerian Independence Medal
- 1 Polish Cross of Monte Cassino
- 1 Order of Merit of Tamandare (Brazil)
- 1 Malta George Cross 50th Anniversary Commemorative Medal
- 1 Norwegian Kreige Medallion
- 1 Russian Convoy
- 1 Zimbabwe Independence Medal
- 1 Crois de Recce (Belgium)
- 1 Belgium Medal
- 1 Distinguished Service Medal (Oman)

## REUNION WEEKEND

### 6/8 July 2007

There is an old saying that the sun shines on the righteous. Members of the RPC Association must therefore be righteous as the Reunion Weekend held on 6 to 8 July 2007 was the only fine weather for about two months. The weather brightened up on the Friday morning and kept dry and warm for the whole weekend, thank goodness as most of the functions were held on the lawns of the WOs & Sgts Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC at Bicester.



The weekend started with the normal 'Bring a Boss' in the newly refurbished Corporals Club and then a reception in the Sergeants Mess. A church service was held at the Corps Memorial on Saturday morning with the able-bodied from the 'Old & Bold' being marched on by ex Sgt Ian Dewsnap. However, we must send him on a refresher Drill Course as he marched the squad off in 'Open Order'! Mr George Pringle laid a wreath on behalf of the Old Comrades, George is now a sprightly 89 year old and served in 175 Company in World War 2 landing in North Africa, Italy and Normandy. He attended this year with three other World War 2 veterans the youngest being 86 year old and the oldest 90. We hope to see them all again next year. All four had travelled from Liverpool and on arrival on the Friday afternoon the two youngest (86 and 87) had to have an afternoon nap whilst the two eldest (89 and 90) stated that "these youngsters just cannot hack it!"

Following the service a group photograph was taken, this was followed by the Annual General Meeting of the Association where members were informed that full convergence had been completed in November 2006 and all assets transferred to The RLC Association Trust in December 2006. The minutes of this meeting are shown on pages 44 and 45. In the afternoon members were free to shop in Bicester Village or attend the Real Ale Festival in nearby Merton. The night time >



entertainment consisted of a live group and disco and a Barbeque, where once again the unit Chefs' proved their worth.

It had been decided this year to produce T Shirts showing Pioneer Reunion Weekend, these proved very popular and were all sold on the Friday evening, thank you for your support.

Because of the operational deployment of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC to both Iraq and Afghanistan this reunion was billed as a low-key affair. It was surprising therefore when well over 200 attended during the weekend. Some members travelled great distances to attend for example Frank Lyle travelled from Dublin and Paddy Ennis from Northern Ireland, others came from Scotland, the North East, Cumbria and as far south as Cornwall. We also had some members who were attending their first Reunion and others who had not attended for some years.

Many letters have already been received from members stating how enjoyable the weekend was and looking forward to the next one – the date of which is 5/6 July 2008.

#### **REFUGEES FROM NAZISM WHO SERVED IN THE BRITISH FORCES DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR 4 October 2007**

On 4 October 2007 Lt Col J Starling and Mr & Mrs N Brown attended a Reunion of Refugees who served with the British Forces during the Second World War. This Reunion was held at the Imperial War Museum.

These were people who had fled their homes to escape Nazi persecution and were given a safe haven in war-time Britain. To repay their debt of thanks, 4,000 mostly Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, joined the British forces to fight Hitler. Hundreds went on to see front-line action and many were dropped into enemy territory. About 100 heroes met at the War Museum to once again swap stories of derring-do and renew old friend-ships. These were not merely evacuees seeking safe haven in England, but a generation of Germans and Austrians determined to do their bit for the war. Some saw frontline service as commandos, marines or tank crew. Others fought in the D Day landings, or played vital roles in communications and code-breaking, using their native German in aid of the Allied cause. One of them, Geoffrey Perry, now 85 and born Horst Pinschewer, has the distinction of being the man who shot and arrested "Lord Haw Haw", the traitorous propagandist William Joyce whilst serving in the Pioneer Corps.

One, German-born pensioner, Willy Field born William Hirschfeld and now 87, told how he was arrested by the SS after Kristallnacht in November 1938 when the Nazis unleashed terror on German Jews. He was taken to Dachau death camp, near Munich, but obtained papers which granted him passage to England. Amid high security, he was interned for a year but was released and joined the Pioneer Corps. He later transferred to the Royal Armoured Corps, rising to the rank of tank commander with the 8th Hussars. His Squadron landed in France on D+3 where he was nearly killed when his tank was hit by a German missile, killing his five crew. He survived with a leg injury and took his next tank into Berlin, where he joined the



famous Victory Parade watched by Winston Churchill.

Another, Eric Saunders born Ignaz Schwarz and now 88, revealed how he watched Hitler march into his native Vienna before fleeing across Europe and arrived in England in 1938. He joined the Pioneer Corps and later volunteered for 'hazardous duty'. He was trained for the Special Operations Executive to be dropped behind enemy lines, one of the 30 'refugee' SOE men. At the end of the war, he returned to Vienna to serve as a translator with an Army unit reconstructing Austria.

Harry Rossney, now 87 and born Helmut Rosettenstein still speaks with a heavy German accent which nearly cost him his life in 1940. He was despatched one evening to watch the North Devon coast for an enemy invasion. Unfortunately, a squad of soldiers were also patrolling the beach. 'Halt! Who goes there?' was the cry that rang out in the dark. Harry identified himself - and immediately heard a rifle being cocked in front of him. 'He heard my accent and thought he'd found the enemy,' Mr Rossney said. 'I thought that was it - this was how my war was going to end'. But a Sergeant's voice shouted 'Hold your fire!', which allowed me to explain who I was

During the Reunion there was a book launch of the book "*The King's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens*" by Helen Fry (ISBN 978-0-7509-4700-8), this should not be confused with the book "*The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens*" by Peter Leighton-Langer (ISBN 978-0-85303-693-7) which was published in 2006.

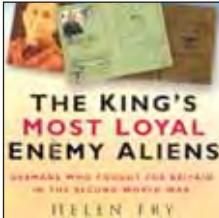
Also during the Reunion there was a musical interlude and one of the players, Franz Lustig, had also served in the Pioneer Corps. The following is an article which he wrote:

#### **PLAYING THE CELLO AS A PIONEER**

I joined the Pioneer Corps at No 3 Training Centre in Ilfracombe in October 1940 direct from internment on the Isle of Man. As I had heart of the Orchestra in Ilfracombe before I left the internment Camp, I took my cello with me (it had proved invaluable at the Camp, to keep me 'busy', and to entertain others). Immediately on arrival I was spotted and instructed to find the orchestra's conductor, Cpl Strietzel, who after a perfunctory 'audition' applied for my transfer to the "Entertainment Section" of HQ Company after my 3 weeks' initial training. This meant that I was going to stay in Ilfracombe, and that my duties would consist mainly of playing the cello. However, the Entertainment Section also contained singers, actors, producers, and the clown "Coco" (Cpl Polakov). The wife of one Pioneer was a professional dancer who had been a member of the famous Ballet Joos in Germany (Hanne Musch), and she regularly took part in our shows, and also acted in several plays.

Occasionally members of the orchestra would be given small parts in plays and join the professional actors on stage. I was one of those called upon several times, and my most demanding part was that of the "Native" Jim Fish in the play "White Cargo", for which I had to black up completely (apart from the part covered by a loincloth) and sing a "Native song" of >

# Past Events *continued*



my own imagination!

► Apart from concerts given by the orchestra (which usually consisted of a mixture of classical and "popular" pieces) and in which the solo singers Jess (tenor) and Karg-Bebenburg (baritone) took part, and the plays mentioned above (mainly farces), we also put on a variety shows and pantomimes. In all of these "Coco" took a prominent part, and usually members of his family were also roped in. For female parts in the plays and shows members of the ATS also stationed in Ilfracombe as well as civilian volunteers – among them two daughters of the Commanding Officer Lt Col Coles – volunteered to take part. The proceeds of our public concerts, plays and shows were given to local charities – about £1,200 in total, a substantial sum at that time.



In January 1942 No 3 Training Centre was dissolved, and the Entertainment Section moved to Bulford on Salisbury Plain, where for rations and administrative purposes we were attached to 229 Company, but otherwise remained completely independent under our own officer, Lt White. We were now called the "Southern Command Pioneer Corps Orchestra", and for a time even had to wear a costume (black trousers, a white blouse with a high collar, and a red sash). We did not like this a bit and felt rather like "performing monkeys", and to our relief it did not last long. For special occasions we were absorbed into the

"Southern Command Symphony Orchestra", which consisted mainly of army bandsmen and professional musicians. With this body (which was conducted by Eric Fenby, the amansuensis of the blind composer Frederick Delius) we gave several broadcast concerts, and on one occasion a section of the orchestra (including me) played in the National Gallery in London. We also made several recordings, which were used to entertain troops overseas. From both bases – in Ilfracombe as well as in Bulford – we made tours of other garrisons to entertain service personnel there, as well as civilians. It is amusing to see from my collected programmes how many different names our orchestra was given in other places: Alien Pioneer Corps Orchestra, Pioneer Continental Orchestra, Southern Command Continental Orchestra, Southern Command (Pioneer Corps) Theatre Orchestra – apart from its "official" names of No 3 Pioneer Corps Training Centre Orchestra and Southern Command Pioneer Corps Orchestra.



I had never been very happy in the orchestra as I did not consider that playing the cello was the best way of helping to win the war. So I was very glad when at my request I was transferred to the Intelligence Corps in May 1943, and my new Commanding officer assured me in a "welcoming interview" that what I was going to do now would be far more valuable for the successful prosecution of the war than firing a rifle or driving a tank. I was demobbed as an RSM (WO1) in September 1946.



► **RPC NOSTALGIA GROUP MEETING 6/7 July 2007**  
The first meeting of the RPC Nostalgia Group started on Friday 6 July 2007 when



## ► **RPC NOSTALGIA GROUP MEETING 6/7 July 2007**

The first meeting of the RPC Nostalgia Group started on Friday 6 July 2007 when



everyone started arriving in high spirits and looking forward to a great weekend especially the Saturday evening dinner. Unfortunately I could not attend until the Saturday because of work commitments. On arrival my wife and I were greeted in true Pioneer fashion with "What would like to drink?". It was nice to see a lot of faces that I knew and also a few I did not.



My wife Chris had been very busy making 3D frames of the Pioneer cap badges, a lot of hard work on her behalf but never the less everyone thought that they were excellent. I opened the night's proceedings with a short welcoming speech and thanked everyone for turning up and then made presentations of a frame to Neil Taylor, Alan Sootcliffe, John Hatfield and Liz Sootcliffe whose idea it was and who arranged the venue, The Claridion Hotel, Redcar. The Hotel went out of their way to make us welcome.



One member of the Group had arranged the printing of T Shirts with the Nostalgia logo which went down very well as everyone bought one. The Group presented one to my wife for producing the frames. I had arranged for a plaque to be painted and this now takes pride of place in the centre of the bar in the Claridion Hotel. The landlord, Dave, was very impressed with the conduct of the party and asked if we had considered making it an annual event. We replied that this was our intention but at a different date because of the clash with the Pioneer Reunion Weekend.



When the night drew to a close everyone, including wife's/girlfriends agreed that it had been a super weekend. *Tony Tuplin*

## Future Events



### ► **61st PAST & PRESENT OFFICERS DINNER Officers Mess, 23 Pioneer Regt, Bicester Friday 12 October 2007**

Held in the Officers Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester on Friday 12 October 2007. Bookings can be made at any time to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF. The cost will be £20 per head.



### ► **WOs' & SNCOs' PIONEER REUNION CLUB LADIES DINNER NIGHT Sergeants Mess, 23 Pioneer Regt, Bicester Sat 13 Oct 2007**

Once again to be held in the WO's and Sergeants Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment on Saturday 13 October 2007.



### ► **FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE, WESTMINSTER ABBEY Thursday 8 November 2007**

The Field of Remembrance will open on Thursday 8 November at 1100 hours, when a short service will be given. Members attending the planting of crosses at the Corps Plot (No 134) are asked to arrive by 1030 hours. It would be prudent to bring identification as entrance to the Field will involve security checks.

All those attending must be prepared to stay until the reviewing party has departed the Field. The use of large 'intrusive' camera equipment is not allowed. The field will be open from 9 to 5.30 hours until Saturday 10 November 2007. Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held, see details below.



#### ► LONDON LUNCH

**Thursday 8 November 2007**

It is intended to make this an annual event following the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey. Bookings can be made to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Barracks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF. The cost will be £15 per head.



#### ► CENOTAPH PARADE

**Sunday 11 November 2007**

Last year 19 members marched at the Cenotaph, this year we have been allocated 30 tickets; these can be obtained on application to RPC Association on a first come first served basis. Tickets will be distributed in October 2007.

Following the Parade it has become the custom for all marchers to have a meal and a drink in the Civil Service Club, Old Scotland Yard (about 250 yards from Whitehall).



#### ► 39/93 CLUB

##### **Club Dinner, Red Lion Hotel, Fareham**

The Club hold two dinners annually in March and October at The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham where discounted rates of accommodation have been arranged. If you would like details of these events please contact the Club Secretary, Mr Les Rowley on 01628 890913.



#### ► NORTHAMPTON BRANCH CHRISTMAS PARTY

At the time of going to press this event is still being organised, if you live in the Northampton area a Branch Newsletter will be distributed. If you live outside the area and wish to attend please request information from either email: [pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk) or telephone 01604 403338.

## News Articles



#### ► VETERANS BADGE

Veterans who served in the armed forces during and following World War Two are now entitled to receive a Veterans Badge, it is available to all those who served prior to 31 Dec 94. Since the Armed Forces Veterans Badge was launched in September 2004, over 328,000 have been awarded.

To apply for the badge contact the Veterans Agency on 0800 169 2277 or visit [www.veteransagency.mod.uk](http://www.veteransagency.mod.uk)



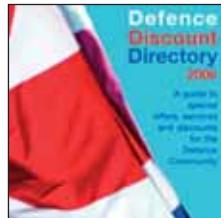
#### ► HUNDREDS OF DISCOUNTS FOR VETERANS!

Did you know that the offers listed in the Defence Discount Directory are available to veterans as well as serving military personnel?

There are currently 350 great offers available to you as a veteran. Most of these are listed in the Defence Discounts Directory which came out in January this year. However to view the full range of discounts currently available you need to register on the online version of the directory at [www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk](http://www.forcesdiscounts-mod.co.uk).



This website is the only official online version of the official directory and it's important to remember that if the web address doesn't say MOD then it's not the real thing. So don't waste any more time paying full price for things, log onto their



website and start saving today!

If you didn't know what you were entitled to then it's quite possible that your veteran colleagues are equally unaware of their rights. Can you help us to get the message out to them? Finally, don't forget to sign up to their newsletter when you register on their website.

#### ► DERBY DRAW 2007

##### **The Results**

May I take the opportunity to thank you for participating in the derby draw and hope that you participate in the Christmas Draw. Tickets are attached with this newsletter.

1st	£500	D Graves, Leamington Spa
2nd	£250	Capt M East, ATR Pirbright
3rd	£125	M Mayers, Southport
4th	£75	Mr L J Harvey, Rayleigh
5th	£50	K Adeniran Acton Vale



#### ► THE WARM FRONT TEAM

##### **The Government Funded Scheme**

Warm Front is a government-funded scheme which provides grants to make your home warmer, healthier and more energy-efficient. The following energy efficient improvements of up to the value of £2,700 can be provided:

- Insulation improvements
- Loft insulation
- Draughtproofing
- Hot-water-tank insulation
- Heating improvements
- Gas, electric or oil central heating
- Repairs to your existing heating system
- Converting a solid-fuel open fire to a glass-fronted fire



Further details can be obtained from:

Telephone 0800 316 6011 or [marketing@eaga.co.uk](mailto:marketing@eaga.co.uk) or by post from: Emma Finlay, Marketing Department, Eaga Partnership Ltd (MK754) FREEPOST NAT 13708, Eaga House, Archbold Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 1ZL



#### ► SPOT THE TERENCE CUNEO MOUSE !

Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day. By 1st Aug 1944 there were over 35,500 pioneers in Normandy. D-Day + 79 there were 231 Coys and over 68,000 men.



In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse (sometimes lifelike, sometimes cartoon-like) which was his trademark and somewhere in this newsletter we have hid a Cuneo mouse! They can be difficult to detect, and many people enjoy scouring his paintings to find one.

Did you spot the Mouse in the April 2007 Newsletter or are you still looking? It was, of course, on Page 11, photograph number 26 on the top of the wall.



The first correct entry was from Mr P Ennis, he was presented with a pocket watch engraved with the Royal Pioneer Corps Cap Badge by Major PJ Fleming following the Association AGM.

Can you spot the mouse in this issue? (and the one on this page does not count!). The first person that emails me with the location of the mouse will win a prize !

# Letters to the editor...



Dear Norman,



May I take the opportunity to thank you and your staff for the brilliant composition of the recent copy of our Newsletter.

The lay-out and information was superb, I am sure most of the Association members look forward as I do to receiving the magazine.

The news of the operational deployments of the 23rd Regiment to the War Zones was sad but I wish them a safe and speedy return. I know how their families must be worrying as I have a nephew who is going shortly on his 3rd Telic mission.

The letter page is very interesting and I will be writing to Derek (Taffy) Luker as we keep in touch as he made us 3 veteran musketeers very welcome at all reunions.

I'm hoping to see you on the 6th July.

Yours in comradeship  
George Pringle

PS My eyes are dim I cannot see the Cuneo mouse in the mag but I did find him on the painting of Sword Beach, at the bottom and almost centre with his mine detector. I thought it was someone playing golf.

Dear Norman,



Thank you so much for the latest edition of the Newsletter (it arrived here in Bulgaria just shortly after I received your e-mail - this must be a Postal record - our worst experience was a letter that took 7 weeks to arrive!)

I rather like the new format that you are using as it makes such efficient use of space available and with so many photos, imparts such a lot of information - super job!

I was amused to see photos of Ron Freeman and Terry Burden looking so young!

I often wonder what has happened to so many of my former friends and comrades - Roger Kirby, Sammy Bowler, Paddy Doyle, Tony Bloor, Benny Brown, Paddy Guy, Kevin Shields and many others too numerous to mention - are you perhaps planning to publish on your website a sort of 'Alumni' giving basic contact details?

Please continue this very important work and I can only congratulate you on your success.

Best wishes from the Balkans, please give my best regards to all.

John Allen

Hi Norman!



I am in my "Thinking Mode" at the moment, just before going off to work!

Can you imagine just how difficult it is to teach 'proper' English to over 300 children, in a private school, from amongst the richest families in Bulgaria? - I am only joking! - but it is interesting to note, that for a relatively 'poor' country, that has only recently joined the European Union, there are the 'Have's' and 'Have Not's' - over here there are so many very expensive cars on the 'streets', and it is impossible to find a 'parking space' in the city centre, and the relatively few 'parking lots' are controlled by organised crime!

There are no 'School Uniforms' over here, so each of my students are wearing 'Versace', 'Armani', 'Cardin', 'Dior' - what can I say?

Again, I was thinking about the Corps - I pose you a puzzle - 'Who is, or was the most "decorated" soldier (in the generic sense of the term) - Firstly in our Corps and secondly in the larger family of the RLC?

OK - I will post my own 'record' for somebody to "knock down" - 7 medals - MBE. GSM. NATO (Former Yugoslavia, Macedonia, and Kosovo), ACSM and Jubilee Medal. It may make an interesting exchange of correspondence!

By the way, has anybody yet found the Cuneo style mouse (or ears) that you cleverly inserted to the right of the editorial banner in your latest issue?

OK - all for now

Best Wishes, John Allen

*(Sorry you were wrong about the mouse it was in photo 13 on the wall, the first correct entry was from Mr P Ennis for which he received a pocket-watch with the Pioneer badge engraved on the front. Can anyone beat John's 7 medals?)*

Hey Norman,



Please find enclosed ticket stubs and money for Derby Draw - some things never change... leave the Army and someone is still giving me tickets to flog!

Also, my new contact address is at the top of the page along with 'phone number for your records. Will be giving the reunion a miss this year as the troops are away but making plans for 2008!

Take care, Ross  
From Ross Harrison, Illinois, USA

Dear Norman,



Thank you for the excellent April Newsletter, I would also like to thank you for the back issues 2004-2006 and the 1945-1948 Magazines. I've read them so many times over and over again.

When my time came to depart from the RPC in 1948 I only wished that I had been told of the RPCA, looking back I know so much has been missed.

Had it not been for my wife and I making a visit to the War Memorial at Alnewas and received the Veterans' Badge and later the War Medal, with the help of the British Legion who gave me your telephone number, I would still not have known about the Association. But now I look forward to many more Newsletters. I must now congratulate you and all and everyone that helps in organising the events and Newsletters.

Best wishes,  
James Stout (ex Cpl)

Dear Sir,



I regret to have to inform you that my husband Maj (Retd) Larry Smith late the RPC died on 18 Apr 2007 at the age of 91 years.

Although it is a long time since he retired from the Corps, he still took a keen interest in its affairs and looked forward to receiving the Newsletter.

Yours faithfully,  
Gerda Smith, Dusseldorf

Hi Norman



What a surprise, at last I've won something...all those years investing in the wrong tickets have finally paid off. The bad news is that I've lost my car keys with house keys attached...guess what the money will be used for?

I'm still running my own company which has seen a huge increase in work i.e. working in Turkey, Poland and Lithuania with the European Commission but I hope to settle down to more UK work next year.

Best wishes and of course thanks for all the info you send.

Dave Graves

Good Morning Norman,



Thank you for a great reunion party last weekend. This year I was in two minds whether to come or not. I didn't think this years event could top last year's, but I'm glad I did. I really enjoyed myself.

The food, drink and the entertainment was fantastic, also I met up with a few old comrades I didn't meet last year and also made some new ones. I thought those tops you made up was a very good idea, I can't believe you only had 50 of them.

As everywhere I looked I saw people wearing them even down town.

Keep up the good work Norman.  
Regards, Gary McQueen

Dear Norman,



Please receive herewith a cheque in respect of my Derby Draw tickets, I put them in a draw of my desk intending to deal with them directly. My health took quite a plunge for the last few months and the tickets went completely from my mind, so I'm the loser of the chance to win a prize.

Pleased to say that I've made some recovery and able to make amends with a little extra included.

Hope to behave better when the Xmas Draw comes on stream.

Lilian and I are counting the days to our Golden Wedding on October 18th.

I'm not sure as to whether I thanked you for the entry in the last Newsletter regarding "My Story" and photos and your kind comments.

Do so like hearing from you and being able to keep a hold on the past, my involvement and my memories of friends long past now and the fact that my Corps has not forgotten us and still reaches out to us.

Wish I were more able to get out more and visit. However, sincere good wishes to you and all at the Corps.

Yours sincerely,  
Arthur C Cole 13093381  
(and that was not my Co-op number)

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Dear Sir,



I am the daughter of Mr Thomas Harkness. Thank you for mentioning my dad in the April Newsletter in the Last Post.

My mum, brother and I would be grateful if you could help us to find some photos of when my dad did his national service basic training at Wrexham, especially when they must have had the passing out photograph.

It would be lovely to have a copy to remember him. He was: Private Thomas Harkness (22739009) Service 6 Nov 52 - 21 Nov 54, he served in Egypt from 9 Jul 53 - 26 Oct 54.

Yours sincerely,  
MA Harkness

*(Ed note: if you are in possession of any photographs of Thomas please forward them to the RPC Association)*

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Hi Norman,



Thanks for sending the newsletters, I received them last week but I've been too busy to reply as I was in Cumbria visiting one of my old mates I found through the website.

I would like to thank you for a brilliant website, I hope to get in contact with a few more old buddies. I recognised Taff Wall in one of the Newsletters he's not changed a bit in 23 years bar his grey hair.

John McCusker

Dear Mr Brown,



Many thanks for sending me a copy of the April 2007 Newsletter and Derby Draw tickets. I return herewith the draw counterfoils together with my cheque to cover the tickets and a small donation to general funds to help with postage etc.

I found the Newsletter most interesting and noticed that you had "put me into print".

If I had known that would happen I would not have babbled on about an attack of influenza when this planet of ours is loaded with suffering and hardship.

However, I was intrigued to read on page 7 a reference to the late artist Terence Cuneo. I was unaware of his "D Day painting or the "Mouse" trademark - something he probably adopted later in life, but I certainly know of his fine work in vivid colour.

More often than not his wash colour paintings formed the front cover of the old "Wide World" monthly magazine which regrettably ceased publication many years ago.

Soon after I first went out to work in 1935 I was employed in the accounts department of the publishers of "Wide World" and many other magazines including "Strand".

Several times I have seen a Cuneo original in the editors office ready to go across Covent Garden to the print and engraving department.

Happy Days!!

Yours sincerely,  
George Greaves (Ex 123 Coy then 231)

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From the forum section of the website following the Reunion Weekend:

I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank Norman for yet another great reunion weekend, the weather was ordered well in advance and didn't disappoint.

Even though the Regiment is away on Ops the planning and execution of the weekend was seamless (or so it seemed), the Cpl's mess ran out of beer (again!), but the Sgt's mess took over with ample supplies. nothing left in my wallet to prove that!

It was great to hear that the lads are holding their own in Afghanistan and Iraq and in some cases out performing the infantry in true Pioneer spirit.

Best wishes for a safe return lads (and lasses).

Great to see some new faces this year; Stan the man Stanley, John Johnson, Geordie Ray Lumley, Snapper Morewood, Geordie Gwyn Davis, Jack Regan to name a few; all promised to be there next year!

Cheers Norman,  
better start planning the next one!!

Dear Norman,



I hope that you are well and enjoying this somewhat mixed summer.

Once again thank you and the RPCA Newsletter for alerting me to the possibility of obtaining an invitation to one of the Queen's Garden Parties.

After two applications my wife and I were invited on the 17th July, it was one of those rare occasions when the event actually lived up to and exceeded expectation. We stayed for a couple of nights in the Goring Hotel and on the day we just had to walk across the road at the allotted time.

During the afternoon I was approached by someone who asked me which Regiment my tie represented, on being told he said 'Oh, you're a chunky.' (I had not been called that for fifty years) anyway he said just stand here and not to move away. Within a few minutes he returned and we were introduced to HRH The Duke of Gloucester who asked about my service with the Corps.

I have, as you requested, enclosed a photograph of the day. I have also enclosed a couple of shots which you may find interesting (see centre pages), they were taken during 1957 and show part of 260 Coy's shooting team, where I have long since forgotten although I do remember the names. Spotting for me on the Bren was Sgt Hiscutt and if you look closely you will see that he wears the insignia of the SAS, I wonder if he was unique in this as far as the Corps was concerned.

Yours sincerely,  
Michael V Bradley (23370827)

**write to us at:**

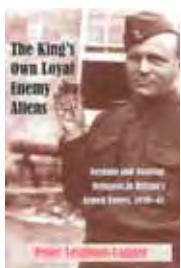
The Royal Pioneer Corps Association  
c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC  
St David's Barracks  
Graven Hill  
Bicester OX26 6HF



**or email us at:**

pioneers@rpca.fsnet.co.uk





# The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens

*The following is an extract from a speech made by the author Peter Leighton-Langer, at a reception at the Austrian Embassy, London on 28 Nov 06. Lt Col J Starling and Mrs N Brown also attended.*

by Peter Leighton-Langer  
Published by Valentine Mitchell  
ISBN 0 85303 693 4

**B**roadly speaking - the general facts in this book are not new. Norman Brentwich presented "I Understand The Risks" in 1950. Wolfgang Muchitsch published "Mit Spaten, Waffen und Worten" in 1992 and had to see it sold at a silly price because nobody was interested in it. My own "X Steht Fur Unbekannt" was published in 1999 and whilst it went into a second edition, its impact outside the circle of insiders has not been exciting.

At the time they were written all these books contained all, or much of, what could be known to a diligent collector of facts about the Germans and Austrians in the British Forces. That each was more informative than its predecessor was due to the fact that in the meantime more knowledge had become available. "The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens" is already suffering the same fate. The pace at which additional information is becoming available is increasing. Just the short time of 2 years which it took to get it published is enough for there being available so much new knowledge that another volume with as many pages would be justified.

This new knowledge, emanating as it does from the Army Medal Office and the

Pioneer Corps Records is being worked on by Colonel Starling and as I have said thank you to everybody else I should like to say this here also to him "John, you are doing a smashing job and we shall be eternally grateful when you have finished it." Despite all this new information, however, nothing has come into my hands which would contradict any of the essential facts as presented in this book. The new information does confirms what has been said before, although it now turns out that there were a few small groups which were so secret that they managed to escape notice altogether.

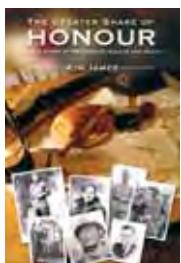
This book was not written with the intention of writing biographies but because I was fed up with people knowing absolutely nothing about us and to draw attention to the fact that we numbered some 10,000 men and women. We were not organised in a single or even several formations, apart from our time in the Pioneers we had no common history. In addition to us another 14,500 Germans and Austrians served in the US Forces, about 5,000 in the Forces of the Dominions and India and unknown numbers, but certainly not less than 10,000 in France and in Palestine. A total of at least 40,000

with the Western Allies.

We were united in two respects. The first was that being in Britain, under British law, we were enemy aliens. We were subject to the same disqualifications at any given time, and the second was "We all hated Hitler and the Nazis". There are a number of publications about the exceedingly dangerous jobs which some of us did, those who did this are acknowledged to have been brave men and women. However it must be remembered that everyone of us was equally brave.

