the Pioneer

the newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

April 2010 www.royalpioneercorps.co.uk

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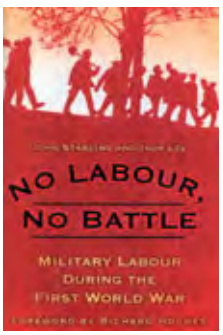

◀ **"No Labour, No Battle" Military Labour during the first World War**
by John Starling and Ivor Lee
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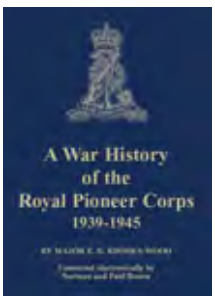

◀ **"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"**
by Major E H Rhodes Wood
This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of
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◀ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
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◀ **"Royal Pioneers 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

the Pioneer

Front Cover
Reunion Weekend
Main Picture: Paul Brown

Back Cover
23 Pioneer doing their duties during the period 2007-2009

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Chairman
Colonel A Barnes TD JP

Controller / Editor
Norman Brown Esq

Design / Photography
Paul Brown

telephone
01869 360694

fax
01869 360695

email
royalpioneercorps@gmail.com

website
www.royalpioneercorps.co.uk

facebook group
www.tinyurl.com/b82ste

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

SINCE THE last Newsletter we have said goodbye to both the CO and RSM of 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Lt Col Wheelton and WO1 Ross, I would like to thank them for the work they undertook on behalf of the Association during their tour with the Regiment and wish them well for the future. It is hoped that they both return to Association functions. In their place we welcome Lt Col SD Fletcher and WO1 (RSM) C Johnstone.

It is pleasing to report that only 20 Newsletters were returned as "Gone Away" in the last distribution, members thankfully are now informing us of change of address. I recently received ten notifications of change of address in one day! As the price of postage is now so high the cost of re-sending Newsletters is both expensive and wasteful.

A record amount was made in the Christmas Draw, may I thank all members for their continued support. The list of winners is shown on page 12. As usual tickets for the Derby Draw are enclosed please also give this your fullest support. If you can sell extra tickets please let me know - a telephone call will suffice.

Once again, sadly, it is my duty to publish a long list of obituaries in this edition, many who were well known Corps "Characters" and many who saw service in World War 2.

However, with new members still being recruited the 'Active' list of the Association continues to rise, we know that there are still a large number of members who are not on this active list and therefore not receiving the Newsletters.

As is normal, a booking form for the Reunion Weekend is enclosed with this edition, a draft programme, as planning is still in progress, is published on page 8. It is intended to use the Reunion as a fundraiser for the ABF The Soldiers' Charity, and we are asking for £5 per night voluntary donation for accommodation. I hope you agree that this is a sensible idea. It is envisaged that we will have record numbers attending this year, let us hope (and pray!) for good weather! We are aware that accommodation within St David's Barracks will be limited and some may have to be accommodated at St George's Barracks. We will, of course, provide transport between both barracks so there will be no excuse for drink driving.

May I also thank members for contributing articles, and letters, to this Newsletter, these are always welcome and help to maintain the history of our Corps. If you have any anecdotes, humourous or relative to the history of our Corps please send them to me. Articles always appear more interesting if accompanied with photographs.

Once again may I thank my son Paul for his hard work in the preparation of this Newsletter.
Norman Brown

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PAST EVENTS

■ ON 3rd November 2009 Lt Col John Starling and Mr Norman Brown were invited to attend a Book Launch at the RAC Club, Pall Mall, London.

The book was the autobiography of Mr Hermann Rothman and entitled "Hitler's Will". Herman for a short time served in the Pioneer Corps during World War 2 before transferring to the Intelligence Corps. It was pleasing to see another ex Pioneer at this book launch, Major Geofrey Perry who captured Lord Haw Haw in 1945 in the woods outside Hamburg (photos can be seen on the gallery pages).

■ ON 10th February 2009 Lt Col John Starling and Mr Norman Brown were invited to attend a book launch at the Lansdowne Hotel, London.

The book entitled "German Schoolboy, British Commando" was the story of Colin Anson who fled Germany in 1939 and joined the British Army, firstly the Pioneer Corps and then the Commandos.

■ THE FIELD of Remembrance had a large number standing behind the Corps Plot (Number 134) and our only In Pensioner Mickey Hull and WO2 Tats Faulkener standing at the front of the plot.

It was pleasing, once again, to see two daughters of George Scully GC stand alongside members of the Corps.

■ IT HAS become practice to follow the Field of Remembrance with a London Lunch in the Marquis of Westminster Public House in Wilton Street, Victoria.

Twenty attended this year with a pleasant lunch and chat which everyone enjoyed.

A number from both 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments attended this year as WO2 Colin Bell was using the opportunity to have his first of three "Stag" nights following the lunch in preparation for his wedding to Ruth on 19 December 2009.

Once again after the lunch it was decided to take our In-Pensioner Micky Hull back to Chelsea - and as is the custom we paid a visit to the bar where, once again, we were made very welcome and had a good chat with other In Pensioners.

■ AFTER THE solemnity of the Two Minute Silence and the wreath laying at the Cenotaph, Peter Cleminson, the British Legion's National Chairman, led the 7,000 strong veterans in Whitehall on the March Past to the rousing sound of the massed military bands playing It's A Long Way to Tipperary.

Thousands of people lined the street, sometimes 16 deep - their thoughts with the millions who have fallen during battle from World War One through to Afghanistan in the service of our country.

Poignantly, the deaths of two more soldiers serving in Afghanistan were announced that morning, bringing the number of personnel killed to over 260 (as we write) since military operations began in 2001.

25 members of the Association marched in the RPC Association contingent with Mr Ian Dewsnap trying to keep everyone in step.

The wreath was laid by Mr John Barlow who had travelled from Bootle to attend.

Gift of a tie

The 63rd past and present officers dinner

THE 63rd Past and Present Officers' Dinner held on 27th November was a great success with 82 sitting down to a well prepared and presented meal.

The guest of honour was Brigadier AS Downes OBE (Head Def Log Ops & Plans), the other guest was Capt (Retd) Ray Hazan (President St Dunstan's) no stranger to the Pioneers as he was OIC the Cadet Training Team located in our former Training Centre at Simpson Barracks, Northampton. Also in attendance was Maj (Retd) Geoffrey Perry, who on 28 May 1945 shot and captured Lord Haw Haw, William Joyce. Lord Haw Haw worked for Josef Goebbels' Nazi propaganda ministry, his sneering voice earned him this nickname but his ludicrous propaganda broadcasts to England throughout the war amused the public rather than snapped morale. Full details of how Maj Perry captured and shot the traitor can be found in his autobiography "When Life Becomes History" (ISBN 0-9543617-1-7). Thinking that Lord Haw Haw was putting his hand in his pocket for a pistol he was shot in the buttocks, the one shot ripped through both cheeks of Joyce's buttocks, creating four holes in all!

It is the custom at the Pioneer Past and Present Officers' Dinner to present a Corps Tie to the main guest. At the last dinner the question was asked, "When did this custom start?" The following is an extract from a report by the General Secretary of the RPC Association following the 21st Anniversary Dinner:

The 21st Anniversary Dinner of the Past and Present Officers of the Royal Pioneer Corps was held at the Connaught Rooms, London, on 28 Sep 67. The Colonel Commandant, Lt Gen Sir John Cowley, KBE, CB, AM presided and there was an attendance of 140 Officers.

We were greatly honoured, privileged and delighted to have such a distinguished Guest of Honour in Field Marshal The Vincent Montgomery of Alamain, KG, GCB, DSO, DL. He was very warmly received and looked extremely fit and seemed in great form.

Prior to dinner being served, the Field Marshall and the other guests were able to meet and chat to many of the officers present.

The Field Marshall, in particular, seemed to enjoy it immensely. After the announcement that "Dinner is served", the Light Orchestra of the Corps of Royal Engineers played the Royal Pioneer Corps March as the officers entered the dining room to take their places. Almost immediately following this the Field Marshall was led in by Lt Col Donovan who conducted him to his seat. As this was taking place the orchestra then played the March of the Field Marshal's old Regiment – the Royal Warwicks. He was apparently touched by this, and with the tremendous ovation he received.

Telegrams and messages were then read out by the Chairman. After the Loyal Toast, a brief ceremony took place in the dining room at which the Field Marshal kindly handed over to the Colonel Commandant the presentation of the silver centre-piece for the Corps Central Officers Mess, on behalf of those former officers who had subscribed to it. This was followed by prolonged applause. Lt Gen Sir John Cowley spoke briefly of the timely reason of the gift and the significance of its design.

"Monty", as he is better known, proposed the Toast of the Royal Pioneer Corps. He then spoke for over half an hour without a note, which is remarkable for a man who has reached his eightieth year. His speech was a pot pourrie of interesting news from home and abroad, some amusing and some more serious, which conveyed his wide knowledge and experience of present day affairs. He spoke well of the Corps and said he was glad he had been able to give praise to it in public for the great service it rendered during the war. His speech could be termed as brilliant.

He mentioned that he liked our Corps tie and was desirous of having one. Lt Col Stanley, a serving Corps officer, who sat opposite the Field Marshall, took off his tie and presented it to him, which he appreciated immediately. Incidentally, a photograph of the Field Marshall holding and admiring the tie was taken at the time, and since then he has kindly autographed a copy of an enlargement of it, which is now Framed and placed in a prominent place in the Corps Museum. (Now held in the RLC Museum).

The photograph, and Menu Card also autographed by him, marks this great occasion and should, in years to come, be of historical value to the Corps. As "Monty" concluded his speech everyone stood up and gave him tremendous applause.

After a brief period the Field Marshal rose to leave and on his way to the door the whole assembly sang "For he's a jolly good fellow" and gave three rousing cheers. There is no doubt that he felt the warmth of this real Pioneer send off. He thanked everyone and then asked if he may fall out, which caused some amusement.

■ C Mckenzie with the 23 Pioneer colours at the Arboretum

Picture: C Mackenzie

Bikers pay their respects

Hundreds of motorcyclists paid their respects to fallen soldiers

HUNDREDS OF motorcyclists paid their respects to fallen soldiers at a special ceremony in Staffordshire on Sat 11 Oct 09.

Bikers involved in the second annual Ride To The Wall (RTTW) went from Drayton Manor, near Tamworth, to the National Memorial Arboretum in Alrewas.

Andrew Baud, from the Royal British Legion, said people from across the UK were taking part in the event.

"Everybody can be a biker. We have journalists joining us and we have got members of clergy joining us," he said.

Mr Baud added: "We have got riders coming from as far afield as northern Scotland and the tip of Cornwall."

The event was set up by Martin Dickinson last year as a way to remember armed forces personnel who have been killed since World War II and to raise cash for the Arboretum.

Organisers said about 6,000 motorbikes went through the arboretum gates.

Dozens of veterans with military medals pinned on to their riding leathers and a Major General in uniform were among those at a service of remembrance.

Major General Lamont Kirkland, who had ridden his Harley-Davidson from his base in Aldershot, Hampshire, to Alrewas, said he expected the event would grow further. "I think what you have seen today is the start of something really big - this will grow over time," he said.It's deeply emotional and it's deeply poignant - bikers are deeply respectful people.

"It shows we are supported very strongly at home and that the Army has never been held in higher regard."

Mr Dickinson said last year the response to RTTW was "beyond anything I could have ever dreamed of" with an estimated 2,500 motorcyclists taking part.

Last year's event raised more than £10,000 for the 150-acre National Memorial Arboretum.

Ex SSgt Charlie McNeil wrote: Again thank you for the use of the Flag on Saturday, you can be sure that it was flown with pride, along with about 50 other service, regimental and national flags making up the flag party that led the bike parade.

Over 6,000 bikes attended this years "Ride To The Wall" (RTTW).

I had a long chat with Maj Gen Lamont Kirkland the senior serving person present. He expressed his delight at seeing so many Regimental Flags on display along with numerous Regimental and Corps berets and cap badges, a lot of which only now remain in the hearts and minds of those who still wear them with honour and pride.

The wall as you know is near Alrewas and the Ride started from Drayton Manor theme park. It took well over 2 hours from the first, till the last bike leaving. It could have been a nightmare policing and directing that many bikes but with so many Ex services personnel present and a remarkable amount of volunteer marshals all went well.

PAST EVENTS

■ THE WOs' and SNCOs' Pnr Reunion Club held its annual dinner at Bicester on the 28th November 2009, with 205 members attending.

This was an opportunity for the Club and the Regiment's Sergeants Mess to say goodbye to Lt Col Simon Wheelton (CO 23 Pnr Regt), WO1 Will Ross (RSM 23 Pnr Regt) and Maj Jimmy Shields (OC 144 HQ Sqn 23 Pnr Regt).

Because of the large attendance the dinner was, once again, held in the Place2Be (Unit dining hall), a special thanks must be recorded for WO2 Charlie Woods and his wife Heather who organised the event and decorated the dining room. All agreed that it was a night to remember.

Maj Jimmy Shields presented the mess with a framed history of the Corps and Lt Col Wheelton presented a large painting describing the work that the Regiment had undertaken in the years he had been CO.

WO1 Will Ross's leaving gift was, I am assured, greatly appreciated by all members of 23 Pnr Regt Sgts Mess!

It was pleasing to see ex SSgt Paddy Tubridy at this function, Paddy had left the Army in 1979 and thought the Association had been disbanded in 1993 with the formation of the RLC.

■ AS HAS become practice the Northampton Branch of the RPC Association held its Christmas Party in Kingsley Park Workingmens Club on Sat 31 Jan 10.

The Club once again kindly allowed the Branch to hold its party in the lounge of the club free of charge.

Unfortunately this year only 32 attended with 11 dropping out in the last few days because of illness or work commitments.

Once again the Irishman from Blackpool had to pull out as he had again fallen over and broken his leg, it's nice to know that Paddy McPhillips does not change!

At the party it was pleasing to see some of the civilian staff from Simpson Barracks attending namely Ann Sharp (Nurse), Hazel Perks (Pay clerk) and Betty Dempster (Telephonist).

■ THE 39/93 Club once again met at The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham on 19/20 March 2010 and had a very successful weekend.

The Friday evening started with a meeting of the Club before everyone made their way to a Social Club (former British Legion Club) for a meal, a chat and one or two beers! A few of the more hardy ones then found a pub that closed at 0100 hrs.

During Saturday members were free to explore the area, go shopping or visit the Isle of Wight.

On Saturday evening the Club held its dinner, although only 14 attended on this occasion it was still a great success.

Two questions remain unanswered from the weekend. First, who was the man holding the pink handbag and second who was the person who managed to lock himself out of their room and had to go to reception (naked!) to request assistance.

The next meeting is to be held on 24/25 September 2010, further details can be obtained from the Club Secretary, Mr Les Rowley on 01628 890913.

Best of luck for the future

Latest news from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC

THE END end of 2009 has brought some significant changes to 23 Pnr Regt. Following 2½ years in command Lt Col Simon Wheelton has stepped aside on promotion to Colonel and WO1 (RSM) Will Ross has moved on to pastures new.

It would be a lie to say that Col Wheelton and WO1 Ross have had a dull tenure; with the Regt deploying to Afghanistan and Iraq twice, tours of Bosnia and Cyprus, a smattering of Public Duties and the colossal task of raising over £29k in money for the ABF. The Regt wishes both of them the best of luck for the future.

The new CO is **Lt Col SD Fletcher RLC.**

Biography:

He was born in RAF Akrotiri, Cyprus in 1968. He was commissioned into the RCT in Apr 90 and posted to 3 Armd Div Tpt Regt RCT as a Tp Comd in Duisburg, Germany. During this posted he deployed on Op GRANBY as a Battle Casualty Replacement from Jan-Apr 91 and ran a War Maintenance Reserve Troop attached to 43 Ord Coy RAOC. On return he deployed to West Belfast on Op BANNER attached to 1 Bn the Prince of Wales' Own Regt (now the Yorkshire Regt) as a Pl Comd from Nov 91-May92. On the formation of the RLC in Apr 93 he was posted to the newly formed 2 CS Regt RLC in Gutersloh as an IRG Comd, during which time he successfully completed 'P' Company. On promotion to Captain in 1995 he was posted as the Tpt Control Officer of 63 Sqn RLC, 5 Airborne Logistic Bn during which he deployed on Ex GRAND PRIX in Kenya and Ex PURPLE WARRIOR in North Carolina, USA. He was subsequently posted to 11 EOD Regt RLC as Adjutant in 1997. In 1998 he was released from the surly bonds of Regimental G1 and discipline, to be selected as a Platoon Commander at Sandhurst, which included 3 terms as directing staff on Rowallan Coy. Selected for promotion to Major in Jan 2000, he deployed on a 6 month UN tour to Sierra Leone as a military observer with UNAMSIL. On return he was posted as SO2 J4 at the Joint Helicopter Command at HQ Land in Wilton as the desk officer for the RAF's Tactical Supply Wing and the Joint Helicopter Support Unit. In 2003 he was selected to be OC 1 Sqn 10 Tpt Regt which included a 3 month tour in Iraq on Op TELIC 1. On return to UK, the squadron transitioned to Ghurkha manning and reformed as 1 Sqn QOGLR. In 2005 he was posted to the Joint Force Logistic Component in PJHQ Northwood, as SO2 J5 which included a 6 month deployment on Op HERRICK 4 as part of the National Support Element (Afghanistan). Selected Lt Col in Jun 08, he attended the Advanced Command and Staff Course at Shrivenham in Sep 08 gaining a Masters Degree in Defence Studies. On completion he was posted to the MOD in London as SO1 J4 in 'A' block.

Lt Col Fletcher enjoys Triathlon, Nordic skiing and mountain biking. His interests include backpacking, cooking and eating. He is married to Jackie a serving RLC Officer and they both live in Amrbosden.

The Regiment also welcomes three new troop commanders 2Lt Ben Brading, 2Lt Richard Hunter and 2Lt David Slater after successfully completing their Troop Commanders Course down at Deepcut. They will take over troops in 187, 206 and 518 Squadrons respectively.

These three young second lieutenants all commissioned from RMAS in August 2009, before embarking on the Royal Logistic Corps Troop Commanders Course. Both being extremely challenging courses they overcame many obstacles and have developed into more than capable leaders ready for their first command. The Troop Commanders Course finished with a final exercise in Germany supported by 2 LSR. The exercise revolved around basic Logistic operations such as setting up distribution points and basic convoy drills. The majority of the exercise was based around the current operational climate with current threats to deal with.

During the course the three subalterns visited the Regiment on a week's induction, where they met key personalities and learnt the key roles of a young officer in the Regiment. The week finished with a trip to Hereford on a RAAT task playing enemy for the service support team.

All three subalterns will complete the Platoon commander's battle course in Brecon during their post at the Regiment.

This period has seen Soldiers and Officers of 518 Sqn taking well deserved rest after a busy year in 2009. However the time for rest is drawing to a close as the squadron begins preparation for further Op HERRICK deployments in 2010.

A number of Soldiers from the Sqn are in final preparations for deployment on Op HERRICK 12 in March. These Soldiers have been selected to deploy with a composite Force Protection Troop under Lt Jodie Slatter, SSgt Barthram and Sgt Taylor. The Force Protection deployment is to be the first in an enduring role for 23 Pioneer Regiment. The Regiment is

■ **Private S Joof 25172857**

Picture: Supplied

warned off to provide one Troop per Op HERRICK deployment to provide force protection for the designated LSR, in this instance 12 LSR.

9 Troop, headed by Lt Butcher, SSgt Middleton and Sgt Bennett has now become Combat and Support Troop. They are due to continue the regiments force protection commitment by deploying on OP HERRICK 13 with 13 Air Assault Support Regiment. The troop is busy conducting weapon and individual skills in preparation for commencing PDT.

10 Troop, under Lt Slater and Sgt Clarke is also conducting weapon and individual skills. This is in preparation for it taking over as Charlie Troop in support of PJHQ's JFHQ commitment in October 2010.

11 Troop under SSgt Henry has been tasked to control incoming equipment and to act as the Regiments first Operational Hygiene Troop. This task has required that the troop are busy including a 10 day Operational Hygiene course at Grantham.

LCpl Smith was awarded acting LCpl under DRLC new direction that the best Pte Soldier in the Regiment can be awarded local rank by the Commanding Officer. LCpl Smith will be employed as the Commanding Officer's driver.

25172857 Private S Joof

On 1 July 2009, Private Joof was part of a patrol mounted in MASTIFF vehicles that had been tasked with escorting a Combat Logistic Patrol to MUSA QAL'EH District Centre. On the move to the rendezvous point with the convoy, the vehicle in which he was travelling suffered a strike by an improvised explosive device. The 25 kilogramme explosion rendered the vehicle immobile and left the crew uninjured but disorientated by the detonation. Despite being much shaken by the explosion, Private Joof had the presence of mind to take control of the BARMA team to which he was assigned and started to organise the team to undertake the initial extraction of the crew form the stricken vehicle. Private Joof successfully led the team in clearing the area for the extraction of the crew and cleared sufficient space for the recovery team to undertake their task. His work done, Private Joof and the BARMA team were moved to another vehicle to continue on task.

Private Joof was soon called upon again to dismount from his new vehicle and deploy with the BARMA team to clear a route through a small wadi that had been identified by the vehicle commander as a vulnerable point. Despite having earlier been caught in an explosion, Private Joof showed no reticence in undertaking this dangerous task and was soon in the front of the team studying the ground for any indication of an improvised explosive device and listening intently to his mine detection equipment. Through his methodical approach Private Joof soon found a device and positively identified it as a pressure plate operated improvised explosive device. Having warned his section commander of the risk, the device was marked and avoided and he continued with the search. Within five minutes, Private Joof through his diligence had uncovered another pressure plate initiated device in the same wadi and would go on to discover a further two devices during the same day.

Private Joof has proven to be a soldier who has shown great courage in placing himself in harms way when searching for improvised explosive devices; especially having suffered the immeasurable shock of being involved himself in a mine strike. Private Joof has gone on to discover a total of eight improvised explosive devices during the tour and each time has displayed such a cool and methodical approach that he has been able to confirm the type of devices, which included a low metal content device. Private Joof's skills have also attracted praise from the Ammunition Technical Officers' who have subsequently had to deal with the devises.

Such a performance from a junior soldier is highly commendable. He has worked tirelessly to ensure the safety of numerous patrols and has mentored many of his contemporaries, to such an extent that the standard of BARMA drills in the Squadron has risen as a result.

Sport

With the Regiment having returned from their 4 weeks of leave, it wasn't long (12 days in total) before the Rugby Army Cup was upon us again. The Regiment stood on the brink, having defeated 2 PWRR in Cyprus then losing narrowly, in miserable conditions. The next game against 7RHA was winner takes all.

FUTURE EVENTS

■ THE RPC Association (Northampton Branch) is to hold a 'Return to Our Roots' evening on Saturday 19 June 2010.

Members wishing to attend should assemble outside what is now Simpson Manor (entrance to what was Simpson Barracks) at 1830 hrs where we will have our photographs taken next to the plaques and then walk along to the Queen Eleanor for a beer, a meal and a chat.

■ **THE PIONEER Reunion Weekend will once again be held at St David's Barracks, Bicester on 2 - 4 July 2010.**

Although the full programme has, at the time of going to press, not been finalised, a draft programme is as follows:

2 July 1500 hrs
Reception/Bring a Boss Corporals Club

2 July 1830 hrs
Social Evening, Sergeants Mess Supper to be served
2000 - 2100 hrs Dress: smart casual no blue jeans

3 July 0900 hrs
WOs & SNCOs Pnr Sergeants Mess Club Members only Reunion Club AGO

4 July 1045 hrs
Form-up for Church. Outside Place2Be Standard Bearer to Service lead contingent to War Memorial

4 July 1100 hrs
Church Service War Memorial. Wreaths to be laid by member of RPC Assoc and young soldier

4 July 1120 hrs
March Past Outside RHQ COs' and Chairman. RPC Assoc to take salute

4 July 1130 hrs
Photograph Officers' Mess Steps

4 July 1200 hrs
RPC Assoc AGO Place2Be. Points for the agenda should be sent to the RPCA Sec by 15 Jun 10

4 July 1230 hrs
Lunch

4 July 1315 hrs
Regimental Open Day Sports Field Programme to be issued

4 July 1900 hrs
Pioneer Social Night To be confirmed

A booking form is issued with this Newsletter, please note that bookings must be made by 15 June 2010.

Accommodation will be allocated on a first come first served basis, it is also intended this year to request a voluntary donation of £5 per night for accommodation. Proceeds will be made to the ABF. It is anticipated that some members will have to be accommodated in St George's Barracks, it is hoped that transport will be available between both barracks.

■ THE 64th Past and Present Pioneer Officers' Dinner will be held in the Officers' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC, Bicester on 15 October 2010.

Bookings can be made at any time (by 30 September) to The RPC Association at the usual address. The cost will remain at £20 each.

■ **Regimental Rugby Squad** Picture: Paul Brown

The Regimental Rugby Squad assembled straight after Christmas and with a few spare inches around everyone's waists, fitness and conditioning came to the fore in preparation for the match. The guys gave their all and in the short time, cobwebs began being blown away. With training being juggled between ranges, PDT, courses and what we thought at the time was the kitchen sink; the team began to gain shape.

The game as expected was highly charged with 6 Army players (4 with 7 RHA and 2 with the Pioneers), and countless Army A and Corps players slugging it out for supremacy of the breakdown area. Initially the game became stuttery and with constant infringements by both sides, not helped with constant rain making handling difficult, only the Pioneers managed to gain the advantage with their Army fullback Pte Coetzer converting two penalties. As the game progressed the physicality of the Pioneers enabled them to begin to dominate, with bone crunching hits and a seemingly impenetrable defence the Pioneers stood strong, however they could not convert their dominance into points. The second half started as with the first with neither side wavering however with a scrum collapsing and a quick penalty being taken by the Pioneers Army No.8, and Captain, LCpl Kava he drew defenders before offloading to, the similarly built, inside centre Pte Vave, who crashed over for the try. It was at this point the rain ceased and the Pioneers were able to begin to show their free running attacking rugby. Tries by Pte Coetzer and a very well taken try by Pte Tabewalu, the Pioneers secured the victory.

In the final stages 7 RHA came back into the match and managed to finally breach the Pioneer defence scoring a sole consolation try, with the 7 RHA player unfortunately breaking his arm in the attempt to score, as was the intensity of the defence and the commitment of the Pioneer side. The match ended 27 – 5 to the Pioneers, in a well deserved victory in which the team stated their intention to try to attain the title they have twice been denied. With an away fixture Vs 12 Regiment Royal Artillery, the Brunswick Green and Scarlet Reds march on, with Aldershot in March as their goal.

■ Home coming parade through Bicester

Picture: Paul Brown

Medal Parade

With all elements returned from their operational deployments the focus switched to the eagerly awaited Medal Parade. The weekend started with the Pioneer Past and Present Dinners at the Officers' and Sergeants' Messes. The evenings were very well attended and thoroughly enjoyed. 144 Squadron worked tirelessly on transforming the Parade Square ensuring protection against the forecast severe weather. WO1 (RSM) Will Ross marched the Regiment onto parade on his final day in the Regiment. We all wish him the very best of luck on his commissioning. The Regiment were privileged to have three VIP guests, Gen Sir Kevin O'Donoghue KCB CBE, Master General of Logistics (MGL) presenting medals and addressing the Regiment. Brig CJ Murray CBE ADC, Director Royal Logistic Corps and Brig AT Davis MBE, Commander 104 Log Sp Brigade presenting medals. Following the Medal Parade soldiers and their families gathered for lunch. MGL presented seven LS&GC Medals.

Bicester Town Council invited the Regiment to exercise its Freedom of Bicester. The parade went through the town centre with upwards of 2,000 supporters and well wishes. Brig AT Davis MBE and the Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire took the salute. The entire day was truly a memorable occasion with the sense of pride and affection from the public really quite palpable.

Op Herrick. 206 Squadron had a busy and challenging end to their tour. The Squadron was split up with SHQ 6 and 7 Troop operating in the north of Helmand with the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers. 5 Troop were tasked to provide Mastiff capability to the Light Dragoon Battlegroup, in Nad E Ali. 5 Troop's work with the Light Dragoons found them constantly negotiating IED's and insurgents in Afghanistan's most dangerous area. Their role in the Battlegroup operation during Op PANTHER'S CLAW, proved to be one of their most testing and dangerous times. From Afghanistan, the Squadron took some well deserved R & R in Cyprus where they spent a boisterous day unwinding on Tunnel Beach, offering a variety of activities ranging from volleyball to playing king of the castle on a 30 foot inflatable iceberg. After an enjoyable day at the beach they returned to BLOODHOUND Camp where the decompression team fired up the barbeque and managed to satisfy all pallets with a comprehensive platter. In the evening they were entertained by three very talented comedians, where a select few were privileged enough to feature in their highly amusing routine. On return to the UK the Squadron were greeted by their loved ones in Bicester before heading off for some well deserved leave.