By volunteering for HM Forces, we committed high treason towards the country to which - legally- we belonged and we did this in the full knowledge that in case of capture by the enemy and discovery, as well as in the - most of the time not unlikely case that Britain would lose the war - we should be subject to whatever consequences the Nazis had in store for us. Everyone knew this and was proud of it and everyone accepted the attendant risk for him or herself, voluntarily. We were at war with the Nazis before anyone else, we were in it until the end and we shared in the victory of our side. For that I thank God. ■

# The Greater Share of Honour



*A romantic and moving story to a noble band of men whose story has been hidden for years and soon to be made into a film by Century Aspect films.*

by Kim James  
Published by Matador  
ISBN 9781905 886692

**I**t was whilst working in the hospital in Rouen that Kim James came across the graves of the British soldiers, one of whom was his uncle. His research into the lives and deaths of all the soldiers led to the eventual discovery of the true circumstances of the battle in Criquebeuf – the last before the fall of France.

Long after the last boats left Dunkirk, British and French troops fought on in France in battles that have now been almost forgotten. This book reminds us that behind all the accounts of great events in history are thousands of ordinary men and women risking everything - not for honour and glory, but because it is the right thing to do. They deserve to be remembered and, for the men whose story this is, Kim James has produced a moving tribute. If it were just a work of fiction, it would be a remarkable story. That it is true seems almost incredible.

Seven men - three British, three French and one Senegalese -- born hundreds of miles apart and separated by nationality, race, religion and class... yet all have a unity at the time of their death.

Though ordered to retreat, the men decided to stay in the village of Criquebeuf, Normandy, where they faced a superior German infantry. They managed to destroy a bridge that would have otherwise been useful to the enemy.

Through painstaking research, this account tells of the mens' backgrounds from birth to the out break of the second world war... their loves, hopes and despair, and their optimism in the face of the greatest danger. It describes the coming together of their fates.

These were ordinary men, yet at the same time extraordinary in their stubbornness and ability to gain the trust and affection of their friends, families and neighbours... and the respect of their enemies.

In following their transition from bored labouring battalions during the 'Phoney War' to fighting men in the last desperate battle before the defeat of France, this fictional account breathes life into a long-forgotten yet heroic incident at a time of great turmoil.

Six months ago Kim met by chance, at an art exhibition, another film producer, the

European producer of Woody Allen's latest films. He asked me what I was doing since I was no longer a sculptor and then asked me to send him the synopsis of the book.

He contacted the young film director and the project is now in development for a feature film. The plan is for a soirée at BAFTA to launch the book and the film.

The book is published and available on Amazon and in bookshops everywhere. So far the reception has been good. One reviewer who asked for a copy for review for a military magazine told Kim when he telephoned to check that he had indeed received the copy that he had received it as he sat down to breakfast. He intended to leaf through it and found himself immersed to the extent that he was late for work. Hopefully this is marker for the future.

Kim is now writing the exciting biography of the wife of one of the French soldiers. An amazing story of imprisonment by the SS, blackmail, abortions, child abuse, escape from the guillotine and beautiful women.

"A moving tribute to a noble band of men whose story has been hidden for years". ■



# ...And Then The Music Stopped Playing

*Serving as a wireless operator in a Sherman Firefly tank from the Normandy beaches all the way to Hamburg, surviving the loss of 4 tanks and many friends along the way*

The heart-rending story of a German boy, born in 1922 to a well-known blind music teacher, in a Liberal Jewish family who became a second-class citizen after Hitler came to power.

His parents arranged for him to be on the last Kindertransport out of the country, arriving alone in England one week before the outbreak of WW2.

Escaping the Nazis and certain death at a concentration camp, (where his family

ultimately perished), he fought his own countrymen after joining the British army. Initially in the Pioneer Corps with 87 Company serving at Pembroke and Long Marston and then changing his name, transferring and landing on D+1 in a tank in Normandy with the 1st Royal Tank Regiment, 7th Armoured Division. Life, both in Germany under the Nazis, and as a young soldier in action with the Desert Rats, is all described in great detail.

Serving as a wireless operator in a Sherman

by Ken Ward  
Published by Catherine Aldons Design Ltd  
ISBN 978-1-898030-11-9

Firefly tank from the Normandy beaches all the way to Hamburg, surviving the loss of 4 tanks and many friends along the way.

This wonderful, emotional, true story also covers the authors life after frontline action ceased - transferring again, this time to the Special Investigation Branch, investigating crime over 2 years with the British and Russian occupation forces in the devastated post-war Berlin and ultimately his triumphant return to England - his chosen home for the remainder of his life. ■



## Call to Arms Officer Cadet Training at Eaton Hall 1943-1958

*This book will fascinate and entertain any former cadet or member of staff who ever passed through the Golden Gates of Eaton Hall. It is an ideal present for yourself, a friend, relation or historian.*

In response to very positive support, this book has been written and compiled by two Old Eatonian officer cadets, Keith Taylor and Brian Stewart. It has even been printed by an OE, Ronnie Adam, in Scotland!

Over 15,000 National Service Royal Marine, Infantry and Corps Officers were trained and commissioned at Eaton Hall between 1947 and 1958. (From 1943 to 1947 Eaton Hall was occupied by BRNC Dartmouth). Unfortunately no Army records survive but we have nearly 2,000 names on our reunion dinner database to which new names are added as we hear of them.

The major part of the book consists of over 100 diverse, often amusing, personal accounts and reminiscences of cadets' experience at Eaton Hall OCS with

reflections on the influence that this had on their subsequent lives.

This hardback book is in three parts and is beautifully produced with a number of carefully selected photographs. It includes a foreword by the Duke of Westminster, a chapter on the Grosvenor military history, Eaton Hall as a hospital in WWII and the bombing of the Hall, the occupation by BRNC Dartmouth from 1943—46 and an epilogue by the Rt. Revd. John Kirkham, himself an OE, in the form of the texts of his moving and memorable addresses in the chapel at Eaton on 7th May 1992 and 19th May 2006. It includes copies of documents and a comprehensive list of further reading about British Army National Service.

This book will fascinate and entertain any former cadet or member of staff who ever

passed through the Golden Gates of Eaton Hall. It is an ideal present for yourself, a friend, relation or historian.

His Grace the Duke of Westminster has said: "I am grateful to the authors and to those who have contributed to this book and its publication for their enthusiasm and hard work and for providing a unique record of the military and social history of the period. I hope you enjoy this book as much as I have done."

Further details of the book can be obtained from Keith M Taylor, PO Box 381487, Cambridge MA, USA or email: k.taylor3@verizon.net

The book is a not-for-profit initiative and any surplus will be donated to the Army Benevolent Fund. ■

by Keith Taylor & Brian Stewart



## Witchypoops Three and Cats Two

*A modern, imaginative and quirky story in rhyme for children and parents to enjoy and is destined to be a favourite bedtime read for many years to come.*

This is a magical story in rhyme that features witches, fairies and elves... characters that enchant almost every child. Witchypoops Three and Cats Two tells the tale of three misunderstood witches and their two cats, Mangy and Flea.

When the witches are visited by two children, Lucy and Jack, things look set for a fine time. But then the evil Elflocks strike and whisk the children away to their caves. There they plan to drain them of their goodness.

Can the witches get there in time to rescue them? Can they banish the nasty Elflocks forever? Modern, imaginative and quirky, Witchypoops Three and Cats Two is a thoroughly engaging book for children who are growing more confident in their reading.

Laura was inspired to write her first book while working in a tiny booth at the post office she runs. Mrs Kirby said: "The book is for my grandchildren Jack and Lucy. I never imagined it would get published. My family encouraged me to send it off." I'm

quite pleased it will be available in Tesco. I've been telling people you can now get me along with the frozen peas."

Mrs Kirkby and her husband, Roger, moved to Norfolk six years ago. Roger Kirkby left the Corps in 1993 as Regimental Sergeant Major, 23 Group Royal Pioneer Corps, Bicester.

Boldly illustrated by Tracy Worrall, it is destined to be a favourite bedtime read for many years to come. ■



# No Labour: No Battle

*The following article appeared in  
'The British Army Journal' in July 1950*

## THE RISE OF A MAJOR ARMY SERVICE

One cannot get away from the fact that there is nothing romantic about the word "labour." Ignoring politics for the moment, it conjures up, to the average person, a grim picture of that type of hard work to which most of us are allergic.

Yet there is more than an element of romance about the growth of the Labour Service in the Army during the last ten years. For it is a story of the rise of a minor branch of "A", to the status of a major "Q" service. And, far from being a dull recital of "constants" and "tasks", it is a tale which tells of the rallying to the Army of hundreds of thousands of troops of various colours from all parts of the Empire.

Happily, some genius revived the honourable old Army name of "Pioneer" as a title for these forces. The Pioneer Corps became the instrument of the Labour Service. And the Service itself became known in most parts of the world as "The Pioneer and Labour Service." This was for a good reason. Native troops were too proud to be described as "Labour" and that part of the title was reserved for local unregimented civilian workers.

## FREEING THE FIGHTING MAN

But why, you may ask, should the Army need a new organisation of this magnitude? The answer is that the modern fighting man needs a tremendous backing of disciplined Pioneer labour if he is to be left free to do his fighting. These Pioneers must be armed and capable of fighting; but their primary tasks are the building of roads and bridges for tanks, the laying down of airfields, and the handling of enormous tonnages of stores and ammunition from base ports to the forward areas. It would be a gross misuse of the fighting arms, even if they were available, to make them undertake such work.

The labour problem arose towards the end of the 1914-18 War. In the comparatively static conditions of trench warfare in France, labour companies of wounded or medically downgraded men were formed for work behind the lines.

In the years between the wars Hitler realised the need for mobile disciplined labour. Dr. Todt's organisation had high priority for movement, and his slaves were usually less inadequately housed and fed than others.

The planners of the BEF had also provided for special labour companies and groups of cavalry and infantry reservists to be amongst the first to go to France in September, 1939.

It was quickly realised that military labour would be needed on a much greater scale; so a Labour Branch, and later a Directorate, was formed at the War Office and the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps was born, with an initial strength of 50,000 increasing to 100,000. The original force was 6 Group HQs and 48 Labour Companies. The officers were mostly retired from the infantry and cavalry and had had battle experience in World War I. The best of them -- which was the large majority -- set high standards of administration and discipline, which were later reflected throughout the Corps.

From that time there was a constant race in the UK between demand and supply of Pioneers; there were never enough. Into the Corps came a cross section of the country's manhood, some young and perfectly fit, others medically downgraded owing to poor eyes or feet, and, finally, a few who were considered too dull to bear arms. It is to their credit that they marched like the infantry, toughened up on special courses, and distinguished themselves in assault landings. And it is to the credit of the 12,000 officers, who came into the Corps, that the majority of the dullards were upgraded and armed after a few months of sympathetic handling.

In the end 166,000 Pioneers from the UK served in the Corps. Some of them spent their time at home putting smoke screens over ports and other VPs, fire-watching in docks, aiding the civil power in debris clearance, building camps and airfields, and handling ammunition and all forms of stores. Others went to Iceland, the Faroes, Madagascar, North Africa, Italy and NW Europe, as a spearhead labour force. A selected few went to the outposts of the Empire and to the Far East to create native Pioneer Companies, as we shall see.

## JACKS OF ALL TRADES

The British Expeditionary Force Companies had been allotted to specific employing services, as their names indicated -- No 1 Railway Labour Company, No 2 Docks Labour Company -- and worked throughout for their own Railway Construction or Docks Operating Group. This rigidity resulted in wastage, as labour could not be switched quickly from task to task as needed; so, as Pioneer Group and Company Commanders were becoming expert in labour assessment and allocation, a new system was introduced which gave the Group Commander all labour as a pool to be allotted by him to tasks in the priority laid down by the Staff. There were, of necessity, some deviations from this principle. For the First Army landings in North Africa many Pioneer Companies went ashore as an integral part of a Beach

Group; they did the same in Sicily, Italy, and North West Europe; other Companies remained throughout under Pioneer Group command.

The work was arduous and the tasks varied. Some Companies unloaded ships at ports, frequently under bombardment. One Mauritian Company became so expert as stevedores that they were all transferred to the REs and became a Docks Operating Company. One UK Company had three weeks in the line as infantry in Tunisia -- and then humped ammunition to their old positions for the final battle for Tunis. Certain Companies remained for long periods with Airfield Construction Groups and became airfield experts. Others acted as porters of the Cassino Task Force and took supplies by night to infantry in their fox-holes. An Indian Company won two MCs, a MM and an IDSM in one day putting a bridge across a river under fire. It was in Italy that Pioneer versatility was first fully recognised. And the slogan was born: "No Labour: No Battle."

Lessons learnt in Italy stood many of these Companies in good stead. For on D-Day in North West Europe, 26 Companies totaling 7,500 men landed on the beaches. They were followed by 34 Group HQs and a further 205 Companies totaling 60,000 men by D+60. With RE supervision they provided labour for Mulberry Harbour, laid PLUTO, made airfields and erected bridges. They provided the smoke cover for the crossing of the Rhine. They formed Dutch, Belgian and French Pioneer Companies, on the same pattern as Italian Companies had been formed in Italy.

## RALLYING THE EMPIRE

As early as 1941 Pioneer Officers went to many parts of the world enlisting and training volunteer native Pioneers. There were Swazis, Basutos, and Bechuanas from the High Commissioned Territories of South Africa, who volunteered to fight for Queen Victoria's great grandson. East and West Africans, Mauritians, Rodriguans and Seychellois, Indians of all classes, some traditional soldiers and others making good as soldiers for the first time; Singhalese, Syrians, Cypriots, Palestinians, Maltese and Arabs.

Most of this cross section of the Empire descended on the Pioneer Corps Depot, Qassassin, Egypt, from June 1941, onwards. The Depot staff, modest in numbers, but possessed of a genius for improvisation and unorthodoxy, met the administrative load without cracking. Millions of pounds worth of stores were needed, and were obtained. During the first six months from the time the native Pioneers began to arrive an average of one Company a day was

turned out. At one time the Depot held 23,000 men. It was a tower of Babel.

The British drafts sent out to officer these Companies found themselves facing a new way of life. They had to learn to speak African dialects; to understand the ancient laws and traditions of the Basuto; and to distinguish between the solid bay from Kenya and tribesman from Uganda. They had to learn to hold a balance between Arab and Jew and to accustom themselves to the vagaries of Swazi cooks who served tinned peas as a sweet.

These things were done and the Groups and Companies went out as workers or as guards. There were 68 Companies with the Eighth Army, most of whom went right through from El Alamein to Italy Old Desert Rats may remember how Seychellois Pioneers saved the day for the armour by swimming 40-gallon petrol drums ashore in 1942. The Seychellois are almost amphibious, and were kept active in the cold seas by a reward of a tot of rum for each petrol drum recovered.

## LOADING HISTORY

The Swazis earned fame as workers on docks, revelling in their strength. On occasions a man would handle 20 tons instead of the normal five tons a day. In Tripoli, Mr. Winston Churchill watched them. "Tell them," he said, "that they are loading history." Whether this magnificent message quite penetrated is uncertain; anyway they gave him the famous Swazi Royal whistle which the Prime Minister, with memories of his early days, no doubt appreciated.

No troops were more proud than these Pioneers of being in Eighth Army; they wore the famous flash as if it were an award. A delicate international situation thus arose when a Swazi Company went to Anzio under command of the American Fifth Army. It was settled to the satisfaction of all concerned; on his right arm each Swazi wore an Eighth Army flash; on his left that of the Fifth Army. American "darkies" in Quartermaster Battalions could not understand why the Basutos could not speak English. One black truck driver, held up by a walking Basuto, urged him out of the way without effect. "Hey, savage," he shouted in disgust, "where's your spear?"

## FURTHER EAST

While these things were going on in Europe and in the Middle East, Indian Pioneers and a few East and West African Companies were performing similar feats in the Far East. The Director of Pioneers and Labour, Allied Land Forces, South East Asia, in early 1945 had under his control 34 Group HQs and 266 Pioneer Companies, totalling, with Indian State and Provincial Units and Civilians, a Labour Force of 523,000 men.

Although the main body was in Burma, other units were widely distributed. It is not generally known that on the "American" road to China from Ledo, a British labour force of 53,000 men supported the magnificent American engineering effort; there was a Pioneer Group HQ as far down the road as Bhamo. Pioneers were also in Ceylon, building airfields in the Cocos Islands, in the Andamans, and later in Malay, Java, Sumatra, Sarawak, French Indo-China, Siam and Hong Kong. Pioneer Civil Labour Teams were flown into Burma

and recruited local civilians hard on the heels of the advanced troops. One of these teams was actually recruiting civilians in one end of town while fighting was still going on in the other.

In the course of a message on 9th June 1945, Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, expressed his appreciation of the Pioneers. "My Commanders-in-Chief have informed me," he said, "and I have witnessed myself their admirable and devoted work. It is not too much to say that our success in Burma could not have been attained without the work of the Pioneer Corps."

## LOCAL LABOUR

Another important task was the recruitment and organisation of skilled and unskilled local civilians. Little units called Pioneer Civil Labour Units or "Teams" were formed during the war and were responsible overseas for getting civilians to work not only in the great bases like Egypt, but right up in the forward areas. One team landed at Salerno in Italy with the first wave; part of another was in the bridgehead at Anzio. In Europe it was the same story, and one unit was airborne into Arnhem. The labour which the units recruited, supplied to employing units, and often paid, was numbered in hundreds of thousands and was a vital contribution to our success in the war.

Rather similarly, Pioneers were responsible in many theatres for administration of prisoners-of-war. Germans, Italians and Japanese were formed into units and worked hard and well. Needless to say, they numbered tens of thousands.

## HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS

When the war ended and the Victory March took place through London there were on parade Pioneers from the UK and from all parts of the Empire. It was appropriate, too, that a Company of Indian Pioneers took part in the Victory Parade in Tokyo, for the Corps had played its part in beating both Germans and Japanese. That part was recognised in 1946 when His Majesty made it a Royal Corps. The youngest Corps in the Army to have been so honoured.

Here are a few figures of interest:

The Corps at its peak in May 1945, included 12,000 officers, 166,000 UK personnel and about 400,000 Pioneers from other parts of the Empire. Pioneers were responsible for a civilian labour force of 1,074,000 and for a prisoner-of-war force of 173,000. During the war some 2,800 men of the Corps lost their lives.

## THE MANAGEMENT

On the staff side there were Pioneers and Labour, or Labour Directorates, as they were variously called, in the UK, 21 Army Group, CMF, Middle East, Paiforce, East and West Africa, Alfsea and GHQ India. Except in the UK where civilian labour was a Ministry of Labour affair, and in India, these Directorates were responsible to the "Q" staff for all military and civilian labour in the Command. Branches of "P & L" were at lower Formation Headquarters down to and including Corps. They allotted labour, on priorities as laid down by the "Q" staff, to such user services as REs, Movements

and Transportation, R Signals, S and T, Medical, Ordnance, REME. And often the RN and RAF.

In the field the Pioneer Group Commander had a number of Companies, usually not more than eight, each normally made up of a HQ and 10 sections (292 men). The Group Commander also commanded PCLUs who procured skilled and unskilled local civilian labour in his zone. With all forms of labour under his control, he was able to switch quickly from task to task the right type of men for the job.

This arrangement is fundamentally the same today, and the happy relationships between P & L and their employing Services established in war continue. Yet, like the rest of the Army, the Service has been drastically cut. In the UK there are still Royal Pioneer Corps Groups and Companies engaged in aftermath tasks or providing labour for permanent installations where civilians are not available. Dock strikes, too, have resulted in many Royal Pioneers being diverted to their old wartime quayside role.

As the snow-clearing Pioneer of Giles' Daily Express cartoon put it: "I suppose one day someone'll have a crisis what the poor - - - Pioneer Corps don't have to clear up." (Giles was himself a Pioneer).

The force of native Pioneers has diminished. Some 3,000 Swazis, Basutos and Bechuanas were disbanded in 1948 after a three-year post-war engagement as guards in Egypt. They would volunteer again for service if given the opportunity. Cypriot Pioneer Companies, formed somewhat hastily after the war and taken to Singapore and Malay, completed disbandment in Ceylon early this year.

But there are still pioneers from Mauritius, Rodrigues and the Seychelles in Guard, Labour and Artisan Companies in the Middle East. These islands also produce Pioneers enrolled in RASC MT units and in units of the Royal Corps of Signals.

The Royal Pioneer Corps' part in recruitment and administration of civilians, some of them in units, as in BAOR, continues, although on a restricted scale. Even so the Corps still has control of a world labour force of well over 300,000.

That briefly is the story of the growth of a major "Q" service. As with many things English, it was not planned and blue printed years ahead. It grew naturally out of necessity. And, again, like so many things English, it was strengthened rather than weakened by this lack of rigidity. For during the build up, mistakes were adjusted as they were discovered, and there was full scope for our national genius for compromise. The great thing about the Service is that it never broke down.

But, as indicated earlier on, the need for such a tremendous organisation reveals a paradox. In spite of more and more mechanisation, an increasing proportion of a modern army must be devoted to labour. So large are the appetites of the machines for stores that even more pairs of hands will be needed in the future.

This should not worry the officer who prudently remembers to include plans for labour in his schemes. After all, as every Royal Pioneer knows, 'Labour Omnia Vincit.' ■

We all want the chance to go back for a

# Quick Visit

by Ex Pte Leonard John Hooper,  
190 Company Pioneer Corps

*In the April Newsletter we published a story entitled "My Army Years" by Ex Pte Leonard John Hooper, this article follows his visit to Monkton Farleigh.*

We all have our good luck and bad luck in our time – that's life – and I have had mine in nearly 90 years. Last year my family encouraged me, if that is the right word, to write my life story. I was not at all keen, until I got started and on occasions sat up until midnight. Before I started, a nephew Michael Ralph, compiled a 'mine' of information on a wartime underground ammunition depot at Monkton Farleigh in Wiltshire, of interest to me as I was enlisted into 190 Company Pioneer Corps as a Private 13057212 LJH on 1st August 1940 and our deployment on 24th August 1940 was to Monkton Farleigh to deal with ammunition in the mine. We also ended up sleeping down there because of the fear of air raids. The mine consisted of the former Bath and Portland Stone Quarry extensive tunnelling system which covered 42 acres, average depth 100 ft – a long way down. With conveyor belts and narrow gauge rail tracks it was a hive of activity for our 300 contingent RAOC and RE Members.

We did in January move onto the East End of London for blitz work and Monkton Farleigh became something that happened 67 years ago and I really did not have any wish to go back to the war years. However, the information dredged up, together with getting immersed in my history – for what it's worth – made me think about it again. In conversation with my son Les in Sussex it was decided that when he came down to fetch me up to them for Christmas there would be an attempt on the way back to find Monkton Farleigh.

My appetite was further whetted because I bought the book 'Secret Underground Cities' by NJ McCamley which was a very comprehensive history with photographs. We did find the premises but, being Christmas Eve and Sunday, everything was firmly locked up. We did have the name of the firm now in charge of the site namely Wansdyke Security Ltd and I decided to write in the faint hope that I may be able to visit underground once more – with my son's assistance to get there.

I received a reply within a short period from Mr Mike Barnard, the Mine Manager, who very kindly agreed, as an old soldier, that I could arrange a visit. As I had quoted my age, approaching 90, he reminded me that there were 109 steps down and, of course, 109 steps up again. I felt that I was

very lucky when he said that he had served 22 years in the Royal Hussars and had risen to the rank of RSM (royalty to a private) but he promised not to shout. I don't think anyone could have had a nicer letter in reply to a request 'out of the blue'.

We agreed a date of 9th February. The weather forecast just before was heavy rain, snow, ice so I was doubtful but my son came down and we left in heavy rain which lasted most of the way and found snow on the ground at Monkton Farleigh. Mike Barnard was on hand to greet us for some refreshments and coffee and a friendly chat telling us about their efforts and the fact they cover two smaller mines in addition.

We then set off to descent into the mine via the 109 steps down at Main West. When I looked down from the top I thought 'A piece of cake'. I did manage to get down alright past the narrow gauge track beside us, now unused. At the bottom of the shaft was a battery truck ready and waiting for Mike to drive us around the maze of tunnels below the ground. It was a wonderful experience to once again visit District 14. Stripped of all its solid reminders of 1940 it might have been, but just to enter and feel again the atmosphere and silence so far below ground which was always reinforced by the thick layer of asphalt dust which was everywhere. It was still possible in places to feel a slight 'give' under-foot despite 67 years having passed and thousands of footsteps.

It seemed the same atmosphere as that in which we had lived. Working took the mind away from the surrounding to some extent but in the evenings and nights or any other off duty periods the utter silence and sometimes a feeling of loneliness despite 300 colleagues spread around. Night-time now has its sounds of distant traffic, an owl, wind or thunder, but the mine had nothing but an occasional cough perhaps – uncanny and weird. I could remember evenings sitting on our bunks reading magazines and old newspapers passed in by the WVS and local people. Money was not plentiful by any means and it was very rare that any of us could afford a trip to Bath which was in any event a difficult journey for a short period out. It was a very restricted life with no 'wireless' contact.

Work wise, and that was the reason for us being there, the sight of marks of conveyor belt bases immediately brought back the virtually continual sound of the belt rolling either inwards or out, and the greater noise from the rollers. We had to erect, dismantle and shift these, on trestles, to cover the distance between stocks and belt. Wood and metal boxes were moved on or off the belt to and from the different galleries. Some chaps were spaced along the belt and rollers to make sure nothing fell off during bumpy movement. The asphalt dust flooring was to prevent sparks if anything did fall. It was onerous work and something I was not used to but I was not the only one with 'soft' hands. Working with the narrow gauge trucks was different. They were hauled up the incline by overhead cable and powered by a large engine at the top. One can be seen in the book 'Secret Underground Cities'. The trucks were attached to the cable at the foot of the incline by tossing a chain with a hook up over the cable and this pulled the vehicle – from memory some 6 feet long and perhaps 4 feet wide, often a heavy load with munitions. At the top we had to pull the truck forward a little to loosen the chain and uncouple it. A moving vehicle on rails can be moved forward even if loaded. It was necessary to use great care attaching and detaching the chain or else it was possible to 'crown' oneself. There were the odd occasions when 'detaching' didn't go quite to plan and it needed a very quick switch off for the engine to avoid the chain getting caught up. I have read in the book of runaways but we did not experience one thank goodness.

We saw again the 'Pen'. I had completely forgotten the name of this when we saw it, but two nights later when I woke up and thought about it, the name suddenly came to me. Rifles were left there, near to hand, and away from the dust created while working. Any 'contraband', cigarettes and matches, brought in by mistake also ended up there. A comment from the CSM on occasions was, "You'll end up in the Pen." Thinking of the rifles I remember the period when we had none. How they were collected for Front Line Units and, although we were only 'workmen', it was always possible they could have been required.

There were periodical guard duties 'up top' of course and particularly in the Autumn when another 'Invasion' scare arose. We

enjoyed the fresh air but we hardly got down below to our sleeping quarters before the metalwork of our equipment was wet. It was very obvious on this visit that de-humidification efforts had eventually become successful as we only saw occasional wet patches. First drying-out attempts resulted in unstable rock faces in places. We were reminded of this when wooden wedges in roof cracks were pointed out. A sobering thought.

I had one daily occupation. There was not one day that I did not write some lines to my wife Joan. Letters were only posted once a week but everyday contributed some thoughts and doing it kept me very much in touch with home. None of us had been away from home for such a long time and it was hard to bear for most of us. Letters had to be handed in unsealed to comply with censorship laws. The officers had to read them all before forwarding them. I never heard of any being returned for rewriting.

The utter destruction was hard to believe – even brass top switches ripped off the walls. We saw an area with blackened roof and walls where copper wire had been piled and fired to get rid of the covers. When I think of the large engine – so powerful to pull the loaded trucks up the incline – being smashed to bits just to steal components, it is incredible how this could have gone on without someone's knowledge. I cannot understand how authorities – including Local Councillors – could not have allowed the museum that had tried to save this vital facility, to be swept aside by developers who then left it unattended to be vandalised by layabouts to destroy rather than work for a living.

Monkton Farleigh was a vital part of the war effort. Churchill said "We stood alone for a whole year. The bombs came down but every man, woman and child in the country had no thought of quitting, while all the world wondered." What could not have happened without such facilities as Monkton Farleigh among others. It provided safe storage and prompt supply of munitions without which no one could have succeeded. In Malta their wartime underground facilities are carefully preserved and tended as a fitting memorial. The Channel Island Authorities have also preserved theirs. Why didn't we do the same? I give all praise to Wansdyke Security and their staff for the great effort they are making to clear and restore what they can while ensuring they carry on an effective business.

I can't help thinking that to have a former regular soldier of rank in charge on the site is an inspired choice. Mike Barnard struck me as a man as interested and involved in Monkton Farleigh with its military history as he must have been to attain his former Royal Hussars' ranking. No one could have given us a more pleasant reception or help. I appreciate his remark, "We old boys must look after each other," although he could hardly be described as 'old'. I was delighted also that having completed our tour underground I was able, unaided, to climb the 109 steps up again to the surface. I have to admit (now) that when I was looking up from the bottom I had doubts that I could do it.

I shall always remember this visit and may Monkton Farleigh always survive. ■

**"We stood alone for a whole year. The bombs came down but every man, woman and child in the country had no thought of quitting, while all the world wondered...."**

Winston Churchill



# 'Royal'

They now bear the title

by War Illustrated

*The following is an extract from "The War Illustrated"  
Volume 10 No 253 dated 14 March 1947.*

In December 1946 a Special Army Order announced that in recognition of their past services His Majesty the King had been graciously pleased to approve that the following Regiments and Corps should in future enjoy the distinction of "Royal." Their distinguished 1939-1945 records are here briefly outlined.