What the Papers said:

Bicester troops show true grit

Soldiers from 23 Pioneer Regiment were praised for their determination as they were presented with medals on Saturday.

In freezing weather at the St David's Barracks parade ground, Bicester, 400 soldiers from the regiment received medals for missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Cyprus – watched by their proud families.

During the last six-month Afghan tour, the regiment's Mastiff armoured vehicles were hit 15 times by roadside bombs.

General Sir Keven O'Donoghue praised the "indestructible spirit of the Pioneers."

"You completed the task asked of you very effectively, and showed grit, determination and professionalism," he said.

He said the medals also recognised the fortitude of the soldiers' families, and the months of worry and stress they had ensured.

Bicester troops given heroes' welcome

Thousands of people lined Bicester's streets today to salute heroes who had returned from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Flag-waving crowds lined Sheep Street, as 400 soldiers from 23 Pioneer Regiment exercised the Freedom of Bicester by marching with bayonets fixed through the town centre.

Many of the troops have recently returned from Afghanistan, where the regiment was hit by 15 bomb attacks during a six-month deployment. Others had earlier been awarded service medals for missions in Iraq and Cyprus.

Amy Pomeroy, 22, was one of dozens of army wives lining the route to watch her husband Ross, 25, march past.

Their five-month old daughter Tayah

FUTURE EVENTS

■ WARRANT Officers' and SNCOs Ladies Dinner Night will once again be held in the WOs' and Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC pm Saturday 16 October 2010.

Full details will be circulated to members in the next Club Newsletter which will be distributed in August 2010.

It is hoped that once again this event will be a joint Ladies and Generation Dinner Night as these have proved so popular in the last two years. (This gives members the opportunity to bring their parents, children or even grand-children (if they are over the age of 18).

The attendance in the last two years has been over 200 and all have enjoyed the evening.

■ THE FIELD of Remembrance will open on Thursday 11 November 2010 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 hrs.

All would be prudent to bring suitable 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 9am to 5.30pm Saturday 13 November 2010.

Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held.

■ A LONDON lunch will be follow the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 11 November 2010.

It will be held in the Marquis of Westminster, Warwick Road, London (approx 400 yds from Victoria Station).

Attendance at this Lunch has increased in the last few years.

After Lunch we normally accompany our In-Pensioner Micky Hull back to Chelsea not only to make sure he gets home safely but as an excuse to have a drink in his bar with other In-Pensioners.

Bookings can be made to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Bks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

■ THIS YEAR the RPC Association has again been allocated 30 tickets for the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall on Sunday 14 November 2010.

Attenders should be on parade by 1010 hrs ready to march onto Whitehall.

Members wishing to attend should apply to Secretary, RPC Association, c/o 23 Pnr Regt RLC, St David's Bks, Graven Hill, Bicester, Oxon, OX26 6HF.

Last year 5 members who had applied for tickets failed to attend, these tickets were therefore wasted.

■ THE 39/93 club will once again be holding a "Get together" at the Red Lion Hotel, Fareham on 24/26 september 2009.

The club has negotiated a substantial discount at the hotel. On 25 September the club will have its normal dinner and raffle.

Full details can be obtained from the club secretary, Mr Les Rowley on 06628 890913.

Membership to this group is free and all association members are invited to attend

■ **Pte Josh Campbell** Picture: Paul Brown

was born during Pte Pomeroy's tour of duty, and spent her first few months 3,500 miles away from her dad.

As the troops marched past, her older sister Keeley, two, held a banner simply saying: "Daddy, you're my hero."

Mrs Pomeroy said, "It was horrible when he was away. They deserved everything today. They don't get enough recognition for what they do out there."

Pte Pomeroy added, "When you're out there, you don't realise there's that much support, but when you see people cheering and clapping, you know all those people are there for you. It's a great feeling when you march through the town and see that much support from local people."

Fellow soldier Pte Meli Ncube, 27, whose family had travelled from Birmingham for the day, said, "All these people have come out to see us. Everyone was clapping and cheering, and it makes you want to burst out smiling."

Pte Josh Campbell - what an inspiration

Members of 23 Pioneer Regiment were praised for their grit, determination and professionalism this weekend, and no-one deserves those accolades more than Private Josh Campbell. Josh – at 19 – has already gone through more than most will in a lifetime.

One can only imagine how he must have felt, when, having been woken by his mother, he was told he had lost both his legs.

But Josh took it like a man, because people like him realise being a man is about picking yourself up when you're down.

They know that the true measure of a man is having a dream – and achieving it. As Rudyard Kipling said, it is about meeting triumph and disaster just the same.

On Saturday, Josh achieved his dream by joining his comrades on parade. His next aim is to return to full-time service.

■ Pte Jo Carver

Picture: Paul Brown

Today's Oxford Mail also reveals that after he was hit, Josh's first thought was for his comrades' safety. What an inspiring young man.

At the front of the crowd of well-wishers was Gina Ross, 68, who wore a red, white and blue party hat and waved a Union Flag as the soldiers passed. "These are our boys, they've come home and they are our heroes," she said. "We're here to tell them, 'God Bless you, and welcome back.'"

And Second World War veteran Peter Proctor, 82, added, "There is a fantastic turnout today, and they deserve it."

Mayor of Bicester, James Porter, said, "I am quite choked by the numbers that turned out today. I am very proud of the people of Bicester. It's good to have the soldiers back home and I'm sure the welcome they received was every bit as emotional for them as for the people who gave it."

Bicester troops homecoming: Amputee soldier tells his story

A teenage army hero joined his comrades on parade two months after a Taliban bomb left him fighting for life and without his legs.

Private Josh Campbell, 19, and fellow soldiers of 23 Pioneer Regiment received service medals and paraded through Bicester town centre on Saturday.

Pte Campbell was manning a heavy machine gun in the turret of a Mastiff armoured vehicle when it was blown up in Helmand Province, Afghanistan, on 17 September.

The force of the blast ripped the personnel carrier, mangling Pte Campbell's legs in the gun mechanism.

He told the Oxford Mail, "The blast sent me upwards. I didn't really feel it, I just heard it and remember all the dust coming up.

The next thing I really remember was waking up in the netting of the turret, and being worried the rest of the guys inside had been hit. I got pulled out of the vehicle. They pulled me onto the ground and started giving me first aid." He joked, "I was screaming quite loudly, but in a manly way."

Pte Campbell's life was saved by fellow Pioneer Lance Corporal Jason Gordon, 34, who fashioned a tourniquet to stem the bleeding seconds after the explosion.

LCpl Gordon said, "We were all having a laugh and talking with each other on the radio. The next minute, boom! We were going up into the air and the Mastiff toppled over on to its side. I was straight out of the vehicle. Josh was there with his head down but his legs sticking up. There was blood everywhere. I froze for a second, then got to it."

Pte Campbell was flown to Camp Bastion and then to Selly Oak Hospital, Birmingham. During a week and a half while he was unconscious, surgeons were forced to amputate both his legs.

"I remember nothing at all apart from having some pretty good dreams – I was Ko in Kung Fu Panda at one point," he said. "The first thing I saw when I came to was my mum's face. Once I saw her, I realised something had gone on. I asked my mum whether I had still got everything. She turned round and said they had to take my legs. That is not something she had ever wanted to say to her son."

Pte Campbell, originally from Kelksham, Wiltshire, is now based at the armed forces rehabilitation centre at Headley Court, Surrey, and is slowly becoming more mobile.

He said, "I want to get my strength back up, start waling again, and then get back to being a soldier. I have a simple motto: s*** happens. You've just got to get on with it. One of my main goals at Selly Oak and Headley Court has been to be back with the lads today, and it felt great."

Commanding Officer, Lieutenant Colonel Simon Wheelton, said Pte Campbell was "An inspirational young soldier.

As soon as he came round, he was pressuring me to let him be at the medal parade. He nearly died a few weeks ago, and yet there he was today,"

Long service and good conduct medals

Following the Medal Parade seven LS&GC Medals were presented in the WOs' & Sgts' Mess.

A soldier who completes 15 years reckonable service from date of attestation or age 17½, whichever is later, shall be eligible for consideration. As this medal requires the recommendation of the individuals' Commanding Officer, it can only be awarded to serving personnel.

They were awarded to the following:

NEWS IN BRIEF

■ **THANKS TO all members who supported this draw, the profits from this are used to keep the Association running.**

As usual tickets for the Derby Draw are included with this Newsletter (unless you have already indicated that you are unable to sell them), please give this your support.

1st Prize £1,000 - AE Rowe
Ticket No 36859
Caerphilly

2nd Prize £500 - H Scott
Ticket No 16207
Clitheroe

3rd Prize £200 - M Halford
Ticket No 19126
Bicester

4th Prize £100 - J Shaw
Ticket No 34898
Cardiff

5th Prize £50 - D Brown
Ticket No 23291
Poole

■ THE FIRST Elizabeth Cross, awarded to families of Service personnel killed on operations in recognition of their loss, was presented to the family of Warrant Officer 2 (WO2) Sean Upton in August.

WO2 Sean Upton, from 5th Regiment Royal Artillery, was killed in an explosion while on a foot patrol in Sangin district, Helmand province, Afghanistan, on 27 July 2009.

The Elizabeth Cross will be granted to the next of kin of Armed Forces personnel killed on operations or as a result of terrorism in a mark of national recognition for their loss.

This is the first time the name of a reigning monarch has been given to a new award since the George Cross was instituted in 1940 by King George VI for acts of bravery by both civilians and the military.

Prior to this, the Victoria Cross was introduced by Queen Victoria in 1856 for acts of gallantry by the Armed Forces.

Next of kin will receive the Elizabeth Cross – a sterling silver emblem in the shape of a cross over a wreath – plus a Memorial Scroll which will bear the Queen's signature and the name of the person who died.

The Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll will not just be granted to families who have lost loved ones in the recent operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Queen's recognition will also be available to the families of those who died in conflicts dating back to 1948, including the Korean War, the Falklands conflict and operations in Northern Ireland.

Families of Service personnel who have died since 1948 are advised to read the information on the MOD Medal Office website:

www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/DefenceFor/Veterans/Medals/ModMedalOffice which includes information on the eligibility criteria and how to apply.

Information and an application form can also be obtained by calling 0800 085 3600.

WO2 CH Wood RLC – he joined the RLC on 7 Aug 94 completing his basic training at Pirbright and his Phase 2 Combat Infantryman's Course at Ouston. He then joined 518 Sqn where he deployed to Northern Ireland, Bosnia and Canada. He was then posted to 39 Inf Bde and Sig Sqn before returning to 23 Regiment with 206 Sqn. A posting to 6 Supply Regiment, Gutersloh followed where he was deployed on Op Telic in Feb 2003. He then returned to Pirbright as a Troop Sergeant responsible for turning civilians into soldiers in 12 weeks. A return to 206 Sqn followed where he deployed to Bosnia, Belize and Jordan.

He then returned to Pirbright, this time in the G4 role as a SQMS. Then in June 2009 he returned to where it all started 15 years ago to 518 Sqn, this time as SSM.

Sgt M Taylor RLC – he joined the RLC in Jun 94 completing his training at Pirbright and Ouston and then joined 23 Pnr Regt with 518 Sqn deploying on both Op Resolute and Op Banner and then another tour of the Balkans on Op Lodestar. A tour with Rheindahlen Security Force, JHQ followed before a return to 518 Sqn and another Op Banner tour. He deployed in Op Telic 1 with 187 (Tancred) Sqn in March 2003, this was followed by a posting to 6 Supply Regt, Gutersloh and then 170 Pnr Sqn, JHQ Germany. Here he gained a four star General's Commendation for his service in Afghanistan. He was then employed in the role of Senior Sergeant whilst carrying out Public Duties in London. He then returned to 522 Coy and has recently completed a six month tour on Op Tosca, Cyprus. He is shortly to once again return to Afghanistan.

Cpl MA Turnock REME – he joined the REME in Jun 1994 and completed his basic training at Pirbright and Bordon before being posted to 3 Bn REME in Germany where he deployed to the former Republic of Yugoslavia and Kenya.

Posted back to Bordon for Upgrading training he was then posted to 47th RA Regt Air Defence Wksp, Thorney Island, he deployed to BATUS, (Canada). He was then posted to 27 Tpt Regt RLC LAD in Aldershot as the sole Regimental Inspector. He deployed on Op Herrick 5 as the sole maintainer throughout Afghanistan for the Heavy Equipment Transporter. In Dec 2007 he joined 23 Pnr Regt RLC LAD and on 18 Nov 2009 he successfully passed his Potential Artificers Assessment Board.

Cpl Ballantyne RLC – he joined the RLC in May 1994 completing his basic training at Pirbright and Ouston. He joined 23 Pnr Regt with 522 Sqn where he deployed to Northern Ireland and Bosnia. He was then posted to 9 Sig Regt Cyprus and then HQ Sqn RSF Rheindahlen and then to 67 Sqn, 6 Sp Regt RLC in Dulmen where he deployed to Poland and Cyprus.

He also supported 7 Tpt Regt RLC on Public Duties in London and then stayed to support 6 Sp Regt RLC.

He returned to 23 Pnr Regt RLC with 518 Sqn where he carried out the roll of Senior Sergeant for Public Duties Company London. He also deployed on the final Op Telic deployment to assist in the draw down.

W/Cpl CT Keogh AGC(SPS) – she joined the RLC in July 1994 completing her basic training at Pirbright and special to arm training at Deepcut and Leconfield qualifying as a Driver and Radio Op. Her first posting was to 1 GS Regt RLC in Gutersloh followed by a posted to 27 Tpt Regt in Aldershot where she deployed on Op Banner. She then decided on a career change and underwent training as a Military Administrator in the ADG (SPS Branch). Following her trade training whe was attached to 9 Supply Regt and was employed in the RHQ, here she began her affiliation with the Pioneers being warned for deployment with the Pioneer Operational Health Team on Op Telic. She also achieved the rather unique distinction of being selected for promotion to Cpl by both the RLC and AGC.

After severing her ties with the RLC she was posted to the Parachute Course Admin Unit at RAF Brize Norton and then 42 Eng Geographical and Geospatial Survey Regt before joining 23 Pnr Regt as the Senior Military Administrator with 144 Sqn.

Cpl PC Bereford RLC – he joined the RPC on 8 Nov 92 and completed his basic training at Bassingbourne and then his infantry training at Ouston. He joined 518 Coy where he deployed on many exercises including Ex Lion Sun in Cyprus and the last tour of Belize working with the REs as part of the draw down of British Forces Airport Camp. He was then posted to JHQ Germany as part of the RSF support unit, here he was awarded a CO's Commendation for aiding in the arrest of two suspects believed to be members of the IRA. A posting to JCU HQ Northern Ireland followed before a return to Cyprus with Sp Sqn JSSU Cyprus working as a dog handler. He return to JHQ Germany with 170 Pnr Sqn and then returned to 23 Pnr Regt first with 144 Sqn and then 522 Sqn. In Apr 2007 he deployed with 2nd Bn Mercian Regiment on Op Herrick where his platoon were involved in heavy fighting against the Taliban. He has recently returned from Op Tosca (Cyprus) where he was employed as a section commander as part of the UN Main Force Reserve working along soldiers from other nations.

Cpl L Ball RLC – he enlisted into the Ulster Defence Regt in Jan 91 completing his basic training at Ballykinler achieving Best Recruit.

He was then posted to 3 UDR achieving both best shot in his Company and also best new soldier in the Battalion. In Jun 92 he decided to apply for a job in the cookhouse and was instantly accepted and following his Production NCOs course was posted to 6 Royal Irish in Portadown.

A posting to 8 Royal Irish in Armagh followed and then he applied to transfer to the RLC.

After transfer he was posted to 30 Sig Regt, Nuneaton and was deployed to BATUS (Canada) and was head chef of the Trails End Adventure Trg Camp in the Rocky Mountains for 7 months.

He was then posted to 1 LI in Paderborn where he deployed to Basra and then a tour in the Falklands and another tour in Canada on MedMan 1.

He joined 23 Pnr Regt RLC in July 2008 and has recently served with the Regiment on a 6 month UN tour in Cyprus.

Award OF Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) - WO1 Will Ross RLC

It was announced in December that the former RSM of 23 Pnr Regt RLC had been awarded the Meritorious Service Medal (MSM).

As seen in the criteria for this medal this is quite an honour as only a maximum of 89 are awarded annually to the Army as a whole, he is congratulated on achieving this award.

This same medal is issued to personnel in all services, although the administration procedures differ between them. To become eligible for consideration, other ranks personnel must have 20 years reckonable service, attained the rank of substantive Sergeant and be a holder of the LS&GC Medal. Officers may be considered immediately after commissioning, provided they meet the other criteria.

Award of the Medal requires good, faithful, valuable and meritorious service with conduct judged to be irreproachable throughout. The Service Boards look for evidence of particular achievements, whether in the course of military duty or in extra-mural involvement which benefits the service or the public in the field of sport or such things as charitable work.

■ 168 Pioneer Regiment, RLC, Command Troop

Picture: Supplied

Become an officer?

News updates from 168 Pioneer Regiment, Royal Logistic Corps

THE 168 Pioneer Regiment has a mixture of both regional and national Squadrons. The two regional pioneer squadrons are based in Middlesbrough and Cramlington with outstations in Hartlepool, Washington, Berwick and Hexham.

The HQ and third national squadron are based in Grantham, Lincs; this provides the Regiment with the ability to recruit UK wide. The LAD is a mixture of national and regional soldiers. We have soldiers living from deepest Devon up to the Highlands of Scotland with our regional heart in the North East.

The Regiments role is to provide "Pioneering Capability". To fulfil this role our soldiers are trained in a range of artisan skills, including bricklaying, concreting and carpentry as well as field fortifications.

All soldiers are trained in the use of power tools and some later use the large plant equipment. Coupled with our artisan skills the Regiments soldiers continue to provide key point defence skills as well as a new "Command Support Troop" role. This role sees us involved with 23 Regt in providing force protection for combat logistic patrols as seen on 'Road Warriors'. The first batch of soldiers will soon start to train on a wide range of weapon systems including Underslung Grenade Launcher, Heavy Machine Gun and Grenade Machine Gun.

We also fully encourage our soldiers to undertake adventure training and sport. Currently we are the RLC TA Major Unit X Country champions and have just had one of our troop commanders' return from Ex Transglobe where she sailed from

Australia to New Zealand on an Army yacht.

We are currently recruiting for all trades however we are particularly interested in both men and women interested in becoming officers. Please contact Capt Alan Pickering on 01642 597999.

100 Pnr Sqn Artisan Task

(Photo 1, LCpl Gimes pioneering at 39 Regt RA)

100 Pnr Sqn of 168 Regt with its Sqn HQ's based in Cramlington, Newcastle were invited by the local regular Royal Artillery Regt to help in constructing a large patio area for their families centre.

The Pioneers designed and constructed the patio and raised flower beds.

The regular Gunners were so impressed the Pioneers were asked to refurbish the barracks rather tired looking clay pigeon range; this even involved the Sqns master chef, Sgt Bradley, revisiting his shovel skills.

104 Pnr Sqn Artisan

(Photo 2, Landscaping at Whinney Hill). 104 Pnr Sqn of 168 Regt, Sqn HQ's based in Middlesbrough, spent five days at the Whinney Hill OBUA village Catterick demolishing and constructing. Defensive wire obstacles were ripped out and re-built.

Tired looking sandbagged sangars were replaced with the HESCO type and old concrete pathways were ripped up and re-laid. The Sqns two new plant ops, Sgt Scott and Cpl Elvidge, armed with a 3CX and dumper trucks were in demand moving over 500 tonnes of soil and stone.

RLC Cross Country Championships, Pirbright, 20 January 2010

(Photo 3, 168 X Country Team). 168 Pnr Regt have won the Territorial Army Major Unit's trophy in the RLC Cross Country Championships for the last three years. So for 2010 the Commanding Officer's instruction to the team captain SSgt Anthony was very clear "retain the trophy at all costs". With this instruction still ringing loudly in his ears SSgt Anthony began his task in earnest.

His first task was very simple, to find and select the strongest, fittest, keenest and most able athletes within 168 Pnr Regt. This task took about half an hour! Only six runners of the required calibre could be found when the competition rules demanded a team of eight. So at the last minute the ROSO and PSAO 104 Sqn offered their services.

With a combined age approaching 90 years it was hoped that the inclusion of these two officers would lull the opposition into a false sense of security! The full team was as follows:

Team Captain – SSgt Anthony, Capt Webster, Capt Pickering, SSgt Rushbrook, LCpl Meek, LCpl McCluskey, Pte Donnelly, Pte Hockenhull – Reserve Pte Hutton

Once SSgt Anthony had assembled his team he issued his training programme to be conducted over the Christmas period and the run up to 20 January.

The programme was simple and unambiguous, run, run and run again! Unfortunately the coldest winter for some 40 years played havoc with this plan!

Most of the team's aerobic training over this period consisted of dancing and then walking home when the taxi's refused to work because of the snow. A special pre-race diet of cold turkey sandwiches and selection boxes helped prepare us all for the ordeal that lay ahead.

The team travelled down to Pirbright the day before the race and relaxed in the splendour of a twelve man transit block in Aldershot complete with drunken sailor on resettlement training.

The team awoke to a very snowy 20th of January and after a very hearty "fat boys" breakfast we bid farewell to our drunken sailor and headed off for Pirbright.

The RLC Cross Country competition is a very well organised event and very well attended. When the team entered the gym at Deepcut they were very disturbed to be confronted with hundreds of very fit looking thin people clothed in tight Lycra complete with proper running shoes with studs or spikes.

A very thorough and somewhat worrying brief was issued by the organisers and an option to walk the course was given. The team declined the walk option as it was now snowing heavily and the course definitely did not look conducive to Army issue Hi Tec trainers!

Resplendent in our newly acquired regimental red and green running kits that unfortunately clung to every curve of our bodies the team lined up for the start of the race. A blast on an air horn sent the 140 or so runners on their way around 6 miles of mud, hills, slush and by now blizzard like snow.

The course consisted of two laps of a 3 mile circuit that would have been more suited to crampons than trainers. Human markers assisted in pointing out the by now disappearing snowy track and gave words of comfort such as "Keep going the main group is only 10 minutes ahead" to a by now very tired PSAO.

Needless to say the sight of the finish funnel was most welcome after almost an hour of such snowy fun. Luckily the team only suffered one casualty with a bad sprain however the PSAO did complain of loneliness as he never saw a soul for the entire second lap!

After a frenzied session of hot steamy showers and much drinking of tea and munching of army issue cake it was prize giving time. The usual array of very thin people with rosy red cheeks went forward first for the individual prizes. With baited breath the team awaited the result of the TA Major Unit trophy. And there it was!

With much leaping about and whooping the team celebrated winning the trophy for the second year in a row.

All that now remained to be done was to drive back up north in our damp tracksuits and soggy trainers. With precise military precision the prize giving ceremony ended just in time for us to hit the M25 at 1700hrs.

The leisurely 6 hour drive home in our 60mph governed minibus was a fitting end to this year's RLC X Country competition.

The Commanding Officer has decreed that the regiment will participate in next year's competition. My advice is to start training now if you want to run next year (especially if you are 47 years old, slightly overweight and have a desk job!).

The Lamb / Gore Trophy

(Photo 4, Vets Team). 168 Regt entered 2 teams into the Lamb/Gore Trophy at Deepcut.

No silverware was collected this time but the A team, led by LCpl Ross, were the 2nd best TA minor unit team and the Veterans team, led by Cpl Strong now, gained 3rd place in the TA veterans competition. It was great to meet up with our Honorary Colonel, Maj Gen Cross, at the finish line. We are looking to build upon this platform for next year.

Op Herrick Medal Parade

(Photo 5, Op Herrick). 168 Regts CO, ROSO and families were proud to attend the 33 Engr Regt Op HERRICK medal parade at Carver Barracks in October to see LCpl Welsh, Cfn Williams and Pte Clewer receive their Operational Service Medals from Maj Gen Kennett. The soldiers were employed as infantry escorts for the Joint EOD Gp IEDD teams.

A dangerous job that took considerable mental and physical determination to undertake.

Despite numerous close calls they are safely home and will be a huge asset in preparing others to go to Afghanistan.

Exercise Transglobe Leg 7
Hobart – Auckland,
31st December 09 – 23rd January 10

(Photo 6, Nicky at the Helm and Nicky winding a winch). 2Lt Nicky Hemsworth 168 Pioneer Regiment RLC (V)

In January 2010 I participated in Leg 7 of Exercise TRANSGLOBE (Hobart – Auckland, across the Tasman Sea).

Exercise TRANSGLOBE is a major tri-Service adventurous sail training exercise, with three identical yachts circumnavigating the world with one yacht allocated to one of the Services for the duration and the crews changed at each destination.

The leg 7 crew of the army yacht CHALLENGER was unique as we were the only all volunteer crew out of the 39 crews participating in the exercise.

The crew ranged in rank from LCpl to Lt Col, represented six cap badges from 6 different TA Units with myself as the sole member of the RLC.

For me the Exercise TRANSGLOBE adventure began in August 2008 when SSgt Darren Cattle put me in touch with Capt Hackett and I put a bid in for leg 7.

I heard in the early part of 2009 that I had been fortunate enough to be allocated a place on the leg. In May 2009 I, along with most other members of the crew took part in Exercise SALTY COCKNEY PHOENIX, a sail training week in preparation for TRANSGLOBE.

We practised drills – coming alongside and man over board drills before heading out in the Solent and later into the English Channel sailing down to the Channel Islands and over to France.

The week was a great opportunity to gain some more sailing experience and to also get to know the remainder of the crew. There was a second build up exercise in November 2009 which was great preparation shortly before TRANSGLOBE itself.

On New Years Eve the crew, along with the RAF and Navy crews gathered at JSASTC at Gosport in order to be allocated kit and be given the mandatory safety briefing in preparation for tackling the Tasman.

We took off from Heathrow approx 2200 hours on New Years Eve and I spotted fireworks just as we passed over Prague so classed that as the New Years celebrations!

We arrived in Hobart on Saturday 2nd January and the day was spent prepping the boat for sea including buying food for 14 people for 12 days and carrying out minor repairs to CHALLENGER under the watchful eye of the mate, Lt Col Andy Whitmore.

On the evening of the 2nd January we headed to the Taste of Tasmania festival to mingle with the Navy and RAF crews and sample some local delights! Sunday 3rd January saw us head out into the bay and do some sail training evolutions.

Each of the watches did a couple of tacs and gybes to get back into the swing of things before an early night in preparation for leaving on the Monday.

We set off on Monday evening and it was to be another couple of days before the actual race began. We were fortunate to have very few members of the crew struck down with sickness with just a couple of members feeding the fishes on the first morning.

I along with the rest of white watch was close to feeding the fishes on the first morning as we were on mother watch but a system of 2 minutes downstairs and 15 minutes on deck seemed to cure us!

We soon got into the swing of the watch system (24 hours of being mother followed by 48 hours rotating between on and off watch every 4 hours).

For the majority of the crew (10 members in fact) it was our first experience of ocean sailing and being at sea for a period of more than 15 hours. Luckily the Tasman was relatively nice to us for our introduction and, other than one night, had a pain free sail.

Sunday 10th January started off as previous days had – sunny with some great speed over ground. Gradually it became grey and overcast with rain squalls and 30+ knots of wind leading to bigger and steeper seas with cascading spray.

We were on watch until 1200 before becoming mother once more – being mother whilst the yacht is heeling at 45 degrees is certainly testing, with fruit and plates flying across the galley!

Preparing the meals was interesting, as was sleeping – one was it's practically impossible to get into your bunk and the other you're struggling to stay in your bunk, sleeping proved tricky!

During the night the wind bizarrely changed direction a full 180 degrees testing the on watch to keep on course and several sail changes happened in the night.

Upon waking up the next morning we learnt the RAF in DISCOVERER crept into the lead over night with little chance of us making ground over them due to the higher winds they had. We were still ahead of the Navy in ADVENTURE at this stage but unfortunately they also snuck past us before the finish line on Monday evening.

The finish line wasn't in Auckland itself but at Cape Regina on the north coast of New Zealand, white watch were at the helm as we finished the race with 'We Are Sailing' happening to come on the iPod just as we finished which was a bit spooky.

Tuesday was spent in the Bay of Island, going through customs at Opua and a night out in Paihia with the Navy and RAF crews.

On Wednesday we headed to Paradise Bay, Urupukapuka Island and anchored for swim in glorious blue seas, the skipper and I swam the 30 mins to shore and beautiful white beaches, the remainder of the crew chose the 5 minute dinghy option!

Next was a final overnight sail into Auckland – we were greeted by Lt Commander Roger Saynor of the RNZ Navy who did a great job of looking after all 3 crews during our time in Auckland. Whilst in Auckland there was more chance to socialize with the crews of ADVENTURE and DISCOVERER, as well as visiting some of the well known sites of Auckland (Sky Tower and Museum) and visit Waiheke Island.

The majority of the crew departed Auckland on 17th January leaving just the Skipper, me and one other crew member, Jason, in New Zealand. I returned home on 24th January and as I write this the Skipper and Jason are still enjoying the sun whilst I'm adapting to the cold of the UK!

So overall we came third in the race but for me it was a fantastic experience and a great introduction to ocean sailing. Sailing at night with just CHALLENGER, a lot of water, the moon, stars a full milky way and an iPod blasting out songs of a huge variety was a brilliant experience.

We had no injuries on board and the whole crew thoroughly enjoyed it. There was great teamwork with natural rivalry between the watches, ranging from maximum speed over ground, distance travelled to quality of bread and puddings made!

We got to see a lot of wildlife, dolphins, whales and many an albatross. As a watch we were determined to do as much sailing as possible and one of the watch members, Baz, often spoke to Neptune who obliged in giving us enough wind to not use the engine, gaining maximum experience.

We could always tell when Kev's Red watch (Norfolk Broads watch!!) came on as the vibrations of the engine would begin next to our heads just as we got into our bunks!

I thoroughly enjoyed the challenges the Tasman Sea threw at us and would recommend for anybody to get involved with sailing should the opportunity arise; I hope to be able to take part in Exercise Caribbean Endeavour in the early part of 2011 as my next adventure.

Lt Harvey Wedding

(Photo 7, Mrs Harvey welcomed into 168). 101 Sqns, 168 Regts Lt Chris Harvey and his fiancée Jo recently got married in Lincolnshire.

The CO, Majs Keith Greenough, Martin Collinson, Nick Parker, Capt Pete Mitchener and Lt Ben Howard dusted off their swords and provided the couple with a guard of honour. WO2 (SSM) Anderson and Cpl Mabbitt provided the Pioneering touch by bearing the axes.

Let's hope Jo can improve her husband's personnel admin.

■ Tony Bloor (back row, centre) when is was a young Corporal, many years ago

Picture: RPC Archive

Happy retirement Tony

A grand total of 46 years wearing the Pioneer cap badge!

TONY BLOOR has recently retired as Cadet Assistant Administrator with the Northants, Leics and Rutland Army Cadet Force. A brief summary of his service is as follows:

He became interested in the Army whilst serving his apprenticeship as a Joiner in 1961 and joined the local TA Unit in Sandbach, Cheshire his home town. Having enjoyed the experience he decided to become a regular and as he enjoyed his trade applied for the Royal Engineer's, however, at the time they were not recruiting so he joined the Royal Pioneer Corps, joining in 1963 and training at Northampton.

After training his first posting was to 23 Group where they tried to convert him into a Clerk, but he didn't like the idea of driving a desk and escaped to 522 Coy. (sorry Norman!!).

After serving with 522 Coy he picked up an E2 posting to the Intelligence Corps Centre at Ashford, Kent and during this time met his wife Elizabeth and here their daughter was born, young Liz, it was then back to 522 Coy.

1970 saw a tour of duty in Northern Ireland with 8th Infantry Bde as part of the Brigade Commander's Rover Group as a Cpl, which was an interesting experience and in 1972 it was then off to 206 Coy on promotion to Sgt where he had his first visit to Gibraltar. In 1973 he was posted to 19 Airportable Bde at Colchester as Platoon Sgt and in 1974 saw service in Cyprus after what was meant to be an exercise turned into a longer stay because of the troubles there at the time.

In 1975 he was selected to do the All Arms RQMS & CQMS course and was then posted to 23 Group as Q Sgt then promotion to SSgt saw a move to 521 Coy as CQMS. In 1979 he moved to 518 Coy and carried out a second tour of Gibraltar before going to Belize.

Promotion to WO2 took the family to Germany to HQ 13 Gp as RQMS and in 1982 he came home to where it all started, Northampton, as WO1 SMI of the Pnr Sch. However the travelling was not yet over, as a trip to the Falkland Islands as RSM Log Sp Bn and Garrison Sgt Major of Port Stanley fitted in with his Northampton duties. He retired from the Regular Army in 1985 with a Northern Ireland Medal, LS&GC a GOC's Commendation for helping to save a life in Germany and was awarded the MBE in 1985. Now thinking of a second career and having spent his time on Pre-Release going to College to gain a qualification in Safety Management he was asked if he would like to be a Cadet Assistant Administrator with A Coy the local Northampton Army Cadet Force unit, he had already had some contact with them as a number of their Detachments at that time were Cap Badged RPC so he started a second career in uniform.

Although the work as a CAA is in the main administrative, looking after Uniforms, vehicles and store's etc he was encouraged to also take a voluntary role and since his Army days he had a keen interest in Outdoor activities i.e. canoeing and walking. He gained a great deal of satisfaction seeing young people achieve both canoeing qualifications and their Duke of Edinburgh's Award. In 1993, when the Corps became very large, and the Training Centre at Northampton closed, the RPC Detachments were lost and they rebadged to the County Affiliated Regiment the Royal Anglians.

However, no one told him that he needed to change his Beret or Badge so he soldiered on until he retired as a full time worker in December 2009 having completed a further 24 years proudly wearing the RPC Badge.

A grand total of 46 years with the Pioneer Cap Badge – is this a record?

From Italy to Normandy

Final part of George's amazing wartime experiences

Report: George Pringle
Pictures: RPC Archive

HERE is definitely the final part of George's amazing story. We published in the last edition of the newsletter that it was the final version, but another version was received! Thanks George.

From Naples on board a ship
our Company came home
The sea was rough so we knew
"U" boats would not roam
Passed our rocky friend Gibraltar, but, it's
just called "THE ROCK"
To Scotland we returned to a port aptly
called Greenock

It was from here I sailed in October 1942
All the happenings in Africa and Italy were
they really true?
Or were they all nightmares and I wonder
when it all ends
Will I once again meet my Mum and Dad
and family and friends?

Alas the days go quickly by and soon my
home leave will expire
And then back to reality as the
Army will require
Myself and my mates to no doubt begin
training once again
But we all know what that means, but, who
knows where and when?

Our generals seem happy
as we are sent to Southsea
They say it's the end of Hitler
and his army of Nazi
For this next campaign will
be the last mighty push
And the German generals will
want PEACE in a bloody rush.

On arriving at Greenock on 17 Mar 44 it revived memories of Oct 42 when we had joined our convoy to sail to pastures new and the start of some hellish months. Let's hope and pray all that was behind us. After disembarking we were taken by Army transport to a village named Kilbirnie and billeted in a disused school. Life was to be luxurious? We formed part of 40 Group and had a new officer to replace Lt Hope (our favourite) who was left behind in Italy. The officer's name Lt JD Young is very appropriate as he is only 23 years old and his skin is white in contrast to all members of the Company. He is naturally inexperienced in warfare as we were once, but had done all of his training. Still we'll wait and see how he copes. After a medical examination – precautionary for married men – we were given Rail Warrants and pay and taken to the nearest station which was Glasgow. I do not remember much about the train journey to Liverpool as it was evening and no doubt I like many others was soon asleep. On arrival at Liverpool (Exchange Station) we said our farewells to our 'Scouse' pals and a reminder that we will meet again in 14 days time. Going outside the station I was approached by a gentleman, who was standing by a car, and asked where I was going. I know I said "Bootle, but I can't afford the taxi fare on my Army pay." He said, "Did I mention money? We are part of a volunteer group who meet troop trains and take the troops to their homes and especially by your colour you must have been serving overseas." What a Godsend that chap was, he dropped me off in Aintree Road so he could get back for his next train meeting with the troops. It was 0230 hrs and I pulled out the last letter from my Mum showing that they were now living at 4 Kelly Drive off Aintree Road. I was carrying my pack and rifle wondering where in Aintree Road was Kelly Drive and longing for someone to tell me. I finally sat on the pavement with my back against a 6ft wall hoping I wouldn't doze off as I wanted to meet a passer-by. What a lovely home coming for a 'hero'. It was 0430 hrs before a milkman came by and told me Kelly Drive was on the other side of the wall, but, if I went down Timon Avenue I would find it. So near but so far. I knocked at the door and Mum came to the door with Dad, they had been waiting up for me. Needless to say I did not mention my experience of the last 2 hours as I didn't want to upset them. It was when I returned on my next leave in May 1945 that I said "Finding no 4 was a bit easier than last time". Silly of me as Mum and Dad were very upset but I had brought them a present, so they cheered up.

During my leave I asked Mum if she liked the bananas I sent her from North Africa as she hadn't mentioned them in her letters. She said, "Yes, but they were very hard." I laughed, "Mum, they were dehydrated as we couldn't send fresh fruit through the post as the sea journey was days – you should have put them in water." I had forgotten to tell them, still it was a good laugh. I tried to trace all my friends from the youth club at the Church or the Boys Brigade. However, I found out nearly all members were now in the Forces and both organisations had closed down. My Captain, Mr AD Fisher, of the 37th Coy of the Boys Brigade then told me of several of the lads who had been killed in Africa and Italy or the Far East. The girls of the club were in the RAF or ATS and one was a WREN. Louie and Anne made me feel better and then Louie's husband Bill had come home on leave after being with the 8th Army in Africa. As both his brothers Tommy and George were now in England doing their training they were able to obtain a weekend pass. So a good time was had by all. Bill was in the RASC (Tpt), Tommy was in the Royal Signals while George was in the 5th Kings (Infantry) Regiment. Not one of us knew what our immediate future was going to be. Finally I had to say my goodbyes to all the family, but, it was with a saddened heart as Mum, Lou and Anne were in tears while Dad had a British stiff upper lip expression. "Don't worry Mum. I'm only going to Scotland probably see you soon," I cheerfully said to them.

Arriving back at our HQ in the school at Kilbirnie we were surprised as every one was back on time. We had been told that if anyone was AWOL they would be posted to another Company after serving their punishment. Camaraderie is a wonderful thing – we all stuck together.

Our officers were Major Hubbard, Capt Chapman and Lt Young. During the month of April every day except weekends was training, training, training. Beach landings, scheme, assault courses (with live ammunition) and manoeuvres. It did not mean anything that we were all warfare trained soldiers from Africa and Italy. At a weekend we were lucky to watch a couple of Celtic or Rangers football matches. The pubs in Kilbirnie were for men only no women were allowed. Our beach landings exercises were carried out at Largs or Farland Head on the 13th May 1944 we were moved to BICESTER. Rumours were ripe, something big was about to take place, but, at BICESTER we were surely safe. For 4 or 5 days we worked 12 hour days to keep supplies moving this was better than being at Salerno or Cassino.

We were getting browned off as we were not allowed out of the Camp Barracks for security reasons. However one evening Frank Bennett came into our hut and said he had been walking around the inside of the perimeter and found a place where the soil under the wire fence was very loose and we could dig it out and escape for the evening. Our gang decided to have a go and "borrow" a spade and carried out the necessary operation. We hid the spade in an adjacent wood after covering our retreat. The nearest pub was only half-a-mile away and soon we were enjoying a pint or two and feeling quite at ease and happy. The landlord was quite happy to serve us and remarked the pub had been empty of soldiers for a few days and thought something big must be taking place. At 2230 hrs we wandered back to our escape hole after retrieving the spade and carefully removed the soil and crept through the gap. We put all the soil back in position and pattered it down. As we turned round delighted that we had beaten the MP patrol (Redcaps), a noise roared out, "Where the f..k do you think you smart arses have been?" It was a fair cop and we went quietly to the guardroom where we spent the night. Next morning we were

marched individually in front of the CO and charged with being AWOL and breaking the Kings Rules and Regulations (KRR) and putting the security of the country in jeopardy. I was terrified and thought I was going to be imprisoned in the Tower of London as a traitor. I pleased 'Guilty' and also to accept the punishment to be metered out by the CO and not go for a Court Martial. My punishment was left to the CSM who after marching me out gave me a pair of scissors and marched me down to the lawn in front of the Headquarters office. I stood meekly to attention as I was told to report every day at 0800 hours and work until 1700 hours under the eagle eye of a RP. My punishment was to last for 7 days and in that time I had to cut the lawn in a neat fashion. It's a wonder I like gardening now, But I carried out my job while the rest of the Company minus the 5 criminals carried on with route marches and drilling etc. Who had the best job in the lovely summer weather? My criminal mates were given jobs painting everything white, scrubbing the barrack square and dust bins etc. My job was more technical and skillful.

Then on the 2nd June, 1,2 and 3 Sections (my section) were moved to the South coast. Our OC and second-in-command had been admitted to hospital, Sections 4 to 10 were moved to Chichester. Our 3 Sections then learnt the well kept secret we were the advance party for our Company and were going to Normandy on D Day plus 2 – landing at Gold beach. Our job was just like Salerno – beach clearing, unloading LCT of ammunition, rations and avoiding gun fire and bombing. The rest of our Company were to follow later when a beachhead had been formed and we could arrange a site for our HQ. We were enclosed in our 'bivvy' area outside Southsea and we were not allowed out not even to telephone or post a letter. The 'Redcaps' were numerous and apparently were determined to ensure the orders were carried out at all costs. Security was imperative in case word got to any German agent through some fool blabbing. Posters were everywhere with slogans "Walls have ears", "Be like Dad – keep Mum", "Careless talk cost lives", "She may like you, but she could be a spy".

There were troops and tanks in every road, Avenues and Parks and there seemed to be thousands of them everywhere. The atmosphere was intense but strange to say excited as we waited our final orders. Our equipment was cleaned, rifles checked, clean underwear available (in case one got wounded and germs could enter into the wounds, this must be avoided). We had not been issued with ammunition yet, but knew it would be on the day we were sailing. Our officers then requested us to write our last letters which would be posted after we had sailed for our destination. We tried to make the wording as cheerful as possible, but we knew in our hearts the dangers that we were going to face. I think there were about 80 in our Company who had not served in any campaign before as they were our reinforcements to bring our Company up to strength after arriving at Greenock. All they wanted to know was what it was going to be like. How could you tell them? It was just "Don't worry, pal, keep behind me and do what your Sergeant tells you." Next day was similar but the new recruits were getting edgy and so we played cards, dominoes, sang songs, made up the words (rather rude ones) anything to keep our minds from straying to what our future was going to be in the next day or so. We asked each other to make up jokes and formed a panel of judges to give marks on the performance. There were some jokes that were so rude I cannot repeat them, but the winner was a young recruit named Sid Ives from Cornwall. In his Cornish accent he said, "Remember when you were all in Italy and it was snowing and very windy and mud everywhere, you had 350 men in the Company, so how many balls did they have between them?" "Oh, shut up" was the reply, but, Sid wouldn't be put off and wanted the answer, one of the lads said, "Amuse the poor sod, they had 700 balls". "Wrong they had snow balls (no balls)". We all jumped on him and a friendly free for all ensued. Word went round that certain Regiments of the Infantry had broken out of their confinement camp and had been arrested in the pubs in nearby towns. I don't think any action was taken as there was no time to sentence the men who would have missed D-Day.

'Our job was just like Salerno - beach clearing'

During the night there was a lot of activity, RAF planes overhead, engines of the tanks and lorries revving up, men shouting to each other, cries of 'Good Luck' etc. We were all fully alert and our OC, Lt R A Jay, told us the first waves of our attacking troops were on the move. As daylight came we all wondered how our troops were getting on as we knew the next 2 days were vital to us as we waited and waited. Our Sergeants called their men together and we received our instructions, ammunition would be issued early next day. I was still our Bren-gun team leader and knew that I had Frank Bennett with me as my second man. In our pouches were 6 cartridges of Bren Gun ammunition while Frank had his rifle and a sling of .303 cartridges. We had already packed our belongs into our kit-bags and these were in store at our HQ in Chichester who would bring all our kit with them when they arrived in France some day.

Our OC was then informed our departure was to be delayed by 24 hours, of course no reason was given. Another day to spend checking everything was in order and trying to get some sleep. The weather was not too good, but it was the extra hours of waiting, with nerves all keyed up, in everybody that made it a difficult time. News came through that the landing in our area of the coast of Normandy had been successful, but the Yanks were struggling. Apparently D Day had been scheduled for the 5th June, but due to high seas and low cloud (no air support) that it had been delayed for 24 hours, but eventually 500 warships of all kinds and 3,000 landing craft were crossing or had crossed to the beachhead landing point in France. We knew now on 8th June our turn would come as landing craft loaded with wounded would return to England and they would re-load carrying our Company or part of it (Sections 1 to 3) across to our beachhead called Gold. Early in the morning we were called on parade and ordered to check our arms and rations. This was to be the Day. The day that HITLER had been afraid of as the Fighting Pioneers were going into action, were we afraid? We were definitely afraid and shit scared but determined.

When we were aboard our landing craft our Commanding Officer broke open the seals of his specific instructions and said, "Our battle-orders have been changed. We will land on the beach at Arromanches and swiftly make our way across the open beach to reach our rendezvous inland to support the infantry who were making their way to a town, called Bayeux, 10 miles inland. We were then to locate a site for our HQ when they arrived".

Oh! No sounds all too easy, no unloading the landing crafts, no ammunition, no rations, no re-loading the wounded, just dash off the beach. Our CO then read to us a message from General Montgomery who was commanding the 2nd Army of which we were part.

'The time has come to deal the enemy a terrific blow in Western Europe. The blow will be struck by the combined sea, land and air forces of the Allies, together constituting one great Allied Team, under the supreme command of General Eisenhower. On the eve of this great adventure I send my best wishes to every soldier in the Allied Team. To us is given the honour of striking a blow for freedom which will live in history and in the better days that lie ahead men will speak with pride for our doings.

Let us pray the 'The Lord Mighty in Battle will go forth with our armies and, this His special providence will aid us in the struggle'. I want every soldier to know that I have complete confidence in the successful outcome of the operations that we are now to begin. With stout hearts, and with enthusiasm for the contest, let us go forward to victory, and as we enter battle, let us recall the words of a famous soldier spoken many years ago:

He either fears his fate too much or his deserts are small Who dares not put it to the touch, To win or lose it all

Good luck to each one of you and good hunting on the mainland.'

D Day plus 2 – Into Battle Again

Beaches of Normandy called Sword, Juno and Gold
Names that our memories
will always revere and hold
I'm only one of the thousands who played
their noble part
Through the names of my comrades will
ever remain in my heart.

I know whatever that I do today
Will be to me tomorrow's memory
But I hope when as the
evening shadows fall
That I will have no regrets
for being there at all.

No regrets because my mates and I
Have done our duty whether we live or fall
We can stand up and hold
our hands up high
That is if we come home at all or is it just
Goodbye?

With these words ringing in our ears we sailed across the channel to our Gold Beach destination, many were sea sick as the waves were high and the landing crafts were tossed to and fro. Gradually we approached our landing point and luckily the tide was out so we only waded through a few inches of water. Our Sergeant was shouting to get a move on and move quickly, but the Germans didn't want us to do that and pinned us down with machine gunfire. Once again we were lucky and apart from a couple of casualties we were in our position without delay. We are supporting the Royal Berkshire Regiment and were hurried off to St Aubin-sur-mer where determined opposition by the "Jerries" was holding up the advance and there we took up our defensive position.

I shall now go back to 6th June (D-Day) as it concerns other Companies of Pioneers and it is leading up to our next move at St Aubin-sur-mer. To the thunder of Naval bombardment of the Allied fleets lying off-shore, the scream of diving aircraft and the mortar and machine gun fire of the enemy defences the British assault opened with the landing at GOLD beach sector Jig and King with the 50th Division (Tyne & Tees). (May I again digress as when Renee and I were on holiday in Lake Garda (Italy) in 1983 we met Major McDonald of Warrington who was OC of the Northumberland Fusiliers who were taking part in this initial assault. I learnt a lot of what happened on that eventful day from him which is why I am able to recount the following sequences from a few scribbled notes). At 0725 hrs the 50th Division had landed and were followed in 10 minutes by the 3rd Canadian Division on the left of the 50th Division and by the 3rd British Division on the extreme eastern flank. At 0745 hrs the first Pioneers landed, they were 53 Company (Maj G E Prince) and in quick succession the men of 129 Company (Maj G Thomas), 170 Company (Maj E L Boyde), 225 Company (Maj W J Mullard) and 209 Company (Maj LJ Bunstead). Maj Bunstead had been awarded the MC in North Africa for bravery.

Rough seas and heavy surf made the disembarkation a difficult one and landing craft were hurtled onto the beaches by the mountainous waves, many of the smaller boats being swamped and sunk. An onshore wind had swept the tide up the beaches well ahead of schedule and so the underwater obstacles laid by the enemy which under normal circumstances would have been exposed to view were covered by the tide. This made the work of clearance largely ineffective so that later waves of assault craft suffered many casualties by fouling the uncleared obstacles. The obstacles were iron or steel girders mounted in concrete and inlaid with coils of barbed wire and mines. Numbers of troops were swept off their feet as they waded ashore. As the day drew on towards evening more Companies of Pioneers were landed, 267, 173, 102, 292, 190, 58, 243, 303, 230, 85, 144, 115 and 149 Companies. As each Company comprises of a Major, 2 Captains, 2 Lieutenants, 2 Second Lieutenants, one WO2, 10 Sergeants, 20 full Corporals, 20 Lance Corporals and 300 Privates you can see quite a large number of Pioneers were involved in the D-Day assault. 53, 58, 102 and 115 Companies had previously been in France and were part of the soldiers rescued at Dunkirk, revenge would be sweet for them.

53 Company suffered 21 casualties on D-Day who were killed or wounded while landing under mortar fire. The landing craft carrying 303 Company received a direct hit as it neared the beach but it turned around to sea again with its wounded and gallantly and bravely transferred to another craft for a second and more successful attempt. Some courage was shown there.

The landing craft carrying part of 170 Company struck a mine, but was able to beach with its dead and wounded. 243 and 267 Companies were solely employed in operating Rhine ferries which were floating rafts of Naval pontoon equipment. These were 180ft long by 60 ft wide and powered by two 250 hp engines and designed to ply between LST's (Landing Ship Tanks) off shore and the beaches conveying tanks and other vehicles which could then drive off 'dry shod'. They carried no defensive armour. Each ferry was manned by a crew of eight consisting of Pioneers, but sometimes including two RE technicians. Unfortunately owing to the very rough seas a number of these craft were lost with all hands. 292 Company due to rendezvous at Benouville on D-Day at 1930 hrs to ferry stores and ammunition etc across the Caen canal to the 6th Armoured Division reached their rendezvous only to find the place was still in German hands. 209, 293 and 303 Companies who had been trained in medical work did so immediately on landing collecting many casualties, giving first aid, stretcher bearing, assisting in operating theatres and evacuating the wounded. They also had the sad task of burying the dead. 53 Company were clearing mines and working with the Beach Group Commander.

I will now return to our Sections 1 to 3 of 175 Company at St Aubin sur Mer in the Juno sector where we were joined by 38 Company and then searched the area for 2 miles inland trying to find a place to establish our HQ when they arrived with Sections 4 to 10. Again we were informed we could return to be beach as there was an urgent call for Pioneers for mine clearance, removal of beach obstacles, building up dumps of ammunition and food and supplies. There were now 6,000 Pioneers who had landed in Normandy and some Companies had been working on the beaches up to their waists in water ensuring the Infantry received their supplies. As much of their work had to be carried out under enemy artillery and small arms fire casualties were mounting up. We prayed they wouldn't need us as we had experienced this at Salerno and that was HELL.

A further eleven Companies had landed and 92, 153, 231 and 269 were the experts in air field construction and immediately set to work inland to construct an airfield for the RAF. 112 Company were the smoke screen experts and immediately laid a smoke cover between the enemy and the beach. That day we heard that 225 Company had captured an enemy patrol of 1 officer and 16 men. By the end of D-Day plus 3 there were 14,000 Pioneers with the invasion force. 120 Company we were told had captured an outpost of German Marines and brought back 69 prisoners without having a casualty in their own ranks. As the German Marines were less than half a mile from our position we were ordered to fan out and search for isolated 'Jerry' bands or stragglers. The operation lasted 7 to 10 days and by that time we had reached a town called Bayeaux. There we were able to rest while we handed our prisoners over to the Military Police. Most of the 'Jerries' we caught were only too pleased to give themselves up and did not cause any trouble. Well wouldn't you if you were unarmed and surrounded by determined men who were armed with rifles and bayonets. These Germans were not SS men, but ordinary people like ourselves who had been conscripted in to the Army at a later stage of the war.

'There were now 6,000 Pioneers in Normandy'

All they wanted was the war to finish so that could go back to their homes. As we reached Bayeaux we thought of the popular song in England which was "It had to be you, wonderful you, it had to be you", which we changed to "It had to be Bayeaux etc". Corny wasn't it? By now our troops were between 12 to 15 miles inland and though the Germans were sending reinforcements as quickly as they could, our RAF were bombing or machine gunning the vehicles on the road. Meantime may I take you back to what the other Pioneer Companies were doing or had been doing. It will give you an insight to the various jobs or tasks the Companies were versatile in doing. It will be obvious to you, the reader, that the Infantry was trained for fighting, the Pioneer was also a fighter, but as a support soldier we had to learn many tasks without which the infantry man could not carry out all he had learnt in training.

As mentioned previously the weather on D-Day was atrocious which gave the impression to the Germans only a fool would attempt a beach invasion at such a time. However, British Forces are educated fools governed by discipline and camaraderie. The weather continued to be a source of anxiety and by 12 June the build up on the beaches had fallen behind schedule. Despite this, however, during the first few days 326,000 of the Allied Armies, together with 54,000 vehicles and 104,000 tons of stores had been landed. The towing of the floating pierheads of the two Mulberry harbours, Mulberry "A" in the American sector and Mulberry "B" in the British sector crossed the channel without incident and the first coastal ships commenced discharging in the British sector on 11 June, 4 days after work on the newly built port had started.

By the 19th June the Pioneer strength in Normandy had reached 13 Group Headquarters and 102 Companies (approximately 35,700 men of all ranks). However, on that date a storm of unprecedented force began in the Channel which lasted until the 22nd and largely brought movements of shipping to a standstill. Due to the storm the Mulberry Harbour in the American sector was so badly damaged that work on it was abandoned and spare parts from it were transferred to the British Mulberry. By 22 June the British Mulberry on which 98 Company under Maj Sharpe had done considerable repair work achieved its target of 4,000 tons being discharged daily.

Many hundreds of Pioneers were working on the roads filling in potholes and widening and constructing new roads all in view of the constant flow of traffic going to and from the beaches day and night. The soldiers lived, worked and ate in a perpetual cloud of heavy dust. The only relief was when it rained heavily and turned the dust into a sea of mud.

Bridging and construction of duplicate bridges were necessary to avoid bottle necks at Rivers and Graves-sur-mer. 6,500 tons of ammunition were landed on the beaches on D-Day and 80,000 tons during the first ten days and all this had to be carried and stacked away from the beaches. By 12 June Pioneer Companies had stacked in cans 1,000,000 gallons of petrol and oil. The first mobile laundry and bath units operated by Pioneers were in action by 18 June and moved to the forward area under fire and shelling. Six fire-fighting Companies functioned during the assault. Five Pioneer Companies together with the RE had constructed ten airfields by the end of June and handed them over to the RAF. The oil pipeline named PLUTO (Pipe line under the ocean) which had been built in England by 70 Company and compiled of 66,200 pipes totalling 250 miles and weighing 10,000 tons together with tank insulations and pumps was finally constructed at Port em Bessin. The final construction was actually undertaken by 36 and 30 Companies. Smoke screens were

required to cover an attack by Royal Marines and 112 Company were allocated their own ship HMS Courbet and could sail in the water along the beach or up the river on one occasion to cover any landings which were taking place. The 'battleship' was subjected to heavy German artillery at first and in all was hit by twenty shells as well as a one man sub torpedo boat. While making their final smoke screens across the River Orne the Commanding Officer, Major Cooper, and 3 of his men were killed, but needless to say Major Harrison assumed command and the Company were commended by the Infantry Regiment for their loyal support which saved many lives.