The Royal Hampshire Regiment  
The Royal Lincolnshire Regiment  
The Royal Leicestershire Regiment  
Royal Army Educational Corps  
Royal Army Dental Corps  
Royal Pioneer Corps  
Corps of Royal Military Police

Royal Pioneer Corps. The badge of the Corps is symbolic of the fact that without this military labour force behind the front lines no victories could have been achieved. Units of the Corps were to be found in every theatre of operations as well as in certain island outposts, such as the Faroes, Iceland and the Azores, where construction of airfields and preparation of defences were essential means of preventing invasion by Axis forces.

The men who went to France for labour duties with the first contingent of the Expeditionary Force in 1939 were Army reservists, and it was from them that the first units of Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, as it was then called, were formed. Although Pioneers were at that time only 25 per cent armed many of them did sterling work in the defence of Boulogne

and Dunkirk, and on one memorable occasion they wrecked the tracks of German tanks with picks and shovels. The Corps became fully combatant when it was re-formed after Dunkirk. From a force of approximately 25,000 men in July 1940, it had expanded to an army of more than 160,000 UK personnel and over 270,000 non-UK personnel by May 1945.

Pioneers contributed in great measure to the build-up of the Army in preparation for D-Day, by the construction of depots, airfields, roads, railways and defences and the handling of tens of thousands of tons of ammunition and supplies. They helped to build the Mulberry Harbour and Pluto, and provided specially trained smoke units for screening vital areas from air attack. The fire-watching sections saved quantities of valuable stores and much property from destruction, and special force was formed for the clearance of debris during the intensive bombing of London and other cities.

The Pioneers sometimes fought with infantry units, acquitted themselves well. During the critical battle of the Kasserine Gap in Tunisia they did sterling work in manning the defences. They landed with the first waves of assault troops at Salerno and Anzio during the Italian campaign, and carried out such strenuous tasks as portering supplies to forward troops in mountainous country, often under fire and in appalling weather. Their work at Anzio was specially commended by General

Mark Clark, GOC 5th Army, when the discharge of over 5,000 tons of supplies daily for three days constituted a record then unequalled.

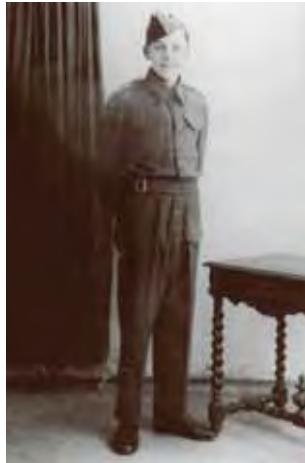
They were also employed as stevedores, dockyard workers, stretcher-bearers and guards for POW camps. In the Middle East many races and creeds were represented in the Corps. Cypriot and Palestinian Companies took part in the operations in Greece and Crete and suffered heavy casualties. Other units were employed on the construction of defences, harbour works and the water pipe-line through the desert behind the advancing 8th Army.

On D-Day, Pioneers landed "wetshod" on the Normandy beaches with the infantry, and distinguished themselves at Caen, the crossing of the Orne River, at Walcheren and Nijmegen. Pioneers operated as air-borne troops for the first time at Arnhem. The great smoke screen that concealed the preparations of the British 2nd and 1st Canadian Armies for the crossing of the Rhine was maintained by units of the Corps. Their proudest moment probably came at the Victory March in Berlin where, while British tanks and troops paraded down the Unter den Linden, the route was lined by Pioneers. Of the men of this Corps it was said by Col H Greenwood, VC, one of their commanders throughout the war, "When trouble came they were too old to run away. They fought with what they had where they were. And usually they were never heard of again." ■



**Left Photo**  
in Tunisia in 1943,  
with native labour to  
assist, Pioneers at this  
enormous dump  
handled 500 tons a  
day, working in shifts  
the clock round to do  
it. When the Royal  
Pioneer Corps was  
the Auxiliary Military  
Pioneer Corps  
(AMPS).

**Background Photo**  
an old soldier with his  
squeeze-box leads a  
sing song in Britain in  
1940.



# A 13 Year Old in 1939

by Cpl J Stout

*I will never forget when war was declared in September 1939, I was just 13 years of age and one of 800 children that were to be evacuated from London...*

I will never forget when war was declared in September 1939, I was just 13 years of age and one of 800 children that were to be evacuated from London as it was considered that London would be the main bombing target.

All school children that wanted to go to a safer area, approved by their parents were to assemble at schools. From here we were taken to Acton main line station in London where we waited for a train to take us to Portland in Dorset. When the train moved off there were many tears as we did not know when we would see our parents again. It was at 1930 hours when we arrived at Portland via Weymouth and coaches took us to a long hall in Portland. Here the local people took two children each to their homes.

The following morning we were taken to the Cliff School (so called as it was on the edge of a cliff). However, as there were so many children including the local children it was decided that half would attend in the mornings and the other half in the afternoon. I spent most of my time helping on a farm, going out in boats with local fishermen and working in a fish shop for which I received a shilling a week (10p today). At this point I was befriended by a local boy named Leslie Goves, who lived in a cottage on Chesil Beach, we became very good friends.

It soon became clear that Portland was not a safe place for anyone. On 4 July 1940 whilst walking to school with other children at 0800 hours a number of bombers crossed Portland and dropped bombs on Portland Shipyard sinking HMS Foylebank with 160 crew lost. One 8 year old girl from our group lost her father on the ship, he was awarded the Victoria Cross for staying at his gun post. On Sunday 11 August 1940 a number of planes again bombed Portland and damaged the Methodist Church as we attended Sunday School but we all got out. As we all ran home the all clear sounded but as we got along Chesil Beach a lone plane returned and machine-gunned all along the Beach.

After all the bombing half the children, including myself, returned to London. During the blitz a lot of bombs were dropped close to our house which was damaged and we had to be dug out. Then came the flying bombs, rockets and fire bombs.

In 1941 at the age of 14, I started work for J Lyons who had tea shops all over London. I worked in the carpenters shop at Hammersmith making wooden trays for all

the bread and cakes that went out to the shops. At the age of 17 in 1944 I became a member of the Company's Home Guard. There were 6 lads all the same age and we had to wait six weeks before we got uniforms. While we were waiting for them we trained after our normal work was finished. We also had on top of this, the air raids to contend with. When we were issued with our uniforms it was a proud moment for me and we were allowed to have a photo taken. I now decided to volunteer for the Army as my three brothers were already serving in the forces, one in the Navy and two in the RASC all overseas. I had to wait until my 18th birthday so in January 1945 I was called to attend a Medical Board. I felt great, not long now. On the 19th January I went to Holloway and joined approximately 50 other recruits. We were then called in for our medical, and to our surprise, instructed to get undressed which we did and stood naked in front of six doctors. The lad in front of me was asked questions but did not seem to understand, as he walked away towards the door, he was called back and he returned proving that there was not much wrong with his hearing. The rest, including myself, passed A1 and I was given my number (14039823). As I was still only 17 it was a case of waiting for my birthday which came and went. Then out of the blue came my papers dated 12th June 1945. I had to report to Primary Training Centre General Service Corps, Bury St Edmunds, a warrant was sent for the journey. I also received a postal order for 4 shillings (20p today) in respect of advance of service pay. I then had to inform my employer and also my Home Guard Platoon Commander and obtain from him a statement of items of WD Clothing and equipment which I should take with me, the remainder were returned to the home guard.

I was required to report to the unit in home guard uniform and not in civilian clothes. I arrived at the station to be met by some 50 others who were all 18 year olds. We all chatted and quickly got to know each other, I was the only one in uniform and this was a talking point. On arrival at Bury St Edmunds we were greeted by a number of NCOs who assembled us and marched us to waiting vehicles then transported to Gibraltar Barracks to start training. We were split into sections and taken to a wooden hut which was to be our billets for the six weeks training. Our Section Cpl then marched us to the QM Stores, the CQMS would take one look and issue a uniform. I was lucky I already had my uniform, others had to have theirs altered. We were also issued kit-bags and equipment and then marched back to our

billet. We were then marched to showers and on return marched to a store which contained bales of straw. We were given a palliass and told to fill them, this was to be our mattress for the next six weeks.

The following morning we were up at 0600 hrs for breakfast followed by drill, marching, PE, dinner, drill, marching, tea, shower etc. Following training a number of us were posted to a transit camp at Prestatyn, North Wales which was the old holiday camp. After a few weeks I was instructed to attend a PNCO Course, a report from Bury St Edmunds commented on my smartness and manner. Following this course I was posted to Marlborough Farm Camp near Kineton, Warwickshire. This I remember so well because of the ghost stories, because of the large amount of ammunition stored here there were lots of guard duties. I was then posted to Ganenden Park, Loughborough to 251 Company, again ammunition, not only in the camp but also along the edges. People nearby were always complaining about the safety of children etc. We also had no sanitation on site but luckily I was not there very long. The civilian population were right to be concerned as there were two explosions whilst I was there. One in January 1947 killed a soldier and four others were injured when a bomb exploded in the ammunition dump. I was then posted to Alveston Leys, Stratford Upon Avon at HQ 25 Group. I was only there for a short time as a waiter. The reason I did this was the ED Pay of 15 shillings a week (75p today) which greatly enhanced my service pay of 21 shillings a week.

As the HQ was closing I was posted to Stourport on Severn, near Kidderminster. I was now a Cpl and became part of the Regimental Police. Whilst an RP I was held for 3 hours by the prisoners in a cell, thankfully no harm came to me and I was released safely by the prisoners.

One night out on patrol I fell and injured my knee and was admitted to Chester Military Hospital for two weeks. On release the day I had been waiting for had arrived and I was demobbed from HQ 68 Group. The sad part of this was, it came so sudden that I had no time to say good-bye to any of my fellow soldiers.

Now that I'm 80 years old I've tried to contact former colleagues without any luck. If there is any person out there who can remember me please contact me on email [jamstout@googlemail.com](mailto:jamstout@googlemail.com) I can remember SSgt Holliday, Conway, Maxstead, Noughtboy and JWG. ■

# Diary 1945

by Pte Charles Henry Warner

Charles died on the "Long March" from Stalag VIIIB to Berlin. This diary has been supplied by his daughter for whom we are grateful. It should be noted that one or two words were hard to understand and have been omitted with -----.

Jan 23 - Set out from E594 did about 42 kms, stayed at a place called Bels

Jan 24 - Marched Rybnik and left at am waylaid. English 28 men, Russian 104 men, Greeks 6 men. Lost all kit

Jan 25 - Still here, done quite well regarding food.

Jan 26 - Attack started between 7-7.30, lasted twenty hours. Russians thrown back. We had no water and no heating. Temperature something like minus 20. Shell came through Russians ---- killing two of them. We were found by the Germans and taken to the school.

Jan 28 - Tonight we received front line rations. Bread, meat, jams, soup, tobacco and coffee. Expecting to move away tonight, have been separated from the Russians.

Jan 29 - Still without water, guard brought two plates of snow in tonight between 34

men. One loaf between 34 men. 6.3- another English boy brought in, A Levison Gower

Jan 26? - Guns opened up this afternoon. Only light stuff. Joe's planes have been over several times with loads to drop.

Jan 30 - Left Rybnik at midnight. Marched about 6 kms got on trucks and left them at Roslan. We marched altogether 34 kms to Hultschin quartered at a farm. Good treatment from civvies pulled one man on a sledge the whole of the way.

Jan 31 - Rode 22 kms to Troppan today. L Gower blew. Joe got here about 2 o'clock. Brewed some tea. At eight we had soup and a couple of biscuits each. May move on tomorrow. Had a medical orderly who bandaged the men with boils and blisters etc.

Feb 1 - Diphtheria total black out. Got put on a train at Troppan with three other Englishmen, I know them, They were from E22. Was pleased to see them. Later we were joined by three more.

I was very ill and we were on the way until the 11th when we arrived at Muhlberg. Stalag IVB. I was taken into

hospital. They said that I had not got dip but I had scarlet fever ague encephalitis and bronchitis which is enough to be going on with. Had a very tough time here. Got put in a small room with Sgt Lowndes from Walsall he looked after me very well.

On the 20th we were evacuated and came onto Leipzig near Muhlberg -- my had two toes taken off through frost bite, Leipsig.

Feb 24 - We are leaving here tomorrow probably to a place called Halle....

Feb 25 - Had quite a hectic night in the siding about four hundred metres away an ammo train blew up. The large Hospital building between us and the explosion saved us from the full blast. A lot of the boys in the big building were injured by glass when the windows blew in. Apart from a shaking we were alright in our little ward. Left at 6 pm for Halle. Arrived here at 1 am

Feb 26 - Slept outside in the open air not bad for sick men. Taken for baths 6 men at a time. This took quite a while. We landed for our bath about 2 pm. While I was still in the nude a raid started. They had kept our clothes for disinfection. I managed to get a shirt but it was not very warm stood there. The raid was on this town so this building fairly rocked. Definitely uncomfortable.

Mar 5 - Received half a parcel today.

Mar 14 - Sent card home.

Mar 18 - Half parcel

Mar 28 - Half parcel

Note: There are no more entries after this date. Charles Henry Warner is believed to have died on the 31st of March 1945. ■

# WELCOME

The following is a copy of a diary maintained by Charles Henry Warner.



**STALAG LUFT • BARTH • GERMANY**



# Introduction to Demob

by Peter Bowden

*We had a SAS lad who was sent there to get fit after a spell in the BMH, he lasted about a week he reckoned that they did harder training before breakfast in his mob, so went back...*

**H**i my name is Peter Bowden (23421804), I would like to try and relate my National Service experience for you. I don't remember too much of the first few days but I remember that I arrived at Gresford Camp on the 26/9/1957 (it was my birthday) I remember getting kitted out at high speed at the stores, being shoved into a uniform that fitted where it touched, given boots, that at the time seemed to big (A hot spoon soon got them down to size). Two days of kit stamping to make sure that what I had, had my number on it. Then came the painful part Square bashing, our section was made up of a Sgt who I can't remember, two Corporals, one coloured and one called Peter Catlow, and a L/Cpl Pennington and about 30 others. Our first time on the parade ground we were introduced to the RSM, who had a very loud voice as I recall.

Training went on for an eternity but at the end of eight weeks we had learned a lot. The PSO put me in for a cadre course at Main depot Wrexham where I was taught that it's not Bull but personal pride to have my gear looking tip top. The cadre course Sgt was George Wells (who later became Lt Wells of 518 Coy in Cyprus).

Back I went to Gresford Hall as a drill instructor and went down in flames on my first intake. My section Sgt was Sgt Moneypenny. One of my first jobs was to do the kit stamping; I never realised how frustrating that could be, "Does this have to have my number on Cpl?", was a phrase I came to hate. If you tell someone that all their kit must have their number on it you would think that they would know that it means EVERYTHING, including shoe brushes, mess tins, webbing and helmet sadly not the crew I had. At that time I had received a letter from my then girlfriend (now wife), that she had to see me urgently so I booked out late evening and hitched home to London to see her. On my return to camp I was put on open arrest and told to report to coy office, apparently I needed to get a pass before I went home.

After being demoted to the ranks I was sent to No1 ESD at Long Marston (524 Coy) where on arrival we were given leave and

train passes. There was a lorry on the weighbridge I asked if he was going to London? He said yes, so myself and another lad got rushed through putting kit into stores getting our money and passes and off we went. On my return I was directed to the WO2's office where I was told I should have mentioned I was not just out of training and not entitled to leave, once again I found myself with jankers to do, but hey at nineteen I could take it.

Within a few weeks we got wind of big goings on, the camp had to be bulled up, nissen huts tidied, barrack room damages paid for, instructions on how to pack all our kit into a kit bag and getting Khaki

jobs like Nicosia Airport perimeter, putting up camps for various units usually under the direction of the Royal Engineers. We also did IS patrols i.e. roadblocks and such.

We went onto Famagusta where we were put up overnight in the cinema at Golden Sands, the following night it was blown up by Eoka. But we had already moved to the camp of the Royal Ulster Rifles.

A detachment was sent to Mount Olympus in the Troodos Mountains, this was the Island's holiday camp shared with the RAF. That's where I saw one of the best football games ever, it was between 45 Commando and the Argyll and Southern Highlanders, talk about a hard game. When the troubles were over we pulled down the POW camp where the internees used to throw messages over the wire for their Families to get news to them, we found some and got one of the civilian workers to translate them for us, they would have made Mike Tyson cry!

I got reinstated to LCpl during this time. I was sent on a preliminary PTIs course at the MELF training camp just outside Famagusta where, I must say, got me to the fittest state of my life. We had a SAS lad who was sent there to get fit after a spell in the BMH, he lasted about a week and reckoned that they did harder training before breakfast in his mob, so went back to his unit.

The whole company moved to Episopi in early 1959 and that's where I saw my time out until I was sent back to the UK for demob in the September. I ran the NCOs mess, was drill and PT instructor for the last few months, taking the new boys as they came out to Cyprus.

During my time in National Service I ran across quite a few people that I admired, but only two that stuck in my mind as top dogs they were Sgt George Wells and WO2 Aplin They had a great flair for man management, and treated all with respect. I had a good time and glad I never missed doing my National Service.

*PS This is a condensed version, I wouldn't want to bore you with a lot of details, hope its not too long!! PB ■*



Drills issued (by a Sgt Ashby and an RQMS). Our section Sgt was nicknamed Charlie Harry who lectured us on the need of not troubling the O.C with our petty problems as we were going to the Lebanon to support the Yanks.

We went by train to London, then onto Blackbusht airport where we boarded a plane to fly out. We came down into Malta to refuel and have a meal, on getting back into the air it came over the intercom that the problem in the Lebanon was over, a great cheer went up and we thought we were going back home, wrong. We didn't count on our illustrious O.C Major Stead; we landed in Cyprus and were transported to Elenja camp (Put up by 518 Coy) where we learned that our OC had volunteered the Company for a tour of duty. Great, I was destined not to see my new wife for sixteen months. We soon settled into a routine, of detachments, mainly on fencing



# The Record

by The Record 1917/1918

*The Association recently acquired 3 copies of a Newsletter titled "The Record - a Labour Corps monthly magazine" published in 1917/1918.*

## Extracts

The following are some extracts:

### FATAL ILLNESSES THAT WERE NOT SERIOUS

Some of the answers to the questions put to applicants for life insurance prove very amusing. The following are some of them:

- Mother died in infancy
- An uncle died of cancer on his mother's side.
- Father went to bed feeling well and woke up dead.
- Grandfather died suddenly at the age of 103. Up to this time he bid fair to reach a ripe old age.
- Applicant does not know cause of mother's death, but states she fully recovered from her last illness.
- Father died suddenly; nothing serious.
- Grandfather died from gun-shot wound, caused by an arrow, shot by an Indian.
- Mother's last illness was caused from chron-rheumatism, but she was cured before death.
- Applicant's fraternal parents died when he was a child.
- Applicant has never been fatally sick.

### SOM(M)E TALE

Everyone will remember the taking of Guillemont and Ginchy in the attack on the Somme. A rather amusing incident, supposed to have happened, was told me a few days after the "show". During the advance of the Irish troops, an Irish soldier came across a wounded comrade, who implored him to remove him out of danger and carry him to one of the Clearing Stations. He said he was wounded in the arm. Our hero immediately shouldered him, and carried him towards the line. On the way, however, a shell took off his friend's head, unnoticed by our hero. An officer, seeing him, approached, and rated him soundly, asking him what he meant by carrying a headless trunk. The soldier dropped the corpse and, looking at it with astonishment and dismay, said, "Well, of all the \_\_\_\_\_. He told me he was wounded in the arm."

### THE ORDEAL OF "JOINING UP" - EXPERIENCE OF THE RAW RECRUIT

When home on my long delayed "Service Leave" I found, amongst some old papers, a diary, a few extracts from which may be a warning to recruits and, at the same time, of interest to those who are "old hands":

**14 Feb 15** - I really must think of joining the Army. I am sure Mamma will not like it, but to-day no less than three beastly girls put a white feather into my hand, and said, "Why are you not in khaki?" If I do join I shall try and get a job as sergeant, or captain, or something, I think.

**17 Feb 15** - I went to the barrack gates to-day and looked in. If I join, perhaps they will give me the job of walking up and down with a stick under my arm. It would be much better than marching about carrying a gun, and a lot of things on my back. I got three more white feathers to-day.

**19 Feb 15** - I have done it. Oh! what a day I have had., I feel very nearly dead. I had no idea they were so unkind and rude in the Army. It is a long tale, but it must be told. This morning I rose at 9, and as I had made up my mind to join, I dressed myself very carefully to make a good impression. I put on a pair of light grey trousers, black morning coat and vest, lavender tie, white spats and a beautiful pair of patent leather shoes. After breakfast, I took my hat and stick and departed, leaving Ma in tears.

I arrived at the barracks, and the first man I saw was stood inside the gate looking at a wagon that had a wheel broken. He looked very annoyed about it. He was not an officer, because he was not wearing a sword. He had stripes on his sleeves like the sergeants wear, only they were turned upside down on his cuffs. I went up to him and said, "Aw, my man, can you tell me where I can join the Army, what?" He looked me up and down, and said, "Good Lord!" I could see my clothes had made a great impression, so I said, "Yes, my man, I wish to do my duty to King and Country." He shouted to another man who was passing, and said something to him I could not catch; but the man laughed, and said to me, very rudely, "Come on." He took me into a room where a lot of rough fellows were sat, and said, "You wait there." I waited a long time, and then he came back and said, "Come on, you." He was a most rude man. He took me into a room, and I answered a lot of questions and signed a lot of papers. Then I was taken into a room by another man and told to undress. Because I was not very quick he got very annoyed. Presently an officer, who was a doctor, came in. I know he was an officer because when he asked me my name, and I told him, the man who brought me yells at me most roughly "Say sir, can't you!"

The doctor pummelled me and made me say ninety-nine and a lot of things. The man measured me and said I was 5 feet 3 inches and had a 34-inch chest, but that must be wrong, as when I got my uniform the trousers had a label on which said 5 feet 11 inches and the jacket 37-inch breast. They were not a good fit, however.

After I had been measured I was told to dress, and the man got annoyed again because he said I was so long. The doctor, too, was cross with me because I asked him to lend me a glass to see if my tie was

straight. He was most rude, and told me to "get to \_\_\_\_\_ out of it." If I had known that they were so rude I would not have come. When I had finished dressing I was taken into a room and sworn in. Then they told me to go home and come again the next day at 8. I said I did not get up before 9. The man was rude again, and said if I was not there by 8 he would fetch me.

**20 Feb 15** - Worse and worse. I wish I had not joined the Army. I got to the barracks at 9 o'clock. The man who told me to be there by 8 saw me and asked what the \_\_\_\_\_ I meant by coming an hour late. I told him my Ma would be vexed if she heard him speaking so roughly to me and using swear words. He said, "D--- your Ma. Look here, young feller my lad, if you don't do what you are told and use less lip, you will find yourself in 'clink'." He then took me with a lot more into a passage, and three men went into a room. After a time one of them came out, dressed in uniform, with his own clothes on his arm and carrying a big white bag. Then another man came out and shouted "three more!" I was in the next three, and as soon as I got inside, he shouted, "Go over there and get your clothes off, you three."

I looked round and found myself in a room with the walls lined with piles of uniforms, caps, and all sorts of things. Sitting at a table with a lot of papers before him was the man whom I had spoken to the previous morning, and who was looking at the broken wagon. I was just going to speak to him when the man who called us in and who had two stripes on his arm shouted at me and asked me very roughly why the Devil I did not get my clothes off when I was told. He made me jump so that my tall hat fell off, and then he put his foot right on top of it. I was annoyed, and the rest of the men laughed. The man looked at me and threw me a pair of trousers, and said, "Those are yours, put' em on." I did so, and said, "These are too long, please." He said, "Why the Devil don't you put on your braces." When I did so they were still too long, but he would not give me any more. Then he gave me a jacket, which I said did not fit. He got quite cross, and asked me if I expected a uniform made in Bond Street, because if I did I should be d---d well disappointed. Then he gave me a lot of things, towels, socks, and great heavy boots with nails in. He made me put on the boots. Whilst I was dressing in the horrid clothes he had given me, one of the men who had come in with me had finished. The man who was giving out the clothes took him to the table where the other man was sitting and began to call out a long list of things which he pushed into a large white bag he called a kit-bag. When he had finished the man had to sign a paper. He had put his own clothes into a suit-case he had brought, and he kindly offered the

man sitting at the table one shilling to carry it to the station. I thought the end of the world had come. The man at the table used dreadful language, and the recruit said he would pray for him. I think he was a kind of a parson. That made the other man worse, and he said if he did not get outside quick he would put him in "clink".

I wonder what "clink" means. They seem very fond of it in the Army. Presently I had got up to the table, and the man with the two stripes on his arm said, "Now then, see you get these things," and began to shout out the names of all sorts of things which he put into the kit-bag. As soon as he had finished he said, "Sign here. Get your civvy clothes over your arm and get outside."

When I had signed the paper proving I had had the things, I said to the man, "Please, my hat does not fit." He looked at me and roared, "Get your hair cut, then. Hop it." I got out as quickly as I could and found I had left my hat and shoes, gloves and spats behind. I am afraid I have lost them. When I got outside a man came and asked me if he should help me put on my puttees. I thanked him and he did it. He also very kindly showed me how to pack my bag properly, but when I got home I could not find a lot of articles that I saw them put in. Perhaps I lost them on my way home. I am not very pleased with my new clothes, as the puttees, trousers, jacket and cap all seem different colours, somehow, and they do not fit very well, I did not enjoy my journey home, having to carry that beastly bag; and the big heavy boots they gave me made an awful noise on the pavement. Everyone seemed to look at me and smile. I wonder why?

**21 Feb 15** - Another awful day. I got to the barracks at 8 a.m. I had to run nearly all the way and go without my breakfast to get there in time. About half-past eight someone shouted, "Fall in." I did not know where to go, so stood still and in less than a minute a man rushed up to me and shouted most rude things, calling me all sorts of names. However, he showed me where to go and then we answered our names. Then an officer came out and walked up and down the line. When he came to me he asked me why my buttons were not clean. Then about 50 of us were taken to one end of the drill ground and an awful sergeant started to teach us our drill. He was most uncivil and very unkind. He taught us how to salute and turn to the right and left.

At the end of two hours he said we might "break off" for half an hour and go the the YMCA. I was very tired. Suddenly someone shouted, "Fall in" again. I get there all right that time. A man came with a slip of paper in his hand and shouted out my name and the names of three more. When he had got us placed to his liking, he said, "You four are for QM fatigue." I wondered what he meant. I now know. We went to the place where we got our clothes, and as soon as we went inside the man who gave me my clothes yesterday grinned at me in a most offensive manner. He then said, "Now then, you four, sweep this place out and clean it up properly. He gave us some brushes and dusters and made us clean the whole place. I saw my beautiful new hat hung on a peg with a label on it "A relic of 1914." I was afraid to ask for my shoes and things. Just before we had finished, the man who sat at the table came in. I have found out since that he is the QMS. I wonder what that is. The other man, who I have found out is a corporal, said to him, "Is

there anything else for these fellows to do?" and the QMS said, "Yes, take them to the sergeant-cook and tell him to put them to scrub out the cookhouse, as it is a disgrace." The corporal marched us off and handed us over to a sergeant who gave us pails and scrubbing brushes, and made us scrub the floor on our hands and knees. When we had done that he made us polish a lot of dirty tins and dishes. and kept grumbling at us all the time.

At last I got cross and said, "Excuse me, but I did not join the Army to clean your dirty floors and dishes." I thought he had gone mad. He shouted out, "Fall in two men," and two men who were standing outside came. Then he said, "Take this blighter to the clink," and before I knew where I was I was in a nasty dark cell and the door locked. I know what the "clink" is now. I had been there about two hours when a corporal came and said, "Come along." Two men walked with me, one on each side, and took me outside a door marked "Orderly Room." We stood there a long time. Presently the door opened and a man, who I found out after was the sergeant-major, whatever that means, shouted, "Bring in the prisoner." The corporal said, "Take your cap off." I did so and was marched into an office and told to stand before an officer who was sitting at a table. The sergeant-major read something from a piece of paper and said I was charged with insolence to a NCO and all sorts of things. Then the sergeant-cook was fetched and he told an awful lot of lies about me. The officer asked what I had to say, and I told him I only said I did not join the Army to wash dishes. He was very nice about it and said he would let me off this time, but if I came there again he would deal very severely with me. I began to thank him, but before I could say half a dozen words the sergeant major shouted, "Right turn, Quick march," and I found myself outside. One of the men who took me in told me I was very lucky to get off, as they usually shot people for less than I had done. When this was all over it was time to go home. I shall have to be careful in the future. I do not much care for the Army. Must clean my buttons, I suppose.

**23 Feb 15** - Got to the barracks in time. It took me a long time to clean my buttons, and they do not look very bright even now. I must get someone to show me the proper way. When they shouted "Fall in" I got into my proper place this time and answered my name. After the officer had looked at us, he read what he said was the Army Act. All I know is that for whatever I did wrong I was subject to death or some such less punishment "as in this Act mentioned." I wish more than ever I had not joined the

Army. This took about an hour, and then we had some drill. The man who drilled us called me dreadful names, but I did not answer him as I was still thinking of the "clink" and what the officer read out. Besides that, he seemed a bad-tempered man. When the time came to break off, a man came to me with a large bucket, and told me I was to go to the store and ask for a bucket of whitewash to whitewash the "last post". I went and knocked at the door. Someone shouted, "Come in." I went in the QMS said, "Well, what do you want?" I said, "Please, I have come for the whitewash to whitewash the last post, and please can you tell me where it is as the man did not tell me." He said, "Put the bucket down," and he scribbled a note and said, "Take this to the sergeant-major." I did so and the sergeant-major smiled, wrote another note, and told me to take it back. I did this and the QMS called a man and told him to give me some whitewash and a brush and put me to whitewash the latrines, and to see I did it. I did not know they called those places the last post, or I would not have gone to get the whitewash. It took me all day to do them and I put nearly as much on myself as on the walls. I had to walk home with everyone laughing at me. It will take me hours to get my clothes clean.