It was in this period of time that the city of Caen was proving a stumbling block to General Montgomery as it was being held by SS and panzer troops. The city of Caen was a vital road and rail link and communication centre, through which the main routes from the east and south-east passed through and was, therefore, of considerably importance to the enemy. The Germans were concentrating the bulk of his artillery and armour (tanks etc) there and was putting up a stubborn defence. Throughout June and the early days of July both sides fought vigorously and our Company (175) were involved night and day as support troops to our infantry to ensure vital supplies were available at all times. On 9 July following a formidable bombardment on the previous day by Allied bomber aircraft our infantry entered the town and Caen was captured. All this sounds so easy, but I have the knowledge at first-hand that hand-to-hand fighting took place for many hours as each street or even house had been occupied by the Germans and they had to be driven out by the courage of our infantry step-by-step. According to reports the Americans were not happy with the time delay the British had taken in capturing Caen. The British sector had involved fighting Field Marshall Rommel (Monty's old enemy in Africa) and the 1st and 2nd Panzer Division and 4 more Panzer Divisions the elite of the German Army. The enemy was now heavily involved with the British on the Eastern front and so the Americans had the easier task of advancing on the western front, but they could not or would not take the initiative. The Germans had since D-Day suffered 43,070 casualties including 6 Generals and 63 Commanders which almost equalled the Allied casualties. At the present time the Allied Forces (British) were contained more German divisions in their area than the rest of the whole bridgehead.

The Allies had nearly 1,000,000 troops ashore in the bridgehead and the battle for Caen, now finally won, has been termed as the most decisive in its conception and relentless painstaking execution. On 9 July 3 and 4 Sections of 175 Company had been pulled back for a rest, we had been guarding German prisoners of war. The rest of the Company had been installing and erecting huts and tents enclosed by a perimeter barbed wire fence and Dannet coiled wire covering an area of approx 2 football pitches. Inside the fencing were approximately 1,000 prisoners and we were given the privilege of guarding them and ensuring not one escaped. We were also told they were a mixed bunch of German SS and Panzer Regiments and Wermacht so we could expect trouble as the SS and Panzers were fanatic Hitlerites who would try and force their Nazism on the Wermacht regular soldiers and conscripted men, and endeavour to help them to escape which is of course the right of any soldier. We were on 2 hour 4 hour stag and a 24 hour day and night duty which was covered by every soldier doing a 150 yard patrol. We, of course, were expected to march or walk in a leisurely manner, but to keep an alert and watchful eye on the cage. At the end of your 150 yard patrol you met your co-patrol sentry and exchanged a few words indicating all was well or the prisoners were massing up in one corner so inform the Corporal of the guard who would come out and investigate. The guardroom was a small Nissen hut outside the cage which had been built by Pioneers. The watch was covered by 6 men and a Corporal and Lance Corporal and changed every 12 hours. The Corporal of the guard would stay in the guardroom and the Lance Corporal could saunter around the perimeter ensuring we did not hide or fall asleep while the 6 men patrolled their 150 yard beat. After your 2 hour stag on guard the sentries were changed and the dismissed sentries would go back to the guardroom for a rest without taking off their uniform or gear. A meal would be served on the appropriate times usually thick sandwiches of bully beef or ham and tongue roll, a mug of tea and some kind of pudding. The guardroom had bunks in it and a fire stove and a large iron kettle. It had to be kept tidy as the Guard Officer usually a Lieutenant would occasionally visit and inspect that the guards were on duty and everything was "Pukka". We knew we would be on this guard duty rota for a few days and so during the day we would unofficially talk to the prisoners who sometimes would make us a brew of tea and pass it through the wire on a long pole in exchange for cigarettes and as I was a non-smoker I was of course, very popular. We were told there were over 140,000 German prisoners in various cages covering a large area and a further 100,000 would be taken when our infantry closed the Falaise gap encircling the Germans. Of course, the eventual destination of these prisoners would be England to be guarded by the Home Guard or non-combat troops (conscientious objectors). The weather was good, but at night it was an eerie business until the prisoners settled down to sleep. On moonlight nights it was possible to view the whole cage, but when it was dark and cloudy and rainy you could always expect trouble. To ensure the Germans knew you were on patrol you would ease out the cartridge case of your rifle slightly and then bang it back into place. This made a loud clicking noise which every soldier recognised the sound and we hoped it would delay any escape action that may have been planned.

'You must have good eyesight to hit a small target in darkness.'

It was a boring task but a necessary one and we knew if any prisoners escaped the guard would be put a a "fizzer" (charge sheet) and have to try and explain the reason why he allowed a prisoner or prisoners to escape. On one particular night at about 0230 hrs I was about half way through my 150 yard patrol when I heard a rustling noise and also an empty can rattling (empty cans with a stone inside were always fastened to the barbed wire). I was immediately on the alert and with my rifle in the on guard position I stealthily approached the place where I had heard the noise. It was dark and drizzly an ideal night for an attempted escapee to "try it on". If it was an escape attempt I was determined it wasn't going to be on my patch. I stopped and listened, oh yes, more rustling and rattling noises. We did not carry a torch as it would give our position away so I carried on silently creeping towards the noisy area. The rustling was now nearer and I stopped in my tracks and listened once again. Oh yes, it was definitely someone trying to get out so I pushed my rifle and bayonet forward and shouted "Halt, who goes there. Halten schnell" (halt quickly). The noise stopped so I waited with tension mounting in my stomach, my thoughts were of 2, 3 or even 4 Germans creeping towards me through the barbed wire. I raised my Lee Enfield .303 rifle to my shoulder determined I would get him or them before he or them got me and shouted "Halt, or I fire", the noise stopped and then continued again so I fired one bullet in the direction of the noise and slipped in another bullet into the breech of my rifle. I called "Call out the guard" in my loudest voice and the Corporal came quickly as he had already heard the rifle shot. I quickly told him what I had done and he pulled out his torch and with me behind him, he began inspecting the area. Suddenly there was a noise and a cry, the torch revealed the escapee, it was dead. I say "it was dead" not "he was dead" as the culprit was a cat.

The officer of the guard came over and again I repeated the episode. "A bloody cat, you must have good eyesight to aim and hit such a small target in darkness". I felt like a hero until I was told I would be relieved of the rest of my guard and told to collect the body of the victim and proceed to the guardroom for investigation. Did you know a cat's blood is black? The Lance Corporal had acquired a sack from somewhere and I carried the body to the guardroom. Of course several prisoners had heard the noise and were shouting "Was ist los (what is wrong)", we told them to get back to sleep. The next day the body of the cat was hung on a pole with the words in German, "This could have been you – do not escape". The cartridge shell I still have and keep it polished.

Next day I was cleared of any malpractice and recommended by the OC for my quick action and stopping what he said may have been an attempt to escape by using the cat as a ruse to see if the sentries were alert. There were no escapees attempted from our prisoners of war cage, but it could have been a catastrophe if I hadn't have used my training and firing skill. You must be joking it was a lucky shot, but don't tell my mates.

On 9 August 175 Company was again dispersed and Sections 1 to 5 were called upon to help and support the Green Howards who were preparing for the battle to enclose FALAISE and so close the gap which would trap many thousands of the German Army. No accurate figure of captured Germans was every mentioned, but our OC believed it was 100,000.

On 15 August we were transferred to the 1st Canadian Army and worked with REME. Our HQ was at Biary, we were assigned to assist the Engineers in bringing in the "cookies". These were tanks that had been hit by shelling and set on fire. After a battle and our troops had advanced a mile or two we went forward and retrieved the tanks by bringing them back to the depot and cleaning the insides with a hose pipe. Sounds a good job until we saw the first tank, the tank crew had been caught inside and their bodies were burnt almost to a cinder. We removed them piece by piece and trying to find their identity tags around their necks, but where were their necks? The scorched limbs seared by the flames

were twisted as the men had tried to reach their escape hatch only to find the steel hatch had been welded by the heat to the body of the tank and the ammunition inside the tank had blown up. The stench was horrible, but bit by bit we managed with our scarves over our mouths and noses to clean out the mess. What a way to die, those tank men were heroes as they knew what could be their inevitable end. After cleaning the tanks we handed them over to the engineers who commenced to repair them and so return them to the Armoured Corps to use in the next battle. While I was there I learnt to drive a Bren Gun Carrier, a smaller version of the tank, but faster and more mobile.

On 31 October we ceased working with the REME and we were really sorry to leave them. Not because of the type of work which was horrible, but the Canadians were a generous and friendly lot. They were well supplied with beer and chocolate and cigarettes and their food was fantastic. It was here that I made arrangements to contact my brother-in-law Bill Ashcroft. He was in 401 Company RASC, his insignia was a chain of 3 links painted on their wagons and trucks. We used to say RASC meant Run Away Someone Coming, only joking of course. The method we used to find where a Regiment or Company was situated was on your stand down day you would make your way to the nearest main highway and hold a large-piece of paper with the name of the unit you required as the drivers came past. If a driver knew the location area he would stop and pick you up and take you there. It may be a mile or it may be 20 miles, but you would be dropped off at the nearest point.

This is what I did and I surprised Bill by walking in and meeting him. He worked in the Quartermaster's Stores, which was a rewarding job, but as I emptied my pack his eyes opened wide. It was full of the contents that the Canadians had given me when I mentioned that I was trying to meet a relative. I had my meals there and made my way back to the main road. This time it was just a matter of hitch hiking and having succeeded gave the driver some (not a lot) cigarettes and beer, Bill tried to find me later, but by then we had moved up to the next coast near Abbaye Mondaye. I was also successful on another occasion to meet my Brother Bill who was a nurse in 75th General Hospital and made his day with another feast of Canadian Goodies. In this case Bill could not attempt to find my Canadian area as he was far too busy attending to the wounded. The next few weeks we were busy on our usual tasks, but had more time off as more Companies came over from Britain and gave us a break and it brought us some relief as we had not known a real day off since landing two months earlier. Towards the end of August, however, we were busy constructing bridge approaches for the River Seine crossing and enjoying our bridging operations. We were with the 113 and 153 Companies working under constant fire and suffering the inevitable casualties. The movement forward was a rapid advance through France and Belgium and considerable difficulty was experienced by Pioneer Companies to keep up this rapid forward advance as they had no transport of their own and had to rely on the good intentions of other units or even hitch hiking. Pioneer Companies were being scattered far and wide and infantry were complaining there was no support for them when it was needed. Finally Brigadier Brown, Commander of 2nd Army Troops, issued instructions that the practice of abandoning Pioneers on forward moves must cease as these troops were essential of Logistics.

The port of Dieppe was captured on 3 September and repairs to the docks were commenced immediately. Our job was tracing and lifting unexploded land mines while other Pioneer Companies carried on with constructing or repairing the train ferry ramp and repairs to cranes, winches and railway sidings. The port of Dieppe was opened on 5 September and the first coastal ship was unloaded 2 days later. So our lines of communication (LoC) were greatly shortened as previously all ships unloaded at Arromanches. From Arromanches (the original beach landing on the 6 June) through France and Belgium to the Dutch border units of Pioneers were operating with the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force as well as the Army, changing at a moments notice as was their custom from one task to another with scarcely a break in the rhythm. Road and Railway construction including bridging or working in hospitals, acting as guards of PoW camps or traffic control or constructing airfields, all jobs came alike to us, Jack of all trades, the handyman of the Service. Hard work but essential and better than being shelled or bombed.

Unfortunately this safe period was soon to end as we reached the borders of Holland. We were stationed in Antwerp preparing for another advance as support troops. The bases of the V1 (flying bomb or buzz bombs) rockets had been overrun and captured but the bases of the V2 (the silent rocket) were deep into Holland and so Antwerp became a target area. In no time over 1500 rockets (V2) were launched against the city where 3,500 Belgian civilian and 680 Allied service men were killed. Few Companies of the Pioneers stationed in Antwerp escaped casualties (figure unknown), but approximately 10 per cent of the total casualties were Pioneers. Once again I was lucky.

It was around this time, if my memory serves me right, that the battle for the Arnhem Bridge was to take place. I know that the last week in September we were ordered to commit our services to 30 Corps under Lt Gen Horrocks. We arrived at Eindhoven to find the attack had already started 3 days ago, but we were given the task together with the RE's to ensure the road from Eindhoven to Arnhem was kept reasonably clear of broken down tanks, lorries and evacuees from the neighbouring villages who tried to escape the German bombing by using the only road available to them and to us. It was 64 miles to our objective, but the road crossed five major rivers or canals which the Germans were holding at all costs. On our flanks were 2 Divisions of Infantry who would make subsidiary attacks to try and lure the Germans away from our real purpose. The RE used bull dozers to move the abandoned obstacles of the road while we used our rifles to move the refugees of the road onto the tracks in the forest. The refugees were not too pleased and their language although foreign was atrocious. The Guards Armoured Division had been in the front of the attack advancing behind a rolling barrage from our Artillery. German defenders put up stout resistance and hand to hand fighting had taken place. We were then switched to helping the Medical Corps with the casualties, we were stretcher bearing them to the rear for medical attention. As nightfall fell our attack had only travelled a mere 7 miles reaching a village named Valkenswaard. Our aim had been to cover the 64 miles to Arnhem in 2 days to help the paratroops who were fighting on the Arnhem Bridge, but after the first day we still had 57 miles to go. Accurate German mortar fire and their tanks had slowed our advance right down. This was unfortunately the day by day way of advancing slowly and steadily with casualties mounting up as the Germans fought fiercely to stop us from getting to Arnhem. Elements of the 43rd (Wessex) Division making an end run around the German defences on the Arnhem road established a fragile corridor with the Polish troops at a village called Driel near Nijmegen. An attempt was also made by the 4th Battalion of the Dorset Regiment who attempted to reach Arnhem by river using a captured ferry boat. The full total we left behind was 1,200 dead and 6,500 wounded or missing, another glorious but disastrous battle in which I was once again lucky.

175 Company was not actually involved in the fighting of the next big battle in the Ardennes where the Germans had attacked the Americans and driven them back several miles. It was two days before Christmas when 30 Corps was again sent to assist the Americans who were in a desperate state and unable to stop the Germans. Elements of the British 30th Division began to arrive from our reserve positions in Belgium and Holland to bolster the Northern and Central sectors of the Bulge. Our 29th Armoured Brigade soon drove the Germans out of Celles on 27 December. Our troops were then deployed on the other side of the River Meuse to stop the Germans from advancing across the river. Our task was the usual support troops job bringing up the ammunition and rations. By the end of January the Germans had been pushed back to their starting line leaving behind 120,000 casualties. Anglo-American losses were 75,000 dead, wounded or captured. The battle had taken place in the deep snow of the mountains (memories of Italy) so we realised why the British Army wanted us hardened veterans there. However, once again I was lucky.

At this time our OC was Major Hubbard with Captain Jay, Lts Adie, Hardy and Farmer. February found us back to the old routine working with the REME and RE's and doing PoW guarding in the freezing weather. Your feet just freeze and your fingers ached and tingled as you tried to bring them back into circulation. When will this war finish? We are all getting sick of it! What future lies ahead? Will I be lucky until the end? Please God let it be soon.

'The Germans left behind 120,000 casualties'

We were regrouping and it was during this period that the General Hospitals and the CCS's (Casualty Clearing Stations) were hurriedly moved to the South East. The Director of Medical Services, Gen Sir A Hood, informed the Group Commander (Lt Col Colvin MC) that he was firmly convinced that the services of the Pioneer Companies (including our 175 Coy) had become indispensable to the RAMC during active service. Nice to be recognised? 130 Company (Maj H Butcher) had been bridging in the forward area for several weeks received the congratulations of the Corps Commander for the speed and efficiency of their work. Six Sections of this Company under Lts Davis, McCluskey and Robinson operated with forward elements of the 11th Armoured Division clearing land mines, removing booby traps from

trees and patching roads in order to speed the advance of the armour as it moved towards Venlo.

Once again we were to be brought out of the front line and forward areas and to use us in a School of Instruction in Meerhout. The syllabus was to teach basic infantry training to the raw newcomers of the Pioneers from England. This included building defence positions, the attack on strong points, the clearance of the enemy from woods and range work. Here we trained Companies to a necessary state of battle preparedness for the assault of the Reichswald and the crossing of the River Rhine. Our Company provided the demonstration squads in battle drill, unarmed combat and allied subjects in relativity with the course. The school closed in March 1945. What a nice change to be in a brick building with proper beds and cooked meals. It was like heaven, but it was soon back to our usual routine as the date for the Rhine crossing was the 24 March 1945,

At this time our Colonel Commandant, Lord Milne, was retiring due to his age and he sent the following to all Pioneer units:

'From this present day I am retiring and my appointment of Colonel Commandant would be better filled by a younger and more active man who would be more able to look after your interests. I still hope, however, to keep in touch with the Corps for which I have a great admiration and affection. I have followed your activities during the past five years with great interest and have been impressed by the magnificent spirit which animates all ranks. You have nobly responded to every call on your services whether made in the face of the enemy abroad or when engaged in difficult and uncongenial tasks at home.

I congratulate you on the magnificent work you have done and on the high standard of efficiency and discipline you have attained.

Good luck to you all and my best wishes for your future."

Lord Milne was succeeded as Colonel Commandant by Major General A L I Friend CB CBE MC

The Grand Finale in Europe

The war is nearly over
And the last battle has begun
And it's been many a year
Since I joined as a Pioneer

I was trained to work
And to fight as well
And that part of life
Has been spent in Hell

From day to day
I lived in fear
As the battles raged
And death was near

But I never gave in
For I was trained and strong
And to be a coward – would be a sin
For we knew Victory would one day come along

To have served with heroes
Of that I'm proud
And I don't care if no-one knows
For I'll not be shouting it out loud

For time marches on and as I stand
With my head bowed low –
to the Lord I say
And to my best comrades in the land
For five long years each day was the
Longest Day

24 March 1945, the main crossing of the River Rhine. "Will the war be over soon?" The thoughts of most men were "will I see the end" "How do I survive". "The end must be close now and I have survived since mid 1940 can my luck still hold out".

Only the training and camaraderie kept us going as at this time demands for the Pioneers became incessant and 87 Companies were massed under Second Army control for the assault on the River Rhine. A tremendous accumulation of stores, ammunition and equipment was essential for the coming battle. In addition roads had to be constructed, strengthened and maintained for the volume of heavy traffic that was to pass over them plus vast tonnage of bridging material were brought forward and approaches to the river constructed for bridging operations. Companies engaged in smoke duties had throughout this period been screening from the enemy the troop movements and activities on the western bank of the river with a pall of smoke 10,000 yards in length. As the hour for the assault drew near we stood by to launch the assault boats, to ferry the attacking infantry troops across the Rhine also to operate as stretcher-bearers during the battle and to start immediate bridging operations on the enemy Eastern back as our infantry advanced. The Commander of 30 Corps wrote in his diary: "The Pioneers toiling under heavy enemy fire and observation, suffered greatly in casualties but never let us down. Their spirit was exemplified by one Company which despite very heavy casualties, refused to be relieved until its part in the attack was fully carried out".

'We wore clean underwear in case we were injured.'

As the evening of 23 March drew near we knew this was going to be the time of high adventure and great activity for the men of the Pioneer Companies. We were 'requested' to check that our wills had been passed into HQ for safe keeping and we had clothed ourselves in clean underwear (in case we were wounded). We had drawn 32 rounds of .303 ammunition and the rest of our Army kit plus personal belongings had been put in our kit bag secured tightly and were in HQ. We sat around talking just small talk and stupid talk just anything to pass away the last and maybe final few hours. I remember young Sid Ives who had only been with us for a few months saying, "It's nearly the end of the war and I'd hate to get killed, but if I do I know I would die with the best lot of mates I had ever met". He had been in an orphanage since he was 8 years old and he was now 18 years old. We understood his feelings and respected them but told him to "shut-up as no-one was going to die". Strange but one's thoughts seem to be "Don't let it be me. Selfish, maybe?"

At 2100 hrs following a bombardment of one hour by 2000 guns of the RA, the crossing was launched. With the 25th and 51st (Highland) British Divisions and USA 30th and 79th Division in the lead the river was crossed in a short time and our troops landed on the Eastern bank. All through the night the crossing of Allied troops continued these included George Ashcroft in the 5th Kings Infantry and Tommy Ashcroft in the Royal Corps of Signals and Bill Ashcroft in the RASC and by dawn bridgeheads had been established. On the 24th, two airborne Divisions dropped into the enemy lines north of Wessel and by the evening the four assaulting Divisions had extended the bridgeheads to a depth of 5,000 yards (nearly 3 miles). George Ashcroft was badly wounded in his arm by shrapnel and returned to England. The following Companies of Pioneers had been involved as follows: six Companies 112 (Maj Harrison), 805 (Maj Leggatt), 810 (Maj Chittenden), 843 (Maj Johnson), 846 (Maj Jones) and 806 (Maj Pointer) had been busily engaged on what was to be for most of them their last action of the war as Smoke Companies. 224 Company (Maj Jaggers) launched the storm boats and ferried the assault troops across the River Rhine under heavy fire. Numerous Companies were engaged on construction work on bridges nicknamed "Lambeth" and Waterloo" and other well known names. Lt S Freeman and a detachment from 175 Company (mine) had crossed the river with the assault troops to prepare bridge approaches on the enemy side. Other Companies were acting as stretcher bearers and other work controlling the hundreds of German prisoners who were being captured. More Companies were settling in Field Medical Centres (FMC's) on the Eastern bank as the bridgehead was established and feeding ammunition and supplies to the forward troops. 91 Company (Major Ticehurst) loaded fifty 3 ton lorries with 25 pounder shells in 25 minutes. The Germans finally collapsed as our Allied Forces drove them in retreat and by the end of the month the success of the battle was assured. As you can see it takes all kinds of serving soldiers and activities to win a war. No one is dispensable.

To the Pioneer Companies the cost in casualties was a heavy one, 252 killed in action or died of their wounds, 1,096 wounded and many missing not accounted for in the recording of the glorious attack and victory of the Rhine crossing. This was grim evidence even if such was need of the significant part Pioneers had played in active operations. This action was to be the final one for 175 Company and we, those who survived, were to find a complete change in the complexion of Pioneer activities. On 3 April 1945 Lt Farmer was stuck off strength (SOS) and transferred to 278 Company while a Lt J W Robinson was taken on strength (TOS) to replace him.

On 5 April we moved to Eerzel where we operated barges at Voorheide on the Antwerp, Turnhout Canal, bringing logistic supplies right to the heart of the conflict. 13 April was a momentous day in the life of our Company as our CO, Major Hubbard, who had been in command since 1 August 1943 and guided and lead us through Salerno and Mt Cassino and D-Day landings in Normandy and right up to the crossing of the Rhine was SOS and posted to 81 Company. He called us on parade and addressed us in a manner of a father leaving his family. He had protested to the higher-ups about being relieved of his command solely to hand over to a younger man when 175 Company was moving forward as the most experienced in the Army having been formed in July 1940. He had commanded us through lots of campaigns far worse than the present one and in the worse conditions of Italy and elsewhere for some years. We stood to attention and saluted him as he saluted back. We noted he had tears in his eyes as he said, "My ambition was to lead my Company until the end of the war as I had faith in each and every one of you". We broke ranks and cheered him as he marched away. We had not lost only a leader but a friend. Major Hayward

assumed command.

On 18 April we were dismantling Bailey bridging and Lt Adie was SOS and transferred to 284 Company. On 30 April our officers were as follows: Maj Hayward, Capt Jay, Lts Robinson, Dunkley, Hardy and Huggett.

As the war was now coming to a close our thoughts were turning to demobilisation. The War Office had thought of a system in which the years of service and the age of the soldier justified the date of demobilization. My number was 29 and this meant my release from action duties, but not the reserve would be about September 1945. Unfortunately there was a little matter of a war still raging with Japan in the Far East and, as we were now in training, it would appear that very soon we could be going to help the 14th Army and Americans in Burma and other regions. This was not something we were looking forward to in the future as we all had a queer feeling we would not return from the Far East.

No less dramatic was the change of duties that came to most of the Pioneer Companies who had been engaged on 'Smoke' duties. With the successful crossing of the Rhine 805, 806, 845 and 846 (and later 803) Companies were transferred to "T" Force, an inter-service body formed for the purpose of moving in immediately behind the assault troops to seize and safeguard selected intelligence "targets" from destruction and looting until they could be examined by experts. These "targets" included research and experimental establishments engaged in the development of weapons and war materials, military headquarters, government departments and ministries, war factories, industries and naval and air weapon plants. If a "target" was found empty the unit of "T" force had to find and capture the personnel who had worked there. 805 Comapny's first task was to take over a repeater station at Hannover as the USA Signals Group found the intricate equipment beyond their understanding. Lt H Sykes rounded up the German technicians and "forced" them (in a friendly fashion) to continue work under guard so that the Americans could follow the operations involved. A platoon of this Company took over a police station at Lunenburg with all its records and later when they moved to Munster it took the Chemical Warfare school under its charge. They continued in succession to take over "targets" in Lubeck, Kiel and Munster Lager carrying out house-to-house searches in the latter town for hidden documents and equipment.

Meantime 806 Company had taken over Breman airfield and the "Focke-Wulf" aircraft factory and were operating in North West Germany and Denmark. 846 Company captured vital targets in Munster, Cuxhaven and Cologne. 810 Company had taken targets in Oldenburg, Wilhelmshaven and the E-boat pens at Rotterdam and a radio factory at Hilversum, a radio station in West Holland and two man submarines at Ijmevden. 845 Company had captured naval installations and air experimental station at Hamburg. They then moved to Newhaldenslaben from which it had to withdraw in favour of the Russian Army, but not before it had taken the precaution of removing some of the German technicians to the British Zone. 803 Company had occupied the Bluhm and Voss factory at Hamburg. Information, material and personnel were not always easy to find and much detailed investigation work was necessary to uncover not only documents and instruments which had been hidden, but also German scientists and technicians who had gone into hiding. The USA demanded the latter personnel should be sent to America. At a later stage the men of "T" Force were used to guard and transfer the captured materials and key German personnel to England. 175 Company was enjoying the change as we were station at Borne in Holland resting or on PoW guard duties and support troop training, it was now 13 May.

However on the 4th May in Field Marshall Montgomery's tent on a desolate Luneburg Heath, South of Hamburg the surrender of all German Forces in North West Germany, Holland and Denmark was received by Field Marshall Montgomery. A week before this eventful occasion on 29 April the Germans in Italy, almost a million men had surrendered to Field Marshall Alexander. The Germans in Norway under General Hans Bushme also surrendered on 5 May. German Generals were being rounded up by the hundreds including Field Marshall Gerd Von Runstedt, Heinrich Brauchitsch and Erin Von Manstein, and over 150 other German officers were brought to Britain and were eventually put to work on farms near Bridgend in Wales. First news of the German acceptance of total defeat came in a broadcast over Flensberg radio by Count Schwerin Von Krosigis the German Foreign Minister who said that "to continue the war would only mean senseless blood shed and futile disintegrations." The Germans, however, delayed signing the Armistice in order to allow as many of their soldiers and refugees as possible to give themselves up to the Western Allies rather than to the Russians, who they hated and they were scared of the Russian reprisals.

'German Generals were rounded up by the hundreds'

On 7 May as peace finally came to a battered Europe as at 0241 hrs in a small red schoolhouse in Rheims where General Eisenhower, the Allied Supreme Commander had his HQ, General Alred Jodl Army Chief of Staff acting as the German emissary signed the instrument of unconditional surrender. He said "With this signature, the German people and the German armed forces are, for better or worse, delivered into the victors hands." General Bedell Smith, Eisenhower's Chief of Staff (COS) signed for the Western Allies and General Ivan Surlapator was witness for Russia. Unfortunately there were still small pockets of German SS and Hitler Youth Soldiers who would not surrender and fought on until all were killed. This stupid episode cost the lives of some British soldiers who would otherwise have lived to celebrate peace in Europe.

8 May was officially declared by our Prime Minister Winston Churchill "as the day that common-sense had ruled over tyranny", but on 13 May the day was declared a holiday and crowds in London and every part of England took to the streets to celebrate. In London the Royal Family who had remained at their post throughout the war appeared eight times during the day on the balcony of Buckingham Palace together with our hero and leader Winston Spencer Churchill in response of the cries and shouts of the people. Licensing laws had been suspended and uniformed service men who were lucky to be in England were carried shoulder high by the revellers.

On 13 May I was stationed at Borne, Holland carrying out guard duties as a PoW camp, no festivities here, but we did receive an extra bottle of beer.

However, before the end of the war on 4 May I had given my name and number to our Sergeant Major as I had volunteered to return to England to be trained as a member of the British Military Government and to be posted back to Germany. I had given this decision much thought as it meant leaving my comrades who were mates and pals and with whom I had been in many battles and campaigns since July 1940. However, the training we were doing in woods and scrubs could only mean a posting to the Far East as that part of the world was still at war. I was not a coward, but I think self-preservation came first in my mind. As it turned out the war in the Far East ended on 15 August and 175 Company returned to England on 27 October after Capt Jay had been SOS to command 139 Company and Capt J Rath had taken his place. The OC, Maj Hayward, was posted to 294 Company and Major D C McKeand took command. 175 Company (except me) was billeted in Hampstead and were put on dock work and coal distribution.

On 23 May 46 the War Office disbanded 175 Company and all ranks were finally sent home. I have only briefly covered the final weeks and months of my old Company as it was in one way sad to see the break up of such a good crowd of lads. Unfortunately in one respect I was not there to say my Goodbyes and wish them all good luck as I was then in Warendorf Germany, but that is another episode of my life.

On reminiscing I think or even know I made the right decision in volunteering as making coal deliveries in London would not have been my scene. This may have been government essential work as many hundreds of houses had not received regular coal supplies for months. The householder apparently paid for his allocation at a coal depot and the Army delivered the allocations direct to his house.

To the Pioneer Companies still in Germany the end of hostilities brought little in the way of relaxation. In the next three successive days since the signing of the Armistice two and a half million German Soldiers had surrendered and a high proportion of these were to pass through Pioneer hands, together with a new flood of Allied Prisoners of war and displaced persons. Also much of the work of the past eleven months had to go into reverse, bridges dismantled, large stocks of military stores and equipment to be re-packed and sent back to England.

With dramatic force the evil that the Allied soldiers had helped to exterminate was impressed on the memory of all ranks of some Companies as in the late Spring and early summer months of 1945 they uncovered first hand evidence of brutality and bestiality which will for generations associate the horrors of Auschwich, Belsen, Buckenwald and Dachau with Germany and its people. One Pioneer unit commander when his men came across pits into which the bodies of over 1,300 murdered men, women and children had been thrown turned out every able-bodied German man and woman in the district to dig graves and give the victims a decent burial. The administration of Belsen camp was taken over by 35 Group of Pioneers under Lt Col A M Duncan TD, who by early June, was able to report that deaths had been reduced from 700 daily to 21,

and although the burials were rather crude the covering for the bodies was being provided and proper registration being carried out and graves marked. Such was the work carried out by Pioneers so ghastly, but essential work. Do you think the German people in these areas were ignorant of the happening from 1942 to 1945? Finally a Pioneer of 137 Company became Principal investigator of outrages in concentration camps and later as Prosecutor conducted the trial of SS men charged with crimes at Ravensbruck Camp and Assistant Prosecutor at the trial of the leaders of Belsen Campo at Nuremberg.

Though I have kept this account as far as possible a record of my experiences I have also deviated from my own career to give a broader outline of what the Pioneer Companies have done in many countries. It is said "They go everywhere, and they'll do anything" our unofficial motto is, "We do the difficult immediately, the impossible takes a little longer". All this honour glory was not attained without the inevitable casualties and according to the records from D-Day 6 June until official VE Day 7 May the number of Pioneers killed and wounded was just over 10,000. In my Company (175) from 8 Officers, 1 WO2, 1 SSgt, 10 Sgts, 30 NCOs and 300 Ors, we suffered 71 killed and 82 wounded and 54 taken PoW of which 50 died during the period 10 December 1941 to 7 May 1945.

"We will remember them, as for your tomorrow they gave their today"

Of course, I could have written more on the good and humourous times, but what is comical to the serving soldier to help him to keep his sanity would be considered nonsense when read in modern times. All I can say is there was more happy times than tragic, horrendous and terrifying times, but we cannot forget them or the friends we made and friends we lost.

"We love them still, though we see them no longer."

I have given more or less full details of how 175 Company fared after the Armistice had been signed on 7 May 1945. As I left my Company on 4 May after volunteering to return to Germany this was to be a new routine in my life and so I will detail my new experiences as fully as I can possibly can.

Exodus – Farewell to Arms

So to my comrades I said it was goodbye
Probably knowing I might
not see them again
And I know it would be telling a lie
If I said I didn't feel any regret or pain

So it was back to England
and to my family most dear
For a happy leave I hoped it would be
Knowing I would have
another leave that year
After I had returned to work in Germany

No more fighting or shelling sound too
good to be true
As I went to London to an Army School
I had some idea of what I may do
So I do hope they don't think I'm a stupid
fool

My story is told in the next few pages
And I am determined to do my best
For the prisoners-of-war
who I had guarded in cages
Their future well being will be my test

As I returned to Germany soon
the Jap war would end
So I exchanged my rifle for a pen
And as I said a fond farewell
to my trusty friend
I knew I didn't want to see him again

World War Two started on 3 September 1939 and in the European zone ended officially on 7 May 1945. Though the signing of the Armistice denoted the fighting could cease chaos was rife in the country of Germany. There were approximately two hundred and fifty thousand German prisoners of war, and thousands of our Allied prisoners who had been released from their confinement. Displaced persons and refugees were roaming the countryside and towns seeking food and shelter. There was no actual German Government, and so the Allied Military units had to bring order and organisation to an absolute chaotic state. The Chiefs of Staffs in England had foreseen this situation and had made plans to cope with this inevitable situation. Notices had been placed on the notice-boards of many Headquarters of military units requesting volunteers to serve another twelve months in the Army.

So on 4 May 1945 I was ready to carry out a task for the British Army voluntarily for the first time, which was a momentous day in my Army Life. Our platoon Corporal "Ginger" Lowe had returned from a visit to HQ to rejoin us in our forward position near the River Elbe, and mentioned that they were looking for volunteers to return to England. Names had to be handed into our CSM, WO2 Maskell, who would then arrange for all volunteers to report to our HQ. I was surprised to find out that I was the only soldier to volunteer. Apparently all volunteers had to sign on for a further twelve months, and then return to Germany after a six weeks clerical training course. No one else fancied the idea of serving until June 1946 as most of our lads had been in khaki since June 1940, and they were due for early demobs, probably in October.

Arriving at HQ I was told that I would receive seven days leave, and then be trained as an office clerk. After six weeks, and if I was competent, I would be returned to Germany as a member of the Military Government (later called Control Commission of Germany). As a trained soldier and a veteran campaigner, I thought acquiring knowledge as a clerk would be in a different vein to what I had previously experienced, so I volunteered to participate in the scheme. After my seven days leave I reported on 5 June to a depot near St John Wood in Surrey and commenced my first day as a trainee. After the six week course I was deemed to be competent, and able to commence in the rehabilitation of the German people. It was also a sad time, because I was transferred to the RASC, but I would not part with my regimental Pioneer badge. Field Marshall Montgomery was not the only one to wear two badges in his beret. Our section or squad consisted of Cpl Dunbar, LCpl Aspinall and six Ptes. We were issued with our instructions and travel permits and so journeyed across France, Belgium and Holland to a place in Germany called Warendorf. Warendorf was thirty kilometres from Munster, and we were seconded to the 1029 Military Detachment, but our HQ was in Munster.

'Our job was to revolutionise the mills and factories'

We then learned that the 1029 Detachment was to consist of our squad the Textile Section, a Transport Section and an Investigation Bureau (IB), and Captain De Vries from Holland. Captain de Vries was to be our interpreter and was also in charge of the Displaced Persons department. There was also a platoon of infantry who performed the security and sentry duties on a weekly bases. We were then introduced to Mr Hoyle from Halifax who was an expert on textiles in civilian life, but was now seconded to the Army with a rank of Acting Captain. He showed us our working offices and gave us a brief résumé of our duties. Our senior clerk, LCpl Aspinall, then conducted us to a large house, which was to be our quarters for the next twelve months. He informed us that a senior officer in the German Army had occupied the house, but we were to treat it as we would our own home in England. The large garden with a summerhouse and swimming pool was soon to be very popular by all ranks as the weather was very good.

Our job was to revolutionise the mills and factories in our district, and ensure they became profitable and self-supporting businesses. The quicker the scheme was carried out the less financial aid would be required from the Allied Governments. The reason being was that German workers would soon be earning wages and consequently able to purchase the necessities of life from marketing resources which would gradually become available. As we had to tour the area around Warendorf it was necessary for us to requisition a car from the transport pool and with the aid of a local map we began to locate mills and warehouses. As we located these vital buildings we would mark them as Military Government bonded property and seal the entrance. The contents of either raw materials or machinery would be put on hold until we could take a stock check and record the same at our base.

It was the work of the IB to investigate the background of all claimants to any properties in the area. Once their Fragebogen (questionnaire) was completed and the claimant cleared of any previous Nazi activity they were passed to our department. Here Mr Hoyle would cross-examine them to ascertain if they were the rightful owner, and had previously used the mills or factories as a productivity asset. They were also checked to see if they still had the acumen to run a textile business. If any businesses were not claimed then the contents were later divided out to other businesses in production. The next stage was to open a mill and access if the machinery was intact or could be put in working order. We then issued raw material from the bonded warehouses to enable productivity to commence. The mill owner had also been sanctioned to employ local workers. Our office staff accurately logged all details of raw materials issued against goods manufactured. We had no union problems, as all workers would have worked twenty-four hours a day and every day if they were allowed. Their wages were paid to them by the mill owner and were aligned to productivity. As time went on, and our local area became almost a self running concern, we were able to cast our net further afield.

You can now imagine accurate account records had to be recorded and sent on to our HQ in Munster, where they were collated and sent onto England. Up to this time we were very busy and had no time for pleasure trips, but with the lifting of the non-fraternisation order we were able to employ German female staff as typists,

cooks and interpreters and found them to be a great asset. As a result we were able to lessen our workload, and consequently some of our clerks were given the option of staying on or applying for demobilisation.

Captain Hoyle had been a football referee in England and he suggested we formed a football league between local villages to alleviate the boredom. This idea proved to be a great success and also relieved the tension between the Germans and the Allied forces in the area. Eventually a challenge came from the local teams who wanted to pit their skills against a British Army side from the area. We obtained permission and I was given the task of selecting our British team whilst Captain Hoyle did the organising. I scoured the area visiting several infantry regiments to obtain players to make up our eleven. I was overwhelmed with volunteers, so I asked the Sgt PE Instructor to name two or three of their best players and the position I needed them to play in. The game was advertised over a large area and on the day of the game over two thousand spectators turned up to cheer one side or the other. As we did not expect any trouble and to ensure none occurred we placed the Tommies on one side and the locals on the opposite side. Captain Hoyle was to officiate as the referee and the linesmen were also experienced officials. The game was played in good spirit and fortunately we triumphed by two goals to one, but, alas, I did not have the pleasure of getting my own name on the team sheet as a scorer. I believe this was the first football match to be played between a German eleven and the British Army since hostilities had ceased. We as a detachment were visited by many VIPs and were congratulated on our efforts in bringing stability and profitable finance to the area. On our visits to the outlying districts we now had a choice of vehicles from the Transport Pool. The choice ranged from a VW Beetle to a Mercedes depending on your rank. Incidentally if you could obtain permission to ship a VW Beetle to England it would cost sixty pounds sterling.

The final date of my twelve months extended service was drawing nearer, and although the authorities tried to persuade me to re-sign for a further period I declined, as I wanted to return to England. I left Warendorf on 28 July 1946. I had spent six years in battledress "visiting" North Africa and Salerno to Mount Cassino and finally Normandy to Germany. After reporting to our HQ in Munster, where I received my instructions and travel permits, I was ordered to report to Ashton-under-Lyme for my demob papers and, of course, a civilian suit. I had found my last twelve months very interesting and rewarding and for many years afterwards I followed the fortunes of Germany and noted their success in the business world. Maybe I did have a hand in revolutioning and stabilising Germany's rise in the financial markets. Who will ever know? But then I was just a small cog in a big wheel. As I have mentioned the first three or four months of our stay in Germany had been boring due to the fact that we were extremely busy in our jobs. We spent our evening playing cards and listening to the news and programmes from England. It was also a beautiful area in the country and so we walked along the paths through the forests. Sometimes we were allowed to travel to Munster, but as that city had been devastated by our RAF it was in a chaotic state as buildings were just being bulldozed.

The process of re-building was soon to take place, but it was not an interesting side. With the lifting of the non-fraternisation law we were allowed to enter any German wine "keller" and enjoy the music and, of course, several Allied soldiers enjoyed the company of the frauleins. One evening a coach took many volunteers to the town of Bielefeldt where we heard a rendering of Handels Messiah sung by a choir of 500 voices, of course, it was in German, but as it was a popular piece of music we could follow and admire the singing. At other times we held parties in the hall of our house and Capt de Vries would play and entertain us on the piano while the beer was served by the kitchen staff who were local people. The kitchen staff consisted of a cook and two waitresses who were supervised by Harry Beardsmore a Cpl in the ACC. Harry and I were good friends and as he allowed the staff to take home any food that was left over from the days meals we soon made friends with Matilde and Marianne. Very soon we were invited to their house at No 2 Walger Weg in Warendorf and met their parents Herr and Frau Schulte and their family. We enjoyed the company and learning each others language was very interesting. The family had been able to keep out of the clutches of the Nazi party by various ways as these were against their principles and doctrines, and hated all forms of Hitler power. There were no books in the house, only copies of Mein-Kamp as the Nazi Government had ordered all foreign books to be burnt. I was given a copy of Mein Kamp, but as it was written in German I could not read it. The title means "My Struggle" and is the life of Hitler and all his ambitions for Germany. In the November Harry was demobbed and so returned to England where his wife and family lived in the Kent area. I still spent some of my time seeing the Schulte family, but it was not the same without Harry.

'This was the first football match to be played between a German eleven and the British Army'

However, it was this time of the year when families start to think about Christmas and here in Germany it was no exception. I was thinking of buying some coffee in England when my 7 days leave arrived which was in about 3 weeks. Germans have always liked coffee and during the war they made an ersatz drink with any kind of crushed beans. I still continued to visit my friendly family. The British Army officers who had been teachers in civilian life had commenced evening classes in the town to teach English to anyone who was interested. Very soon the classes were full and there was a waiting list. Pity there wasn't any German classes where we could have learnt languages. However, Marianne and Matilde and their relatives Helga and Erica soon realised I could prolong their lessons in English by asking me of an evening to correct their homework. Some evenings we made it a rule to speak only in English. By the time I left Germany they had learnt a lot while I had only a smattering of German. On other evenings, we played card games like pontoon, whist and patience and as all these were something similar in both countries it was quite enjoyable as all the family were very competitive.

I came home on leave and my family were very interested in what my work was like and how did I cope with the Germans? I showed them some photographs and when they saw the two girls they were curious and finally wanted to know if they were more than just friends. I assured them I had no intention of courtship and definitely not marriage. Matilde was married to Eric Budde who was the brother of Erica. He was working away from home in a business firm in Austria, but came back for a few days every month. Marianne had had a boy-friend at one time, but he had been killed in one of the battles in Italy in late June 1944. I managed to purchase some coffee and some knitting and sewing material and needles which were not available in Germany and took them back with me. About two weeks before Christmas the Schulte family received news that their son who had been a PoW in the Russian territory was coming home. No actual date was given, but I knew how the system worked as it was all about whenever transport was available. So every day in the morning the father, Herr Schulte, used to call at the Rathaus (town hall) and enquired if any news had been received about their son Kurt. I had seen photographs of their son and I must admit he was a good looking and healthy man. About three days before Christmas in the afternoon a representative from the Rathaus called at the house and said three wagon loads of ex PoWs were expected within one hour. As everything had been done for days at the house there was no panic only excitement. Marianne and Matilde were given permission to leave work and join the family at the Rathaus. Our Major told me to go to the Town Hall and if there was any delay to pull rank using his name. I did not go to their house in the evening as it was a family re-union. Next morning I was asked to come and visit them as a party had been arranged. My mind was in a whirl and I tried to think of some excuse not to go. Could I meet a German soldier, and how would we react on meeting. However, I was persuaded to go, but I wanted to go on my own later in the evening.

Arriving at the house with my arms full of provisions and expecting to hear some noise I was amazed it was so quiet. As I entered and was made welcome, I cautiously looked around for Kurt, but did not recognise anyone from the photograph I had seen. Frau Schulte came over to me and led me to a figure sitting in a lounge chair clothed in a dressing gown not a uniform. I looked at him and as he rose to his feet I put out my hand. He took it in a feeble manner and muttered some words and sat down again. I was amazed to see how this feeble figure could be Kurt. I later learnt that he had been given a bad time in the Russian PoW camp. Food and medicines had been very scarce and all prisoners lost stones in weight. I saw Capt Hoyle and asked him if there was anything he could do to help Kurt to regain his health again. He said for me to forget it as we could not "foster" every PoW who returned home as it was the responsibility of the family. However, as his sisters worked in the cookhouse and served our meals he would have a word with the Catering Corps Chef. I did not return to the Schulte family for a few days as I explained to Matilde who was the elder daughter that I may embarrass Kurt before he had a chance to feel better. She mentioned they were receiving extra rations from the chef, but I said I didn't want to know about that winked my eye and she smiled in a gratifying way. When I next saw Kurt he was much better and we were able to talk to one another about the war. He really had had a bad time, much worse than I

had in Italy regarding the weather. Their clothing was inadequate for the bitter cold winds from Siberia and their rations often never turned up. As I had the use of car, Kurt and I were able to enjoy jaunts around the countryside and coming from and living in the area he knew all the back roads where we could dodge the Military Police. Although I could drive a car I did not have an official driving licence and when we pulled into a Military garage for petrol or oil I just showed my Military Government pass and got away with murder. Still life was now beginning to become enjoyable and the Schulte family were happy when I could take them in my spare time to see other members of their family in outstanding districts.

I was enjoying myself and the weather was very good although I was pining to go home and see my family. With working in the office I was now 13 stone so decided to join a physical training school to get my weight down to a normal 12 stone. It was still an asset to be able to have the Schulte family as my friends and Kurt was a good pal. He had been like myself an ordinary citizen until he received his calling up papers to join the Army. He had never joined the Nazi party and so he said Army life was made harder for him as they tried to break his spirit. We were two of a kind as we both hated the Governments for starting wars and causing terrible hardship to the ordinary citizen. Very soon I would be saying my goodbyes to the family who had almost adopted me and I knew in my heart I would miss them, but I did not want to keep in touch. It was a memory which I know would always remember and cherish and they had made and given me a happy time and rescued me from boredom. Yes, on my last days tears flowed and Kurt was really said, but I wished them all a fond farewell. My Army friends were soon to also depart to England as their and my twelve months extended service was up and replacements had arrived from England to take our place and carry on the good work. My family wanted me to go back on a holiday later in the year, but as I had started work and met the girl of my dreams I knew as Renee said, "It was better a happy memory than a sad farewell re-union".

The Fighting Pioneers

Just listen to my song of joy – come on boys make a crowd
I want to tell you a story which makes us old veterans proud
It didn't take us centuries – in fact it was just a few years
To earn our official name – "Royal Fighting Pioneers"

You have heard of the "Fighting Fifth" the "Diehards" and the "Bays"
The "Lincolns" the "Bedford's" or "Fusiliers" and "Greys"
The "Scotties" in their kilts or the noble "Grenadiers"
Now you're going to hear a bit about the "Fighting Pioneers"

Of course we're not real fighting men – Lord Haw Haw blew the gaff.
He called us "wrecks and ruin" and termed us "riff and raff"
But I think old Hitler told him as we held his "Jerry" band
As we fought them back at Arras and Boulogne and faced them hand to hand.

We fought beside the "Durham's" with picks and hammer shanks
We then pinched "Jerries" Tommy guns and blew up his blinkin tanks
We held the Germans back for days while our troops reached Dunkirk by the Score
We've earned our share of honours and hope to win some more

We fought with the 1st Army in North Africa – then across the "Meddy" Sea
To invade Sicily, Salerno and Anzio then Rome in Italy.
We were support troops at Monte Cassino in the mud and snow – but soon
Churchill wanted us veteran soldiers for "D" Day on the vital sixth of June

I've only told you a little bit but in time you'll hear the rest
Sometime in the future when the war is over and we're having a well earned rest
But we've had enough of jobes and jokes and the infantry's blinkin sneers
Because we've shown our place is amongst the best – 'cause we're the Fighting Pioneers

World War 2 has been over for 59 years and though my memoirs have been written I wish to add the following:

It is now 2004 and we have been visiting our Royal Pioneer Corps Barracks for most years at Bicester, but at Northampton until 1993. As we meet a few of the WW2 veterans chat about the days of the years 1939-1945 and often pondered over how different our lives would have been if those years had been peaceful. Of course most conversations start with "Do you remember the ...../" On these occasions when we are invited into one of the mess rooms, Corporals, Sergeants or even Officers the new recruits of the Regular Army often crowd around as they want to hear about the details of warfare. What do we tell them? They almost demand to know by offering to buy us drinks for the rest of our weekend and they wish to know all the details. You have already read in my memoirs of the happenings during war-time, but we tell the young lads of 19/20/21 years of age that the one thing that stands out and always will was the camaraderie amongst the enlisted soldiers of a regiment. However, it may be better if I started at the beginning of our journey to St David's Barracks in Bicester and carry on from there.

'We both hated the Governments for starting wars'

Approximately in March or April of the appropriate year we receive a Newsletter from the Secretary of the Association containing a form which details the action to be taken by the member who wishes to attend the reunion. If your application is approved it is returned to you duly signed and a ticket number is given. Then begins the task of how to travel down to Bicester and who are to be your travelling companions. Some years we have been lucky and have travelled by car which takes approximately three hours. By the pronoun we, I mean Hugh Rooney, Arthur Sullivan and myself. On the occasions we have travelled by coach the following schedule had to be strictly adhered to as timing was an important factor. I arranged to book our weekend at Bicester and also to book our seats on the National Express Coach. As our coach left Norton Street Liverpool at 0910 hrs we arranged to make our meeting time 0845 hrs, so as to be able to be on time and get the best travelling seats. We then proceeded to Manchester where we exchanged drivers with the coach which had just travelled up from Birmingham. We arrived at Birmingham at 1230 hrs and then located our next coach to travel to Oxford. As it was to be an hour's wait in the Bus Station we forced our way to a table in a cafe and opened our haversack rations, tea or coffee and sandwiches. We often exchange some of our sandwiches and as Arthur always brought cakes we were well catered for the next part of the journey. A visit to the toilet to wash and brush-up brought the time to around 1300 hrs so we went to the next location to catch our coach to Oxford. There was always a long queue, but we made our way to the front waving our tickets and saying "We have reserved seats". People in the queue were very kind to us veterans and ensured we got on the coach with the minimum of effort. Showing the driver our tickets he said "Sit anywhere 'lads' as there are no reserved seats". This information we already knew, but it worked every time. Arriving at Oxford at about 1530 hrs we enquired at the information office about the bus to the shopping centre car park in Bicester. It was leaving in about 10 minutes and the next one would be about an hour. Once again we used our ingenuity to get three places on the bus and soon the bus was full of people, some of whom were standing. The journey was tiresome as we visited every village and even stopped at places which were not official stops to let the local people get off. The nine mile journey took 50 minutes and we were getting a bit tired then, but we still had to ring a special telephone number to inform the guardroom at the Barracks that some weary veterans were waiting transport. Fifteen minutes later our army vehicle arrived and we "clambered" aboard.

The journey to the Barracks did not take long, but we were challenged by the guards who were armed with AK47 guns (Ed note: sorry George but they were SA80 – the British Army has never been issued with AK47's). However our passes were okay and so we made our way to the guardroom where we again showed our passes and received an envelope which gave our billeting instructions and tickets for our meals. We then "clambered" back onto our vehicle and the driver drove us to our barrack rooms. There we were met by a CSM who asked us if our rooms were okay and not upstairs and instructed an NCO to guide us to our rooms. The first time I went was strange, but Arthur who had been going for years soon decided we should be in one room for five and not split up. The CSM was called for his advice and decided that this could be done by removing the names on the doors and putting our names in their places.

There was Arthur, Hughie, Bill Whitby, Taff Luker and I now in this room. As we were the first arrivals we could settle down and make our beds up ready for the night. We were doing this operation when another chap arrived and wanted to occupy the spare bed, but "Taffy" whose name was Derek and Arthur told him to get lost as he snored too much. "Taffy" then wrote on the door notice our names and added an additional one as a ghost person. "Taffy" was our standard bearer and had been in the regular Army for 18 years until the Government decided to amalgamate certain Regiments as a large Army was not required. "Taffy" decided to leave the Welsh Fusiliers and serve his next four years in the Royal Pioneer Corps. He never regretted his action and always praised the pioneers for camaraderie and friendliness.

He was a smashing fellow and friendly and I still keep in touch with him. According to the instructions on our programme for the weekend we were entitled to a meal on our arrival so we made our way over to the canteen. Everything in the room was spotless and nobody was present to serve us. We called out and a Sergeant came from the kitchen at the rear and we asked him when our meal was being served. "Sorry lads", he said "but the meals are not served after 1700 hours. As we trooped out of the room we met RSM Thomas who knew Taffy and he asked us if we had enjoyed our meal. We given him a précis of what had occurred and he took us to the Sergeants' Mess and after a few choice words to the staff we were given a pile of sandwiches and cakes and tea. He apologised for our previous predicament, but said orders are orders, and they have to be obeyed so the Sergeant was right in closing at 1700 hrs.

After returning to our billet we lay down on our beds as we had been up that morning at 0645 hrs to ensure we caught the coach from Liverpool and it was now 1800 hrs, nearly 12 hours since our breakfast. What a journey and a first day. At 2000 hours we had to present ourselves at the Corporals mess where we were made welcome and the drinking and reminiscing started. Taffy and Arthur warned us to take it easy on the free drinks as we had to go into the Sergeants' and finally the Officers' Messes.

'It is amazing that we are not drunk because everyone wants to buy the veterans a round of drinks'

At 2100 hrs prompt the RSM appeared and informed us we were to follow him and he would take us to the Sergeants' Mess. We said our thanks to the lads who had entertained us for the past hour and said we would meet them on parade in the morning. In the Sergeants' Mess the evening was in full flow and we were invited to occupy any tables and chairs and our orders would be taken. The next hour was riotous with singing and telling jokes (mine were those I had 'borrowed' from Albert Ashe) and then at 2200 hours the RSM took us to the Officers' Mess as we had been invited by the Colonel to join them. What a contrast, as the Officers' were seated at tables and we had to go outside onto a veranda.

A couple of soldiers acting as barmen came over and took orders and whispered we would be lucky if we received any more. However, it wasn't that bad, but the atmosphere was quieter so we left at 2230 hours and made our way back to our room. No! We were not drunk and merry but capable of polishing our shoes and medals for the morning parade and service. Arthur had mentioned to me to bring a padlock and keys to lockup up the clothes locker as a precaution. Once again the camaraderie showed as mates from the other rooms were popping in and asking if 'anyone got any brasso' or ' got a button stick or polish' was the various requests from the 'lads'. All were finally sorted out and the good humour and talk finally ceased as we remembered breakfast was at 0800 hours. We all had a good nights sleep only punctured by doors banging as occupants made their visits to the toilets or on one occasion one occupant was carried out on his bed and left outside in the open air because he snored too much.

The weather was good and it didn't rain. Breakfast was self-service but plenty of good food of eggs, bacon, tomato, black pudding, fried bread and beans preceded by cornflakes or cereals and lashings of tea or coffee, and there was seconds if required. On arriving back at our billet we all carried out our polishing and brushing our blazers and trousers and a final polish to our medals and badge. One volunteer would give the floor a brush and close the windows. "Taffy" being the standard bearer would be polishing the brasses on the standard and ensuring the holster was clean and polished and his gauntlets were blancoed white. As we had to muster outside at 1015 hours ready to march off at 1030 hours most of us made our way while those who were unable to march wended their way at their own pace to the War Memorial about 400 yards away. Brigadier Hickman wearing his bowler hat and medals on his suit called out "Veterans of the Royal Pioneer Corps fall in". We made our way to the assembly point and fell in three ranks with the Officers on our right at the rear. We were at ease position as the Brigadier was speaking to some of the 'lads' who he knew. He then asked who was the oldest and it was Arthur Peters he was 86 years old and had been a CSM at Oldham during the war. His job in the Army was training or overseeing the training of all raw recruits, but as a friendly person we were to find out he was not. The chap who had travelled the farthest was someone who lived in Berwick-on-Tweed. Finally we were called to attention and were told to march smartly and in step and not to let the veterans down. Bloody cheek, as if we would "Left turn" and then "By the right quick march" and so we set out. It is very strange how one feels when marching as it makes one feel younger and proud to be a veteran. Soon the order came to "Halt" as we reached the RV position and the orders given "Right Turn" and "Stand at Ease". We relaxed our shoulders and muscles as from the assembly of spectators came a loud clapping noise to welcome us. That moment often brought our eyes close to tears. The regulars were already in position and then the padre came slowly forward as were brought to attention. For the next 25 minutes we could not move position and we wondered if we would make it, but determined to rise to the occasion. As veterans we knew we could relax any stiffness by a slight bend of the knees and wriggling our toes for a few seconds and let our shoulders sag. These movements are never noticeable, but are very helpful allowing us to maintain our posture and not spoil the ceremony.