**24 Feb 15** - They told me last night to bring everything I had had given me with me this morning for kit inspection. I was nearly sure I had lost a lot of things and now I am quite sure. I had to spread everything out and an officer and the QMS came and looked at them. The QMS said, "Where is your razor, clothes-brush, hair-brush, hussif and clasp knife." I said, "I don't know," and the officer said, "Charge him up." There were other things besides, and I had to get new kit from the store. The QMS told me that I should be stopped 15s. 10d. from my pay. I wonder if the man who helped me pack could tell me anything about them. I do not like to ask him as he may think I thought he stole them. Nothing but drill all day.

This ends the items of interest in the old diary. After that it was drill unceasing, and I managed to steer clear of trouble. Then off to the 2nd line, and after lots of moves and transfers I fetched up at Egg Buckland. Reading over the above I came to these conclusions that the next time I join the Army I shall:

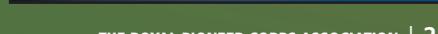
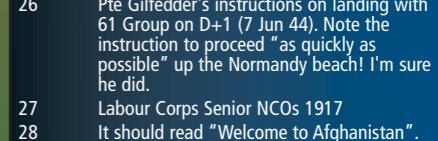
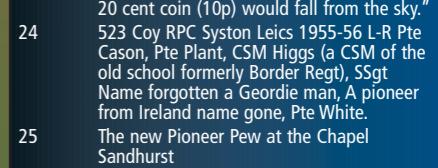
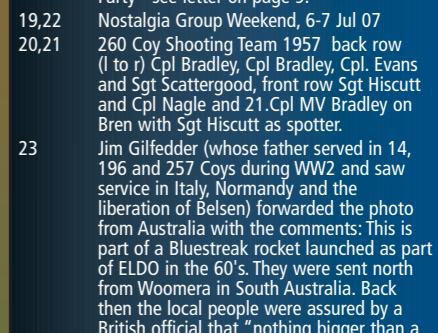
- Join in my oldest clothes.
- Do everything told without comment.
- Take what is given me, but be sure to pack my own kit
- Never go and ask for whitewash to whitewash the "last post." ■



# Passout Parades

The following photos are from various passing out parades. If you recognise any please write in to let us know. Please note some of the photographs have been cropped in size.





# INDEX

- 1 Army v Navy game at Twickenham on 4 May 07: Sgt Tony Hincliffe, Sgt Simon Durnford, Mr Tommy Hulse, Cpl Martin Brimacombe, LCpl Simon Forman & Cpl Jason Dowse.
- 2,3 Bicester Civic Parade, 17 Jun 07
- 4-10 Founders Day at RH Chelsea 7 Jun 07
- 11-17 RPCA Reunion Weekend, 6-8 Jul 07
- 18 Mr & Mrs MV Bradley at Queen's Garden Party - see letter on page 9.
- 19,22 Nostalgia Group Weekend, 6-7 Jul 07
- 20,21 260 Coy Shooting Team 1957 back row (l to r) Cpl Bradley, Cpl Bradley, Cpl. Evans and Sgt Scattergood, front row Sgt Hiscutt and Cpl Nagle and 21.Cpl MV Bradley on Bren with Sgt Hiscutt as spotter.
- 23 Jim Gilfedder (whose father served in 14, 196 and 257 Cosys during WW2 and saw service in Italy, Normandy and the liberation of Belsen) forwarded the photo from Australia with the comments: This is part of a Blustreak rocket launched as part of ELD0 in the 60's. They were sent north from Woomera in South Australia. Back then the local people were assured by a British official that "nothing bigger than a 20 cent coin (10p) would fall from the sky."
- 24 523 Coy RPC Syston Leics 1955-56 L-R Pte Cason, Pte Plant, CSM Higgs (a CSM of the old school formerly Border Regt), SSgt Name forgotten a Geordie man, A pioneer from Ireland name gone, Pte White.
- 25 The new Pioneer Pew at the Chapel Sandhurst
- 26 Pte Gilfedder's instructions on landing with 61 Group on D+1 (7 Jun 44). Note the instruction to proceed "as quickly as possible" up the Normandy beach! I'm sure he did.
- 27 Labour Corps Senior NCOs 1917
- 28 It should read "Welcome to Afghanistan".

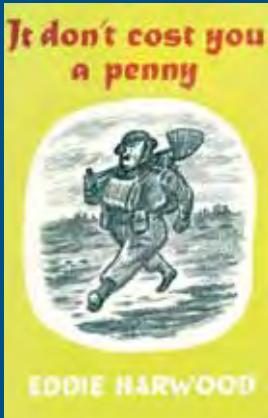


# The Worldwide Distribution of Association Newsletters...

In addition to the wide distribution of the Newsletter within the U.K. and BFPO addresses, the Newsletter is also distributed to the following countries:

Australia  
Belgium  
Bulgaria  
Canada  
Cyprus  
Denmark  
Dominica  
Eire  
France  
Germany  
Gibraltar  
Holland  
New Zealand  
Portugal  
Qatar  
Sierra Leone  
Spain  
Sweden  
Switzerland  
USA



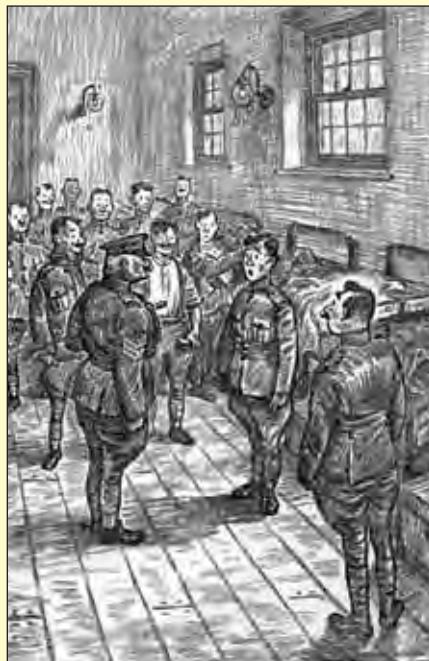


# It don't cost you a penny

THE MEMOIRS OF A BATMAN

by Eddie Harwood  
(Maj E H Rhodes-Wood)

*First Published 1955 by the author who wrote the RPC War History with 34 drawings by Sillince*



'I am pregnant, sgt, and it don't half hurt.'

## CHAPTER 1 - How I come to be a batman

People have often asked me how I come to be a batman, so as you will want to know the same thing, I will tell you. Also, my mates always want to know how I got in the Pioneer Corps so I will tell you that as well because it is only fair for you to know if you are going to read this what I am writing. But first of all I have got to join the Army so I better start from when I took the shilling in the Old Kent Road back in 1907.

Me and a pal of mine was going along to the gas works to see can we get a job when this recruiting sgt stops us. He looks proper posh this sgt does in his full regimentsal with ribbons in his cap and a stick under his arm and shiny medals on his tunic.

'Where is you 2 smart lads going to?' he says.

'We are going to the gas works to get a job, my mate says.'

'Strewth,' says the sgt, 'ain't you got no ambition? Fine big lads like you should be in the Army and not in a stinking gas works,' he says. 'Good pay, and good holidays, and travel all over the world, and it don't cost you a penny,' he says. 'And then a lovely pension at the end of it! Come on, what about it?'

So my pal, what is called Johnny Beer, looks at me and says, 'How about it, Eddie?' and I says, 'I don't mind,' and he

says he don't mind, and so we joins up. I tell this sgt I would like to ride a horse so they put me in the Royal Horse Artillery, and Noggin, which is how everybody calls Johnny, he goes in the Engineers and they send him to Chatham, but I goes to Woolwich so I do not see him no more except once when we are both on leaf at the same time.

It is a funny thing about Noggin. When he goes in the RE, he becomes a Sapper, which is how they call a private soldier in that mob, only nobody don't call him Sapper Beer but always calls him Supper Beer. That makes me laugh when he tells me. He married a girl in Chatham what was called Herring and they made a proper meal of it and had 6 kids, only Noggin is dead a long time now.

Well, like I says, I was sent to Woolwich as is the Depot for the RHA. Proper ignorant I was in them days, me being only a kid, and they all take the mike out of me they do. I have got to tell you this one. One morning at Reveille I am not feeling very good.

'I ain't half feeling sick. I do not think I can go on parade,' I says to the other blokes in the room.

'What is wrong?' asks one bloke, so I tell him it is my stomach what is hurting and after he has asked some more questions he shakes his head like he is very sorry for me.

'Blimey, that is bad and you will have to see the MO,' he says, 'I know what is wrong with you. You are pregnant.'

'Is it serious?' I asks him.

'Well, there ain't many blokes in the Army what has got it,' he tells me.

Now as I have not been pregnant before I do not know what it means and the pains is so bad that I get real scared. Then the Orderly Sgt comes round.

'Is anybody sick in this room?' he asks.

'Yes, sgt, I am,' I tells him.

'And what is wrong with you?' he says.

'I am pregnant, sgt,' I says, 'and it don't half hurt.'

Blimey, I thought he was never going to stop talking. He cusses me out good and proper and says he is going to put me on a charge, but after a time he sees that I do not know what I am talking about and it is the other blokes what has told me to say it so he stops cussing at me and tells them others off for putting language like that into my mouth when I don't know what it means.

I done a pontoon in the Artillery, that being how they say in the Army when a bloke has served his 21 years, and I come out with a 'V.G.' on my certificate. Served in India and all over the place, I did, and was all through the 1914 War so when

this last war comes along I goes to join up again leaving the Mrs to look after the barrow what I have got in Camberwell, and a very good pitch it is as well. Fruit and veg I do, with sometimes a few flowers but I don't touch flowers much because Harry King what is 2 stalls along from me he does flowers and nothing else so it don't pay if both of us does them, and anyway young Harry is going out with my girl Edna and I would not want to make no hard feelings.

Well, like I says, I kisses Ma and the 2 girls Good Bye and goes to join up again. Ma is sniffing and saying I did not ought to go to war again at my age and the kids is sobbing their poor little hearts out. But what else can I do? When a bloke has been soldiering all his life he cannot help his self and has got to go back. A couple of hours later back I comes home again.

'They won't take me,' I says. 'I am too blooming old,' and I chucks my bag in the corner and goes out on the booze. Half a dozen times I kisses my family Good Bye and goes off to enlist and then comes back home again, only they don't cry no more but just laughs and says, 'See you soon, Dad,' so the last time when I goes up and don't come back no more they don't half get a shock.

'Oh, God, is you back again!' the man says to me.

'Yes,' I says, 'And I am going to keep on coming back because you are going to need me before this lot is over.'

'Well,' he says, 'if that is how it is we had better join you up so we can have some peace. What mob do you want, mate?'

'Royal Horse Artillery,' I says.

'Oh, no, you won't,' he tells me. 'There ain't hardly no RHA left now.' So then I says I would like to be a Tank. but he says I am too old for the Tanks. Then I says I would like to be an infantry and go in the Bermondsey Bleeders what some of my pals is in and he says I am too old to be an infantry in the Bleeders. So then I says, 'Then I will go back home to my grandchildren,' only that is a joke because I have not got no grandchildren, and he says, 'No you will not. You will go in the Coast Artillery.'

So I done that but I did not like it. This Battery is miles from anywhere and a proper ragtime mob and the officers was not proper officers but only Terriers so I am in trouble all the time because I do not care any more. If there had been a real war going on I would have soldiered proper but there was not any fighting war and we was always shut up in this bleeding fort what is more like a prison than a proper barracks so I says, 'To hell with this.' So when I come out of the Glass House the second time the officer has me



*I kisses Ma and the 2 girls Good Bye and goes to join up again.*

up on the mat in front of him.

'You are always asking for a transfer and now you have got it,' he says. 'You are a crummy soldier so I am going to send you to a crummy mob and good riddance to you.'

So I come to a Pioneer Coy and the Major there was an old sweat like me and not one of them war time blokes what don't know the Army proper. Well, when I joins this Coy I am marched up to the Orderly Room by the sgt major to see the Old Man, that being what we call the Major. When I come in he was looking at my crime sheets.

'This is a dam poor show, my lad,' he says, 'and being an old soldier you ought to know better.' So I says, 'Yes, sir.' Then he says to remember I am no longer in the Artillery but back in the real Army again and so help me God if I play any monkey tricks with him he will break my bleeding heart so that I go to bed and cry myself to sleep at nights, but he will forget my old crime sheets if I don't remember him of them. And I says, 'Yes, sir', again, and thinks to myself, 'Watch your step, Ed, because this old basket means what he is saying and this is the sort of officer like what you had in the Regulars.' Proper sods they was, but real officers.

'What is the Old Man like, sgt major?' I asks when I am marched out again, and the sgt major looks at me and grinds his teeth.

'Stand to attention when you speak to me, you gutter sweepings,' he yells, 'and say, "Sir!"' So I stands to attention and says 'Sir' like what he said but I think this is a blooming hot crowd and I am not going to like it very much.

There was some other blokes which comes to this Coy the same time as me from other regiments and they has bad records like what I got and this sgt major has us all paraded.

'Now, you men, let me tell you something,' he says, looking at our papers what he has got in his hand. 'You have come from the Guards, and the Gunners, and the Tanks, and some lousy infantry mobs,' he says, 'and they could not handle you so they sends you to us and now by God you will start proper soldiering and if you put one foot wrong you will wish as how you had never been born.' And that is the way it was. The officers and non coms was nearly all old sweats and you could not get away with things with them. Some of the blokes tries to come the old soldier but it do not work, and some of them deserted and the sgt major laughs and says he hopes they come back so he can tear their bleeding hearts out. But they do not come back no more. Some of us stops in the Coy and I am one of them and I done very well in the

Pioneers and after I have done a time on drills and work I was put in the sgt's Mess as an orderly. Then one day the sgt major sends for me.

'Here, you,' he says. 'You have been promoted to a batman. Go over to the officers' lines and look after them new Lts what has just come in.'

'Sgt major,' I says, 'I have never been a batman and do not know what to do.'

'Then you had better learn bleeding quick,' he says.

And that is how I become a batman. Then in Italy I got promoted to Group HQ but when we went to France I was put back again with the boys and I was not in a Mess no more but the war ended then so it was alright.

When I was in the Officers' Mess I met all the brigadiers and colonels and at the beginning I was windy of them but after a bit I was not windy no more because when you have seen them with no uniform on but only in their little short shirt with their teeth in a cup you know they are not so big as they make out but are just ordinary men what likes to have a joke and a booze up and have a Mrs and kids just the same as us.



*'Stand to attention when you speak to me, you gutter sweepings!'*

## CHAPTER 2 - I nearly died of laughing

In the early part of the war we have one Coy in the Group which is a proper terror. All the blokes in it was dockers who got took away from the docks when the war broke out and were put in uniform and sent to France to work in the docks there. They are first class when it comes to working but ain't no good on parade because they ain't done no drills and do not have no use for discipline. Well, nobody don't bother about them being scruffy so long as they loads up the ships alright but after we has done a scarper out of Dunkirk and they come back to England somebody says they has got to start looking like soldiers when they is not working on ships. Only those dockers are not interested in looking like soldiers.

The first two Majors what they sent to this Coy don't get on very good because the men don't take no notice of them and the only time everybody is on parade is on pay day so these Majors do not last very long. And it is the same with the sgt major who is supposed to be a hard case but he is not hard enough to handle these blokes what only shouts back at him when he shouts at them. Only they shout louder than what he does. After this sgt major has been took to hospital because a brick fell on his head one day the Colonel what is in charge of the Group don't know what to do and it is just then that a new Major is sent to him. He is a big bloke

this Major, over 6 foot, and he has got the First War ribbons up but he wears an eyeglass and all the time has a coloured hanky stuck up one sleeve of his tunic and which is generally hanging out a few inches. So the Colonel sent him to this dockers Coy.

Well, when these dock blokes see this new Major what has come to them with his eyeglass and everything they laughs and winks at each other and gets all set for a proper caper. But this Major don't take no notice and lets on like he do not see they are making fun of him and starts off by saying he will have a full Coy Parade.

Us chaps in the other Coys are hanging about to see what will happen because we do not think the dockers will turn out on parade and are very surprised when the whole blooming lot falls in. They lines up 3 deep but don't take up their dressing proper so they is all over the place like a snake and is all standing anyhow sloppy like. So the Major looks at them and shouts to them to stand to attention and with that every man jack of them puts his hand down the neck of his tunic and pulls out his identity disc what is on a string round his neck and puts the identity disc in their eye like they was monocles. Then they fumble round the sleeve of their tunics and pulls out the end of their hanky what they has put up their sleeve before they come on parade. And after that they come to attention, or the best they know how, never having learned the drill.

I nearly died of laughing because I have not seen anything so funny in all my life. There was them 300 men with their identity discs stuck in their eyes and their hankeys sticking out of their sleeves and the Major standing looking at them with his monocle in his eye and his hanky sticking out of his sleeve.

Well, that Major never batted a bleeding eyelid. For a minute he stands looking at them and then he starts an inspection just like they was not taking the micky out of him. Some-times he stops in front of a man tell him not to screw his mouth up because he is holding his identity disc in his eye and not in his mouth. And other blokes what kept on dropping their discs out of their eye he shows them how to hold it proper. Sometimes he tells a man he has got too much of his hanky showing or another bloke that he did ought to wash his hanky before



*There was 300 men with their identity discs stuck in their eyes*



*He just raises his peak cap and says,  
'Good day, gentlemen.'*

he let other people see it. And all the time he is as solemn as a judge.

There is quite a crowd hanging about the parade ground by this time and it is as quiet as in a church. Well, the Major finishes his inspection and then stands in front of his Coy looking at them and them looking at him and I reckon they was feeling a bit silly like by this. Then he takes his eyeglass string from round his neck and holds the glass between his fingers. It is one of them glasses in a gold frame and has a sort of veranda round it and he throws it up in the air and catches it in his eye and says:

*'Now let me see you do that, you bloody dock rats.'*

So help me, they stood and cheered him like he has promised them all a free drink.

The place where us and them dockers was working is a big factory and as there is secret stuff in there every Coy has to take it in turn to have an armed guard on the gates. Us other Coys does the guard proper like with our rifles at the slope and the sentries marching up and down like they was in barracks. But not them dockers. Sometimes they carry their rifle under their arm like they is going shooting rabbits but most times they leave their rifles leaning against the wall and the two sentries stands talking to each other with their hands in their pockets. Fred Karno's army don't have nothing on them dockers I can tell you. They don't bother about officers or anything like that and if an officer chokes them off they are as likely to tell him to go and jump in the river as not. Mind you, they is friendly like to officers the same as they is to other soldiers and says, 'Hello, mate', or 'How do, cock,' if one goes past them what they know is a decent bloke.

Well, they are on guard the week this new Major come to them and they carries on like they always done but he don't go off the deep end at them like other officers would only he just raises his peak cap when he goes past the sentries and says to them, 'Good day, gentlemen.' If that Major went in and out of that there gate once that first day he went in and out a hundred times and always he lifts his hat and says, 'Good morning, gentlemen' or 'Good afternoon, gentlemen' as the case may be.

At first they think it is very funny and grins at him and says, 'Good morning, Major,' or something like that but by the afternoon they are proper browned off because they see he is taking a rise out of them. In the canteen they says to us other blokes, 'That there Major thinks we don't know how to salute proper but we will show the old basket that we can do as good as anybody else.' Then the blokes what is down

for guard the next day says to us will we show them how the drill is done. So we done that. All that evening they learns Stand at Ease – Attention – Slope Arms – Butt Salute – Order Arms and back to Stand at Ease again until they are fair wore out and by this time they don't do it so bad seeing as how they has not done it before.

The next morning us blokes what is working near the main gate hangs about with our eyes skinned waiting for this Major to come along and see what happens. Soon we see him coming down the road and as he gets near the gate he is just going to lift his titfer when them two sentries what has been standing proper at ease comes up to attention and slopes arms and give him as snappy a butt salute as ever I see and this Major chuckles them a salute back like he is in front of a General. He don't say nothing. No 'Good morning, gents' or anything like that but when he has gone past them I see he is grinning away to his self. And after that they always give their own Major a proper salute, but they don't bother with other officers.

In the end this Coy was transferred to the RE as a Docks Coy and I never see them again but before he has finished with them this Major with the eyeglass has them eating out of his hand. They never become proper soldiers when they was with us but I never saw men try so hard to please an officer like what they done and if anybody else makes fun of this Major and his eyeglass them dockers give them a proper bashing.

### CHAPTER 3 - The Foring Legion

Most people do not know that there was a Foring Legion in the British Army in the last war but I was in it for a few weeks so I know it is true. Mind you, I never knew what I was going in because nobody didn't tell me which I do not think is the right thing to do when a bloke is a volunteer like me and not a blinking conscript. How did I get among them foringers you ask? Well, I will tell you.

One day when I was with a Coy soon after I joins the Pioneers the sgt major says to me, 'Here, you, Harwood. Go to the Orderly Room.'

*'I ain't done nothing,' I says.*

*'Don't answer me back,' he says, 'but go to the Orderly Room at the double and report to the Major.'*

So I done that.

*'I have been hearing about you,' says the Major.*

*'Well, I never done it,' I told him.*

*'Done what?' he asks.*

*'Done what you heard about me,' I says.  
'What ever it is I have got an alibi.'*

You see, I do not think there is anything what he could have found out about so I puts on an innocent act. But he only laughs.

*'What service have you got in?' he asks me. So I told him. 'Have you ever thought about taking a stripe?' he says.*

*'Not bleeding likely, sir,' I says, 'Begging your pardon, sir.'*

And that is the truth because I would not let my pals down by doing a thing like that.

*'Well,' he says, 'things is different in war time and we has got to do a lot of things we don't like doing so I am making you up to a corporal because there is a place where they wants old soldiers like you and they has got to be non coms.'*

Now, I am very upset about this because I have done C.B. and field punishment and 2 trips to the glass house but I have always kept myself respectable and never took a stripe. So when I come away from the Orderly Room I do not tell my pals that I have been made up to a corporal because I

do not want them saying things behind my back what they have always said to my face. So the next thing I know I am on 48 hours leaf and my old lady is putting them stripes on my tunic. Nearly in tears she was.

*'What has you been a doing, of Ed, for them to do this to you?' she says.*

*'I can't help it,' I says, 'Orders is orders as you well know and if the Major says I got to put them 2 stripes up I got to put them up and that is all there is to it.'*

*'Well, mind it don't go to your head,' she says. 'You has been a private soldier all your service and you know what they say about good privates making bad NCOs.'*

The way she carries on I am glad when my 48 hours is up and I get on the train to go to this place they calls Westward Ho, which I think is a silly name for a town only there wasn't no town there as I could see but only country and the seaside. A proper dump it was. Going up to the camp and a carrying of my kit I stops a bloke what is in uniform and wearing a Pioneer badge.

*'Hello, cock,' I says. 'How much further is it to this bleeding No 3 Centre?'*

*'No spik,' he says, waving his hands in the air.*

*'What's that?' I says, thinking he is doing a smart alec on me.*

*'No spik,' he says again and walks away.*

*Well, stone the crows,' I say to another bloke what comes along. 'Do you see that bloke what is dressed like a Tommy? He says he don't speak English. Do you think he is a spy?'*

This other bloke he clicks his heels together and makes a funny little bow.

*'Nine, corporal. He of the Austrian Coy is,' he says.*

Blimey, I nearly fainted because this second bloke he talks just like them German soldiers what is in the movies. We have been invaded, I says to myself. These blokes is para-shooters. I knew something horrible would happen when they give me them stripes. I wonder if I ought to shoot them both as they don't have no rifles only I am carrying so much stuff what with a kit-bag, and a haversack, and a water bottle, and a gas mask, and a gas cape, and a tin hat, and a greatcoat, and a rifle, and a cake what Ma made for me tied up in a parcel that I could not get at my ammo without I undresses myself by which time they would have done me in so I don't let them see I



*'No spik,' he says.*

have spotted they are Germans but just says, 'Good night, chum,' and walks away quick like.

After a bit I sees the camp in front of me on a bit of a hill so I sits down on my kitbag and lights a fag and thinks it all out. The way I see it, I am surrounded by these parashooters so it ain't no good trying to get back to the station again, but things seem quiet up at the camp so perhaps they have not been captured yet. To be on the safe side I slips a clip of ammo in the magazine of my rifle and makes sure there is one up the spout because no ruddy German is going to shoot at me without I shoots back at him. Then I leaves my kit under a bush and sneaks up to the camp without nobody seeing me so I can have a dekko. There is a bloke at the gate what is dressed like a Pioneer sgt so as he is all by his self I creeps up to him and jabs my rifle in his back.' Who goes there?' I says. He didn't half jump. 'What the hell do you think you are a going of, you drunken basket?' he asks. 'Don't point that rifle at me or I will kick your perishing guts right through your bleeding neck.'

'Blimey, I could have kissed him I were that glad to hear proper English spoke again.'

'Turn out the guard, sarge,' I shouts at him. 'We has been invaded. This place is lousy with Gerrys what is all around us. We have been parashooted.' I says.

'Take is easy, corps,' he tells me. 'There is thousands of them blokes here and they are all Pioneers just the same as you and me.'

And it is just like he says. There is Gerrys and Eyetalians and Spanish and Poles and French and god knows what else. But how the hell was I to know? Nobody never told me.

The Colonel in this place was a real live Lord what they call a Markwis. A proper gent as well, he was, and real regimental. Anyway, he was the regimentalest Colonel I ever met in the Pioneers which is saying a lot. The next morning I goes up in front of the Adjutant.

'You have been sent here to be a drill instructor,' he says.

'But I do not speak their lingo,' I tells him.

'Well make them learn yours,' he says.

So I done like he told me but I was not happy there and missed the blokes I was used to serving with because only the officers and non coms was English and you can not be very friendly with them, can you?

Now these Germans and people was not Nazis but blokes what Hitler has got his knife into so they done a moonlight flit out of their country because if they never done that they would have got put in one of them concentrated camps. So they come to



*The Lord was very nice about it and made me up to a private again.*

England. 'Let us come in your Army so we can get our own back on them Nazis,' they says. And the government let them. Only after they has enlisted all these foringers the War Office don't know what to do with them. So the Army says, 'Give them to the Pioneers. Those boys can do anything and if the Pioneers can't make soldiers out of these foringers nobody can.' And that is what they done, and the Pioneers took them and learned them English and made soldiers out of them. Lots of them don't speak nothing but their own language when they joins up so they has to learn English and learn drill at the same time. But some of them spoke very good English just like Vic Oliver.

Taking them all round they was not a bad lot of foringers only I never stopped there long enough to get to know them very good because soon we are moved to Ilfracombe and I am brought up before the Lord.

'You are a shocking bad NCO,' he says. 'Have you got anything to say why I should not take them stripes off your arm and send you back to a Coy to dig latrines which is all you are fit for?'

'Thank you kindly, Lord,' I says.

'Say "Sir",' says the RSM what is standing behind me. But when I am having a friendly talk to a Lord I do not hob-nob with RSMs so I don't take no notice of him.

I tells the Lord that I don't want to be nothing but a private the same like what I has always been, but my old Major made me up to a corporal without asking me which I do not think he ought to have done. The Lord was very nice about it and made me up to a private again so I don't have to be a corporal no more.

When I gets back to my Coy again the sgt major is proper browned off.

'O God, I thought we had got rid of you,' he says. 'Where have you been?'

'Serving with the Foring Legion, sgt major,' I says.

'I don't want none of your lip,' he tells me. 'Parade at the Orderly Room in the morning for insolence to a superior officer.'

I got away with it, of course, because that was the truth what I told him about there being a Foring Legion in the British Army. Because if there had not been I would have had to do CB for saying that to a sgt major, and I never had to do so that proves it.

## CHAPTER 4 - The trick cyclist exam

Everyone has got to have some learning but it is dangerous having too much. Like when them blokes came round the Coy with books with little pictures and all that sort of thing because they wants to see how clever we were. We had one what come to see us when we was stationed in Surrey. The first time he come we were getting ready to put on some sort of a concert in the recreation room. I forget what it was now but me and another bloke was doing a painting job there the day before.

The Colonel and a lot of the officers from the other Coys was there having a dekko at what we was doing when the sgt major comes in and whispers something to the Major and the Major says to the Colonel, 'The trick cyclist has come, sir. Would you like to see him' and the Colonel says, 'Yes, I would.' Now I have not heard that we was going to have a trick cyclist at the concert so I think I would like to see him as well so I stays quiet behind some scenery. The sgt major spots the other bloke what is on the painting job and slings him out, but he do not see me as I am hid so I do not get chucked out.

Well, the trick cyclist come in but he is

only an officer and he don't have no bike with him I am very sorry to see as I hoped he was going to give a show for the officers to let them see how good he was. He talks to the Colonel and the Major and then brings a lot of papers and books out of a case what he is carrying and all the officers get round the table for to see them. From where I am I cannot see them papers but I can hear what they are saying and it seems like it is some kind of a game.

'This is the sort of thing, sir,' the trick cyclist says to the Colonel as he turns over the pages of one of his books. 'Here are 4 pictures but one of them is out of place. Which is it?'