At one time we used to march about 50 yards and before being dismissed the CO would tell us how good we had been and then arrangements were made for the photograph. However we now form up and march towards the Regimental Headquarters where the COs' of 23 and 168 Regiments and the Association Chairman take the salute. The photograph is then taken and we then make our way to the Association Annual General Meeting in the Dining Hall, transport is available to the AGO but I used to walk and have, on occasion, helped Bill Rowland's, who was semi-invalid and we struck up a good friendship. He does not attend the weekends now as he had to use a wheelchair, he does have an electric wheelchair but this form of transport is not allowed on the Motorway from the East Coast of Essex.

After the AGO we then attend the lunch which is always ready in the Bain Marie's, where a wonderful selection awaits us. This is where we meet up with all the veterans as some only come for the day. The banter and chatter is incessant. After the meal we go back to our room and change our clothing because in the afternoon it is Fete time. This consists of about 20 stalls all manned by soldiers and consist of coconut shies, knocking the tins down, darts, football, shooting the ball through holes and lots of others. There is also a dummy grenade throwing and to check accuracy of the winner the RSM is in charge. Tug of War teams and a football march, rifle and AK47 (SA80!) target shooting are watched by all the crowd of spectators and the day is thoroughly enjoyed. Just when you think it is finished the Regular Pioneers of 23 Regiment come roaring in on their assault vehicles with guns blazing and attack a make shift building. The enemy inside the building are soon defeated and all leave spattered in paint, but the best of friends and the next stop is the bar.

We make our way back to our billet and then proceed to the dining room for tea. Back to our room for a rest and then get spruced up for the Saturday evening gala night. Transport takes us down at 2000 hrs to the Garrison Theatre, here we are joined with about 500 Army personnel and their ladies where we enjoy a drinking session. It is amazing that we are not drunk because everyone wants to buy the veterans a round of drinks. Dancing, if capable, to a DJ and then at 2130 hours comes the banquet. A regular soldier is detailed to each veteran to ensure he receives all the ingredients of the meal he wishes to have. It is then carried to our table where we show our appreciation by eating a lot. At midnight or so we request our transport and make our way back to bed – after having a whip-round for the driver. Next morning we are up at our usual time as breakfast is at 0800-0930 hours, but as we have to make arrangements in the guardroom for when our transport is available we cannot have a lie-in. The breakfast is the usual good ingredients so we stuff ourselves as we do not know when our next meal will be. Some of us veterans, Arthur, Hughie and I ensured the previous night that the Sergeant cook and his staff enjoyed any surplus pints of beer we had left on our table so we button holed him at Breakfast and asked so innocently, "If he could make us a packed lunch". He winked and said "Come back later when things are a bit quieter".

We concurred and were rewarded with a box of various edibles and a good wish for a safe journey. We said our farewells to all the lads and a wish that we all meet again the next year. As our bus leaves Bicester Town Centre at 0930 hrs we ensure we three are at the guardroom in time for the transport to take us to catch the bus. Our coach leaves Oxford at 1315 hrs so we have time to eat our lunch and have a cup of tea. Oxford is a dead town on a Sunday. We arrive in Liverpool at approximately 1800 hrs and we separate to catch our buses for our last journey home. It is always and enjoyable, but sad week-end, but Je Ne Regrette Rien. One wish cannot be fulfilled, I wish I had joined the Association in 1947. We think of our comrades we left behind in Africa, Italy and Normandy and the following saying comes to mind:

"Only the Dead have seen the end of war – the living never"

We have turned the last page – now's the time to close the book.

GD Pringle, 1st July 2004. ■

From Salerno to Vietri

Translation of a diary of Lt Rocholl, 16 Recce Bn, 16 Panzer Division, 7-14 Sept 1943 at the Battle of Salerno.

Report: Lt Rocholl
Picture: RPC Archive

FOR MANY weeks now the Allies had been entrenched in Sicily and it was apparent to all of us that the long-awaited threatened and well-prepared invasion of the European mainland by the Allies would shortly have to take place, if they wished to avoid the unfavourable October weather. We were ready for anything and already on 6 Sep a "Stand-by" alarm had been given.

At 1400 hrs on 7 Sep a call came through from the G1 (Ops) of the Regiment; "Attention – Operation FEUERSBRUNST". This was alarm No 1 – the "Stand-by", which meant that we could reckon with an early enemy attempt to land. This news, however, made no special impression on us, as we had had similar alarms often enough; consequently, we did not interrupt our afternoon siesta.

Suddenly, about 1630 hrs, the G1 (Ops) of the Regt came through once again: "Attention, Operation ORKAN". This was Alarm No 2 – the "Get Ready", and meant than an enemy convoy was actually in sight; all preparations to move to be made immediately.

Thereupon began a feverish activity, especially among the three Recce patrols (2 Armd Cars with 2cm guns, 1 armd car – W/T – Ed) which were to be employed, in the event of an attempted enemy landing, at SALERNO, CASTEL-LAMMARE and VIETRI. Within a short time, I was able to announce that my patrol, which was to proceed to SALERNO , WAS READY TO MOVE. When I reached the Coy HQ, to obtain from the OC Coy my battle instructions and to telephone to the Signals Officers for the W/T ciphers, I learned that Italy had unconditionally surrendered. At first, the news came as a shock to me, but afterwards I realised that I had foreseen all this, and, in fact, had expected it.

At last everything was finished. I shook hand with the OC Coy and the other OC Recce Patrols and went down, my map case under my arm, to my three armd cars which were stationed in front of the church awaiting my orders.

I called the crews together and explained briefly the military and political situation, our assignment and the W/T cipher. "Mount" – "Take Positions". I fixed the map-case into place, loosened my revolver in the holster – one could not tell how the Italians would behave now. With a quick glance around to see that everything was in order, I signalled to the OC's of the other two armd cars; "Start up Engines" = "Forward". At a very high speed we proceeded down the motor road to SALERNO. Everywhere Italians were standing in groups, deep in excited discussions; they had obviously also heard of the capitulation of their country.

Thanks to our fast journey, we arrived, as I intended we should, in daylight at the Observation Point I had chosen, and I was

able to make all necessary arrangement before dark.

The OP was located on the top of a mountain ridge near the sea, south-east of SALERNO. From this spot I had a view NW towards SALERNO-VIETRI and SSE along the entire coast and the FAIANO Plain. I was glad to see that in the neighbourhood of the OP a Hy MG section of 3 Coy had taken up position, so that together we formed a small combat force. I contacted the Sgt in charge of the MG section. Now everything was in order, with the exception of the Armd Cars.

Where should I place them, and in what way to give the best reception for the W/T car. I could not leave them all on the road, as this ran along the forward slope of the hill, and the cars would be too open to enemy fire. On the other hand, I did not want them too far away. Consequently I placed the W/T car facing back along the road, just around the bend in the road in front of the OP. In this spot the W/T car, even if it meant using a high aerial and 80 kw, would have good reception.

Darkness descended, and as, apart from the nearby noisy Italian post, nothing was to be heard or seen, I ordered a few potatoes to be fried on the ESBIT cooker. Scarcely had my lads started to peel them when the Sgt from the MG section came running up to me in great excitement. "Sir, a DR has just arrived from Regt HQ, I have been ordered to take over the Italian position. Would you, as an officer, undertake this mission?" Good! I made my arrangements; one half of the section was to give me cover and to open fire if I signalled with a white tracer. I went with the other half of the section and in no time at all, had disarmed the personnel in the Italian Hy MG nest. I told them that their country had capitulated and that, after being disarmed, they could make their way home. It happened just as I had expected. They threw their weapons away, and showed their joy that the war was now over for them, and they could go home.

Much more difficult were the negotiations with the Arty position, which was under the command of a Lt. First of all I spoke with a 2Lt who showed great fear, and didn't deserve to be an officer.

When I requersted his revolver, he handed it over without question. I next approached the OC Bty, and found him quite the opposite – he behaved as an officer and gentleman. I explained the position to him, of which he knew nothing, and demanded the unconditional surrender to me of the Arty position.

He asked permission to contact his superior officer, but I had to refuse him this. He did not seem at all keen to comply with my order, and I was forced to give him a short-term ultimatum – to hand over or be fired on by my men. When the officer realised that it was a case of 'either – or' he came to a decision, and handed over his Bty.

Some of my men fetched out the Italian personnel, fell them in and disarmed them. Later we sent them home. I gave the Lt his revolver, however, without ammunition. The whole thing did not take more than about 45 minutes. It was then about 0815 hrs, when we got back to our fried potatoes, but they tasted wonderful. We were just enjoying this meal when we were surprised by a terrific explosion. We sprang to our feet, to witness a terrifying, yet beautiful spectacle. The mole in the SALERNO harbour had been blown up by the engineers. Explosion followed explosion, and soon warehouses and numerous small schooners in the harbour were on fire. The warehouses were apparently empty, as they burnt to the ground in no time; on the other hand, a large boat burned the whole night through.

Slowly the time passed. We were all keyed up. Towards midnight we were disturbed by a sound overhead. These weren't British planes! German bombers! Flying out to sea. The moon shone as a weak crescent, very low on the horizon. We could recognise nothing at sea.

Suddenly on the horizon terrific AA fire opened up: "A convoy". The broad curtain of AA fire showed us clearly the full length of the convoy. One could recognise especially the special AA ships, with the 4 barrelled guns firing uninterruptedly.

'At dawn we witnessed a magnificent spectacle: the entire Allied landing fleet lay in the Bay of Salerno.'

The first wave was over. An hour later the second wave flew in from the sea. We could quite clearly see that the entire convoy had advanced far into the bay of SALERNO.

Soon afterwards heavy fire (I estimated it to be from cruisers) was opened on the coastal area before FALANO, and then followed a new terrifying picture; the British opened up from the sea with rocket mortars (Nebelwerfers). One could feel the whistling and whining shots and the reverberations of the explosions. Soon afterwards we saw that the MG along the coast had opened up 'Tommy' with his landing barges must be very close in now. All this time, the heavy ships guns bombarded the area around PONTECAGHNO-FAIANO.

Up till now my reports to Regt were going through so fast that W/L operator had his hands full, encoding and despatching. But he managed. I was using a 80 kw and a high aerial. That means, with the strength of a medium sender like COLOGNE we could easily be detected, but fortunately the Allies were too busy with their landings to intercept my station. We continued with this luck all the next day.

Now followed a break. One could still hear the sounds of battle from the mainland, but could determine nothing definite, as it was still an hour from day-break. Shortly after 0600 hrs it became quickly light. I immediately sent my armd cars down below, and remained above with a Sgt and three men as messengers. We moved into the Bty position which the Italians had evacuated.

At dawn our astonished eyes witnessed a magnificent spectacle: the entire Allied landing fleet lay in the Bay of SALERNO. Two ships of about 20,000 tons were lying near the coast near FAIANO, unloading under Arty fire. Among other things, we could see tanks in the distance, which meant that the Allies had succeeded in gaining some ground, as they are usually the last thing to be landed.

It wasn't long before daylight made things unpleasant for the Allies which was very understandable, as the entire landing fleet lay before us as on a platter. Consequently, numerous destroyers started laying a smoke screen. From 0900 hrs onwards the main landing point was continually under smoke, so that we could not see what was happening there.

At about 1000 hrs a new convoy appeared from the West, moving in the direction of the port of SALERNO, but it stopped some 7 miles from the shore. A single landing barge with some 12 to 14 men left this convoy, and all along, approached the destroyed mole. Still 100 m to go, still 50 m, only 25 m now. Suddenly a shot close to the barge. An 8.8 cm of an AA Bty located on the rear slope of our mountain, had fired, but too short. Another shot, close to the barge. The stern dips deep into the sea. We wait to see it sink completely, but what happens? The little boat turns sharply round – that caused the deep dip of the stern – and paddles, as if nothing were the matter, back to the main force. These were regular fellows.

Another 15 minutes passed. Suddenly a few shots whistled close over our heads and landed behind our ridge. More shots came over. Had we been spotted and they had fired wide? We did not have to wait long to find the solution. The landing barge had spotted the AA position and 'Tommy' was shooting it up. The first salvo was 20 m short, the second was right on the target. The entire Bty was knocked out.

Later on the convoy which was lying off SALERNO turned towards the main landing point at FAIANO.

During the entire day, this gigantic landing fleet lay quietly and undisturbed in the bay. In spite of the smoke screen I was able to count, excluding the numerous small landing barges and the stuff already on the beaches, 365 units. This picture remained unchanged during the whole day. Around mid-day, the ships fired a few shots towards SALERNO, but apart from that nothing special happened.

About 1600 hrs, 3 Coy left their positions, in order to occupy the second line of defence at the road block North of FRATTE. Why this was done, I do not know, seeing that 3 Coy had had no contact with the enemy. At any rate, they were off, and with them, our Hy MG Section. And so I was left on the ridge with my handful of men, armed with revolvers, sending an occasional message down to the armd cars. Time went on, and it was already 1800 hrs. Not anticipating any trouble, we sat there in the grass and ate a few grapes, when suddenly some MG shots whistled past our ears. "Take Cover". Damnation, what was it? Once again the unpleasant tat-tat-tat, but this time from behind the Bty position. Two men of a British recce unit had approached on rubber soles to within 210 metres of our position. There was nothing for us to do, but to scurry away to the left and attempt to reach our armd cars. This we successfully did.

I deliberated: as up till now no orders had been received from Regt to withdraw, but our OP had been discovered, I had to establish a new point. If we remained up on the ridge, we would certainly be wiped out in the night. I drove with my patrol into the now uninhabited town of SALERNO. It was a ghastly feeling to drive through a destroyed and dead city, where, however, one may find an A/Tk gun hidden around every corner. I drove through the whole city to the sanatorium, where I intended to set up a new OP and from where I would have at least a new road of retreat open. We had been there scarcely more than five minutes when a priest came up and beseeched us not to shoot, to give thought to the sick, a strange conception of war these Italians have! However, I was able to do him this favour, as an order came through then by W/T, to drive on to the road block. It was already 2000 hrs and dark when I drove through SALERNO for the second time wand was able to establish

that it was still free of enemy troops.

On the return journey through several small villages, the Italians waved to us and threw flowers on our armd cars, shouting "Viva Inglesi". These had been our Allies and now presumed that the British were already on the march.

Without further incident, we reached the road block, behind which I made a halt, in order to contact the A/Tk gun comd, who was standing there beside his weapon.

I dispersed my armd cars behind the block and drove on a MC to Regtl Battle HQ, but was unable to find it as it had been moved in the meantime. I drove back to the road block and found that the quartermaster who had been looking for us, had arrived with rations and post. I drove with him immediately to HQ and reported. It was now 2300 hrs. The OC was asleep, but the Adjt assured me that the OC had been particularly pleased with my messages and dismissed me. I returned to my quarters and found that my patrol had already come in. I called the crews together and expressed my appreciation, especially to the W/T operator who had really earned the greatest praise. He had remained without break at his set for 32 hrs, and had even gone to the latrine with the earphone on, and his message pad in his hand. Extraordinary will-power on the part of a 33 year old! Soon after we ate and then slept like the dead. The next day my patrol was given a well-earned rest. The Allies had advanced to the block, and had liquidated out 7.5 cm A/Tk gun. During the night there had been the danger that 3 Coy which were in the neighbourhood of the block on the left flank would be surrounded, but the enemy were driven back. On 10 Sep there was heavy fighting around the block, in which the Allies suffered severe casualties, and were finally driven back by a counter-attack. Among other things, an A/Tk gun was captured.

In the night from 10 to 11 Sep, contact with the enemy was lost. As a result, on the morning of the 11 Sep, my patrol was sent out to contact the enemy again. We reached FRATTE without hindrance, but on leaving it in the South; we were fired on by infantry weapons. Our mission as such was fulfilled, but I had to await orders at the Northern exit of FRATTE.

I placed my armd cars close to the left side of the road (the sea-side) as there was a perpendicular slope here, about 5 m high. This gave us the necessary cover from the ships' guns which were firing uninterruptedly on a bridge about 50 m behind us. The spotter for this firing was on a hill about 2 kms away, and could see us clearly and obviously wanted to catch us. Nearer and nearer the shells dropped with shrapnel flying past uncomfortably close. Involuntarily one ducked together in the car, although that would not have given the slightest protection. Suddenly there was a sharp crack and a deafening explosion – a shell had exploded on the edge of the slope directly over the second armd car. All the earth and dirt seemed to drop into our open turrets. This was a bit too much, and I ordered the armd cars to withdraw under a bridge about 200 metres in the rear. Here we met a clerk from the Coy office, with orders for us to return.

Parachute Troops

The following two days were quiet, particularly for us in the Recce , who are used for three things only:

1. To make contact with the enemy.
2. To make contact with neighbouring forces.
3. To secure open flanks.

As a result, I had plenty of opportunity to be in Battle HQ and to study the situation map. According to this, the following counter attack was planned for the evening of 12 Sep.

One Regt with its two Bns was to take Height 522 in a night attack, following this, one Bn would remain on this height, and the second would take over the neighbouring height, lying to the south-east, and hold it. If this succeeded tanks and Panzergrenadiers would sweep round from the north on FAIANO and take it. If this was also successful, Recce troops would occupy SALERNO and then move out towards VIETRI, while the HG Div would take VIETRI from the north and then move eastwards. In this way the entire Allied front would collapse. But the plan failed because the OC of the Inf Regt was in charge and had too much confidence in himself and in his Regt. During this time I was in charge of the Coy, as the OC had to be continually with the Commander. The Coy lay more or less quietly although we had to change position several times, as we were often between the Bty positions and unnecessarily exposed to the strong enemy arty fire. For this reason I decided in the end to move the Coy to the old position at PENTA, as PENTA was beyond the range of the arty fire, and our quarters there were situated at the foot of a hill, standing between us and the enemy.

We reached this position about 2100 hrs and were looking forward to a quiet night. With great care we established our camp on the spot to which we had already spent many weeks. The guards were posted and soon we all lay in the deepest sleep.

I was awakened suddenly by a violent shaking of my arm and found a guard bending over me and pointing towards the sky, "Lieutenant! Lieutenant! Paratroops!" I was still half asleep, but I forced my eyes open and saw the amazing sight for myself. While in the distance one heard the faint droning of the departing planes, 50-60 paratroops, still at a height of some 160 metres, swung towards the ground.

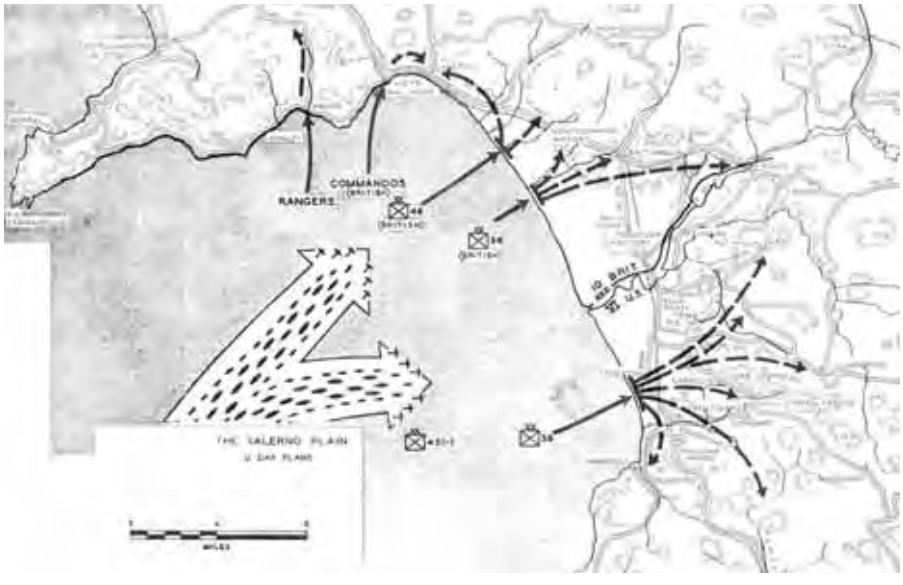
As it was a bright moonlight night, one could recognise every single white fleck in the heavens. I quickly overcame the moment of terror and roused the whole Coy, "To your arms! Prepare to fire!" Like cats the gunners sprang into the turrets, and soon fourteen 2 cm guns and some 20 MGs were firing on the descending enemy.

This continued until the angle of fire became too small, and our own men were in danger. "Cease Fire!" Now we had to move quickly. I have mentioned before, that we had camped at the foot of a thickly-wooded hill. The paratroops were landing all around us, but most of them about half-way up the hill, so that they would be able, under cover of the trees, to approach close to us and place stick-grenades or similar 'toys' on our armd cars. With this in mind, I ordered all armd cars to proceed without delay to the main road and secure it from attack. When this was done, I set off towards PENTA with a few men to carry out a recce. Nothing was to be seen, we searched a few houses but could find no trace whatever of the paratroops. In this way we reached the last house in PENTA, which I also intended to search. I went up to the door and found it locked. Two of my men tried to force it and finally burst it open. At the same moment, three automatic rifles opened up from the house and my men were lucky to escape injury. So that's where they were! One, two, three grenades were our prompt reply. A few bursts with our automatics and we forced our way into the house. Pitch black! I risked it and flashed my torch around the room, calling out 'Hands Up'. There were 8-10 paratroops, apparently wounded, in the hallway. They blinked in the light and hesitantly raised their arms. The remainder had escaped through the back door of the house, but it was too difficult to go after them then. We took the prisoners and all the material we found and started back heavily laden.

On arrival back at the cars, the prisoners and booty were thoroughly examined. They were American paratroops from Sicily, on their first combat mission, which was to interrupt traffic on the road between AVELLO and SALERNO, to the rear of the German front. Among the material we found a sack with mines, two A.Tk rifles, two light MG, two light mortars and two days' rations for 30 men.

Each man was excellently equipped, one 12 mm Tommy gun, one 12 mm revolver, three hand-grenades, numerous fuses, knife, compass, maps printed on silk, a brass knuckle-duster-knife, cigarettes and excellent first aid equipment.

During the next two days I undertook three further patrols on foot, during which I brought in another six prisoners, beating them at their own game. The patrol, which consisted of four men, armed with automatic rifles, revolvers and hand-grenades, had to wrap rags around their boots – we did not have rubber soles like the Americans – and in this way would approach the enemy unnoticed. Every time we were successful. ■



■ **Field of Remembrance, 2009** Picture: Norman Brown

■ **Field of Remembrance, 2009** Picture: Norman Brown

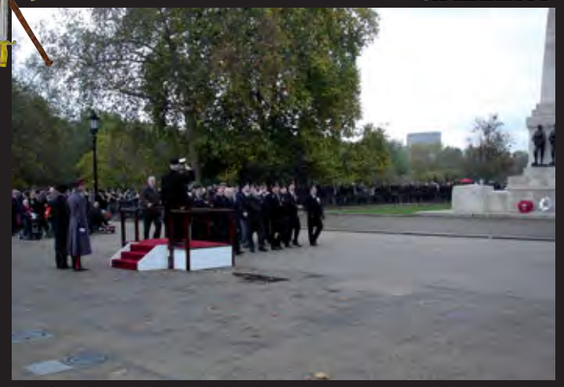
■ **Mr Brian Freeth, Wootton Bassett** Picture: Supplied

■ **WO2 Colin Bell and wife Ruth** Picture: Supplied

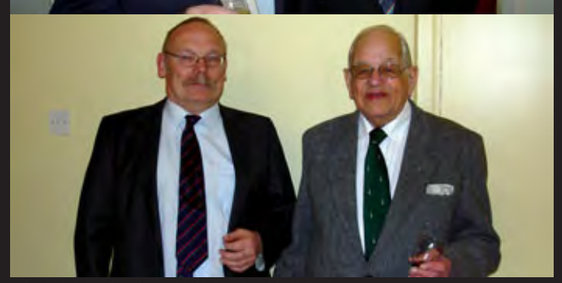
■ **39/93 Club, Fareham (with pink bag)** Picture: Supplied

■ **London Lunch, November 2009** Picture: Supplied

■ **Staff Sergeant Patrick Donaghue with wife Jane** Picture: Sergeant S Barker



■ **RPC contingent at Cenotaph Parade, 2009** Picture: Norman Brown



■ **Lt Col John Starling with Helen Fry, Mr H Rothman, Maj (Retd) Geoffrey Perry and Mr C Anson** Picture: Norman Brown

■ **CO and RSM 23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC, Chelsea Hospital** Picture: Supplied

■ **Past and Present Officers Dinner, November 2009** Picture: Supplied

■ **Officers & Senior NCO's, 23 Pioneer Regiment, Cyprus** Picture: Supplied


DADDY
YOUR MY
HERO

Tunnels full of cheese sandwiches

WW2 Memoirs Lieutenant Edward Lambert Hayball - Gloucestershire Regiment and Pioneers Corps

Report: Edward Lambert Hayball
Picture: Edward Lambert Hayball

EDWARD LAMBERT HAYBALL was born in Bristol on July 14th, 1911. His father, Edwin Lewis Hayball, was a company Sergeant Major in the Royal Gloucestershire Regiment. His mother, Sarah Sale, was the daughter of a local shopkeeper and picture-framer. CSM Hayball died in Mesopotamia (present day Iraq) of wounds received in the Dardanelles expedition in March 1917. Sarah opened a sweetshop in Lower Castle Street, Bristol, and lived with her two sons - Ted, as he was known, and his younger brother Peter - over the shop. Ted attended the local Church of England School, and, after leaving school at 14, was employed in several jobs in central Bristol. Grief at the loss of her husband and financial difficulties in the depression of the late twenties eventually overwhelmed Sarah: she became mentally ill, and according to the custom of the time, was placed in a mental hospital, where she later died.

After living with his grandparents for a short time, Ted decided to follow his father into the Gloucesters. During service in India Ted availed himself of the educational opportunities offered by the army, and after his return to civilian life was studying for the entrance exam to H.M. Custom Service, while working in a factory in Bristol. But he was then recalled to the army at the outbreak of war. These memoirs begin at that point and cover the duration of the Second World War.

Ted had intended to publish these memoirs, but died before this could be accomplished. The text printed here is exactly as he wrote it, but has been edited by his daughter Jane with the help of his son Richard and myself, his wife. We have added footnotes giving clarification or background information, and have added a bibliography listing the sources that we used. Ted's memoirs were all based on his memories, except where he states otherwise.

Constance Hayball
January 2009

Chapter 1: 'Once more…'

I looked at the grim stone walls of Horfield Barracks, Bristol, the depot of the Gloucestershire Regiment. *([1] The Barracks was by the Gloucester Road, entered by an imposing arched gateway bearing the date 1847. They were significantly altered in 1873 when the Barracks became a Local Military Centre under the Army Re-organisation Act. The buildings were demolished in 1966 apart from the chapel, which is a listed building and is now used as offices).* My feelings were mixed with relief at being released from the boredom of factory life balanced by the grim prospect of war. The sergeant at the gate greeted me with "Look what the tide's washed in." It was what he said many times that morning to other army reservists.

It was my second return that year *([2] It was 2nd September 1939, Ted had been in the army from November 1931 to February 1939, serving over five years in India. After discharge he had been working in the Bristol Aircraft factory at Filton, Bristol. As a reservist he was amongst the first to be called up: the first period was for two months from June to August 1939).* A few months earlier, as war loomed, I had been called back to help train the militia, the first conscripts. My duties had been light. I was the room orderly and my job was to be a sort of uncle to them and to ease them gently into army ways. I showed them how to make their bedding and kit ready for inspection. A soldier's mattress then consisted of three square sections which were put in one pile when placed out for inspections. Previously they had been wrapped in some nondescript light brown material, and therefore known as 'biscuits'. However, in order to make the new entrants feel more at home these mattresses were now covered in brightly patterned material. I showed them how to clean their rifles and how to lay their kit out for inspection. Although that had been a doddle of a job, this time - two days before the war really started - the Army did not look so inviting. The main barrack blocks were already full with Militia and Reservists so I was directed to the gym where I met some old sweats *([3] British slang for an experienced soldier, dating from after the First World War)* from my Indian days.

After a few days we went to a camp at Severn Beach on the Bristol Channel near a rifle range at New Passage where we put in some practice. *([4] This is Pilning Rifle Range, which is situated north-west of Bristol near the village of Pilning, overlooking the River Severn, between the two Severn bridges)* I was detailed for lookout. This entailed sitting by a flagpole near the Channel and when a ship appeared I had to hoist a red flag so that firing would stop. There were not many ships. Most of them docked at Avonmouth, but there was the occasional one for Gloucester. I sat there for hours until I grew bored with my book. The heroine never suffered a fate worse than death after all. As time went on I heard only an occasional burst of fire. I looked across to the Severn Beach Hotel. *([5] This was subsequently renamed the Severn Salmon Public House. It closed in 2002).*

Many years before, as though Weston-super-Mare, Burnham, Clevedon and Portishead were not enough, someone thought of creating another resort, which they called Severn Beach. The citizens of Bristol, Birmingham and various other places flocked there to find exactly nothing. I can't remember when the hotel was built but it certainly attracted few customers. Nothing had happened for ages and I felt thirsty so I thought I would nip across for a quick pint. I was halfway through my second pint when the landlord said 'There's a ship coming up the river.' Horror at the thought of the possibility of there being dead sailors on the ship stung me into action and I must have broken the record for the five hundred yards. Running up the flag I collapsed onto my seat. I needn't have bothered, as at that moment the call came to return to camp. On the way back I met a man who told me that the Royal Oak had been sunk by a German submarine. The war did not seem to be starting well. *([6] On the night of Friday 13th October 1939, HMS Royal Oak, a 600 foot long 29,000 ton Dreadnought battleship, was sunk by torpedoes from a German U boat which had penetrated the British Navy's main anchorage at Scapa Flow in Orkney. 833 men lost their lives, with the 2nd World War just six weeks old).*

I returned to Bristol where, due to my being an ex-signaller, I was sent to Shirehampton where I sat beside a phone. Nothing much happened but I didn't mind. I could have sat there through the entire war. Meanwhile, young conscripts were being loaded up at Avonmouth for various destinations and there were yarns about the newly joined warriors having to have their rifles loaded and unloaded when they went on and off guard – the Army will concoct rumours about anything, as I knew from my days in India. One evening for a change I went to a local hop and danced with several girls. The following morning I was called back. An A.T.S. unit was taking over. They should keep women out of the war I thought, turning chaps out of soft jobs. Back in Bristol, Horfield Barracks was full so I began a period of sleeping in various places that were to include the Bristol Rugby ground and the County Cricket ground, and eventually Eastville Park, which was full of tented accommodation. *([7] is a large Victorian park two miles north-east of Bristol city centre)* I would not have been surprised if my accommodation had included the Cathedral and Council House as well. I actually did once sleep in a Cathedral, but that lay in the future.

I did not feel too good the following morning and the Sergeant Major sent for me to help him go through some nominal rolls. The names and numbers started dancing in front of me. Finally the C.S.M. dismissed me with an ungracious 'You haven't been much help.' I decided to go out hoping the feeling would pass. I boarded a bus and as I stepped onto the platform I blacked out. When I came round I found myself in Ham Green Isolation Hospital on the Somerset side of the Avon. *([8] Ham Green House had been the home of the Bright family, one of whom was the famous physician who discovered kidney disease. Bristol Council bought the*

Georgian house and estate in 1893 because they wanted to use it as an isolation hospital, in particular for sailors with infectious diseases. Its proximity to Avonmouth meant that it was possible to treat sailors without risk of infection entering the city of Bristol). I was diagnosed with German measles and I was lying there I saw a nurse pass in the corridor. She was one of the girls I had danced with at the recent hop. The infamy of women! Perhaps she was one of Hitler's secret agents. The measles passed and I was discharged with a recommendation of light duties for a week. I thought they could have stretched it a bit and made it a week's sick leave.

Our accommodation had now changed to the Gloucestershire Cricket Ground where we slept in the dressing rooms and other places. It was there that, along with some others, I was given the pleasing news that we were booked for a draft for the Second Battalion in France. We were given a week's embarkation leave, which I spent with my younger brother and his wife in Bedminster. *([9] Ted's father was killed in the First World War, and his mother committed to an asylum in 1930, so his younger brother Pete and his wife Megan were his closest relatives).* I usually spent leave with Pete and Megan, although at first I had gone back to my last digs a few times. On another later occasion I spent it at the Union Jack Club in London. *([10] This club was in Waterloo, and had been established in 1907 to provide a place for non-commissioned servicemen and their families to stay when in London, to avoid them having to stay in less salubrious parts of the capital).* There, a plate on my cubicle stated that it had been given in memory of a midshipman of fifteen who had died in the Battle of Jutland, which cheered me no end.

Pete was rather disgruntled because his attempt to get into the Navy had failed. Unlike myself, who had only been a fixer of nuts and bolts, he was a qualified engineer. After the First World War a generous government had offered to give twenty-five pounds towards an apprenticeship for sons of war widows, provided the widow gave an equal amount. It was offered to me but factory life did not appeal so I refused it. Instead I joined up and went to India. When my brother subsequently wanted to get into the war as an artificer they asked him where he worked. When he told them that he worked at the Bristol Aircraft Company they said 'Not a chance."

Peter later joined the Home Guard where he saw service in a rocket battery. I have read many books about the war on the home front, but I have never seen mention of rocket batteries – 'Dad's Army' missed that one. After the war I endeavoured to find out more about these rocketeers. Even the Bristol Record did not know anything but they put me in contact with a man who did. I wrote to him and he kindly sent me a list of these batteries, their numbers and a map of their locations. My brother said they loaded up the rockets and then retired behind a brick wall to protect themselves from the flashback as the rockets were fired. I do not know if they managed to hit anything. *([11] Initially operated by soldiers, rocket batteries were increasingly run by the Home Guard from 1941 onwards).*

I had been told to report at noon to the Cricket Ground after my leave. As it was only about eleven, I decided to turn into the inn on the road that led up to the ground for a last drink. In there I found a few familiar faces from my days with the regiment in India, also booked for France. We only meant to have a modest pint but unfortunately time went by until it was well past the appointed hour. So on the principal that one might as well be hung for a sheep as for a lamb, we went to the Horfield Baths Cinema. I had not been there for years since as an errand boy I had miked off from my job for an afternoon and seen the 1924 silent film version of 'Peter Pan' and fallen in love with Wendy. The film this time was called 'The Doomed Battalion' and was about fighting in the Alps in the First World War. Owing to my inebriated state I could not make out whether the ill-fated battalion was Austrian or Italian. There was a feeling at the back of my mind that our own doom was waiting for us at the County Cricket Ground. When we finally reported they were not too pleased about it and we were put under open arrest. The next morning we were sent before the detachment commander, reprimanded, and fined a day's pay. All the rest of the draft had been made up to unpaid Lance Corporals. At ten the draft was paraded, and we were all set for France. After arrival at Southampton, we were all pushed into an ex-cross channel steamer filled to the gunnels with gunners, engineers and, it seemed, detachments from every infantry regiment in the army. On 18th April 1940 we reached Le Havre and went to a transit camp at Rouen, and after a few days there, we then went on to join the Second Battalion.

Chapter 2: La Belle France

The Second Battalion of the Gloucestershire Regiment was stationed at Tourmignies. They were commanded by Brigadier N.F. Somerset, whom I had last met at Gravesend. Tourmignies was a little mining village near the Belgian border, south of Lille. There was not much there other than a small estaminet. *([12] A small local bar). The 61st (as the Second was known by its pre-Cardwell numbers) ([13] In 1881 the Minister of War, Cardwell, introduced a number of reforms to the Army, including a reduction in the number of regiments, each of which were to have two battalions)* quickly divested the newcomers of their stripes saying that if there was any promotion to be done they would do it and not some lot in England.

It was here that I met again an old friend from India, Ed Drawneek. We had been together in the Signal Section in the First Battalion in India. He had been due to return to England on the same boat with me but lost a year's service because he had deserted from another regiment. For this he had served a sentence in a Scottish military gaol. The year after I had returned from India, I happened to meet an ex-Sergeant who had just come back to the barracks with that year's draft from India. This individual had lost his stripes because of a bust up with the R.S.M. He said "Drawneek's in the Duke of York." The Duke *([14] Horfield Barracks, was built on land formerly known as Royal York Crescent. The Duke of York changed its name to the Gloucester Arms a few years ago)* was opposite the barracks' gate and generations of Gloucesters must have quenched their thirst in there. So we had a jolly reunion and Ed invited me to go up to London, which I did at the first opportunity.

The Drawneeks lived in West Molesey on the Surrey side of the river. Old man Drawneek was a character. He was Latvian by birth and had taken part in the abortive Russian revolution of 1905, and had been chased through the woods by Cossacks before managing to escape to Britain. He worked for an expensive tailor in London and made me a suit – the only time I had one made by a Saville Row tailor! His English wife (the second I believe) was immediately ordered on my arrival to produce a cup of tea. This lady had hardly managed to open the kitchen door when he would bark "Woman! Why is there not a cup of tea?"

Ed was going about with a Latvian girl. She and her sisters both worked at the Latvian Embassy, and Ed and I were once invited to their place of work. This was my only visit to an embassy, although it was just to the servants' downstairs kitchen. The table seemed to be groaning under the weight of the food, most of which came in from Latvia. I hadn't seen so much food for a long time. If they lived like this downstairs, one wondered how they lived upstairs.

Ed had already seen some action in France. Various British infantry battalions had taken their turn on the Maginot Line. He went out on a patrol, which consisted of an officer and two privates, and, running into a German working party, they opened fire. The Germans quickly made themselves absent and the patrol brought in the first prisoner of the war, but as he was already dead perhaps this didn't count. *([15] See pages 242-243 Scott Daniell for an account of this incident).*

There was not much going on at Tourmignies. I used to find a field, lie down in it and read since nothing seemed to happen. Alas, it was too good to last. On 10th May 1940 the Germans invaded Belgium. We loaded up into lorries and into Belgium we went, along roads lined with refugees. *([16] On 10th May 1940 the Germans invaded the Low Countries and both the Gloucestershire battalions moved forward into Belgium, with the lead element of 48th Division (which included the 2nd Battalion)* setting off in the afternoon of the 10th (www.glosters.org.uk)) I remember passing through a village and seeing a young woman sitting on her front doorstep weeping bitterly. I felt like getting out and putting my arm around her. Up to this point I had taken the war fairly casually but this incident made me hate the Germans for all the pain, sorrow and death they were inflicting on Europe. Eventually we were out of our transport and marching. I didn't have a clue where we were marching to.

'It was too good to last. On 10th May 1940 the Germans invaded Belgium.'

One night we were marching past some Matilda tanks when Ed said "Ted, do you know where we are?" I did not know in the slightest and told him so. "Waterloo", he replied. I told him I would rather be on Waterloo station *([17] By 16th May the two Gloucester battalions were in position near the Waterloo battlefield of 1815, with the 2nd Battalion (Ted's) having gone forward at 1.00am on that day and having taken up position on the outskirts of Jolie Bois, near Mont Saint-Jean, within a mile or so of the Waterloo Memorial. But the French army had already been fatally broken, and the 2nd and 5th Battalions received the order to retreat (Scott Daniell and www.glosters.org.uk)).*

We dug in on the edge of a farm but again nothing seemed to be happening so I decided to have a scout around. The section Commander told me not to be long. I didn't intend to be, but to our left stood a large house and I wondered if anyone was there. I could not see any signs of life but at

the back a window had been left open. I climbed in and found a kitchen, a drawing room, and what appeared to be a study. On the desk lay a half-written letter – someone had left in a hurry. In the bathroom was a cupboard full of men's underwear, so I had a quick change and put my old stuff in the receptacle for dirty linen. Then I returned to my section.

The next morning we were pulled out and began to retreat. *([18] This was on 17th May).* I never knew why but perhaps they thought we were out on a limb. We began our long trek. We marched twenty-five miles a day for about three or four days, plodding down dusty roads and getting little sleep . *([19]"The troops marched wearily along roads crowded with refugees, subjected to frequent low-level bombing and machine-gun attacks from the air, with scanty rations and but little rest. Men slept as they marched, from Jolie Bois to Tournai, no man of the 2nd Gloucester's had any sleep at all, and very little food" (Scott Daniell p.247)).* I wasn't taking much interest in the places we passed through but remember going through Terlinden and Ath, and climbing along the ruined girders of a bridge at Ath. I had been given a tripod for the Bren gun to carry as well as my rifle, ammunition and equipment, and so on. This seemed rather pointless, as a man behind a tripod is a better target than one firing from a prone position. As we were passing a hedge I tipped the unnecessary object over into someone's front garden. At night we slept in barns or outhouses, or anywhere we could find.

So it went on for three days, marching, marching, marching, until about ten miles from Tournai, someone took pity on our sore feet and loaded us into lorries. The long lines of refugees were still trudging along the sides of the road. *([20] It has been suggested that the Germans purposely bombed villages so that fleeing civilians would clog up the roads and thus impede the Allied soldiers' movements).* Looking back I wish we hadn't been picked up. As we trundled into Tournai in the early morning of 19th May the Stukas *([21] The term 'Stuka' was a German abbreviation referring to any type of dive bomber. The allied servicemen, however, applied the term specifically to the Junkers type 87, which were the aircraft that bombed Ted's column in Tournai. These were ugly gull winged dive bombers which first saw service in Condor Legion in Spain in 1936. They were crewed by a pilot and wireless operator/machine gunner and would dive to their target at an angle of 80 degrees before releasing their bombs. They were fitted with a siren, which emitted a terrifying scream when diving and came to symbolize Nazi military aggression in the Blitzkrieg years. Although slow, cumbersome, and vulnerable to fighter attack, various versions saw service until the end of the was by which time they were hopelessly outdated)* found us and bombed hell out of the battalion. As the bullets swept across us, we all flung ourselves on the floor of the lorry. There was a lull and then we all scrambled out of the lorry, but just as I was on the tailboard another bomb landed nearby. The blast lifted me up and dropped me down with considerable force on my right leg. Something in my knee cracked in an agonising spasm. Tournai was full of refugees and when I picked myself up I saw burned and maimed bodies lying all around me. I managed to scramble up and hobbled towards a nearby ditch. I lay there, winded and twisted in pain, until I could focus my eyes. I found myself looking at a tiny rolled up hedgehog, fast asleep, oblivious to the world. "You lucky bastard," I said to it. We were now attacked again by the Stukas, screaming down at us with their machine guns working overtime. When they had disappeared a row of blazing lorries was left behind from which burning figures were being dragged. I jerked myself up painfully and hobbled over to the trucks, but by the time I arrived, all who could be saved had been pulled out. Some of the twisted, contorted dead were unrecognisable but I saw several men I knew. 194 men in our battalion were killed or wounded in that raid. *([22] See Scott Daniell p. 250)*

Later we were collected up and taken to a makeshift camp. The following day my knee had swollen up to a balloon. Soon we were on the move again and the C.S.M. gave me a lift in his car. At the next location we were digging in alongside a canal. My knee didn't seem to improve so I went to see the M.O. who took one look and stuck a ticket on me. With some other casualties, I was then taken to a Casualty Clearing Station in Lille. My feelings were a mixture of relief and sadness – relief at getting out and sadness at leaving my friends. At Lille I was put into an ambulance. The bunks were filled with more serious cases, one being an unconscious Belgian or French woman, so I and another soldier had to sit on the floor – not the most comfortable place as the ambulance bumped over rough roads and cobbles.

'I'm not greedy – one war was sufficient for me.'

In the front next to the driver sat a Lance Corporal of the Medical Corps, armed with a map. Either his map reading was not very good or the map no longer corresponded to the chaos around us. We became lost and went round in a circle, only to finish up at CCS Lille where we had started, with one of the wounded having died during the trip. Here the Lance Corporal presumably received a telling off, and I received a cup of tea.

The Lance Corporal was replaced by a Corporal. I had a vision of us being continually lost and each time the navigator being replaced by a higher R.A.M.C. rank up through Sergeant to Lieutenant and beyond. If this went on long enough the Germans would have caught up with us.

It was hot and dusty and this time I watched the scene unfold before me as the road was choked with refugees and vehicles. At one point I heard a clatter of hooves and looked out to see a column of North African Spahis of the French Army mounted on white horses, which reminded me of Ronald Coleman in 'Beau Geste'. They will be a lot of good against the Panzers, I thought. After some time we came to a halt next to a N.A.A.F.I. depot where they were evacuating, and we were showered with chocolate and cigarettes. I did not smoke at the time but things were becoming desperate and I felt that I could have done with a fag. Unfortunately they had not thrown in any matches!

Somehow we reached the railhead and were loaded into an ambulance train. It was warm and I could smell death and festering wounds inside the carriage. I had to lie on the floor and orderlies and doctors walked up and down, stepping over me. Eventually the train began to move and then after a short while stopped. It seemed that the Jerries were bombing a nearby village. I did not feel too comfortable about this, mostly because there was nothing I could do. Just for something to pass the time, I pulled out an old envelope and pencil so I could draw my Fairy Godmother. So I drew a rather plump fairy and this activity seemed to lessen my tension. Many years later after I had become a teacher I used to teach slow readers. I never called them backward – they had just been a little slow off the starting block. I tried not to put any pressure on them and I made the lessons enjoyable with jokes, drawings and stories. I must have done some good because some years later I met a lady who was a health visitor. She said "I remember you – you used to draw me little fat fairies."

The train plodded on. I hobbled to the kitchen and scrounged a cup of tea. The cook had a radio and the news was not good. I mentioned this to the chaps in the carriage and told them an M.P. had been sent to prison. Outside in the corridor there was an officer who was looking out of an open window who then enquired who it was. "Captain Ramsay, Sir," I replied with some smug satisfaction that it wasn't just 'Other Ranks' who were potential traitors. *([23] Captain Ramsay was the Conservative MP for Peebles, the only openly anti-Semetic and pro-Nazi Member of Parliament, and head of the Right Club. Along with other leading British fascists, he was imprisoned in May 1940).* The next morning we started pulling into another place. Troops were manning slit-trenches as we reached the outskirts. Near me was an Artillery Sergeant who wore his First World War ribbons. I couldn't understand these chaps who having survived the last lot couldn't wait to get into the next. I'm not greedy – one war was sufficient for me. I asked him about where we were. "Calais, son," he told me. At this moment I heard the roar of guns and asked him what it was. 'Oh,' he said, "I remember they used to have artillery practice camps down here in the last war,' I told him that they ought to get up to the front and practice. However, we were soon to discover exactly what those noises were: Calais had been experiencing air raids and shelling throughout the night. *([24] At 4.45 am coastal guns operated by French sailors began to fire at the Germans, whose artillery retaliated – it was probably this that Ted remembered hearing).*

The train drew into Calais station, with the two of us gaping out of the window. Here we saw troops and medical orderlies taking shelter behind stone pillars, and we realised the danger of the situation. *([25] Ted was on the second hospital train that arrived at Calais. Roy Archer, a Rifleman at Calais, described the arrival of the first train: "A hospital train steamed slowly into the Gare Maritime and started to unload its cargo of severely wounded. All the dead were laid in rows and covered with blankets. The train had been three days being shunted about escaping from German troops." (Quoted to Cooksey p.86)).* The Germans had already taken Boulogne and they were now concentrating on Calais. *([26] After several days' battle, the garrison at Boulogne finally surrendered the following day, on 25th May 1940. Calais was taken on 26th May. There was no full evacuation of the men defending Calais, who were attempting to hold back the Germans while the main evacuation took place (primarily from Dunkirk). The Rifles were sent to Calais on the same day that the Guards were evacuated from Boulogne.*

The men fighting in Calais were mostly either killed or taken prisoner, with a few escaping (principally 47 who managed to jump off a breakwater onto a Royal Navy yacht during the night of 26th May while Germans walked above them)). Shells were screaming over our heads. The walking wounded were ordered out and onto a ship in the harbour, the Canterbury, which had brought part of the brigade for the defence of Calais and still had 15 cwt trucks in its hold. *([27] Overnight on 23rd and 24th May two ships – the Canterbury and the Kohistan – were still having their cargo of vehicles and supplies unloaded. These had been sent to support the defence of Calais but while unloading was continuing on the morning of 24th May, messages about evacuation began to come through and the unloaded vehicles were disabled so that they would be of no use to the Germans. At 7.30am the unloading of the Canterbury was halted (unloading of the Kohistan had finished at 4.30 and the wounded men from the first hospital train were being loaded). The Canterbury's holds were closed, and the wounded men from the second hospital train were carried aboard by the men of the Rifle Brigade. It sailed for England at 8.30, taking with it half the equipment and trucks with which it had arrived. At noon the Kohistan also sailed – the last ship to leave Calais before the order came through instructing the defenders to fight it out to the end. In total, approximately two hundred wounded men – including Ted – were evacuated, with 500 of the more seriously wounded unable to be evacuated or moved. (see Cooksey pp85-6)).* I only had one good leg but I managed it with a hop and a jump, and got across that jetty pretty sharpish. Someone wanted me to go below but I took no notice and chose the open deck. If the old tub went down those below deck would not have stood a chance. I parked myself by the donkey engine – I preferred dying in the open air. On deck was a captured German pilot and a ship's officer was searching his briefcase. He bad-temperedly emptied the contents and then threw the briefcase over the side. We put into the open channel and were now visible to the enemy. A shell screeched over and landed in the sea about fifty yards on the starboard side. The Artillery Sergeant took a professional interest in the matter. "They'll drop another to port, and then split the difference to drop one in the middle,' he explained, rather in the manner of an Oxford professor expounding some theorem. I told him that he was a cheerful soul to be with. I stuck down as the next one arrived. The Sergeant was still sitting up, a professional gleam in his eye. "There, what did I say? Dropped short." Meanwhile, the old boat was full ahead with its engines thumping away. My companion cocked an ear – "here it is." I crouched down and kept my fingers crossed. The third shot arrived, but fortunately missed. There was a roar and a great fountain of water went over us. "That was near," said the Sarge. Then we were out of range.

Eventually the ship pulled into Dover, which was jammed full. A naval officer was standing on the jetty and told our skipper that he could not come in. 'I've got men dying in here,' was his reply. It was to no avail. The naval officer said that he couldn't help it and that we would have to go on to Southampton. So we chugged down the Channel and arrived there right in the middle of an air raid. We lay to outside Southampton all night. I tried to sleep but the bombing and a hard deck made it impossible. By the time we were unloaded the next morning a few more of the wounded had died. I couldn't put much weight on one leg but the ground felt pretty good to me. Home at last!

Chapter 3: Marking Time

I was taken to Staines Emergency Hospital in Ashford, Middlesex. I am not sure what they did for my knee but they certainly did not operate. In an adjoining bed lay an extremely pale-faced young man who was obviously seriously wounded. He was very good looking and when I spoke to him he only managed a weak smile. Eventually the swelling in my knee went down and I was allowed to get up, and given that horrible blue uniform that convalescents had to wear. I thought a lot about my friends who had died or of whom I had heard nothing. On one occasion we were visited by a minor royal personage, who may have been Princess Alice. The walking wounded had to stand by their beds to receive the benison of a weak smile. I was now allowed out and went to the cinema. On my return I noticed that the curtains were drawn around my neighbour's bed. A sister signalled to me to keep quiet. In the morning the curtains were drawn back and the bed was empty. I inwardly cursed the war as this chap would now never become someone's good-looking Grandad.

At last I was discharged with a note saying that I had suffered from synovitis knee. *([28] Ted was in this hospital for only two weeks (arriving on 24th May and leaving on 8th June 1940) but he describes it as though it was a much longer time. He had been with severely injured and dying men both before and after his evacuation from Calais and was probably desperate to get away from it all. His discharge certificate is stamped received 12th July at the Infantry Training Centre. He went to his brother's house for a month after his discharge from Staines, traumatised by his experiences – something he glosses over in this account).* I went back to the depot and it was here that I received a letter from Millie, my American girl friend. While in India I had picked up an American magazine, which contained a pen friends column. I wrote to several of them and, in time, I had a bundle of letters back. The letters dropped off until only Mildred Alberta Harris remained. She was of both English and German descent and was a typical all-American blonde who worked for the Bell Telephone Company in St Louis, Missouri. Her father had vanished and although she seemed very bright there was not enough money for a university career. She wrote to me throughout the war. If I were in some dump, miles from anywhere, a letter from Millie would come to cheer me up. She sent me her photograph and she seemed a bright, bonny kind of girl. At one point she sent me a food parcel, probably thinking I was suffering under British food rationing. I wrote to Millie to say that I was back in England. Whether she prayed for me or not, I don't know, but she was greatly relieved to know that I was safe.

'There was a roar and a great fountain of water went over us. That was near, said the Sarge.'

A short time after my return to the depot I took part in an infantry training exercise. It was not long before my knee gave way again. This time I went to Bath *([29] Ted was at the St Martin's Emergency Hospital in Frome Road, Bath from 12th August 1940 to 22nd October 1940),* where I took the famous waters, which didn't seem to help much, after which I was moved to a hospital nearby at Combe Down. Here I was presented with another medical certificate. Although I was allowed out at certain times, the local hostelries were forbidden to serve men wearing hospital blue. On the other hand, convalescent officers could walk out in uniform, so publicans couldn't tell that they were convalescent. However, there was a village nearby where, fortunately, the landlord wasn't too fussy about serving us boys in horrible blue.

I was concerned about Ed Drawneek and I had already visited his family up at West Molesey to tell them that up to the last time I had seen him he was safe. Later I discovered what had happened to the Second Battalion. They had retreated as far as Cassel where they were soon attacked by enemy forces. They should have fallen back but no message to this effect ever reached them. *([30] The order for them to retreat to Dunkirk was in fact made, but not sent to them until 26 hours later).* After a stout defence, during which many were killed, they were obliged to surrender and were taken prisoner. *([31] The fighting and resulting carnage at Cassel is detailed in Scott Daniell and Sebag-Montefiore. Left to defend the Dunkirk perimeter, the 2nd Battalion were virtually surrounded at Cassel and, when they finally did attempt to withdraw, unable to get past the Germans. Only a few escaped, with large numbers killed and wounded, and almost 500 taken prisoner. Sebag-Montefiore quotes Brigadier Somerset: "I now fully realized that we were the "Joe Soaps" of Dunkirk. That we were being sacrificed so that as many British and French (as possible) could get away from Dunkirk ... I felt very bitter."*

In 1948 Brigadier Somerset wrote the following letter to 'The Times':

"Sir – I notice that in his memoirs of 1940 Mr Churchill observes that "After the loss of Boulogne and Calais only the remains of the port of Dunkirk and the open beaches next to the Belgian frontier were in our hands." At that time I was commanding a brigade group holding a sector from Cassell to Hazebrouck. We were heavily attacked by German armour on May 27. At Cassell the Germans were repulsed and with the loss of over 20 tanks. At Hazebrouk our force there was surrounded and did not finally capitulate until the evening of May 28. Not knowing that the BEF was embarking for the United Kingdom we hourly expected a vigorous counter-attack by British and possibly French troops to restore the situation. We hung on at Cassell until the night of May 29, and then tried to reach the Dunkirk bridgehead. German operation maps at the time showed Cassel and district still occupied by the enemy, and leaflets were dropped calling on us to surrender, as "your generals are gone"! I feel it is fair neither to myself nor the troops under my command to let this stand pass from mind, especially as so many gave their lives, and most of the remainder of us spent five years in captivity. Incidentally, by holding on at Cassel we not only deprived the Germans of one of the main roads to Dunkirk, but enabled many British detached units and individuals to reach the bridgehead.

All these facts appear to have utterly escaped the notice of the authorities at the time owing to the indescribable confusion,

and I feel that an opportunity has now been afforded me of bringing them to light). Among the prisoners was Ed Drawneek. However, one lieutenant and a few men managed to escape and make their way to the coast. One night, as they were creeping through some parked German armoured vehicles, the lieutenant was challenged by a sentry. He replied in French and was allowed to carry on, eventually winning a Military Cross for this successful evasion. *([32] Scott-Daniell pp 257-259 for an account of this escape).*

In the meantime I went before a medical board where they asked me if I could manage to do Home Service. I had no desire to return to factory life even though it was better paid, so I said I could and was graded C3. I was given a week's sick leave, which I spent in Bristol listening to air raids. Then I returned to the depot, which had been moved to Reservoir Camp, Gloucester, as the old Horfield one was now too small. Reservoir Camp was aptly named. When it rained it was like Paschendaele. Duckboards stretched to each hut and if you stepped off one you were likely to disappear from human ken. I studied the orders and saw that there was an Adjutant's Parade the following morning so I cleaned up my kit and duly joined it. Afterwards at breakfast I joined a group of ex-Indian warriors. One of them asked me what I had been doing so I told him. 'Adjutant's Parade,' he scoffed, 'Nobody goes on those things. They've got so many blokes in the camp that they don't know where half of them are. Get yourself a job, we have.' Indeed they had, and were engaged in occupations ranging from regimental police to sanitary men. If there wasn't a job available, they invented one. There was a mournful looking chap who was a drain cleaner. He said "They're raising new battalions and they'll want N.C.O.'s for 'em." "Blokes with some service," said Jimmy Brown, "that's who they'll pick. My Dad was in the last lot. He said it was bloody murder." The others agreed. The chance of obtaining glory by advancing to the liberation of Europe did not seem a particularly attractive prospect.