'Damned if I know,' says the Colonel scratching of his head after he has looked at this book for a minute. So then the Majors has a dekko and some says one thing and some says another but none of them ain't very sure about it.

'This one,' says the trick cyclist, and they all say, 'Oh,' so I do not think he is a trick cyclist at all but one of them blokes what do card tricks and that sort of thing.

So, after that this bloke shows them some more papers and in the end they all say they have got the hang of it.

'What do you do with the men what passes this test?' asks the Colonel.

'We puts them in the infantry and Tanks and things like that,' says the trick cyclist, so then I rumbles that it is some sort of dirty trick they is going to put over on the lads and this officers is not a trick cyclist at all but that is just what they called him to fool the troops. So I makes up my mind I will put the lads wise to what is going on.

When the boys come in from work that evening I gets all our platoon together and tells them that next week a bloke is coming down from War Office to put a fast one over on us, only I make it sound worse that what it is and says they are going to send all the blokes what passes this exam into some sort of sewerside squad. In the next day or two we spreads the word around the other platoons so they will be ready when this chap turns up.

But them blokes in the War Office is proper crafty and the next week they do not send an officer down but only a sgt instead. Every platoon in turn has to go in the recreation room where we sits down at tables and the sgt tells us they are going to see how clever we are, but he do not say anything about being sent to the infantry if we is too clever so we looks at each other and winks when he is not looking. Then this sgt gives us each a book and tells us to turn to the first page.

'There is 6 drawings there,' he says, 'but one of them things has got nothing to do with the other ones. All you have got to do is put a line through the one what don't belong. If there is 5 animals and one bird that there bird is different from the others so you strikes it out. Or if there is 5 trees and one flower you strike the flower out because it is different from the others. Is there any questions?' he asks.

'Yes, sarge,' I says. 'What if we do not know the answers?'

'Just shut your eyes and have a bash,' he says.

We goes all through them papers and, blimey, I never see nothing so silly in all my life. Some pages had words missing what you had to fill in and some had other questions like, 'A rose is red-blue-green', and you had to strike out the wrong colour. My two kids could have done it easy. You should have seen my paper when I finished. It was a beaut. I nearly died with laughing making



*'Damned if I know,' says the Colonel.*

up some of the answers. I could have done it all proper standing on my head only I never wanted to leave the Pioneers what was a bloody fine mob and doing just as good a job of work as anybody else in the flaming Army.

Well, the only blokes what got any answers right was them what was too ignorant to make a mistake on purpose. Nothing happens for a few weeks and then I gets put in the sgt's Mess as an orderly. One day the sgt major comes into the Mess and says sarcastic like to the others, 'You will be happy to learn we have got the most ignorant Coy in the whole Group and the Major is very pleased about it, but I don't think it is anything to be proud of.'

'How's that?' asks one of the sgt's and the sgt major goes on to tell them that we only got 3 men in the Coy what passed that there trick cyclist exam. Some of the other Coys has got 30 or 40 men what passed and is being sent to the infantry but we are only losing 3 he says.

'Bloody blacklegs,' I says.

'What's that?' asks the sgt major sharp like.

'Nothing,' I says, 'I was only talking to myself.' And then I goes in to the kitchen and laughs up my sleeve.

But them 3 men was not much good to the Pioneers anyway. They was nice enough blokes and well brought up but one of them has been to Oxford and Cambridge and the other 2 has put in for a commission so they wasn't much good for work.

So like I said it shows that it don't pay to have too much learning because the Colonel was giving a silver bugle to the best Coy in the Group. We was the best Coy, of course, but because we was so scattered up we could not get a good football team together and thought we would lose points on the score for sports. But the other Coys got all broke up after that there trick cyclist exam so we walks away with that silver trumpet easy as pie. The Colonel give it to us after a concert what we had and says what a good Coy we are and how he is very proud of us. But I still think they ought to have give it to me because if it had not been for me we would never have won it. Of course, I cannot play a blinking trumpet but I bet I could have flogged it to one of them clever Coys what never won it.

## CHAPTER 5 - Don't take orders too serious

There is a saying in the Army that 'Orders is orders and has got to be obeyed' but if you ask me a lot of them is silly ones and anyway it is a funny thing what can be done with orders if you have a mind to.

I remember one order what come from the top brass in Algiers the time I was batting for the Major what looks after the arabs. Them wogs has a big religious do every year what they calls a ramadam when for a whole month they don't eat or drink nothing all day long. They has had this in arabland for thousands of years. Well, after the first couple of weeks them arabs is not much good for working seeing as how they has to stop up all night catching up on the grub what they never had in the day time, and as they are working for the British Army them blokes in Algiers gets into a panic about it and sends to my officer to say he has got to see the Grand Mufty, that being how they call the head arab parson, and get him to put off having any ramadams this year.

'My, God,' says the Major, 'has them so and sos gone mad?'

'What are you going to do about it?' ask one of the other officers.

'Nothing,' says the Major. Which is what he done.

Another week or so goes past and then another message comes from Algiers asking what is happening about the ramadam and the Major sends back an answer to say he is looking into the matter. But he still don't do nothing. The next week they sends another signal and the Major tells them he is expecting an answer any day now. And he still don't do nothing. By this time the blokes in Algiers has got their selves worked up into such a state they is fit to have kittens any minute and says they have got to have an answer immediate. So the Major give them a day or two to cool off and then sends them an urgent message to say as how the Grand Mufty has agreed to putting off having any ramadams this year if the Pope and the Archbishop of Canterbury will put off having any Christmas, but he has got to know the answer by next morning. A proper comic that Major was. Anyway, this was the last we heard about having no ramadams.

There is another story about orders as I will tell you and this was in England before I went overseas. Soon after I was sent to the Pioneers I got made a driver. How it happens was the sgt major catches me one day when I am supposed to be cleaning out the billet but have knocked off for a minute to have two draws and a spit.

'Ho,' he says, nasty like, 'you are having a bit of a mike, are you? I got to find you a job where you can't knock off any time you feels like it. What was you when you was in the Regulars?' he asks.

'I was a driver, sgt major,' I says, that being what I done in the Horse Artillery.

'Ho,' he says, 'then tomorrow you can take over the ration lorry and drive that,' and off he goes not giving me a chance to tell him I used to drive horses and not lorries. But it just happens I know how to drive a motor because I have got my own lorry what I use to go to Covent Garden to pick up my stuff for the market, so when I was put on the Coy transport it was easy as kiss your foot. Then when the OC's driver went sick I got put on to drive his car for him.

At this time we has got a lot of officers what was in the cavalry before and this Major was one of them. You see, there wasn't no cavalry in this last war so they ain't no good for the infantry or artillery nobody

don't know what to do with these officers which was why they put them in the pioneers. A proper toff this Major was but a bit short tempered like and any cuss words he don't know is not in the drill book. Me having been a Horse Gunner we got on pretty good, this Major and me. Although I am supposed to be the driver he always drives his self because he has got his own cars on Civvy Street and do not like being drove by somebody else, so all I got to do is sit there with him when he is driving some place what suits me alright because it is a nice change having an officer drive you round when you are not used to it.

About this time a new order comes out what says officers is not allowed to drive cars but have got to let their drivers do it. This Major is fit to bust when he reads it and he even uses some new words which I have not heard before.

'Half of these drivers,' he says, 'is not fit to drive a fly off a bit of treacle pudding and I will not trust my valuable life in their hands. I have been driving motors all my life and am a better bleeding driver than any man in the Coy. To hell with their orders,' he says. 'But I sees a way out of it so I can still keep on driving. It says an officer can take over from the driver to give him a rest on a long run or if the driver is took sick. So don't you forget,' he tells me, 'if anybody asks you why I am driving you got to say you have been took sick.'

And that is the way we done it. Any time one of them red caps asks me did he see my officer driving the car I says, 'Yes, you did, because I been took sick all of a sudden like and am too ill to drive.'

One day the same red cap stops me three times and every time I spun him the same old yarn.

'If you is so sick you ought to see a doctor,' he says, sarcastic like, the last time he stops me.

'Do you know who my officer is?' I asks him.

'No,' he says.

'Well, I will have you know that is Lord Horder,' I tells him.

He never had the answer to that one.

But he got pinched in the end. By a red cap officer it was, who was a nasty bit of work as likes throwing his weight about. They never put him in the clink or nothing because they do not put officers in the jug unless it is for something very serious. What they done was to send him up in front of the Colonel for to get choked off. Only that don't do no good because he tells the Colonel there is a war on and he has got a lot of work to do and don't have time to



*'Ho,' he says, nasty like,  
'having a bit of a mike, are you?'*



*They do not put officers in the jug unless it is something serious.*

waste on silly orders what some b.f. has wrote. So the Colonel sends him up in front of our Brigadier and the Major, who do not care a dam for nobody, tells him the same thing and in the end the Major has got to see the General who is in charge of all the troops in that part of England.

Now where we were at this time is a part where they done fox hunting on horses which my Major is very good at and I have been with him 2 or 3 times as his groom which I like very much. The General is likewise a fox hunting man and he goes there as well. Only I never knew he was a General at first because my Major calls him Charlie and he calls my Major George and the Major don't say 'Sir' or nothing like that to him. Well, when this trouble about driving the car is on there is one of these here hunts.

'Are you game for a bit of sport?' my Major says to me, so I says, 'Yes, sir.'

'Alright,' he says. 'You are coming with me to the hunt tomorrow and I think there will be a bit of fun.' Then he tells me where the hunt is going to start and says I am to take his horse and wait for him there. So I done that. The dogs is there and the bloke with a little trumpet and some more gents and ladies and I see the General there as well. I am walking the Major's horse up and down when the Major comes walking across.

'Good morning, Charlie,' he calls out to the General what is near where me and the horse is.

'Good morning, George,' says the General what is mounted on his horse and comes up alongside. 'What is this dam nonsense I hears about you coming up in front of me tomorrow for refusing to obey orders?' asks the General.

'It is these silly bleeding orders what you have been putting out, Charlie,' says the Major. 'I thought you had more sense,' he says.

Then the Major turns to me and says quiet like out of the side of his mouth, 'Mount,' he says, so I mounted his horse and I am hardly in the saddle before the Major hops up and is sitting back of me on the horse's cruppers. Me and the General is very surprised when the Major done that and the General looks at him with his mouth wide open.

'Strike me pink,' he says. 'What are you doing up there, George?'

'Ain't you heard, Charlie?' says the Major all innocent like. 'Officers ain't allowed to drive their own cars or ride their own horses no more. Some silly basket has wrote an order about it. They tell me this is the way the Horse Guards is mounting guard at Whitehall now. But you don't have to worry, Charlie,' my Major tells the General. 'My man has done a three week riding course the same as my driver has done a 3 week driving course so he is trained proper.'

Well, the General went all red in the face

like he was going to have a fit.

'Get off that blasted horse,' he says, angry like, 'you are making a laughing stock of the Army.'

'Nobody don't have to make a laughing stock of this Army,' says the Major, 'the Army is doing that for their selves. And I will have you know, Charlie, I will ride my horse any ruddy way I wants and don't take no orders from you on it.'

So then the General rides away.

'Follow him up,' says the Major to me, so wherever the General goes me and the Major rides along behind and everybody is looking at us and wondering what the hell we are doing. In the end the General comes back alongside us.

'For God's sake stop this dam nonsense, George,' he says, very humble like. 'I expect we can square up all this business tomorrow.'

So the Major tells me to hop off what I done.

'You got to knock sense into some people with a bleeding hammer, Charlie,' the Major says to the General as they rides off together.



*'My man has done a three week riding course.'*

I don't know what happens the next day but the Major still drove his own car after that which only goes to prove that you gets on very well in the Army if you don't take orders too serious. Of course, knowing the General well enough to call him Charlie helps a bit as well.

## CHAPTER 6 - The Mutton Feast

Well, not long after that we got sent to North Africa and the Coy is in a little town called Bougie when I gets sent to be bat-man to this Major what works with the arabs. This Major he don't have a Coy but only has a sgt major and 4 sgts. He don't have any privates like other Majors has. Until I come the sgts and the sgt major cleans up their own quarters what is a flat where the civvies has gone away and left when the war come to Africa. Well, this is a cushy job and right up my alley as I do not have any parades, but being an old soldier I do not let on it is cushy. I says I have got too much to do and I tells the sgts, 'Why do you not get one of these arab kids what is always hanging about to do the dirty work like washing the floors and clean-

ing out the warehouse where you works?' So they say this is a good idea and we picks out a bright little kid about 6 years old which we call Charlie.

When he first come to us he don't have nothing to wear only a sack with holes in it what he puts his head and arms in but the sgts would not stand for that so they got an old battle dress blouse and trousers and cut them down for him and give him a pair of boots what they bought in a civvy shop. When he got these on it was a fair treat to see him standing outside the billet with all the other arab kids just standing around looking at him. Not saying nothing, they wasn't, but just staring at him with their eyes nearly popping out of their blinking little heads and young Charlie taking no notice of them as if he never saw them but all the time he is fit to bust his self with pride. Only he never could wear them boots because he had never wore boots before in his life and they hurt his feet so he just carried them under his arms. He never took his new clothes home but left them in a corner of the warehouse and changed in the morning and again at night when he finished work. When he come in the morning I made him wash his self every time and he got quite clean in the end.

Well, when young Charlie has been with us for a few weeks it come time for one of the wog feast days what they call the Mutton Feast, but we never knowed anything about if because we have not been very long in wog land so we ask Charlie what it is all about and it seems it is some sort of religious feast when they kill a sheep and eat it. The sgts ask Charlie is his family going to kill a sheep but he says they is not because his father has not got any money but only a lot of children and it is only the rich arabs what can buy a whole sheep. So when he has gone home we all has a talk about it and says it is a crying shame that Charlie can't have no Mutton Feast because he is a good little kid and we all put 100 francs each in the kitty to buy a sheep for him.

The day before the feast comes the sgts say I have got to go to the arab market as I am a good scrounger and buy a sheep. So I does that. All the sheep is a bit thin looking but I gets one what is not so bad. The wog what I buys the sheep from give me a bit of string to tie round its neck to take it back to the billet what is the other end of the town and I sets off with the sheep bleating at every step and all the wogs laughing and shouting out things what I do not understand. But when I gets out of the arab market it is much worse because there is a lot of troops about and they starts taking the micky out of me



*All the time he is fit to bust his self with pride.*



*What with them shouting 'Ba-a-a'  
and the sheep going 'Ba-a-a'*

and shouting out 'B-a-a-a,' so what with them shouting out 'B-a-a-a' and the sheep going 'B-a-a-a' I am nearly drove crazy. And then the next thing that happens two red caps comes up to me.

'Now then, who do you think you are?' one of them says. 'Mary with her little lamb? Where did you pinch that sheep?' he says.

So I say I have not stole the sheep but have just bought it from a wog.

'What the hell do you want a sheep for?' they wants to know and as I do not know if it is wrong to buy a sheep for an arab I do not tell them but just says I wanted it. So they says 'Come along with us', and I am marched through the streets by these two red caps, me still leading the sheep what is making more noise than ever and all the troops laughing fit to kill their selfs. In the police office I am took before an officer and told I have to explain everything so I tells him the truth that I have bought it for Charlie.

'Take him back to the market,' he says to the red caps, 'and find the man he bought it off and check that he paid for it.'

'Can I leave the sheep here till I gets back, sir?' I asks him.

'No,' he says, 'I do not want that bleeding animal making that bleeding noise in my bleeding office.'

So back we go to the market, me and the red caps and the sheep. The troops is very much amused but I am not and the red caps is not, and the sheep do not seem very happy either. Well, the wog tells the red caps that I buyed the sheep proper and we go back to the police office and the officer tells me to get to hell out of it which I am very glad to do because now I am very tired of this sheep. So I sets off for the bullet again but have not quite got there before a jeep pulls up alongside of me and there is some more red caps in it.

'What are you doing with that ruddy sheep?' asks one of them, and the next thing I know me and the sheep is in the jeep and going back to the police office. When I comes up before the officer the second time he is very angry.

'Oh God, not you and that bleeding sheep again?' he says, so I says, 'Yes, sir.'

'Take him and that blasted animal out of my sight,' he says, 'and don't let me see

them never no more.'

So again I starts to walk back to the billet and it is a long way and I am very tired as it is so hot and the sheep does not like to hurry. I do not think it is a very strong sheep and am afraid it will die on me any minute and then I would have to carry it. Only it would not make so much noise that way.

In the end I get back to the billet and do not meet any more red caps and we put the sheep in the yard until the end of the day when the sgt's gave it to Charlie as a present. He stares at it and can't hardly believe his eyes. And he sniffs a bit like he is going to cry because he is only a little boy what has never had a sheep before. Then he laughs and hurries away pulling the sheep behind him so I am afraid he will pull its head off. But I am very glad to see that sheep go because by now I do not like sheep very much.

But that is not the end of the sheep for the next day as is the feast day and a holiday for the arabs Charlie comes back with the sheep and a lot more wogs what he says is his father and brothers and uncles and god knows what and they all says 'Thank you very much' in wog talk. Now it seems there is a proper drill about killing this sheep and because we give it to them they has to do the drill in front of us, and with that they gets hold of the poor animal and lies it down in



*The worst was yet to come.*

the gutter and cuts its throat and lets the blood run away after they as dipped their hands in it. You never saw such a mess, with blood on the pavement and blood on the road and they had blood all over them until I am nearly sick and has to go back in the billet. Then they take the sheep away and we all say, 'Thank God that is done and we won't buy no sheep for no arab no more.'

But the worst was yet to come as that evening back comes Charlie and his father and his brothers and all of them and they is carrying a tin what has something in it with a horrible sink. Then they tells the sgt's this is part of the sheep what Charlie's mother has cooked special for us and we have got to eat it. Well, for a long time we do not want to eat this horrible stew but the arabs think we are only being polite when we says, 'No, thank you', and they keep on saying how good it is and how it is for us to eat and they all look so pleased that we do not like to hurt their feelings. So in the end we got our spoons and starts on this stuff what tastes worse than what it smells so we think they must have forgot to clean the carcass first and we cannot each much but the arabs is satisfied and goes away.

Well, we do not stop in arab land until the next Mutton Feast as we is all sent to Italy. Charlie is very sorry when we goes away but I do not mind because then I do

not have to go and buy another sheep. But Charlie was a good boy even if he was a wog and I bet he has never stopped talking about the sheep what the Pioneers give him.

## CHAPTER 7 - Captain Bo Peep

Some blokes is just born unlucky and the unluckiest one I ever come across in the Army was a young Captain what we had in North Africa. He was a nice enough bloke in a way and had one of those Coys of arabs which they put Pioneer officers in charge of. Only the trouble was he kept on a losing of them. Now, you would not think an officer could keep on losing 200 men but this chap had the knack of it and was an expert arab loser. Mind you, I don't say it was all his fault because it was not. Just bad luck, that's what it was.

Take the first time he done it. This young Captain has just got his wogs given to him, they having just joined up. They come from some place in the desert hundreds of miles away where they don't know nothing about white men or wars or anything, and this Captain has been down to their part of arab-land for to fetch them.

I am just pouring out a drink for my Majors in his room one evening, him being the one they call the Chief Wog, when there is a knock on the door and this young officer comes in.

'I got them arabs outside,' he says after he has saluted. 'They is fell in in column of lump because I cannot make them understand about falling in 3 deep. As a matter of fact,' he says, 'they seem a dim crown to me because I told them all about Hitler and Musso and fighting for freedom but they don't seem interested. I don't know what they joined up for,' he says.

'Then you had better get it into your head straight away,' says the Major. 'They don't give a dam for you or me or Hitler or Vera Lynn. The only thing they are interested in is francs and I don't blame them. I will come and have a look at them.'

Well, just at that minute some Eytie planes come over and give us a proper pasting. I do not think they killed anybody, but me and the Major and the Captain didn't half bump our heads all trying to get under the table at the same time. After the bombs has stopped falling the Captain looks out of the window.

'Blimey,' he says. 'Look at my arabs. They are all gone.'

'Then you had better go and bring them back,' says the Major.

'But where are they?' asks the Captain who is very upset, him being the serious sort what worries about little things like that.

'They ain't never been told about bombs,' says the Major, 'so I expect they are half way home by this. You had better go back to the desert and bring them up here again.'

So the Captain done that, but it is a week or more before he comes back because them arabs are very good runners.

Well, the Major and the other officers in the town they pull the Captain's leg a bit but him and the arabs settle down all right so after a few weeks people has forgot all about it. Then one day an order came through from Algiers that when the arabs has done ten weeks service they can be let go for leaf for 7 days. So this Captain has the order put in to arab writing and stuck up on a tree in the camp for his wogs to see, him thinking as how it would cheer them up. Now this was a very silly thing to do. You see, if they had been Tommies they would have come and looked at orders and said, 'I'll bet there is a catch in this somewhere and my turn don't

come till next Christmas,' and then they would have got on with their jobs and forgot all about it. But these wogs being so ignorant do not understand the Army and think it means they can go on leaf for 7 days like it says. So having just drawed their pay they gets all excited and cheers a bit and then disappears. Just like that. You see, they don't have no packing to do because they ain't got nothing to pack, and they don't have to wait for no transport because when they wants to go places they just starts walking. Proper flabber blasted he were, that Captain. One minute he has a Coy and the next minute he don't have one. Them having just finished work for the day he doesn't think nothing of it at first when they all goes out of camp and it ain't until the next morning that he finds out there is nobody left except for his self. All of a dither he was when he came in to see the Major.

'Good morning, Skipper,' says the Major, 'and how is the arab legion this morning? All well, I hope.'

'I ain't got none any more,' says the Captain, miserable like.

'You what?' asks the Major.

'I lost them again,' says the Captain.

At first the Major don't believe it because he thinks nobody could lose a whole Coy of arabs twice, but then he looks at the Captain again and says, 'Well, perhaps you could.'

'Why ain't you looking for them instead of wasting my time?' asks the Major, so the Captain says he don't know where to look and the Major tells him he don't never have to look but one place and that is back at their home.

'Off you go, Little Bo Peep,' he says, 'back to the flipping desert and don't let me see you again until you have got all them black sheep back on the job wagging their tails behind them.'

And after that everybody calls this bloke Captain Bo Peep, which was not his proper name but only a joke.

Well, sure enough he finds his wogs all in their villages and he plays hell with them for going home without nobody telling them to. But they says it was wrote up on the order board that after 10 weeks' service they could have 7 days leaf and until their week was up they would not budge an inch, but when their leaf was finished they all come back. There was hell to pay about it when they hears about this in Algiers but it was too late then to do anything so they hands out a rapping to the Major what passes it on to the Captain what gives the wogs a proper ticking off. But as the wogs has had their leaf they don't care and anyhow they do not know what he is saying to them half of the time.

It is not long after this that there is orders to move this arab Coy to some other part of wogland and as it is a long way they have got to go by train. You never saw such a circus as that mob was when they goes down to the station from their camp. Worse than hop pickers going off from London Bridge, they was. Being wogs they don't have no Coy transport so they have to carry everything they have got like their camp gear and tents and cookhouse stuff and all that sort of thing. They never did learn to fall in and march proper so they shuffles along in ones and twos and all you could see of them was their legs under the stuff they was carrying. The Captain has had a party the night before to say Good Bye to his pals what is mostly officers from the Navy and a Scotch regiment and everybody knows there is not a worse mixture than the Navy and a Scotch mob if you are going on a drink so this Captain has got a cruel hangover. He comes along at the end of this ragtag and bobtail

crowd waving his little stick and shouting, 'Keep moving, men. Keep moving. Oh, my poor head. Keep moving. Oh, my poor head.'

When he gets to the station me and the Major is waiting for him.

'I am lending my batman to you,' says the Major. 'He will look after you for a couple of days while you are on the train but mind you sends him back straight away because I want him again.'

Them wogs was just like a bunch of kids because they have not been in a train before and they keep on getting in and out of the trucks and leaving half of their stuff on the ground outside and having to come back and fetch it by which time have forgot what truck they was in and goes up and down yelling for their mates.

'I suppose you have called the roll and knows your men is all here' says the Major. Then he takes another look at the Captain and says, 'No, of course you haven't. You ain't even sure if you are here yourself.'

Then he tells the Captain to start at one end of the train and count the men and he



*'Keep moving, men. Keep moving.  
Oh, my poor head.'*

will start from the other end and do ditto. Three times they done that and all the answers was different so the Major says, 'For God's sake take them away before I goes balmy. Now there is one thing you have got to remember,' he tells the Captain. 'Tomorrow morning this train stops to take on water at a place as is near where these arabs live so when you get there keep them all in the trucks or some of them will sling an absent on you.' Then he waves to the driver to get started and me and the Captain gets in our carriage and off we goes.

All that day and all night we rattles along and every few hours we stops for a bit and I brews up some tea for the Captain and the wogs cook up something for themselves and then the next morning we pull up at the station what the Major spoke about as is near the village where these wogs come from. I gets busy brewing up and getting some hot water so the Captain can have a wash and shave and he hops out and goes up and down the platform.

'Nobody mustn't get out,' he shouts, waving his little stick about and pushing back a few arabs what tries to leave the trucks. 'Stay

where you are everybody. Don't get out.'

So after a bit them arabs never tried to get out on the platform no more and we has our breakfast and a wash and brush up and gets back in the carriage and off we goes again.

'Well,' says the Captain to me, 'I think I managed that all right. Them wogs know who is boss round here,' he says, so I says, 'Yes, sir,' and then he lays down on the seat and has another bit of shut eye because it is still kind of early in the morning. The next time we pulls up them wogs don't try to get out of the trucks.

'They are just like children,' the Captain tells me. 'I bet they are sitting there sulking because I would not let them out the last time. It is a good job I understands them and knows how to handle them,' he says.

So then he goes along the train to tell them they can get out. White as a sheet he was when he come back.

'Gone,' he says. 'All gone.'

'Gone where?' I asks him.

'How the hell do I know?' he says. 'They never said.'

So I goes along and has a dekko in the trucks and it was like he said. Not a wog left but all the truck doors on the other side was wide open so I see what has happened. When he was going up and down the platform at that last stop telling them to stay in the train they was hopping out on the other side.

'Oh, dear. What shall I do? What shall I do' he says.

'If I was you, sir, I would desert,' I says. 'I got 3 days CB once for losing of a tooth brush out of my kit so they will probably give you ten years for losing a whole Coy.'

But I couldn't cheer him up nohow.

I don't know what they done to him when he got to the place where he had to take them arabs because as soon as we gets there I hops on another train and goes back to my Major as I did not want to get none of the blame for it. But I think perhaps they didn't give him no more arabs after he has lost his Coy three times because the next time I see him he was a Major in Germany where he was in charge of a depot where they has Bailey bridges. I asks one of the blokes there if they has lost any bridges yet and he says 'No', so I expect this chap has got out of the way of losing things and that is whey they made him up to a Major.



*'Nobody mustn't get out,' he shouts.*

## CHAPTER 8 - Me and the Matron

When I was a young soldier nobody would ever have thought as how women would get in the Army and become soldiers as you might say. But now nobody don't think nothing of it. Mind you, it is a very good idea because there are some things a man did not ought to do like being a batman to a lot of women, which is what I done once.

Take the first time he done it. This young Captain has just got his wogs given to him, they having just joined up. They come from some place in the desert hundreds of miles away where they don't know nothing about white men or wars or anything, and this Captain has been down to their part of arabland for to fetch them.

After that Major what I was batman to in North Africa has gone away someplace else I am sent back to my Coy again. We are in a little town and near us there is an Army hospital, only it is not a proper hospital but just a lot of tents where nobody would want to go sick as did not have to. To start with they only has doctors and RAMC blokes at this place but after we have been there a bit some nurses come out from England. Them arab women don't know nothing about keeping things clean so they can't get anybody to look after the nurses quarters and them being officers they are not supposed to do no cleaning themselves so they come to the pioneers to help them out. And that is where I come in. One day our Major sends for me what is working in the Sgts Mess and asks me would I like to go and be a batman to them nurses. Fair took aback I was.

'No, sir,' I says, 'I would not.'

'That's the spirit,' he says, him being one of them clever dicks. 'I like a man what shows willing. Pack your kit and go and report to the Matron at once,' he says.

All hot under the collar I was when I stood in front of that Matron what is a big woman and very regimental like. 'So you are the man from the Pioneer Coy,' she says. 'Are you a family man?'

'Yes, miss,' I says, 'And what my old woman would say if she heard what job I got now don't bear thinking about.'

'Well, I ain't going to tell her,' she says, 'And if you do you're a dam fool.' So when she spoke out like that I didn't feel so bad about it.

'How old are you?' she asks me, and I tell her I am 53. 'Then you are old enough to have got over silly nonsense about women,' she says, but I do not say nothing to that.

So then she takes me round the nurses quarters and tells me all the things I have got to do like cleaning up round the tents, and seeing they are properly aired with the walls rolled up, and fixing of the mosquito nets, and cleaning boots and looking after uniforms. I forgot to tell you them nurses all wore battle dress and army boots just like the men do because their ship got sunk when they was coming over and they lost all their kit and there is no uniforms for women in Africa. 'The Sisters will make their own beds,' this Matron says, and I am glad they are going to do something because after all the things she says I have got to do it sounds like nobody else is going to do any work except me. But it wasn't such a bad job after I got the hang of it and them nurses was as nice a lot of ladies as you could wish for after we have got used to each other and them and me has got over me going in and out of their tents. All day long you could hear them shouting 'Eddie!' whenever they wants something and it is not long before I am thinking of taking out a transfer to the ATS and serving out my time in that billet.

Just like a father I was to them nurses, even the ones what is not so young, a scolding of them if they don't put enough clothes on and listening to the stories what they tells me all about the troubles they has with their boy friends. As is only natural there is some as I likes better than others but I treats them all fair and square and don't show no favourites. The first few days I was always in trouble me being new to the job. Well, I mean to say, take Reveille for instance. You know how they go round waking blokes up in the Army. Well, you could not go round doing that with a lot of women, could you, so I goes round all polite like and slaps on their tents and shouts out, 'Wakey, wakey. Show a leg there.' Ticked me off proper that there Matron did.

'That ain't no way to speak to my girls,' she says.

'Sorry, Miss,' I tells her. 'I didn't mean nothing by it. That was only a manner of speaking as you might say.'

'Well, you be more careful in future,' she says. 'By the way, what about a cup of tea when you gives me a call?'

So then I brings her a cuppa after that, and then one of the Sisters wants one, and then another, and by the end of the week I am going round with mugs of Rosie Lee for the whole blinking lot of them. 'Cup of char



'Wakey, wakey! Show a leg!'

outside,' I says, when I give them a call. 'Don't let it get cold or I won't bring you no more.' By the end of the second week they are saying, 'Put it just inside the tent, Eddie, and the week after that it is, 'Put it on the box beside the bed, Eddie.' Just like being at home it was.

The funny thing is I like that there Matron the best of the lot. 'The old Battleaxe' they calls her and true enough she was as regimental as a button stick and proper fierce, only when you got to know her she was a real lady. She was not just a war time but a Regular and me having been a Regular as well we sort of understood each other. She was a big built woman and has got the First War ribbons up so you can see she was no chicken. Many a yarn we had in the mornings, me and her, when I takes along her cuppa, her lying in bed under the mosquito net and me standing respectful like just inside the tent. I tells her all about my Missus and the 2 girls and shows her their photos, and every time there is mail from England she asks me have I got a letter from home and wants to know how they all is.

'What the hell are you doing here at your age, soldier?' she says to me one time. Always called me 'soldier', she did. Never called me by my proper name or 'Eddie' like

the others done. 'Why ain't you home with your Missus?' she says, 'with all this here bombing and air raids.'

'Well,' I tells her, 'if you got soldiering in your blood like I have you can't stop at home when there is a war on, can you?'

'But young men ought to be out here in these foreign parts doing of the fighting, not old men like you,' she says.

So I laughs and says I know a lot of young blokes what would like to have my job a fighting her and looking after them young nurses of hers.

'You keep an eye on them girls of mine,' she says. 'They is good girls but you know how it is being a long way from home with hundreds of men all round and nothing special to do in off duty time. I hope I can trust you, soldier,' she says.

'You can now, Miss,' I tells her, 'But 30 years ago a fine big woman like you would not have been safe with me in her tent. I always did like my women big.'

'Get to hell out of it, you wicked old devil, while I gets up and puts some clothes on,' she says.

A lovely woman she was. And could swear like a trooper when she had a mind to. Not rude words, I don't mean, but dams and blasts and that sort of thing.

But Africa don't seem to agree with the Matron somehow and after a bit she is always ill.

'Blimey, I feel like death, soldier,' she says to me sometimes when I take her her morning cup of tea.

'And you don't half look it, begging your pardon, Miss,' I tells her. 'It's the heat, that's what it is. Sometimes it goes to the head and other times it goes to the stomach like what you got. If you'll take my tip you'll let yourself go free and take off them corsets. Murder them things is in this climate.'

But she don't take no notice of what I say and in the end they has to send her back to Algiers and I hear she went home again. So then another Matron come to the hospital only she come late in the day after I have gone off duty so I never see her until the next morning when I goes round with tea at Reveille.

'You'd better take a cup of tea to the new Matron,' one of the Sisters tells me, so in I goes to her tent.

'Here you are, Missus, a nice cuppa char,' I says, and with that she let our a screech like she has been shot.

'Help! Help!' she yells. 'A man! Help!' And she dives her head under the pillow screaming blue murder.

Well, me being the only bloke what is allowed in the nurses' lines I looks round for this man what she is in a panic about but I cannot see nobody so gets down on my hands and knees to see is this bloke under the bed.

'Take it easy, missus,' I says, me still being on my hands and knees, 'there ain't no one her.' And with that she takes her head from under the pillow and yells louder than ever and has a swipe at me through the mosquito net. So then some of the Sisters come in.

'I think this old geezer has gone balmy,' I says. 'She says there is a man in her tent.'

'Take him away,' yells the Matron. 'He tried to get into my bed. He was a going to insult me.'

Well, them Sisters laughs a bit and says, 'This ain't a man, Matron. This is only Eddie.' Then they pushes me outside the tent and the next thing I know I am brought up in front of the head poultice wallop, which is how we call the Medical Corps in the Army, and has to tell him what happened. This Matron woman is in his office and she

swears her bible oath I tried to get into bed with her. But like I tell the Colonel, if I wants to get into bed with a woman I would not do it with this old geezer, not with all that young stuff round. He never had no answer to that.



*'I think this old geezer has gone balmy,' he says.*

## CHAPTER 9 - Wilfrid and the Brigadier

After we finished in Africa we went to Italy and there I was batman to a Group Commander who was a very nice man. An Eyetalian he knew gave this Colonel a baby goat for to eat. It was still alive and had only just left its mother and was a very pretty little thing what the officers do not like to eat so they make a pet of it and the Colonel becomes very fond of this baby goat which always follows him about the house. So the Colonel says to me, 'You will look after this goat and groom him proper so he do not stink too much, and don't let no ruddy Eyetic pinch him.' I do like I am told and soon he is quite at home all over HQ which is a big private house. He follows me and the Colonel round just like he is a dog and everybody makes a great fuss of him. They calls him Wilfred.

Well, when this goat has growed up a bit something goes wrong with his temper and he is not so friendly with everybody. With me and the Colonel he is still friendly but with everybody else he is just as likely as not to put his head down and charge at them, so then nobody don't go out without first looking to see is that goat anywhere near. But worst of all he begun to smell. Only we never knew in the beginning it was Wilfred what that pong belonged to. It never come on until the hot summer and then everybody starts sniffing and turning up their noses. Some says it was the drains and some says a German soldier has been killed and buried under the floor. Some say it is just the natural smell of Eyetic houses in the hot weather, but in the end you could not make no mistake what it was because that smell hung all round Wilfred. It was just like he wore it. Very powerful it was and the other officers wants the Colonel to get rid of Wilfred because he upsets their stomachs.

For a long time he will not but then in the end he says to me, 'That there Wilfred do stink horrid bad, don't he? Take him outside the house and never let him come in no more,' he says. But that is easier said than done because Wilfred has lived in the Mess since he was a few days old and now he

don't understand why he can't go in no more. And that is where my trouble starts because everybody acts like it is my goat which it is not. Every time Wilfred gets away from where he is tied up he comes straight back to the house and it is me what gets blamed for it, so in the end I find a long chain what I tie him up with to a post at the end of the garden. And that is when the Brigadier come.

When the Colonel hears that the Brigadier is coming he gives orders for everything to be spit and span.

'The Brigadier will sleep in my room while he is here,' he says to me, 'and you will look after the both of us. Keep an eye on the bleeding goat and if the Brigadier so much as sets eyes on Wilfred I will send you back to a Coy, so help me.'

Well, the day the Brigadier comes I have so much work to do in the Mess that I do not have time to think about Wilfred until he starts bleating loud enough to wake the dead so I goes down to where he is tied up and he has got his self all wrapped around the post and has nearly strangled his self. I undo the chain and quick as a wink that perishing goat races away with about twenty foot of chain rattling and banging behind him. I chases him all over the garden and just as he heads for the front of the house I grabs hold of the chain but Wilfred gives an extra hard



*'Every time Wilfred jumps the Brigadier jumps.'*

don't know what to say.

'It is a goat, sir,' I says.

'I can see it's a blasted goat,' says the Brigadier. 'Do you think I'm ruddy well blind? Who does it belong to? Is this a pet?' he asks, looking at the Colonel. 'You know there is orders against keeping pets.' Then he sniffs once or twice, and says, 'Oh, God, nobody wouldn't keep anything what smells like that for a pet. Whose is it?'

'It belongs to an Eyetalian,' I says, 'and is called Wilfred – the goat not the Eyetalian – and I see it in the garden and was driving it out,' I says.

'Take the dam thing away,' says the Brigadier. Then he looks at the guard of black Basutos what is now standing proper on parade again and says sharp like, 'And take them away as well.'

Well, the Colonel was raving mad and didn't half give me a basin full, but he quiets down after a bit. He don't say no more about it only to see that Wilfred don't get loose no more.

The next day the Brigadier and the Colonel is away all day inspecting Coys and things go off very quiet. In the evening before they got back I lays the Colonel's best uniform out on the bed for him to change before dinner. The same with the Brigadier him having brought a spare uniform with him. Also I have got some hot water on so they can have a bath when they come back. I pops down to the kitchen for a few minutes to see is the water boiling and when I gets upstairs I can smell Wilfred has got loose and is in the house again. I rushes into the Brig's



*'Never let him come in no more,' he says.*

tug and I slips on the gravel. Down I goes, tip over elbow. Blimey, what a panic. There is me lying on the ground holding on to the chain and at the other end of the chain is Wilfred with his head down trying to reach the Brigadier what is inspecting a guard of honour of black Basutos. Every now and then Wilfred gives a jump at the Brig but because I am still holding the other end of the chain he cannot quite reach him. Every time Wilfred jumps the Brigadier jumps and every time I try to get on my feet Wilfred gives another jump and I ends up on my kisser again. Them black Basutos was standing proper to attention at first but then one laughs and then another one and in a minute they is all stamping and rolling about and slapping each other and doubled up with laughing. The Colonel is yelling and the Sgt of the guard is yelling. Wilfred is still trying to get at the Brigadier what he seems to have took a liking to and every time the Brig what is getting a bit pot bellied gives a little hop in the air them black Basutos hollers and cheers and laughs. The Brigadier is getting as mad as hell.

'What is the meaning of all this?' he asks in the end. 'And who is this man?' he says looking at me. 'What's it all about?'

So I picks up my titter what I lost and rub some of the dirt and blood off my nose and chin and stands to attention. The Colonel he



*'I rushes into the Brig's room and what do you blinking well think?'*

room and what do you blinking well think? There is Wilfrid a standing by the bed and chewing off the medal ribbons what he has pulled of the Brigadier's tunic. I do not know what to do so I give that blasted goat a kick up the backside what lifted it clean in the air. Wilfrid lets out one bleat, drops the chewed up ribbons and went out of the house like the devil was after him. Them ribbons wasn't any good no more so I takes them to the Lt Quartermaster and tells him what has happened and ask him can he let me have some new ribbons before the Brigadier gets back. Luckily the other officers has medals the same as the Brigadier and they got spare bits in their kit and the cook what was a tailor on Civvy Street makes up a posh new set and sews them on the Brigadier's tunic. He asked me about them after he has had his bath so I tells him as the other ones was looking a bit scruffy so I made a new set up for him. He says he could not think of letting me buy new ribbons for him and I must let him pay what they cost. So I let him.

He was very pleased for the rest of his stay and tells the Colonel at dinner on the last day that he has got a very good Headquarters staff.

'I wish I had your cook,' he says to the Colonel. 'This meal is very well cooked and served. What is it?' he says, looking at me what is serving at table.

'Just ordinary rations, sir,' I says.

'There is more flavour to it than anything I get in my Mess,' says the Brigadier.

Then I see the Colonel is looking at me a bit strange and not eating so well as he done before. When they goes out to have coffee in the other room the Colonel drops back a bit and come up to me. 'Was that ordinary ration meat?' he says.

'No, sir,' I says. 'It is a bit special what I got.'

'Was it --?' he says, and then don't finish what he was going to say.

'Yes, sir,' I says. 'Wilfrid,' I says.

So he goes outside and pukes his heart up. A nice bloke that Colonel was. Pity he had a weak stomach.

## CHAPTER 10 - Quick thinking

When I was a recruit in Woolwich in 1907 there was a Sgt at the Depot what always says, 'Keep your head, my lad. If you want to get on in the Army keep your head what ever happens and you will not go far wrong.' And them was the truest words he ever spoke. Only it is easier said than done.

If I had kept my head when we was in Bari I would have saved myself a lot of trouble and that's a fact. I was not a batman at this time having got in trouble with one of my officers what give me the sack so am back working with a Coy. What happened was, I am not feeling so good one night and am sitting in the NAAFI having a cuppa when some blokes comes in and sits at the table next to me and starts talking out loud so I cannot help but listen to them. One of them has been overseas a long time but the others is only out from England a few days. They are infantry blokes and the one what has been out a long time is telling the others what a bleeding hard war this is and about all them mountains what they has to fight over with the Germans always up on top and firing down on them and that sort of thing. I am not particular interested because I have got other things on my mind but I am sort of sorry for them infantry because they always has the dirty end of the stick.

But then one of them chaps what has only just come out from England give a nasty laugh and says, 'I wish I had picked out a

cushy job in this here war like them blokes in the Pioneers.' I am sitting with my back to these blokes so they do not see I am a Pioneer but I am so mad at what this chap says that I gets up and without saying nothing slaps him hard in the kisser, and the only reason I never hit him again is because them other blokes all jumps on me and do not let me. So then they call the red caps what puts me in the jug for striking an NCO because it turns out this bloke I hit was a Sgt. They ask me has I got anything to say and I says, 'Yes, Bring that basket here and I will give him another slap in the kisser, only harder.' But they didn't bring him back.

So the next thing what happens I am sent back to my Coy under escort and fetched up before the Old Man, but I am so mad with everybody that when I come up to Orderly Room and he asks me why I done it I will not tell him and am put up for a court martial and am in close arrest. Now while I am in close arrest I cools down and think to myself, 'You are a silly sod, Ed, to act like this because if you are found guilty of hitting a Sgt on active service they will shoot you as like as not.' So I asks if I can see the Major what is a good bloke and when he comes I tell him how I come to do it.

'You dam fool,' he says. 'Why did you never tell me this when you come up in front of me? I can't do nothing now because it is out of my hands but I will go and speak to the Colonel,' he says. 'So keep your pecker up.'



*Them other blokes all jumps on me.*

A few days passes and I have to go and see the Colonel and tell him all about it and then in the end I have to go and see the Area Commander what is a Brigadier. Our Major is there as well and he says, 'Now tell the Brigadier what you told me.'

'It was like this here,' I says. 'The day before this happens, sir, I am working on the docks when a Gerry plane come over and dropped some bombs and one of them falls on my platoon and 5 of my mates was killed. So the next day, which was the day when I hit the Sgt, I am on the bearer party because I am an old soldier what knows the drill for the funeral service. And after the funeral I ain't feeling so good because them chaps was my pals so I goes to the NAAFI for a cup of tea. I ain't interfering with nobody,' I tells the Brigadier, 'when this bloke what is sitting behind my back laughs and says he wishes he had picked a cushy job in the Army like in the Pioneers so I gets up and gives him a fourpenny one. I never knew he was a Sgt.' I says, 'but if I had, so help me, I would have hit him just the same. And that is the truth of it, sir.'

Well, the Brigadier he looks at me for a bit and then he turns to my Major.

'What have you got to say about this man?' he asks.

So the Major says I have got a clean sheet in the Pioneers and is one of the best men what he has got, and it is true about them chaps getting killed and me being on the

funeral parade. He didn't half lay it on thick that Major, but that is the sort of bloke he was. Always stood up for his own men, he did. Then the Colonel cuts in and he give me a good character as well, so after that the Brigadier says I am to be let out from close arrest and return to duty, and I am not to worry because he will get the charge scrubbed out. Then he gets up and gives a bit of a grin and holds out his hand and shakes with me he did. True as I'm standing here, that there Brigadier shook me by the hand.

'Do you know what I would have done in that there canteen if I had been in your shoes?' he says.

'No, sir,' I says.

'Well, I will tell you,' says the Brigadier. 'I would have done just the same as you, only I would have tried to hit that bleeding Sgt a bit harder than you did.' Then he give me a slap on the back. 'Only never tell anybody I said so,' he says.

You can serve with blokes like that, can't you?

One time I had to keep my head was when I was batting for a Colonel. This Colonel lends me to a Brigadier what is visiting the Group and has not got his batman with him. The Brig decides all of a sudden like as he will go right up the line to see some work what is going on there and as he will be away for a couple of nights I am detailed to look after him. He is driving his own jeep so I hops in alongside of him and we goes up and down them Eyetalian mountains looking for this mob what he is going to inspect. When it come dark we has still not found them so the Brig says we will sleep in a barn near an Eyetie farm so I makes up his camp bed and serves him up some compo rations and we kips down for the night.

The next morning it is raining like hell and the jeep will not start and it turns out this bloke is one of the finest swearers I have heard for a long time, so though I did not think much of him at first I changed my mind and think perhaps he is not such a bad officer after all. He fancies his self at putting motors right and soon he has got half the engine lying all over the floor of the shed what we used as a garage and is as happy as a kid playing with toys on a Christmas morning. By the time it comes midday he has still not got that jeep going and his temper is not so good so I am glad when he tells me to scout around the country and see can I find someone to come and give him a hand. The day before having been warm I do not have no greatcoat with me and as it is still raining cats and dogs I ask the Brigadier can I have my groundsheet what I had wrapped my blankets in but which he has now got on the floor with bits of engine lying all over it, but he says as it is all mucked up with oil and grease I can put his coat on so as not to get wet. So I done that. I didn't half feel posh walking along the road with all them stars and crowns on my shoulders and would like to have had a picture took to send home to



*He fancies himself at putting motors right.*

my Mrs only there is not anybody to take photographs in the Eytalian mountains. I keeps on walking and walking and begin to think all the soldiers has left Italy and there is only me and the Brigadier left when all of a sudden I come across some Americans what took me to their officer. He is a very nice young fellow and give me a salute and a cigar and called me General. I starts to tell him all about the Brigadier and the jeep but he won't let me get a word in nohow and says I have got to see his men and his camp and everything because they do not have a 3 star General come and see them before.

Now that is where a young soldier what has not been trained proper would have let down the Pioneers and the British Army. But me having learned to always keep my head I done some quick thinking. 'If you will parade your men I will inspect them,' I says, speaking all top-hat like the officers does. So this young chap says it is very kind of me and has all the men fell in. I have been inspected thousands of times in my service so knows the drill proper. Money for jam that inspection racket is. All you got to do is walk up and down the lines of troops and stop every now and then and ask one of them some dam silly question, 'How long have you been in the Service?' you asks one bloke, and if you sees another bloke with a



'If you will parade your men I will inspect them.'

ribbon up you asks him, 'Which part of the line did your serve in?' You don't care a dam how long they been in the Service or where they put in their time but it shows the troops you ain't so dumb as you look. So knowing the drill I inspects these Americans and says what a fine looking mob they is and how I will tell President Roosevelt all about them the next time I see him. So the next thing what happens them American soldiers gets out their cameras and takes pictures of me, and some of them wants my autograph which I give them. After that we goes in the Mess tent and has something to eat and drink and I tells them all about the King and the Queen, and Churchill, and my Mrs and the 2 girls.

All very nice and friendly it was and I am sorry I cannot stop with them any longer but after I have been with them for a few hours it is getting dark and I think perhaps the Brigadier is getting worried in case I have had an accident or something, so I better be moving on. I told the American officer about my jeep breaking down and he says he will send me back in one of his jeeps with a bloke what is very good at mending cars, but I do not think it is a good thing they should meet the Brigadier so I say not to trouble because the man what is driving me is a good mechanic and he will put it right and

catch me up. Only I asks would they drive me up the line a bit where I wants to see some British soldiers. Now that is where I was proper crafty because does the Brigadier find out I have only walked 5 miles he will ask why I took so long to get back so it is better I go further away from him than what them Americans is. So I says Goodbye to them and gets their driver to take me on a few more miles and at last we come where some Pioneers is working so I says I don't want to go no further and after he has drove away I find the Pioneer officer and tell him all about the Brigadier and the jeep what has broke down.

The things that there Brig said to me when we got back to him you would have thought it was my fault them Pioneers was so far away. And after the language what he used to me I do not tell him about them Americans and how I inspected them for him because then he would have been sorry he called me them names and I don't want to upset him no more. And he hadn't half mucked up my ground sheet with all that grease and stuff, I can tell you. It was a good job I changed it with his the morning he went away or I would have got into trouble the next time we had a kit inspection.

Paddy Riley never kept his head so he ends up in the Glass House which is what generally happens. I got pinched for escort duty when Paddy was brought up before the Old Man in the Orderly Room. A very quiet bloke that Major was, and them quiet ones is always the worst if you ask me.

'Private Riley,' says the Major, 'you are charged with using bad language to an NCO. Are you guilty or not guilty?'

'Not guilty,' says Paddy, looking like butter would not melt in his mouth.

'First witness,' says the Major. So then the lance jack in charge of the dining room says his piece.

'Sir,' he says, 'on the afternoon of last Wednesday I was on duty in the Mess Room when Private Riley comes in and says to me, 'What is there for tea, Corps?' and I says to him, 'There is pickles and cheese,' and he says to me, 'You can stuff the pickles and the cheese as well, you toffee nosed little basket,' so I reports him to the Orderly Sgt what puts him on a charge.'

Well, the Major looks at Paddy over the top of his specs like he is proper shocked. 'You have heard the witness, Riley,' he says. 'Have you got anything to say?'

'May all the holy saints forgive the poor man for perjuring his everlasting soul,' answers Paddy, with his eyes thrown up towards heaven.

So then the bloke what was orderly man in the dining room give his evidence, but he says he ain't sure if Paddy said, 'Stuff the pickles' or 'Stuff the Corporal,' and Paddy says if a bloke cannot hear better than that this evidence ain't worth nothing.

'Do you like cheese and pickles?' asks the Major.

'Oh, yes, sir,' says Paddy. 'They is very healthy after a hard day's work.' So the Major just smiles and says, 'And I suppose you would not dream of saying such a thing as 'Stuff the pickles', or calling the Corporal a toffee nosed little basket?'

'Glory be to God,' says Paddy, 'Me old mother would turn in her grave if I ever used such language.' And the Major says, 'I am sure she would, Riley,' and starting turning over the pages of Paddy's crime sheets, which is like a book, and reading them out loud but like he is only reading them to his self.

'September 1939,' he reads out. 'Using

bad language and refusing to carry out an order. November 1939. Using profane language to an NCO. January 1940. Disorderly conduct and the use of obscene language. February 1940. Striking a non-commissioned officer. May 1940. You went a long time there and never got put on a fizzer,' says the Major. 'Oh, I see,' he says. 'You was visiting some friends in the Glass House in Aldershot about that time. Riley,' says the Old Man, 'Are you quite sure you didn't say 'Stuff the pickles' etc, etc – just by accident as you might say and not thinking what you was a doing of?'

But old Paddy he never bats a ruddy eyelid. 'A decent Catholic man like meself would never let such dirty words pass his lips, sir,' he says.

Well, the Major give a little sigh like he is tired of wasting his time and he goes on reading.

'May 1940,' he says. 'Fighting in the cantine and using bad language to a superior officer. June 1940. Drunk and disorderly.' The Major looks like he is very upset. 'Oh dear, Riley,' he says, 'This is horrible. Drunkenness raising its ugly head,' he says and goes on, 'Tut, tut. September 1940. Fighting in the barrack room after Lights Out. October 1940. Bad language on pay parade. November 1940. Swearing at the Guard Commander. April 1941. Ah,' says the Major, 'I see you done another trip into the country then,' he says. 'I hope this doesn't upset you, Riley, me reading all this out? But you aren't being very helpful, are you? Perhaps you didn't say all the words that the Corporal says you did but only some of them. Is that it, Riley?' And the Major looks up at Paddy again over the top of his specs.

'May heaven be me guide,' says Paddy. 'I could explain all them other times if you'd only give me half a chance.'

'I am sure you could, Riley,' says the Major. 'Shall we go on reading?' he asks, and he carries on flipping over them crime sheets again.

'Riley,' he says, after he has been reading out for a couple of minutes, 'I would not like to think you are lying to me. But you know how it is. Sometimes we forget things. Do you think it has slipped your memory but that there is just a possibility that you might have said, 'Stuff the pickles'? You know, it just slipped out. 'Stuff the pickles'. Like that.'

'No, sir,' says Paddy. And then he lost his head. 'Ah, what's the use?' he says. 'I did say Stuff the pickles, and stuff them anyway, and you as well, you bald headed old sod.'

The Major looks up at Paddy like he is proper shocked and then he gives a little grin and says, 'Remanded for a summary of evidence, Sgt Major.'

Like I told Paddy when he come back from Shepton Mallet, if he had only kept his head he would have got away with that one. After all it was only his word against the lance jack's. There wasn't no real evidence.



'Glory be to God, me old mother would turn in her grave.'

## CHAPTER 11 - A natural born private

When we come back from Italy me and my Major was posted to a Coy in a Beach Landing Gp as is doing training in Scotland for the Normandy business, only we never knew then where we was going to. Now this Coy is a very costeropolitan mob what is mostly blokes from the North of England so as is only natural I chums up with a chap who is a Londoner like me, called Ginger Ellis. Not only does he come from London but Ginger is a porter in Covent Garden market, so me having a fruit and veg barrow in Walworth we are both in the same line of business, as you might say. He is a very nice bloke what has not been in the Army before and comes from Hoxton. You cannot do much a pub crawl in this place where we are because there is not many pubs and what there is has not got much beer, but any time there is a chance of knocking a pint back Ginger is always willing so we get to know each other pretty good after a bit.

Then Ginger goes home on leaf and when he comes back he is a different man, which I am very sorry to see. 'Eddie,' he says to me, 'I am going to work for a stripe,' he says. Struck me all of a heap it did because he never seemed that sort of a bloke and us having been good pals I tried to talk him out of it, only it wasn't no good. I do not hold with promotion myself because the way I look at it some blokes is born to be Sgts and Corporals and some is born to be good private soldiers and it is not any good a leopard trying to change his socks, as the saying goes. And like I tells Ginger, he is just a natural born private and no good will come of his trying to be anything different. Mind you, I do not think he is very happy about it so I keeps on at him and tells him all the horrible things what I have seen happen to non coms, but he won't take any notice of me.

'You know me, Eddie,' he says, 'I ain't the sort to let my mates down by sucking up to officers, but the fact is my kid brother has got the idea there is something wrong with me because I have been in the Army four years and am still a private, so I got to do something about it.'

'Four years,' I says, 'That ain't nothing, Ginger boy.. Look at me. I done 21 as a Regular and never got a tape the whole time. They ought to be proud of the way you are keeping yourself to yourself.'

But I might just as well have saved my breath because he has set his mind on getting promotion for his kid brother's sake so in the end I give it up.

'Well, you can't say I never warned you,' I tells him. 'Any how you ain't got a stripe yet and perhaps they will not give you one and it will all come out all right in the end.' If it had been anyone else I would not have gone drinking with him no more but I like Ginger and am very sorry that this thing has happened to him so I tell him I will not stop being friends with him.

So then he becomes a changed man and got to be the volunteeringest soldier I ever met. He put his name down for everything what come along, he did. Half the time he never knew what he was putting his name down for but that made no difference to Ginger and he just kept on a volunteering. He done a cook's course, and a gas course, and a Bren gun course, and if I had not stopped him in time he would have put his name down to make over a bigger allowance to his missus, what showed the state he had got in to, him not being a married man.

They didn't half give us hell in that there Beach Landing training, I can tell you, and

the weather was proper cruel up in Scotland. What with going on ships and mucking about in them there landing craft and climbing ruddy great cliffs and then getting back into the ships again we was not sure half the time if we was soldiers or sailors. And just to make it more interesting like, we done most of it in the dark. Well, it just shows you how bad it was, even batmen had to go sometimes and if I had not been an old soldier what always knowed how to dodge the column that there beach landing game would have been the blinking death of me. But young Ginger Ellis he loved it and was always one of the first blokes to jump ashore. Mind you, half the time we had to pull him back on the ship again because he jumped off too quick and was like to have drowned his self, but if showing willing got a bloke stripes he would have soon got to look like one of them Yanks what has done a year's service in England.

Well, one night we done one of them manoeuvres and has to take a boat load of ammo ashore and then hump it up to the top of a cliff where the guns is supposed to be. Only there is not any guns there and everybody thinks they have fell in the sea or we has got up the wrong cliff. So the officer tells



*Even batmen had to go.*

young Ginger that he has got to guard the ammo and not let nobody touch it while we others go back to the landing craft again. Nobody don't rightly know what happened after that but when we gets down to the beach again there is a panic on about something and everybody is chasing their tails. Then we climb back in the landing craft and pushes off to sea which is getting very rough where we mucks about for a few hours and then does another landing and climbs some more cliffs. It is daylight by this and raining like hell and we are all proper brassed off and wet through and a lot of blokes is seasick so when they says the exercise is all over for the day we are very glad. But what with the sea being so bad, and the rain coming down so you cannot see your hand in front of your face, people did not get in the right boats and some of the boats goes the wrong way and it is night time again before we are all back together in camp.

It is the next morning before they finds out that young Ginger is missing and the Sgt reports it to the officer.

'Blimey,' says the officer, 'I left the poor little bleeder on that there cliffs with the ammo. I had better tell the Major.'

So he does that.

'What cliff did you leave him on?' asks the Major.

'Well, I don't rightly know,' says the Lt, 'because the navy took us there by sea and it was dark and they all look the same to me, but it was the first cliff we climbed the night before last.'

'That is very helpful,' says the Major, sarcastic like. 'There are hundreds of bleeding cliffs in Scotland and you don't know if you have lost one of your men on the first one on the night or the first one on the left counting from last Tuesday night.'

So the Lt does not answer that.

'Well, say something,' shouts the Major, what is getting his self proper worked up. 'Don't stand there like a stuffed, dummy, what are you going to do about it?'

'I don't know what to do,' says the Lt, who looks like he is ready to go away and shoot his self. So the Major tears a proper strip of him and he feels better after that.

Of course, I am not supposed to hear all this but me being in the next room making up the Major's bed I cannot help listening having opened the door a bit to find out what is biting the Old Man just in case it is something what I have got to think up a quick excuse about in a hurry.

So the Major took over and he phones everybody what he can think of about Ginger being lost, but they do not seem very interested until they hear about the ammo which is valuable, and then they say it will have to be found pretty dam quick or else there will be a hell of a row about it. Only it does not turn out so easy as what they think because there is a lot of them cliffs and nobody don't rightly know which boat we was on as the Navy bloke has gone off on leaf, so after they have argues the toss for a couple of days they sends an aeroplane out to look for young Ginger, but that don't do no good neither. So in the end they sends out a lot of search parties as they are getting very worried about that ammo what they think will not be so good after lying out in the rain for the best part of a week. Of course, they are looking for Ginger as well but like they say in the Officers' Mess he is probably a corpse by this time so there is not so much hurry looking for him.

It is some infantry blokes what finds him in the end. Proper flabber blasted they was when they come across that pile of ammo because there is Ginger still standing on guard with his uniform all wet through and his face covered with whiskers.

'Halt. What goes there?' he says. So they tell him.

'Give the pass word.' says Ginger. But they say their ain't got no pass word because nobody never give them one for a bloke what is supposed to be starved to death and they has come up for the ammo. Well, Ginger won't let them go near that ammo so they think he must have gone off his head or something and gets a young officer to come and speak to him.

'My poor man,' says this young officer,



*There is Ginger still standing on guard.*

'you has had a very hard time and my men have got a stretcher for to carry you back to camp and my men will take over guard of this ammo.'

Well, it is a long way back to camp so Ginger lets these infantry blokes carry him, but the way he carries on at them any time one of them slips when they are going down the mountain they are sorry they found him. The officer wants to take Ginger straight to hospital but he won't let them because he says his first duty is to report back to his Major and then these infantry blokes says the Pioneers must be a bloody fine mob to train their men like that and when they gets to the bottom of the mountain they puts him in a jeep and brings him back to the Coy. Ginger is so weak by this time that he lets the Sgt Major help him out of the jeep and help him by the arm to walk in to the Major's quarters, and he lets one of the Sgts carry his rifle for him.

'This is Private Ellis what has been rescued, sir,' says the Sgt Major, and the Major shouts for me to bring a chair for Ginger to sit on which I done. And then as he is my mate I do not go away but stick around to listen what has happened to him.

'Are you quite alright, my poor boy?' ask the Major.

'Yes, sir,' says Ginger in a weak voice. 'Only I got a bit hungry like when my emergency rations is finished, and I am sorry I never had a shave before they brought me up in front of you, sir, but I looked after that ammo proper what is all present and correct.'

So the Major shakes Ginger by the hand and says he is a credit to the Pioneers and he is proud to have him in his Coy. Then the Major says if the MO reports Ginger is fit to travel he is to go home on leave for 6 days and he can put a stripe up before he goes. After which he tells me to take Ginger in the kitchen and give him a drink while we are waiting for the ambulance.

'I am sorry about that stripe, Ginger,' I tells him. But as you are a bleeding hero I will be your mate just the same.'

'Oh, it wasn't nothing much,' says Ginger, all modest like.

'But Ginger,' I says, 'you might have kicked the bucket up there all by yourself with no beer or nothing. I was very worried,' I says, 'and if I had known where you was I would have come and helped you.'

He just sat there in the chair and laughed like a drain.

'Blimey, Eddie,' he says, 'I never thought I would take you in with that story I told the Old Man. You ought to know me better than think I would frig about on that there mountain in the rain just because of a lot of lousy ammo. Listen, chum,' he says, 'and mind you don't tell nobody. I had a cushy time up on that there mountain. There was a little stone house about a mile away what an old man lives in as looks after the sheep and I stopped with him all the time. He is a very interesting old chap what makes his own whisky and he learned me how to do it and I will show you how when I come back off leave. I only went back to that there ammo when I sees the search party coming up the hill. Look out, here's the flipping ambulance coming and I ain't strong enough to talk no more.' Then he gives me a big wink and flops back in the chair like he won't last much longer.

Well, when he tells me this I am very proud of the artful little basket for having got to be a good soldier like I learned him. But then I am sorry again when I think about that stripe because it is not so good if NCOs gets to be as artful as what privates are.

But it all come right in the end. After he come back to the Coy again Ginger goes on the booze one night. He don't have enough to get drunk but just gets a bit merry and being always fond of his little joke he goes to the 2 cinemas what is the only theatres in this little town which is near us and tells the managers he is from the Station Commander and all the troops has got to return to their barracks at once. Ginger says he never laughed as much as when he saw all them soldiers and sailors and air force blokes come running out of them theatres. Officers and men they all come out at the double and goes running down the street so Ginger had to go and have another drink to stop his self laughing. The word had got round that there was something up and he is the only bloke in uniform in the pub and just as he is finishing off his drink a couple of red caps comes in.

'Now, then,' they says, 'what are you sitting here for? Don't you know all troops has been called back to barracks?'

'Of course I do,' says Gingie, and he starts laughing all over again, 'I'm the bloke what give the order.' And he thinks it is so funny that he tells them what he done. But they never laughed. They just pinched him and slung him in the cooler.

As it only natural Ginger is not a lance jack no more after that which makes me very



A very interesting old chap what makes his own whisky.

happy because a bloke does not like to see his mate get wrong ideas about promotion. Well, it stands to reason. If all the good privates become non coms there would not be anybody left to do the work and you could not run an army that way. And anyhow, Ginger was a natural born private what would have been wasted anywhere else.

## CHAPTER 12 - Young Badgey

What I missed most in the last war was not having no trumpeters in the Army. Anyway, we never had them in the Pioneers except one Coy I was in, and there wasn't any in the Coast Artillery where I went in 1939. I do not know how anybody else feels about it but there ain't no music I like better than trumpet calls. Gets right inside me it does and sends a funny feeling running up and down my gizzard. I always remember the old days back in the Horse Artillery the way the horses stamp their feet and snort when they hear 'Stables' being sounded. I reckon they felt the same way about it like what I do. Knew all the calls as well as us they did. Horse line and trumpet calls. Proper soldiering that was. Somehow it seemed like a natural end to the day to lie between your blankets and hear them playing Lights Out.

Come to think of it, I ain't heard proper trumpeting since 1914 when my Battery left

Woolwich for France. We had just come back from India and was stationed out on Woolwich Common because there wasn't no room in barracks at the Depot. That would be about October, and I won't forget that parade as long as I live. Perishing cold it was and raining like hell when we all turns out in the dark for early morning stables. Everything is packed up and we are down to move off to the station right after breakfast to go to Southampton. Everything was going, men, horses and guns. Everything, that is, except young Badgey, which is how we call a trumpeter in the Army. He was only a kid, see, this young Badgey, about 15, when come in as a boy when he was 14 and has been with us for about a year. Well. Orders has come in as boys is not allowed to be sent to the war so as soon as we move out this poor little blighter has got to go and report back at the Depot. Fair broke his heart it did because he was dead set on going to France with the Battery. Mind you, he was a proper young devil that same trumpeter and up to all the trouble you could think of but everybody liked him from the Major down and we was all sorry he was not coming with us. But there wasn't nothing that nobody could do about it.

So there we was just as it was getting daylight, the whole Battery on parade and ready to move off. I was riding wheel on No 2 gun, I remember, and there standing all by his self with the empty tents and horse lines behind him was young Badgey standing to attention like a bleeding ramrod. Somehow I never noticed before how little he was. The Major was out in front and he give the order, 'Trumpeter, sound the Advance.' And young Badgey puts his trumpet up and sounds the call and the horses leans into their harness and Number 1 gun moves off. Then Badgey broke off in the middle, a thing what I hadn't never heard him do before. So help me, the poor little devil couldn't finish it, but just stood there with his trumpet up at his mouth and the tears running all down his face. Our Major was a proper hard card what nobody didn't like very much and I thought he was going to give Badgey a proper rasping. But he never. He turns in his saddle and sings out, 'Battery, eyes right!' Then he gives the kid a salute. God love him, I would have rode through hell for him after that. So I ups with my whip with all the other drivers and gives a whip salute. Badgey never moved. If you ask me the poor little perisher could not have moved if he had wanted to. He just stood there proper to Attention until the Battery was gone, his trumpet what he couldn't play still up at his lips and the tears dropping off the end of his chin. And that was the last time I ever heard a proper trumpet call even if it was not done regimental like.



He turns in his saddle and sings out, 'Battery, eyes right!'

Forty years ago on Woolwich Common, and us moving off in the rain in the early morning to go to France. There can't be many of us left now. But, blimey, its a long time, ain't it? It don't half make you feel old.

The bloke what we had in the Pioneer Coy he was not a proper trumpeter because he plays one of them cornet things like they has in a band. A busker he was in Civvy Street what plays outside pubs and theatres. Mind you, he didn't half play that cornet lovely and nobody couldn't say different. Well, this bloke, what we calls 'Smudger', does a turn at a concert what we have and the Major hears him and gets the idea of making a trumpeter out of him, so he brings him in from detachment and gives him a job at Coy Headquarters.

This Major, what I am batman to, is an old cavalry officer and I reckon as all soldiers what has been with horses is particular keen on trumpeting. Any way, he tells Smudger he has got to learn all the calls from Reveille to Lights Out and he gives him a book where they is all wrote down in music. Only Smudger tells the Major he do not know how to read music so then the Major tells me I have got to learn Smudger all them calls and after that him and me sits in the kitchen for an hour or two every day, me whistling the calls and him picking them out on his cornet till after a time he has got them all off proper.

Now this bloke Smudger he likes being at Headquarters very much because not only he don't have much work to do but it is a very nice billet in a big house on a village green with two pubs close by. There is the Dukes Head, what is next to the church, and the Five Bells over by the post office, and him being a pub busker on Civvy Street it is just like home to Smudger what is very fond of his home. He couldn't half knock the beer back because trumpeting is a very thirsty job which was why he took on pub busking. You see, it makes him more thirsty for beer than what he would have been if he never has his trumpet to help him. After the first day he is at Headquarters old Smudger has his feet well under the table in them 2 pubs where he sits all evening playing tunes and getting free beer so that he can't hardly walk back to the billet after closing time, and at the end of the week it is like he has been there all his life and even the village copper sees him safe back into the billet one night so he don't fall in the duck pond and drowned his self.

After Smudger has been with us for a week the Major says it is time he started doing his stuff on the trumpet so then he has to start playing all the Army calls at the proper time, and as we have got 2 platoons which are billeted at one end of the village the Major gives orders that Smudger has got to go out on the village green to blow his calls. And that is where the fun started.

Them people in that village was the most unmusical villagers you ever met and before a couple of days was over they was all a grumbling and writing letters to the Major. Some says Reveille was too early and waked them up when they never wanted to be waked up, and the rest of them grumbles because Lights Out is too late and they have just got nicely off to sleep when the call wakes them up again. The teachers kicks up a row because the kids will not do their lessons when Smudger is blowing his calls and the parson don't want no trumpeting while he is having a Mothers' Meeting or any other meeting, and he don't want no calls on Sunday.

The Major is very angry and goes round the Mess shouting, 'Don't they know there is

a war on?' and he won't alter them there calls except that he tells Smudger he is not to sound his trumpet at church times. But there is worse than that because the country blokes what uses the 2 pubs goes right off the deep end saying as how before Smudger come they sometimes get an extra 5 minutes at closing time but they don't get it no more because now them pubs shut sharp at 10 o'clock when he sounds Last Post. Poor Smudger is terrible upset about this because they blame him for it and won't hardly speak to him no more and stops buying him free beer, so after he has sit by his self in them 2 pubs for a few nights buying his own beer Smudger makes up his mind he don't want to be a trumpeter no more only he don't know how to get out of it with the Major being so dead set on him playing the calls.

About this time the Major says he will have a big dinner party and asks the Brigadier and Colonel and god knows who to come.

'Does that trumpeter know the Officers' Mess call?' he asks me, and when I tell him he does he sends for Smudger and tells him he is going to surprise all them other officers who do not know he has got a trumpeter, and Smudger has got to sound Officers' Mess at 8 pip emma. Proper browned off



I props him up against a tree near the Officers' Mess

Smudger was that day as soon as the pubs is open he sits himself in a corner of the Five Bells and starts knocking back pints like his stomach was made of blotting paper.

Just before it gets 8 o'clock the Major asks me if the trumpeter is standing by. 'Yes, sir,' I says, and then I nips over to the Five Bells and sticks my head inside the door.

'Come on, Smudger,' I shouts. 'Five minutes for Officers' Mess call.'

'Go to hell,' says Smudger, what is very drunk indeed.

'Don't be a b.f.,' I tells him. 'All them brass hats is waiting for their dinner.'

'They can all go and take a running jump at their selves,' he says, and don't move from where he is sitting. 'I do not want to be a bleeding trumpeter no more because I ain't got no friends since I am a trumpeter. Tell that there Major I have resigned,' and then he starts to cry like a blooming kid, which is the first crying drunk I have met for a long time, and I do not like crying drunks because they is difficult to handle. Proper plastered, he was.

Well, I quiets him down and gets him outside and across the green where I props him up against a tree near the Officers' Mess.

'Don't let your old pal down, Smudger,' I tells him. 'Wait here while I come back and I will get you a drink.'

So then I go in to the Major and tells him Smudger is outside, only I do not say that he is stinko.

'Ah,' says the Major to the Brigadier, 'I have got a nice surprise special for you, sir, you being an old cavalry man,' and then he turns to me and nods his head. I wasn't half glad to see old Smudger still there against that tree where I put him.

'All right, chum,' I tells him. 'Sound the call and I will get you that drink.'

So he takes his cornet from under his arm and straightens his self up and wipes the back of his hand across his mouth and gets ready to play. I nips back into the Mess because it is al laid on that as soon as the call sounds I have to go up to the Major and say, 'Dinner is served, sir.' For a minute nothing don't happen and I think perhaps Smudger has fell down not having no tree to hold him up. There is me standing at the door looking at the Major, and him standing looking at me with a Now-what-the-hell-has-happened look in his eye, and the Brigadier and them other officers just standing about wondering how much longer they got to wait before that dinner shows up. Then Smudger starts to play.

There is one thing you have got to say about that bloke, he couldn't half play the trumpet. A proper treat it was to listen to him. Only he never played the Officers' Mess call. First he starts off with 'Come into the garden, Maud', and he follows that up with 'Nelly Dean' and a lot of other songs. I am so surprised I just stand there and forget all about saying to the Major, 'Dinner is served, sir.' The Major he looks kind of surprised, too, but he don't bat an eyelid only he says to the Brigadier, 'Shall we go in to dinner now, sir?' and they goes in to dinner and I starts dishing up the soup.

'Is this the surprise you had for me, Major?' asks the Brigadier. 'If you ask me it sounds more like the outside of a four ale bar than an Officers' Mess. Has your Coy band been learning these pieces for long?' he asks. Then he laughs like he thinks he has made a joke.

'Oh, no,' says the Major, who don't hardly know what he is saying of by this time, 'the surprise is coming later,' he says.

He never knew how true he was speaking because after Smudger has played all the tunes what he knows he starts playing Army calls like Defaulters and Come to the Cookhouse Door and Fall in the Sick.

'Send that bloody man away who ever he is,' says the Major to me, so I slips out the kitchen door but when I get round to the front there is no sign of Smudger no place and his trumpet has stopped. It is dark by this so I looks around to see has he fell down and when I can not see him I think he has gone back to the boozer, so I slips into the Mess again.

And what do you think? There in the dining room is old Smudger what has walked in the front as bold as brass. He has got his trumpet under his arm and his hat in his hand what he has put some pennies in and which he is shaking under the Brigadier's nose. Mind you, I don't say he knew what he was a doing of, him being so full of wallop, but he probably thinks he is back busking again. Of course, I took him outside toot sweet but things was not quite so friendly in the Mess when I got back and the Brigadier don't stop long after dinner is finished. We never had no trumpeter in the Coy after that. The Major tore a proper strip off me as if I was to blame for Smudger getting drunk.

But I am still sorry we never had no trumpeters in the Army in the last war. They sort of brighten things up I always think.

## CHAPTER 13 - We should have had a medal

When the war ended my Coy was in Germany and I am not a batman no more after what happened about the Colonel and that bit of Gerry homework what he had. Smashing bit of stuff she was but it was not my fault because he never said not to go into the bathroom, so I am sent back to a Coy again. We was right up near the front line and has been ordered to pack up on the job we was doing because the fighting is about finished so me and Knocker Wright, who was a lance jack, and Dusty Miller thinks this is a good chance to do a bit of scrounging and knock off some souvenirs, so we cops a lift in a lorry to a place a few miles from where our platoon is and hops off near a little town as is back a bit from the main road. A lovely day it was with the sun shining and the birds singing their bleeding little hearts out and no guns firing or nothing, and there is the 3 of us with our battle dress blouses open, smoking fags, and kicking up the dust on this little side road, and talking about how soon we would be sent home.

We are hoping there will be lots of beer and no red caps in this place we are coming to when all of a sudden a big car turns the corner and we have to jump for it or he would have knocked us for six. The car stops and Knocker Wright, what was always a bit short tempered, starts blinding and blasting and telling the driver what he thinks of him in proper Army language. Just as he gets to the part about drivers' mothers not having no marriage lines the door opens and a bloke gets out with a gun in his hand.

'Cor, blimey!' says Dusty. 'A blinking officer.'

Well, you know what it was like out there with so many foreign troops that you didn't know who anybody was. But we didn't go much on officers if they was not English so at first Knocker don't take much notice of him except for keeping his eye on that there gun. Then this bloke comes to us and hands his gun over to Knocker.

'You are English, yes?' he says. 'I surrender myself and my men to the British Army.'

It was only then I notices the black cross on the car and know he is a ruddy German.

'Well, stone the crows,' says Knocker. 'A blasted German, so help me. Here, Ed,' he says, 'you better hold this gun in case it goes off and hurts somebody.'

But I was already in the ditch trying to crawl under Dusty Miller what has beat me to it.

'Come on, you two,' says Knocker. 'Stop mucking about in that ditch and give us a hand.'

So we come out and Knocker asks this Gerry officer where his men is, and he says to come in the car and he will take us to them. And that is what we done. Only Knocker tells him if he gets up to any monkey tricks he will shoot him in the guts.

Well, the car takes us to this here little town and there hanging about in the streets



'Stop mucking about in that ditch and give us a hand.'

was thousands of them Germans just standing around with their hands in their pockets and smoking. Then this officer what we reckon is some sort of General asks Knocker what they have got to do. 'My men would like something to eat,' he says. Spoke proper English this bloke did just like us. So Knocker, who is a saucy little devil, tells him the first thing what they got to do is put them fags out and get fell in proper.

'Tell them to get fell in in three ranks, tallest on the right, shortest on the left, and I don't want to hear no more talking,' Knocker says. So the officer shouts out something in German and they all done like what he said, all excepting some blokes what was standing to one side.

'What's wrong with them blokes?' Knocker asks this General.

'They are officers,' says the General.

'I don't care who the hell they are,' says Knocker. 'Get them fell in.' so he done that, and there is all them Gerries standing looking at us and us three standing looking at them.

'Now what the hell are you going to do?' asks Dusty Miller.

'What do you say, Ed?' Knocker says to me.

'Our Colonel used to say, "Fall out the officers,"' I says.

'That would be silly after all the trouble



'I don't care who the hell they are.  
Get them fell in.'

we has had falling them in,' says Knocker.

'Well, you're the bloke with the stripe,' I tells him. This is where you start to earn your pay. 'We could march them back to our camp and give them to our officer,' I says.

'What the hell do you take me for?' asks Knocker. 'We must be ten mile from our camp and I ain't going to march these silly bleeders all that way. And another thing, if we take them back to our camp who is going to have to look after them? We will, that's who.'

'Oh, for cripes sake, stop talking,' says Dusty. 'We got to do something.'

So Knocker tells this General bloke to make them all left turn and quick march, and he tells Dusty to get one of the guns what the Germans has throwed away and go the head of the column and lead them.

'Lead them where to?' asks Dusty.

'I do not know, but I will think of some place,' says Knocker.

Then he tells me to fall in in the rear and says he will march up and down along side and keep an eye on things. And that is the way we done it.

This column is about half a mile long and I stops where I am until they are all gone and the reason I done so was because I see a place what looks like a boozer and there was someone peeping out of the window of it. So when the column has marched off I

knocks on the door of this place and has a couple of drinks and takes 2 bottles of stuff away in my pockets for my mates. After which I tries to catch up with them but when I gets a mile or two along the road what do you think? There sitting by the ditch is Knocker Wright and Dusty Miller but there is not a German in sight.

'Where is your prisoners?' I asks Knocker.

'I have given them away,' he says.

'Who to?' I asks him.

'To a red cap,' he says. 'This red cap is on a motor bike and when he see all them prisoners with Dusty marching in front he asks Dusty where he is going and Dusty tells him he don't know but to come and ask me. So the red cap comes and asks me how many I got and I tells him there is about 3 thousand.

'Where did you get them?' asks the red cap. 'Do you think we found them by the roadside waiting to give their selves up?' I asks him. 'If you want to know, we surrounded them.' 'Who did?' asks the red cap. 'Me and my two mates,' I tells him. 'You are a ruddy liar,' says the red cap. 'Where is the other chap?' So I tells him you are at the end of the column seeing one of them don't escape. This red cap is so surprised he do not know what to say and I asks him if he will go and take over from Dusty at the head of the column so Dusty can give me a hand back here and he done that.'

'But where is all the prisoners now?' I asks Knocker.

'Still following that blinking red cap, I reckon,' he says. I has got tired of prisoners and don't want them no more. But where the hell have you been all this time?' Knocker asks.

So I gets out the two bottles I got from that pub and give them one each. I do not want no more myself because it is funny stuff what I have not drunk before and I am not feeling so good. Well, they drunk them 2 bottles and soon they are feeling funny too. Dusty Miller wants to go back and find some more prisoners but Knocker only wants to stop where he is and sing 'Lily Marlene', him singing tenor and me singing the low notes, so in the end we all stops where we is singing songs. Then we begin to get a bit hungry and think we will go back to camp, but when we get up we cannot walk so good. And after that Knocker wants to have a kip in the middle of the road and we leave him there and me and Dusty starts walking back to camp, only we have a row about what road to take so he goes one way and I go another.

Well, I do not remember what happens after that but the next morning I am back in camp and so is Knocker and Dusty and we are all on the peg to be brought up in front of the officer. At first the officer says we have all got to go back to Coy Headquarters to come up before the Major but in the end he says that as the war is finished that day he will let us off easy and all we got was 3 days CB which we done and if you look in the books of our Coy you will see that is so. Only you won't see nothing in the book



'So in the end we all stops where we is, singing songs.'

about them prisoners. Dusty Miller wants us to tell the officer about them prisoners but Knocker says to keep our traps shut because there might be some orders about taking prisoners without permission, and if there wasn't we would get into trouble anyway for losing of them.

But I have often wondered what the red cap done with them and what he said when he got to where he took them and found we was gone and he had them all to his self.

## CHAPTER 14 - A bit of a get together

Like everybody knows, the Pioneer Corps was only made in the war for duration and when the war is done they all say there ain't going to be Pioneers no more. Only it don't work out that way. What happens is this. Before the war if the Army has got a job of work to do they just done it and that was the end of it. But after the Pioneers come up in 1939, any time there is hard work to be done or a job what needs a bit of savvy the Army hollers out, 'Send us some Pioneers', and the General sends them and the Pioneers gets on with it.

Well, when the war is over the Generals tells the Army as the Pioneers was only there for duration and now duration is finished they got to do their own work like they done before. That didn't half cause a panic and the Army tells the Generals it is so long since they done any real work they has forgot how to do it. So then the Generals scratches their heads and says, 'Blimey, we got to have some soldiers what can work as well as fight, so we had better tell the War Office they has got to keep them Pioneers on.' And that is what they done. After which the Pioneers got to be part of the Regular Army and was called the Royal Pioneers, which is no more than what they deserve. As is only natural, us blokes what served in the Pioneers is very glad to know they has got to be Regulars because we know they is a very good mob and not scruffy like other people thinks they are. And when we hears they has got their own Depot at Wrexham we are very glad to hear it, because a regiment what has not got a Depot is like a bloke what has got no home.

When the Depot has been going on for a bit the Colonel who runs it asks the Old Comrades to go up there and have a bit of a get together. And we done that, and I goes up with a lot more blokes in a coach from London, leaving Ma and the girls to look after my barrow while I am away.

I have not had such a good week end since Ma and me went to Brighton when we was married, so I will tell you about it. It is after midnight when our chara gets to Wrexham so we do not get much of a gander at the Depot there but goes in the NAAFI where they has some grub all ready for us and after that we are put in huts where there are young soldiers what looks after us. It was lovely to hear Reveille go on the trumpets next morning, I can tell you, and to get the smell of barracks again and to hear the non coms chivvying up the recruits. I have a nice boy who is looking after me.

'Let's have your boots, Dad,' he says, 'and I will give them a bit of a shine up.' But, blimey, I was not going to let him do that so I says, 'You just lend me your brushes, son, and I will do them myself,' I says

So then I goes out with some of the others and has a bit of a look round. It was a big place, this Depot, and they have got everything all spit and span because the Pioneers is very particular about that sort of thing. Even in the war when everybody else was proper scruffy you could always tell a

Pioneer billet because it was so clean and regimental, which was not so easy in some of the places we was in.

Well, on the Saturday there is all sorts of things going on with a slap up dinner in the evening what Generals and Brigadiers and Colonels and everybody is at as well as all us blokes what had been in the ranks, but to tell the truth I never settled down proper like, as you might say. All the times I was wishing that some of my old mates was there what I could have a chinwag with, but there was only one bloke in the Old Comrades what was in any of the Coys I served in and he was a Captain as I did not know very well. There is a cricket match and things in the afternoon, but I don't want to see any cricket match. I want to have a dekko in the huts and the stores and see how they did a guard mounting and things like that, so in the end I pushes off down the town by myself to see can I buy something to take home for Ma and the girls. When I got back I comes in through the Main Gate and past the Guard Room and all of a sudden there is a crash, bang, wallop from the sentry what is on the verandah.

'Oh, blimey,' I says to myself, 'here is the General a coming.'

So I looks round for him but there ain't no General no place only the sentry on the verandah giving a butt salute and me in my best blue suit with a parcel under my arm



'Stick out your chest,' I says to myself,  
'and swing them bleeding arms.'

and the medals clinking on my jacket. I went hot all over, I did, and I never knew what I ought to do. I wants to grin at him friendly like and say, 'Hello, chum,' but when I chuck a quick look at him I see he is very regimental with his head and eyes to the front and dead serious about this business of giving a salute an an Old comrade, so I shifts the parcel what I is carrying and puts it under the other arms and raises my hat like I seen the officers do. I was in a proper tizzy, I can tell you. Me, an ex-private retired, as you might say, taking a salute from the Main Guard of his old regiment. I didn't half wish ma and the girls had been there to see. It wasn't till a couple of minutes later that I found I was still walking along with my hat in my hand what I had forgot to put on my head again, and my head still turned round to the Eyes Left.

Then we had this here dinner what I was telling you about. They sit me down between a Colonel and a bloke what has been an RSM. They were both very nice, I must say, and that there Colonel could not have been more friendly if he had been a lance jack. And that was the trouble really. It wasn't natural if you get my meaning. If one of them had given me a ticking off it would have seemed more at home like. But it was a very good dinner all the same.

We had a Church Parade on the Sunday morning. Us Old Comrades forms up behind the transport sheds and a Cavalry band marches us on to the parade ground where

hundreds and hundreds of the chaps stationed at the Depot is formed up in hollow square. The band is playing 'Boys of the Old Brigade' and us blokes is chucking a chest and holding our stomachs in and trying to make out we are still as young as we was at the time of the Kaiser's War. And it wasn't half good to feel the gravel under your feet, and blokes swinging their arms on both sides of you, and everybody marching in step. Then just as we come up to the square all them troops takes their hats off and cheers, and cheers, and cheers. I feels like I was choking, it all being so unexpected like. It was just like getting a quick kick in the guts. I have got a hole in one of my socks what I hope nobody can't see and I have to keep on blinking my eyes because I feel all soft like.

'What are you sniffing for, you silly old basket,' I says to myself. 'Stick out your chest, Ed, and swing them bleeding arms,' I says.

It is a funny thing. I don't hold with Church Parades and never did but I would not have missed that one if it cost me my pension. I've been on some big parades in my time. King's Coronation, and King's Funeral, and the Delhi Durbar, but there never was one like that Church Parade at the Depot with them thousands of lads cheering us few old sweats in civvy suits. And there never won't be another like it for me.

I tells the old lady all about it when I gets home. 'I bet you want to go again next year, Ed,' she says. But I ain't so sure. You see, I ain't a Royal Pioneer, properly speaking. I am just an ordinary Pioneer, if you get my meaning, what is all right in war time, living and working in mucky camps, and only having one battle dress suit what you tries to push up a bit for a parade. Doing a bit of scrounging on the side, and thinking nothing of being brought up before the Old Man on a fizzer. What it is, I reckon, the Pioneers has grown up since I was in them and has become Regulars and part of the Regular Army. They are the Royal Pioneer Corps the same way my old mob was the Royal Horse Artillery, and that makes a difference that does. When I joined them the Pioneers was a bunch of tough odds and sods, but even so they was better than most war time mobs because they had better officers and non coms. They was tough because they had to be or else the rest of the Army would have spit in their eye given half a chance. 'The Pick and Shovel Boys' they calls us at the beginning of the war, and makes out we only done dirty jobs back at the base, but by the time the war finished and when they comes up the line to a battle and finds that the Pioneers is up there before them and has a rifle what they knows how to use, well, they alters their tune them. And did you ever see them on a Ceremonial Drill? Blimey, we even had black African Pioneers as was so smart they made the Guards look like recruits in a line regiment. They have growed up alright, the Pioneers has, and nobody can't say no different. They won that there 'Royal' handle to their name, and good luck to them.

But me, I ain't growing up no more but just growing older. Being a batman most of the time perhaps I never was a proper Pioneer. I don't know. All the same I am very proud to have served with them and any time you see my barrow down the Walworth Road you will know its me because there is always 2 badges on it what are kept shined up. One is for my old mob, the Royal Horse Artillery, and one for the mob I finished my soldiering in, the Royal Pioneer Corps. ■



# Minutes

Chairman: Maj PJ Fleming

Secretary: Mr N Brown

of the 59th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association, held in the WOs' & Sgts Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Bicester on Saturday 7th July 2007.

Members Present: 72

**A**fter welcoming members present and receiving apologies from Brig HJ Hickman, Brig CB Telfer, Mr GT Hague, Mr H Lewis, Mr D Douglas, Mr J Cordy, Mr J Stout, Mr D Luker, Mr JH Shaw, Lt Col MJ Bennett, Lt Col JGO Lowe, Mr R Fox, Mr D Bryant and Capt M East the Chairman opened the meeting at 1200 hours and requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year after their names had been read by the Secretary.

## 1. MINUTES OF 58TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The minutes of the 58th Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

## 2. REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

Maj A Parry, CO Rear Party 23 Pnr Regt RLC, described that the Regiment was in good fettle, including the Troop which had just returned from Bosnia there were 270 soldiers left in the Regiment at Bicester. He then read a report which had been received from Lt Col M Bennett:

"It is difficult this year to provide a comprehensive update of what we have been up to. So much of the year has been consumed with operation pre-deployment training, EX WINTER PIONEER in Nov 07 on Bramley Training Area and Barton Stacey was our last chance to exercise our Regt C2 nodes and recce parties before deployment training. BOWMAN development continued to make progress.. We have sent a Tp to Malawi with JTFFHQ and then deployed it to Bosnia on Op OCULUS,. 522 Sqn under Maj Tim Burgess have been focused on training and deploying the largest element of the 1 THA BG for Op TELIC 10. Coupled with significant deployment to Afghanistan and more of that later, we have managed to deliver displays to the CinC Land and GOC Theatre Tps, compete in the Army Rugby Final narrowly losing to 1 R WELSH and host a visit from The Princess Royal on 1 Feb 07. Elements of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC have now completed their deployments to Afghanistan and I though that now would be an appropriate time to provide you with an update. All in all and as a resume of where we stand in Afghanistan, the pre-deployment training has gone exceedingly well and we are disposed as follows:

a. B Coy 1 WFR – 1 Tp. Lt Greg McLeod and Sgt Uren-Lamer have settled in well with B Coy and the CO 1WFR, Lt Col Richard Westley, is more than pleased with the progress the Pnr Tp has made. They have now completed their RSOI package at Camp Bastion and are to move forward to a company position in Gereshk. This is very much in the front line, although lines do not exist in the simplistic terms, and the Tp rely heavily on their pre-deployment training with 1 WFR. Interestingly, the Pioneers do not look out of place at all amongst the rest of B Coy 1WFR who appear to have a number of junior looking soldiers on their first operational tour with them.

b. FP Tp, UK Log Be (4LSR). Lt John Conningham and TP have again settled in well with 4 LSR based in Camp Bastion even though CO UK Log Bn has divided the Tp between both 60 and 4 Sqns RLC to spread out the experience and skills. This has proved a challenge for Sgts Belcher-Marks and Roberts as well as Cpls Brentley and Dacey.. The Pnr Tp would have been unable to drive the number of WMIK vehicles required for their role without the assistance of 4 LSR's drivers. This is an operational example of how a Pnr soldier's inability to gain a C licence limits his utility on operations, even those out of role. The Tp have been involved in logistic

resupply and had an interesting moment delivering 105mm ammunition to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Robinson and taking incoming at the same time! They are also about to reconfigure and provide the FP to Comd TFH's ace Gp in support of Op SILICON in the Sangin Valley. Hard and increasingly dangerous work but their morale is high.

c. FP Tp, HQ Regional Command (South)(RC(S)). Capt Jimmy Burroughes has arrived in Kandahar and is preparing for the TOA of HQ RVC(S) and the Comd RC(S)M Maj Gen Page. Preparations have gone well and all the indications are that the Tp will be extremely busy. The Tp have spent much time on the ranges and training with their new equipments.

d. Kabul Protection Company (KPC) Maj Ian Poole and 187 Sqn RLC have completed RSOI and taken over from 2 RRF. There have a particularly difficult task patrolling Police District 9 (PD 9) and dealing with the complexities of movement in a busy and dangerous Third World capital city. Kabul has developed significantly since 2002 and is much more busy and challenging than many would expect. I am relieved that 187 Sqn are such a well trained unit with a strong command team because I think they will be tested. There is a significant SVBIED threat and the heart beats fast on every patrol 187 Sqn are in good spirits and the soldiers are now becoming accustomed to the altitude and patrolling, on foot in PD9 with body armour and a full range of so called man-portable equipment.

As far as the HQ Bastion Support Group (BSN Sp Gp) goes, we are now well and truly bedded in. There has been tangible benefit in using the RHQ of 23 Regiment as the framework of the BSN Sp Gp. The replacement of 3 Cdo Bde RM with 12 Mech Bde and Cdo Log Regt RM configured as an early entry force with a significant uplift at 2nd line has meant that the BSN Sp Gp has had no time to take a honeymoon and get to know everyone. Within 2 days of arriving in Afghanistan, we were delivering the RSOI package to the first elements of 12 Mech Bde as the Relief in Place started. We have nearly completed that particular challenge and using an existing RHQ has paid dividends. It was all a bit sharp especially as we had not been privy to the detailed RIP planning or had ownership of the accommodation plan but we have made it work. WO1 (RSM) Frame has set about improving the operation of the range complex and has a plan to redevelop the Brook District Compound live firing area for the Battlegroups to practice live compound clearance procedures.

Comd NSC(A)/DCOMBRITFOR has set BSN Sp Gp the target of delivering IOC of the TUAV by 31st July 2007 as a measure of mission success. COMBRITFOR/Comd TFH has set us the challenge of setting the conditions for Op HERRICK 7 and every HERRICK beyond that as far as the development of 2 camps at different stages of the construction process and introduction of a new 7000 foot concrete runway capable of receiving C17 aircraft in December this year. We need 3000 foot of concrete for TUAV. As if that was not enough to be getting on with, we are planning to receive several new equipments at Camp Bastion including MASTIFF (IFV), VECTOR (Armed Pinzgauer) and WARRIOR by August this year. So there is plenty for the team to be getting on with. As you might expect COS, Maj Jon Symon – Regt 21C, SCOS, Maj Gary Thomas, and the QM (Maj Graham McLane) with the RQMS (WO2 Dave Carter, have all set about the challenge with determination, intelligence, experience and gusto. I haven't

counted how big my command is now but I wish I was qualifying for C130 air miles!

Communication is one of the biggest challenges we face both within Theatre and out of it. We are in regular dialogue with the Rear Party and it is evident that both Maj Andy Parry and Capt Sue Doran are doing a great job as OC Rear Party and Unit Welfare Officer respectively. The compassionate system was tested last week and it really does work superbly. The good news on the horizon is that DRCL, Brig Jeff Little, has announced that 170 Pnr Sqn RLC will return to 23 Pnr Regt when ARRC returns from Germany in 2008. This will ensure that the Regiment has 5 Task Sqns and will be able to generate a Sqn continuously for operations without breaking harmony guidelines."

3. Lt Col J Stevenson, CO 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) gave an update on her Regiment:

"Background. For those of you who are unsighted on the Regiment, 168 Pnr Regt is the single TA Regiment offering Reserve Pioneer capability within the British Army. We are based in seven locations, mainly in the north of England and the unit is a Hybrid TA Unit, which is currently unique and means that it is a mix of regionally recruited and Nationally recruited Territorial Army within one unit. Regionally recruited TA are soldiers who live around the TA Centre, usually within a 20 mile radius, and who train during drill nights and weekends. Nationally recruited TA are those who travel from all over the country to attend training in a centralised location and who train at weekends.

My Regional Squadrons (formally known as Independent) are 100 Pnr Sqn based in Cramlington, Newcastle, with additional TA Centres in Berwick Upon Tweed and Hexham, and 104 Pnr Sqn based in Coulby Newham, Middlesbrough, with additional TA Centres in Hartlepool and Washington. The National Pioneer Task Sqn, 101 Pnr Sqn, and Headquarter Squadron, 34 Sqn, are both recruited nationally, with TA travelling across the country to Grantham, Lincolnshire.

In addition, there is a regionally recruited Light Aid Detachment based in Coulby Newham and Cramlington, with National REME elements in Grantham.

The Challenges. 168 Pnr Regt has faced many challenges over the last year, with TA Future Army Structures a major issue. Under TA FAS, the Regiment has lost two National TA Pioneer Task Sqns and reduced in number to around 368 personnel overall, which includes Regular, Non Regular permanent Staff (NRPS) and Territorial Army Officers and Soldiers. In effect, the Regiment now comprises 2 x regionally recruited Pnr Task Sqns, 1 x nationally recruited Pnr Task Sqn, a nationally recruited HQ Sqn, a reduced Regimental HQ and a regional LAD.

The TA is currently under strength, with recruiting and retention both major concerns. Indeed, the National TA is currently only 65% manned overall and this is despite a large reduction in numbers under TA FAS. 168 Pnr Regt, although quite well recruited in some areas, are very poor in others. Officers, Chefs, Clerks and REME soldiers are all at a critical level, and regionally, 104 Pnr Sqn in Middlesbrough has suffered with low Pioneer soldier numbers, although the tide is now turning with a new Sqn Commander and staff. A rise in recruit numbers brings additional issues to the Regiment as recruits take around 3 years to be fully trained. To date, we have 60 recruits in the system out of the 368 personnel and it should be remembered that within a regular army unit, you would not receive recruits until they are fully trained.

The Training Year 2006-2007. 2006 saw two major training events for the Regiment. Firstly, Ex CARIBBEAN PIONEER, which was based in Jamaica, and where the Regiment was tasked with the production of a training facility to allow the Jamaican Defence Force and the Jamaican Constabulary to conduct joint training to address the drugs issue present in Jamaica. The facility was to be modelled upon the typical shanty town setup found in Jamaica around Kingston and Spanish Town, where they had 1700 drugs and gun related deaths in 2005. We used large containers for the buildings two groups of 22 hand picked TA soldiers and officers were sent out to Jamaica for two weeks to complete the training village. This was the first time that any TA unit had trained in Jamaica and it was a great success. We were also featured in Soldier magazine. The transformation from a cannabis field to a working training centre was amazing and proved to be a great experience for all concerned. Needless to say that we did manage some R&R whilst out there and we are also hoping for a follow-on exercise to extend the training centre towards the latter part of this year or perhaps early next year, once we can arrange for the travel costs to be funded.

The second major event in 2006 was our Annual Camp, which was held in and around Bicester and culminated in the medal parade to present the members of the Regiment with their Op TELIC medals from 2003 and 2004. Over 150 members of the Regiment and their families were present for the event and it proved to be a very moving and momentous occasion.

On to 2007 and training for the Regt is currently undergoing a major change. Although the Regt was set up in 1996 around the "Specialist TA" design, where individuals holding relevant civilian qualifications joined the TA and, due to their civilian skills, required less training within their chosen 'special to role' function, it appears that civilian skills were never mapped across to military skills. This has resulted in TA soldiers with extensive civilian artisan skills unable to use Pioneer military equipment until they receive the relevant training – even though they are probably more skilled than their military trainers. We are therefore currently undergoing a major mapping exercise to ensure that recognition is given to civilian skills. This is extremely important in the current climate where we need to attract relevant people into the TA – the national element of the Regiment currently only has 85 civilian artisans, unlike 80% in 1996 and with only 19 Man Training Days to train a TA Pioneer, training for the future is unsustainable.

In addition, the Pioneer Career Employment Group within the British Army is yet to be agreed by HQ Land. This means that we are still unseen as to exactly what a TA Pioneer is going to be expected to do. As we also carry out Phase 2 training within the Regiment, covering Pioneer trade training, this has major implications for us, not least the management of expectations within 23 Pioneer Regiment on exactly what duties they can expect a TA Pioneer to be capable of carrying out, especially on Operations.

This year we are continuing to train within each separate Sqn in support of Regimental centralised training, which is held during Foundation Training weekends. These FTPs cover certain training topics within the Adaptive Training Foundation laid down by HQ LAND and ensure that TA soldiers and officers are able to achieve the necessary standards required.

The TA is there to be used and is currently the Reserve of First Choice. This means that we need to be usable. As a Regiment, we are organised to provide a Contingent Component of a Sqn plus size for our twinned Regiment, 23 Pnr Regt, for Large Scale Direct Intervention. With the mobilisation risk of 1 in 3, we therefore need to train the whole Regiment to ensure that the contingent component would be a viable and usable

force. The likelihood of LSDI is however low and there is a need to show that the Regt is usable now. This is difficult when we do not have the same skills as the regular soldier within our twinned Regt.

The situation is very different for other RLC units within the Transport, Movements and Postal field, where TA soldiers can very easily undertake the same duties as their regular counterpart. You will be aware of the current operational role for 23 Pnr Regt, and, as this would mean us taking on duties out of role, we have as yet been unable to go on operations together. However, we hope that this may change in the future, with a long period of specialised training available to ensure that the relevant skills are covered.

Twinning is a very important and vital function for our two Pnr Regts and we are currently working on a Twinning Action Plan to ensure that it works. Not only will this include training together, but it will also mean more joint social events, thus fostering the Pioneer ethos as well as the Regimental ethos.

This year, our annual camp, EX VALIANT PIONEER 2, sees us travelling to Germany in September for two weeks. We are lucky to be able to do this, as there are currently severe funding issues affecting all TA training, with many exercises cancelled or curtailed. The intent for the camp is to develop and exercise the individual skills and command and collective role capability of a realistic sized Pnr Contingent Component TA force in order to develop a TA Pioneer Cohort capable of supporting current LAND Operations. We are also conducting Phase 2 Pioneer trade training during the camp, both in the UK and in Germany and are lucky to have some valuable assistance from members of 23 Pnr Regt to assist us.

We are facing additional challenges. The introduction of JPA, together with Pay as you Dine, have both had a great effect on the TA. These, alongside the introduction of TA FAS, and the current funding issues, have all taken their toll. However, the Pioneer ethos is strong and will ensure. 168 Pioneer Regiment is moving from strength to strength and will continue to do throughout the coming year and beyond."

### ITEM 3. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

**4.** The Chairman thanked the CO Rear Party 23 Pnr Regt and CO 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) for their updates and thanked 23 Pnr Regt for hosting the AGM/Reunion Weekend especially the WOs & Sgts Mess for the use of their excellent facilities. He wished, on behalf of the Association, to congratulate the success of both Regiments.

**5.** Convergence was completed on 15 Nov 06 when the Chairmen of the RAOC, ACC, RLC and, of course, our Chairman signed the formal Trust Deeds. All our assets were transferred to the RLC in Dec 06, a total of £1,607,000 being transferred.

**6.** Now that our 2006 accounts have been finalised the return to the Charity Commissioners has been completed with a request that they cancel our Charity Number and from that date we will come under the RLC Charity Number. This does save the burden of appointing auditors, carrying out an audit and other mundane tasks.

**7.** As reported in previous years funding for the Association has been guaranteed by the RLC as long as there is a requirement, in other words as long as you the members wish it to continue.

**8.** Although it was published in the Newsletter that this year's Reunion would be curtailed because of the operational deployment of the Regiment it is wonderful to see such a large turn-out especially those who have travelled long distances to be here. It is especially pleasing to see our Second World War Veterans once again; it was these and their comrades who helped to forge the Corps in its early days. I hope you all enjoy what is left of the weekend.

### ITEM 4. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

**9.** I will first cover the main points from the 2006 accounts:

Total income for 2006 was £118,032 (£119,363 in 2005)

Total expenditure for 2006 was £129,808 (£175,497 in 2005) – an overall loss of approx £11,000

In 2006 there were 274 applications for assistance received and 263 grants were made at a cost of £88,331 (£93,000 in 2005).

In 2006 a profit of £6,908 was made on the two draws which was slightly down on the 2005 figure of £7,172.

The Derby Draw this year made a profit of nearly £2,000 which was well down on last year's figure as the main buyers, soldiers from the Regt, were not here to buy tickets.

If any member of the Association would like a copy of the accounts please send a large stamped addressed envelope with 48p postage.

**10.** I would like to place on record the excellent assistance that I receive in my work here by all members of the Regt, it certainly makes my life easier.

**11.** It is intended that the first prize for the Christmas Draw this year be increased from £500 to £1000, it is also intended to increase the cost of each ticket from 50p to £1. It is hoped that this may increase revenue, the profits from these draws helps to fund the work of the Association.

**12.** Following this meeting the bar in the mess will be open for a short period. This afternoon there will be transport leaving the mess at 1330 hrs to either Bicester or the Real Ale Festival at Merton. For those that go to the latter please don't over indulge. In the mess this afternoon I will be displaying some old scrap books for members to look at I will also have for sale some Association items including engraved pocket watches and Reunion Weekend T Shirts.

**13.** I must mention once again the distribution of Newsletters,. The April Newsletter resulted in 45 envelopes being returned "Gone Away" or "No Longer at this Address", if you move please let us know.

### ITEM 5. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

**14.** In accordance with the Constitution one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year. The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected: Brig CB Telfer, Col RF McDonald, Lt Col JGO Lowe and Maj PJ Fleming

**15.** The meeting also elected Lt Col SP Wheelton, WO1 (RSM) WF Ross and WO1 (RSM) JA Hutchinson who had been nominated by the Council for the three vacancies caused by the resignations of Lt Col MJ Bennett and WO1 (RSM) J Frame and the death of Maj ER Elliott.

### ITEM 6. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

**16.** The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting would be 4 – 6 July 2008.

### ITEM 9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

**17.** Lt Col J Starling requested that a vote of thanks be recorded for the work carried out by Mr N Brown and his son in producing such a high quality Newsletter and their work in maintaining the web-site, this was unanimously agreed.

**18.** Details of the Secretary's hours of work were requested and it was explained by the Chairman that subsistence and travel costs for the extra days work were to be paid from Association funds.

**19.** There being no further business the meeting closed at 1300 hours.

**N BROWN**  
Secretary

# Lost Trails

*the following are trying to re-establish contact with members, if no contact details are shown contact through the Association*

**ARTHUR HUGHES** - served from 1959 to 1961 at 522 Coy D Camp, Donnington is trying to trace anyone he served with please contact [aprilbridge2@aol.com](mailto:aprilbridge2@aol.com)

**47 COY RPC** - Arthur Brown who served with 47 Coy from 1941-1946 in N Africa, Italy and N Europe is trying to locate any members from that Coy. Tel: 01303 265634

**LCPL COLIN FARRAR (23683461)** - Mr Andrew Farrar writes: I am the son of Mr Colin Farrar who was in 23 Group Royal Pioneer Corps, Company 522. He was promoted L/Cpl on the 16th September 1960 at Saughton Camp in Chester. He sadly died on the 28th April 1978 in hospital after a long illness when I was only 6 and as he was away for so long I'm sad to say that I didn't really know him and have no memories of him. If anyone served with him would they contact me and help me build a picture of him and his service. [andy@andyfarrar.wanadoo.co.uk](mailto:andy@andyfarrar.wanadoo.co.uk)

**ALBERT BELL**, writes "Many thanks for the last Newsletter (Apr 07). I was very interested in the letter from Capt John Coleman, ex Pte Coleman. I was stationed in 523 Coy at Syston, Leics in 1956-57 and was personal driver for Maj Leach.

Also in 523 Coy was a Capt Black. I would be interested to know of their whereabouts and would like to hear from anyone who served with me in 523 Coy. (523 Coy was one of the first Cos to have the Austin Champ Jeep). Contact 01842 752085

**JAMES STOUT** - writes: I have been trying to trace another James Stout that was stationed with me at the old holiday camp at Prestatyn in North Wales in 1945.

He would certainly remember me and for the following reason. We were on Pay Parade and the paying officer called out James Stout, before he called the number I marched out and so did the other chap much to the officer's surprise. He then

asked which one of us was James Stout and I replied that I was and he did likewise. He then "What is your number, Stout?". As we were both named Stout we each called out our service number, we were very much alike and could have been twins. Much to my surprise I was at fault and the other chap was right in coming out first. The officer paid us both and we saluted and marched back to our ranks.

To end the story I found out that he was posted the next day. I have not seen him since but have tried to trace him many times. He would be around my age, 80. Contact James Stout via Royal Pioneer Corps Association.

**601 COY** - any member who served in this Company during World War 2 are asked to contact [cat.lefebvre06@wanadoo.fr](mailto:cat.lefebvre06@wanadoo.fr) who is trying to complete a book of her uncle's service in the Corps.

## Last Post

*it is with sadness that the Association has to report the following deaths*

**TYRRELL GW** (5504852) ex SSgt. 13 Apr 07 Malvern (Aged 87)

**COTTON FT** (24198703) ex Pte 25 Mar 07 Rotherham

**HANNAGAN EET** (13029847) Ex Pte 1 Nov 06 Bexley Heath - ex 50 Coy 1940 - 1946

**HORWELL AR** (295137) Capt (Retd) 1 Jul 06 London (joined the Association in Dec 46)

**O'BRIEN H** (13113090) 2007 Manchester (Served in 323 Coy from Feb 42 - Feb 46)

**SMITH A** (129942) Major (Retd) 18 Apr 07 Dusseldorf (Aged 91)

**CHAPMAN EK** (13116679) eX Pte Feb 07 Salisbury

**LOWE CV** (13060693) Ex Sgt Nov 06 Northampton (Served 215 Coy 1 Aug 40 - 25 Jun 46)

**TURRELL GS** Ex Pte 24075740

Broadstairs, Kent 20 Jul 07 (Aged 59)

**ALEXANDER A** Capt (Retd), Scrattoft, 30 July 2007 (Aged 98)

**BROWN HD** Ex Pte 13060472 Alvaston

2007 (Served 215 Coy 1940 - 1946)

**PRINCE C** Ex Pte 24137666 Bingham, Notts 22 Jul 07 (Aged 56)

**THOMS H** Capt (Retd) Stuartfield, Aberdeenshire 13 Aug 07 (Served 162 Coy during WW2)

**READ JS** Lt Col (QM) (Retd), Boughton, Northants 16 Aug 07 (Aged 74)

**CHURCHWARD A** Ex Pte 14299749 (Served 1942 - 43) Mar 07

**FOUNTAIN D** Ex Cpl 22010470 (Served 1948 - 1059), Dunstable 30 Jul 07 (Aged 77)

**ABBERLEY T** ex Sgt 13115150 (served 1942 - 1946 in 303 Coy, landed in Normandy on D Day) Crosby 21 Sep 06 (Aged 90)

**RICHMAN WE** Ex Cpl 13059010 (Served 1940 - 1944 in 202 Coy, landed in Algeria and Normandy) Gillingham 15 Sep 07.

**CARTER HS** (22837739) Pte 17 Jan 07 Trowbridge (Aged 72) (Member of Coronation Parade and served in Suez Campaign). The following appeared in the Wiltshire Times

"A Royal British Legion standard bearer who took part in the Queen's Coronation, Silver Jubilee and Golden Jubilee Parades has died at the age of 73."

Harry Carter, of Newtown, Trowbridge, represented the town all over the country on behalf of the Legion.

Mr Carter had the distinctive claim to fame of having taken part in the organisation of the Queen's coronation parade as a 19-year old in 1952, the Silver Jubilee parade 25 years later and the Golden Jubilee parade in 2002.

He was born in Portsmouth in 1933. He met his wife Mary in Winchester in 1951 and they enjoyed 55 years of happily married life.

Mrs Carter said: "We had three children and eight grand-children and they were all devoted to him. He was a wonderful, friendly man who always had a lovely friendly smile and would talk to anybody. He really enjoyed life."

The couple moved to Chester as Mr Carter was serving in the Army, and then back to Hampshire. They moved to Trowbridge in 1984, where he was well known for his gardening as well as his work for the Legion. His friend Brian Mitchell, said, "He was a great friend and like a father to me. He will be greatly missed - you couldn't have wished for a better friend to him."

## Obituary

**PETER LEIGHTON-LANGER**  
3 AUG 1923 – 10 MAY 2007

Peter was born as Peter Paul Wilhelm LANGER in Vienna. Since his relatives were Jewish he escaped to England in the Kindertransport in Sep 1938. Whilst the internment of Aliens was underway in 1940 Peter avoided Internment as he was warned in advance by the local policemen to be out every time they called to collect him. Following employment in Agriculture in High Wycombe he joined the Army at 3 Centre Dec 41. Served 229 Coy.

Transferred to RA in September 1943 and attended 123 Officer Cadet Training unit

and was commissioned in Nov 1944. To India January 1945 as it was the policy in the RA to employ their Aliens outside Europe. In 201 Indian Independent Medium Battery RIA till December 1946. Later a Captain commanding A Troop and OC Waziristan Indian Medium Frontier Post, RIA, Razmak. Finally as Battery Captain 18 Battery 8th Field Regt, RIA, Nowshera.

In charge Hindu refugee camp Nowshera Sept/Oct. 1947. Demob Dec. 1947.

Post-war worked with city of London bankers, then with Marks & Spencer, Tesco,

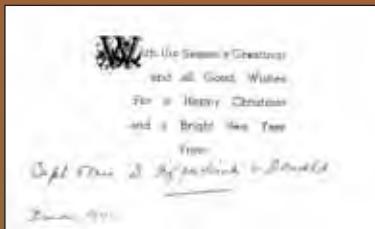
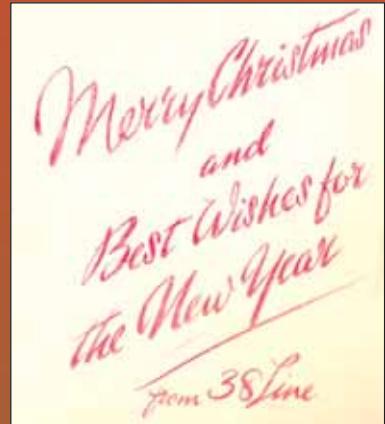
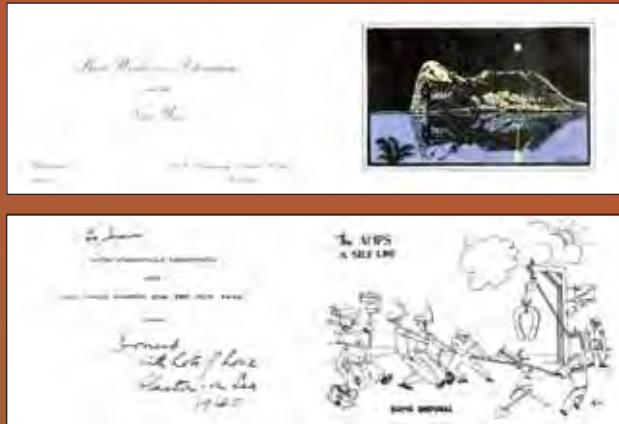
Co-op. Chief Finance Officer Bata Schuhe in Germany.

Peter spent many years researching the German and Austrian Aliens who served in the British Armed Forces. In total he obtained the memoirs of some 400 personnel and produced them in a book in Germany 1999 (X steht fur ubbekannt). This book was translated and updated in 2006 as The King's Own Loyal Enemy Aliens which was launched in the Austrian Embassy in 2006.

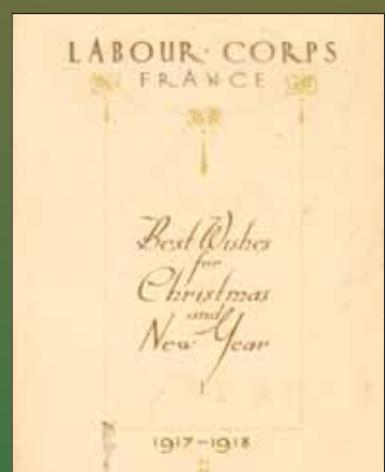
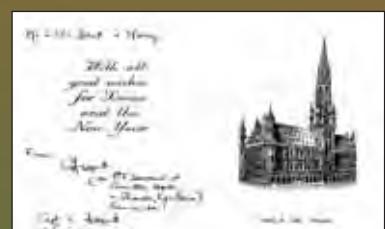
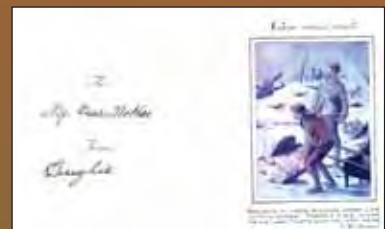
He leaves his wife Renate, 2 children and 5 grandchildren. ■

# Christmas Cards

The following are various Christmas cards issued over the years by various Pioneer Companies and includes two Labour Corps cards.



CHRISTMAS 1942





Gerald C.  
Hudson