I told them that they would not be getting me into any new battalion as I was C3. 'C3! You jammy sod!' they exclaimed. I had heard this said before. In India I had applied to take the examination for the Army First Class Certificate of Education. On the day on which I was to sit the examination the whole Brigade was suddenly mobilised for a special one-day exercise and nobody was excused except my good self because the examination date had been set by the Army. Later that night, the exhausted platoon staggered into the empty barrack room after a very strenuous mountain warfare exercise. On finding me there, they said 'You jammy sod!'

Having been advised to get myself a job, I asked if they had any ideas. Somebody said that a certain 'Olly' Ocker was complaining about having two boilers to look after and that I should go to see him and offer to take on one of his stokeholes. I should have known better. 'Olly' Ocker (I cannot recall his real name) was trouble. When I suggested relieving him of the strain of looking after two boilers, he scowled and said "It'll cost yer on Friday." In due course I went to see our C.S.M., an easy-going type, who merely smiled and nodded agreement. So I began this exacting duty – sitting in the boiler house, putting on an occasional shovel of coal, and reading 'Reveille'. I was only disturbed once - by a bright young orderly officer. I stood to attention and said "All correct Sir." He waved his swagger cane and replied "Jolly good show, carry on." They would have said 'Jolly good show' if you were being cut down by Zulu spears or Boer bullets.

Friday came and Olly indicated that he wished to have my company on a tour of Gloucester's pubs. Into town we went and he proceeded to consume an enormous amount of ale at my expense, my week's pay rapidly vanishing. He seemed to have hollow legs, but at last we made our way back to camp. All would have been well but Olly expressed a desire for some fish and chips. I didn't have the least wish to partake of fish and chips – all I wanted to do was to reach barracks and get my head down. The shop was hot and crowded and there was some delay in the provision of this national dish. As we stood in the queue Olly asked the lady behind the counter if they had gone to Grimsby to get the fish. Leaning against the counter next to us was an R.A.F. 'erk' with about two weeks' service. This worthy said 'Take no notice missus. They've just come out of the milk bar.' Olly immediately swung out with his fist and the erk fell into dreamland. The lady grew alarmed and shrieked 'Charlie! Charlie!' This character suddenly emerged from the back room, and he was enormous. As he made a rush for Olly he was joined by two of his brothers, and they were just as muscular. We did our best but it was a case of Custer's last stand. We ended up outside, lying on the pavement where Charlie and his brothers finished the proceedings by giving us a good kicking.

'At the end of 1940 it was decided to double the size of the Pioneer Corps.'

We returned to camp battered and bruised, with our uniforms covered in blood and mud, and with me calling Olly every profanity that I could think of. He was apologetic and kept saying it wasn't his fault. On our return, the Guard Commander gave us a good dressing down for returning in such a condition and told us to get to our huts quickly before he changed his mind and put us in the clink.

The following morning we attended Sick Parade where the M.O. really blew his top. It was said of this individual that it was down to his mood whether he gave you a week's sick leave or placed you on a charge for malingering. To me he made the observation that I had been wounded in France and demanded to know if I was quite right in the head. I hurriedly assured him that I was before he put me away. We got some kind of medicinal muck spread over our bruises and just as we were returning to our duties the C.S.M., who had been informed of our misdemeanours, had us before the Company Commander for another ticking off. To give Olly his due, he admitted fully that he had started the affray, to which the C.O., gave me a look that seemed to question why I was associating with this idiot. The outcome was that we were both confined to barracks for a period. I got seven days and my partner in crime received fourteen.

As most of the called up Militia were very law abiding, we were sent to the cookhouse where we were introduced to a great many large sacks of potatoes. We peeled so many potatoes that I never wanted to see another for a very long time. Two days later I was making my way back to my hut when someone informed me that my name was on orders. It transpired to be true, and that I was being transferred to a Pioneer Corps company at Cheltenham along with thirty-one other men of lower medical categories. *([33] During World War 1 it became clear that in twentieth century warfare armies required a service corps which would be responsible for roads and bridges required by armoured vehicles, moving supplies, and a range of other support duties. In 1917 therefore a Labour Corps was created, then disbanded in 1919 but reformed in September 1939. In October 1939 it was renamed the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps and later became the Pioneer Corps. At first it was manned by reservists considered too old to fight and unfit conscripts (of whom in 1939 there were many due to poverty and unemployment in 1930's Britain).* However, foreign volunteers, anti-fascists who had escaped from Germany and Italy, and former members of the International Brigade in the Spanish Civil War (groups who tended to be left wing politically and others very well educated) were also placed in the Corps, rather than in more traditional regiments, as the Government didn't entirely trust them. The Pioneers were not supposed to be a fighting regiment but eventually many were armed, and they had fought their way out of France in 1940, being among some of the last to leave. During World War 2 they were present in all theatres of war, and also in England during the blitz, where they worked in London, Liverpool and many other cities demolishing unsafe buildings, keeping roads clear, and other similar duties. In 1940 they were given cap badges bearing their main motto – 'Labor Omnia Vincit', At the end of 1940 it was decided to double the size of the Corps. Other regiments were asked to transfer men and they took the opportunity to rid themselves of C3 men or those who were not amenable to discipline. At the end of the war King George VI awarded the Corps the title 'Royal', in recognition of their contribution to victory. (Information from Rhodes-Wood)). I protested – I didn't want to leave the regiment with which I had served in India and of which my father had been a Company Sergeant Major - but the Regiment made it plain that they would not cart invalids about. I was excused the rest of my punishment and told to see the Quartermaster to get my grubby battledress exchanged for a decent uniform. So with some trepidation, in February 1941 I set out for Cheltenham to join my new unit.

Chapter 4: Pioneers! O Pioneers!

([34] Ted is quoting from Walt Whitman here)

It was now 1941, the year in which Hitler invaded Russia and the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour. Britain no longer stood alone, and preparations began to be made for more engagements with the enemy. We arrived at Prestbury, a village on the southern outskirts of Cheltenham where we were billeted in the village school. My only knowledge of the place is that the village pub was once run by the father of Fred Archer, the noted Victorian jockey. *([35] This was the King's Arms at Prestbury. Elsewhere Ted wrote about his maternal grandfather who told Ted and his brother about various sporting heroes, including Fred Archer).* On the morning of our arrival we saw the night shift returning. The duties had been carried out by a recruit company of the Gloucesters but they were now required for training. The Pioneer Company had an 'S' in brackets after its name, denoting that it was a Smoke Company whose function was to operate

smoke-producing burners to conceal sites which would be likely targets for enemy aircraft. *([36] Countrywide the smoke screens required 500 civilians and 10,000 members of the Army to operate and covered vital points in industrial towns and cities).* Whether this actually served any purpose I am unable to say, but some of the chaps believed that the Luftwaffe only had to release their bombs into the resultant cloud of smoke to be sure of hitting something worthwhile. The Smoke Companies did not endear themselves to the local housewives on washdays. *([37] In his memories of Shurdington in the war, a local resident refers to the Pioneers and seems to confirm a certain tension between them and local residents: "I was made Chief Warden by the Gloucester Authority, and we formed an ARP Post .. The highlights of our activities were challenging an army sergeant whom we suspected of being a spy; holding up at pistol-point a Chief Inspector of Police who was travelling in a car with headlights on while enemy aircraft were overhead; and being taken prisoner by the army Pioneer Corps at Badgeworth Corner near Churchdown, when I went to ask them why they were shining so many lights when they collected the canisters of oil that they used for putting up smoke-screens." (see www.shurdington.org)).*

I was not impressed with the appearance of the returning night shift. They were clad in black overalls and steel helmets, their faces and hands covered in oily soot. The prospect of being one of these black-faced minstrels was unattractive, so I sought a means of escape. There was a notice displayed which conveyed the information that the newly formed company required clerks, cooks, drivers, and other odds and sods. I managed to obtain an interview with the Captain who was second in command. When asked what experience I had as a clerk I told him that I had been a clerk at Brigade H.Q. when I was in India. This had been after I had gained my First Class Certificate, but clerical work had not appealed to me at the time and I was soon back in my old platoon with my mates. *([38] After obtaining his certificate Ted had been made up to an unpaid lance corporal and transferred to the Brigade HQ. Elsewhere, he wrote about this: "A battalion would only be allowed a certain number of paid lance-corporals on its strength. Unpaid had to wait until a vacancy arose in the paid ranks. This could take up to two years, during which time a misdemeanour could make the stripe disappear. Old sweats were scornful of the system and said promotion was a mug's game – ' Dosgbody for two years and then they bust you!' Disregarding these Jeremiahs, I went off to Brigade HQ ...". However, Ted gave up that posting after only a few weeks).* However, I did not tell the Captain all of this. There was also a chap in my hut who had landed a job as a cook. When I asked him what he could cook he replied 'Nothing much. You could do army cooking standing on your head.' He was most displeased when the Guard Commander came in at 4.00 in the morning to rouse him so that he could light the fires in the cookhouse. As he fumbled about in the dark cursing while he tried to find his boots, I said 'Never mind mate. You can do it standing on your head.' He rewarded my encouragement with a fine flow of cookhouse-flavoured language until the rest of the hut awoke and threatened to throw him into outer darkness.

Later we moved to a peaceful paddock at Shurdington on the Cheltenham-Gloucester Road. It seemed ideal – Nissen huts among the apple blossom. But it was there I received news of the 2nd Battalion's last stand at Cassel, from which not many returned. Later, I heard that Ed Drawneek was in Stalag VIIIB at Lamsdorf, Silesia. A few weeks went by and I gained a stripe for my new job, which turned out to be dead easy. I shared my duties with another clerk whose typing was better than mine. I was mainly left to file Army Council Instructions and other bits and pieces. As I was returning to camp one night, I saw a young woman approaching with whom I got into conversation. I arranged to meet her at the local pub the following evening and went to bed that night dreaming of golden hair and blue eyes. Early the next morning the Major entered the office with instructions for me to go down to Bournemouth to check all the men's records. I asked if I could go the next morning instead but he was most insistent.

Off I went with the Other Ranks records filling my pack, cursing the Major for putting an end to my prospects of an amorous evening. The train stopped at Reading and seemed to be there for some time so I put the pack up onto the luggage rack and left the train for a cup of tea in the refreshment room. A few minutes later, someone suddenly said 'Is that your train moving out?' I rushed out to find the train on the move and had visions of a court martial where I would be charged with 'Losing by neglect valuable Army property, through carelessness and irresponsible conduct.' 'It's alright,' said the helpful acquaintance, 'Just changing platforms.' I heaved a sigh of relief. In Bournemouth, I loitered about longer than was necessary to check the documents, from which I learned nothing. None of the chaps seemed to be German spies or had convictions for forgery or bigamy. I returned to Cheltenham, and camp in the orchard at Shurdington.

It was idyllic, and with a pub nearby, the war seemed miles away. Meanwhile, the Smoke Company put its black veil over a factory in Cheltenham so that the enemy could not see its precise location. *([39] Although not a heavily industrialised area there were several factories in Cheltenham producing components for airplanes).* A few days later the major said that I should draw up a leave list. The records of leave were written in an AB64, a notebook that was usually carried in the left breast pocket of a soldier's tunic. The Major had all the AB64's called in so that I could make a list by placing all the leave dates in order. I had taken some leave some time before my transfer but someone in my old unit had been negligent and had not marked my last leave. I subsequently made out a list and put myself about seventh. On looking at the list the C.O. asked me if I would mind delaying it until the Company had been fully sorted out. 'Not a bit, Sir,' I replied dutifully. 'Anything for the Company.'

'The Smoke Companies did not endear themselves to the local housewives on washdays.'

A few weeks later I went on seven days leave. My brother said 'What, you again?' in his usual welcoming way and my reappearance caused some gossip among the neighbours with comments such as 'Our Billy ain't been home for two years.' Back in the orchard, camp life went on as usual. At the top of the Promenade in Cheltenham there was a services canteen staffed by volunteers who were mostly of the Cheltenham Ladies College type. In peacetime working class squaddies were not so welcome in their social circles, but in wartime they were now eager to 'do their bit for our boys.' When you ordered a meal there was a deposit of one shilling and sixpence, which was handed back on return of the cutlery. This measure suddenly caused a severe shortage of cutlery back at the camp as this canteen deposit was worth the price of about one and a half pints at that time.

There was another trick that some chaps played. First, one of a group would enter a cinema in the normal way by paying. Then, after a short while, he would leave his seat and go to the toilet, in which there was an emergency exit door. He would lift the bar and let in several of his mates and eventually they would all find a seat in the cinema.

About this time I received a second stripe and one of the young ladies at the canteen congratulated me. We became friendly and one night I walked her home where we had a cuddle on the doorstep. She told me to come back the following Saturday evening as her flatmate would be away for the weekend. I spent the week in lustful anticipation and on Saturday I smartened myself up, polished my badge and blancoed my stripes. 'My,' said the Guard Commander as I left the camp, 'We are looking smart tonight.'

All this effort was in vain, however. My plan of a blissful evening of love fell flat like most of my plans. When the young lady opened the door she looked as if she had been run over by a bus. 'You can't come in,' she said tearfully, 'I've had an accident.' I asked her what had happened and it transpired she had fallen off her horse. I felt like kicking a lamppost in disappointed rage, and then had a few pints to drown my sorrows while cursing the riding habits of the middle classes.

It was about this time that I became discontented. I thought about my father, 7705 C.S.M. E.L. Hayball, 1st and 7th Gloucesters, who had fought and been wounded in France. He had subsequently served at Gallipoli and in Mesopotamia, where he died of wounds in 1917. He had been a soldier, not a pen pusher. The Russians were dying at Stalingrad and I was filing Army Council Instructions. I began looking around for something to which I could transfer and I saw in an Army Council Instruction that volunteers were needed for flying duties with the R.A.F. Slight defects in limbs would be a deterrent to transfer so I saw the M.O. and managed to get upgraded from C3 to A2. This was to be my undoing as otherwise I would never have needed to leave England again.

Early in 1942 I received an appointment to attend an interview with a R.A.F. board in Oxford. So I went off, mentally painting swastikas on the side of my Spitfire. Alas, I failed the test. Although I passed in English I had never before had any instruction in trigonometry, either at school or in any of my army education. Gloomily, I returned to Cheltenham. Since then I've often thought that if trigonometry had been one of my school subjects I might not be around now to relate this story.

Once more I studied Army Council Instructions to see if I could escape to something a little more warlike than sitting in a tin hut. Some of the A.C.I.'s never seemed to make much sense. One in particular was about various units requiring information about any soldiers used to handling horses. Perhaps, I thought, the U-

Boat campaign was more successful than we had been led to believe and the oil tankers weren't getting through. The British Army was sometimes a little slow off the mark for in India in 1938 we were still using horse-drawn artillery. Once I had been a stable lad on the G.W.R., and I fancied plodding a lane behind a pair of shire horses, so I put my name down. Nothing came of it. There was also an instruction saying that due to the fuel situation there would be no leave over the Easter period and only essential travel would be allowed. Being forbidden from doing certain things only made me want to do them. On Saturday mornings the office was occupied by only the telephone operator. It wasn't my turn for that so I popped into the office and made out two leave passes, validating them with that scrawly handwriting that officers always use. At school we had practiced Copperplate handwriting. They had books that held texts such as 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of the party' and 'The quick brown fox leapt over the hen's back.' From what I know of foxes they would be more likely to be eating their chicken dinner than leaping over it. Copperplate Writing! In these days of computers such script would be on a level with cave painting.

Armed with our spurious passes we duly set off for Bristol. My companion was an ex-London newspaper printer. He would work for six nights of the week on the dailies and the seventh on a Sunday paper, which earned him a nice little bit of money. With his ready wit he was an amusing companion. However, he was often down in the dumps from gravitating from being one of the aristocracy of labour to a private with private's pay. I had little inclination to visit my brother on this occasion because it would only have resulted in 'What, you again!' Instead, after showing the passes to the Military police at Temple Meads station, we went to see Bristol City play. We didn't see a lot of the match because most of our attention was diverted by the antics of a small man standing in front of us. He was so absorbed by the game that he imitated all the actions of the players. He dribbled the ball, kicked off, tackled, passed and headed it, even arguing with an imaginary referee on one occasion.

When the pubs opened after the game we had a few beers and then made our way home (if you could call the army home). Back at Temple Meads we showed our passes again and went round to the Midland branch. We were just about to board the train when a large Sergeant of Military Police approached us and I thought we had been twigged. However, he only said 'Excuse me, corporal, but there's a man here who says he is in your company who hasn't a pass. Can you say if he is?' I vouched for him and said I would see him back. The man had apparently bunked off for the day to see his wife. The M.P. said a report would be sent through but if it was then I never saw it, for about this time our C.S.M. was posted. The Major seemed to be impressed by my efforts to be a World War II air ace and wanted to make me the new C.S.M.

However, the Group Commander told him that they might have a mutiny on their hands if they promoted a corporal over all the sergeants, despite the fact that I had more service than most of them. So instead the Colonel agreed that I be sent for officer training, beginning with a drill and duty course, which was being held in Dursley, a small town to the south of Gloucester in May 1942. On my arrival there I found that the members of the course were billeted in a large attic above a pub, which was very convenient. There were nineteen N.C.O.'s on this course and, to my surprise, some of them were German and Austrian refugees from the Nazis. *([40] Although foreign recruits were allocated to the Pioneers, they were in separate companies, of which 15 out of 19 at the end of 1940 were made up of German and Austrians. Hence Ted's surprise).* They were very quiet and well-mannered. Most of them had been in professional occupations before the war, which meant that they were better educated than the average Tommy.

The fortnight's course was a doddle and the officer in charge was an easy going Lieutenant. The war seemed a thousand miles away. It was odd to be doing arms drill when I had been doing it for seven years before the war. The course ended with a written test on military law amongst other things. On the Friday night all the British N.C.O.'s went out and had a farewell booze-up. On our return to the attic we found that the German members of the course had very dutifully tucked themselves up and were asleep. They were woken up and told that they couldn't go to sleep yet as we were having a sing-song. First, we sang some sentimental English songs and then somebody said that the Austrian and Germans should join in. They replied that they didn't know any English songs so we told them to sing some from their homelands. This they did, and their voices were very much better than our bawlings as they seemed to have some feeling for their estranged homelands.

'One of the Officer Cadets was a German refugee who had been a famous racing driver.'

The next day we were back in Cheltenham and a little while later the results of the course came through. I came second out of the nineteen members of the course, with one of the Austrians coming first. It had taken an ex-professor of Vienna University *([41] Many of the German and Austrian refugees in the Pioneers were academics and intellectuals, including at least six Nobel laureates. (see Ratner)* to beat a former errand boy from Bristol – he had beaten me on the written test but I had come first on the practical - and the Group Commander sent me a congratulatory letter. My success in this course led to me being selected for officer training and that summer I was sent to an O.C.T.U. in Beckingham, Lincolnshire.

Chapter 5:
Almost an Officer and a Gentleman

At Beckingham we slept in marquees in alphabetical order. Next to me there was an ex-C.S.M. named Hayward, whose wife kept a boarding house in Blackpool. I mentioned to him that I was not too certain about handling this officer business. 'Listen, son,' he said, 'All you have to do is to remember the three magic words.' I enquired as to what these might be. He replied, 'Carry on, Sergeant.'

We were given white bands to put round our caps and epaulettes, thus putting us apart from the common herd, and were then placed in squads. Ours was commanded by a Second Lieutenant who was somewhat short in stature. We were all taller and he would never check anyone except the ex-Sergeant Major who happened to be an inch shorter than he was. This meant that only poor Hayward was ever picked on for some fiddling fault. Hayward used to blow his top after the parade. 'Twenty-five years service only to get ticked off by that little squirt.'

In addition to drill and parades, there were lectures on military law, man management and other subjects, which I quickly learned, and quickly forgot. I had been just as quick at learning and forgetting at school. Next we discovered that we were actually going to have a bank account. I was very pleased at this news, as at one time I had been lucky to have a balance of one and sixpence in a Post Office savings account. We subsequently had a lesson in how to write a cheque. A few of the squad got very excited by this and later in their careers let their newfound proficiency in signing cheques run away with them. Some of the cadets started talking as if they were hunting, fishing, shooting gentry. Being unable to do so, I continued to talk Bristolian.

The local pub was always crowded with cadets, permanent staff or locals, so Hayward and I usually searched for an alternative place of refreshment. The part of Lincolnshire that we were in was fairly flat so we scanned the horizon for a church spire, my companion reasoning that if there was a church then a pub wouldn't be far away. We would wander over fields and climb across stiles to find pubs, which looked like something out of Thomas Hardy or Charles Dickens. There was transport available to Newark on Saturday nights which was called the 'Passion Wagon', although I failed to find much passion in Newark on a Saturday night or any other variety of it in a small English town in wartime.

One of the cadets on the course was a German refugee who had been a famous racing driver. Before being allowed to attend the course, he had been called to the War Office to receive an investigative grilling. *([42] Three famous pre-war racing drivers (Benoist, Grover-Williams and Wimille)* who were refugees from mainland Europe were recruited by the Special Operations Executive to work with the Resistance in France – perhaps Ted's acquaintance was being considered for this too, as well as vetted?!. Nothing much came of this but he said he believed that his questioners already knew the answers to their questions. He was then introduced to the 'Passion Wagon' and he seemed to have been taken to every pub in Newark. He arrived back suspended from the shoulders of his companions and was rushed to bed before this unseemly conduct was noticed.

Towards the end of the course we were visited by a firm of London tailors who measured us for our uniforms. It was explained that if one failed the course the order was cancelled and there would be nothing to pay. There was a grant which covered the cost of the uniform, shirt, tie, shoes and a collapsible washbasin and camp bed. We were allowed to have our Sam Browne belts *([43] Sam Browne belts are a combination of a pistol belt or garrison belt and a shoulder strap. The Sam Browne belt was named after General Sir Sam Browne VC GCB KCSI (1849-98) of the British Army in India. The strap was intended to help carry the weight of a heavy pistol, D-lock or sword)* in advance so we could polish them. I had gained some experience in polishing the leather belts and pouches, which we had used in India for ceremonial parades. For field training we wore the usual webbing. My polishing was admired by some of the

other cadets and I was asked if I would have a go at theirs, which I did by charging a pound a time, which brought in useful extra beer money, as I was still on corporal's pay.

Eventually the day came for the completion of the course - I was commissioned on 10th August 1942 - and we were sent on leave before joining our new units. These postings had already been allocated, along with the places where they were situated. Some were rather concerned about being sent to the Orkneys. Somebody said that in the first month there you just looked at the sheep, but that in the second month you talked to the sheep, and then the sheep started talking to you. All the fellows in the line in front of me drew the Orkneys and the chap behind me also got the sheep. I was to go to Great Missenden in Buckinghamshire, which drew a sigh of relief from me.

All my new gear had been sent to my brother's home as I had long given up my pre-war accommodation. On my return to Bristol he demanded to know what all the parcels were for that he had been receiving. I told him that they contained my new uniform. 'New uniform?' 'Yes,' I replied, 'I've been made an officer.' 'Officer? You? Bloody hell! We have lost the war now!' It is nice to be appreciated by one's loving relatives. The next day I sallied forth to let Bristol see me in all my newfound glory. On my way out the neighbours looked at me and I could guess what they were thinking – 'He's home again!' Hardly anybody seemed to notice me and any approaching other ranks generally evinced a desire to look into shop windows, turning their backs. Eventually a small private did salute me and I almost felt like giving him a pound.

When my leave was over I travelled to Group HQ at Great Missenden, where I reported to the Adjutant who said that I had done very well at O.C.T.U. I had expectations of being stationed in a leafy Chiltern village complete with an old English inn. However, all such hopes were soon dashed by my being sent to another Smoke Company at Slough. *([44] A local resident remembered "the dreadful smoke screen in the main part of Slough. Oil drums stood on the kerbs, a lorry of soldiers went round at dusk, they filled the drums with black crude oil and set fire to it, which gave off thick black putrid smoke and flames. The idea was to screen Slough and the Trading Estate from bombers". (www.sloughmuseum.co.uk)).* This was located in the grounds of a sports stadium *([45] Elsewhere Ted described this as a cycle stadium)* where the men were housed in Nissen huts and the officers in the offices above the grandstand. The duties were simple: go round the smoke circuit, call at a hut where the men rested after the smoke pots had been ignited. There was not much to correct – the N.C.O. in charge usually had everything in order. Then call at a pub to get the taste of smoke out of one's mouth and carry on to the next hut. The end of the war, I thought, would find me going in circles around Slough – hut, pub, hut, pub. I even became bored with beer.

The C.O. was Irish, the son-in-law of a famous Irishman, and a thorough snob. He wore a long cavalry tunic from the First World War, of which he was a veteran, and obviously felt it was a comedown to land in the Pioneers. If not on duty or being Orderly Officer, the other subalterns made a sharp departure after the evening meal. If you were Orderly Officer you would have to sit in a wall of silence until the Major's bedtime, when he would give you a grudging goodnight before retiring. The Captain was a genial type with a Military Medal from the First World War who was visited periodically by a young lady from Windsor. It was alleged that the gallant Captain used to take her home on the train and would have his wicked way with her between Slough and Windsor, which would have taken some doing.

Then to our relief the Major was posted. He was a Catholic and there were copies of the Tablet and the Catholic Herald lying around the Mess. The new Major turned out to be a Scots Presbyterian who was rather displeased to find them. 'Get that rubbish out of here!' he yelled. I felt like Mercutio in 'Romeo and Juliet' when he said 'A plague on both your houses.' I had attended a church school back in Bristol and this had managed to cure me of religion.

The new C.O. was a little more affable and one evening I went out with him to a pub in Dorney, a suburb of Slough. We had just got our drinks when the Major moved away to talk to a civilian. I was soon accosted by a drunken, shambling character who put a large grubby finger to his lips and said 'I know, M.I.5, Secret Service, I know, won't say a word, keep it quiet.' If he meant to do this, he wasn't very successful as all the pub could hear. 'Excuse me,' I replied, 'I have an urgent telephone call to make,' and moved to the other side of the room, wondering why idiots always picked on me. Perhaps they recognised a kindred spirit. The result of this encounter was that for a few days after I kept imagining myself as number 0286 Special Agent Ted Hayball, Hitler's deadliest enemy, along with accounts of me breaking up enemy spy rings.

'You an Officer, Bloody hell! We have lost the war now!'

However, nothing so dramatic happened. We moved from Slough a short way to Iver, *([46] At Iver oil burners were set up around the village to provide a "fog" to protect the Hawkers aircraft manufacturing factory at Langley near Richings Park, where the Hurricane was built. The thick oily smoke was hated by everyone in the village)* Buckinghamshire, where we billeted in a large house set in grounds on the corner of a road going north. *([47] This was probably Iver Grove, a large Georgian house on the corner of Wood Lane and Langley Park Road. Built between 1722 and 1724, it is England's first Palladian villa, which in 1802 become the home of Admiral Lord Gambier, who gave the signal to which Lord Nelson famously turned his blind eye. The house was requisitioned and used by the army during the war, and fell into such a state of disrepair that it was subsequently at risk of demolition, until the Ministry of Works was persuaded to buy and restore it. The Red Lion pub is on the opposite side of the road).* There was a pub conveniently situated opposite. Then one day my sections and I were taken off smoke duties. As a Pioneer subaltern, I had command of two sections consisting of twenty-six men and two sergeants, and it now seemed as though we were going to do some real soldiering instead of being sooty tramps. It appeared that there was going to be a parade in the village during one of those events that were held at various times during the Second World War – Navy Week, Air Force Week, Home Guard Week, and so forth. Because we were the only military group in the village, we were picked for 'Army Week'. As the men were usually clad in oily denims, with a steel helmet and carrying what looked like an over-sized flue brush, and spent most of the day asleep after the night on smoke duties, military smartness was not their strong point.

On Monday morning I lined them up outside the Company Office and we went through unarmed Arms Drill. Perhaps I was shouting too loudly, because the Major came storming out in a fury: 'What is all that bawling and shouting about? Disturbing me while I'm doing the Company accounts! Get yourself and that bunch of idiots out of my sight!' So I replied, 'Of course, Sir. At once, Sir' (Hail, Caesar, we who are about to die salute thee). I then marched my mob outside and up the lane until we found a quiet spot, where I made the following announcement. 'What we are going to do is practice our drill until we get it right. If it's O.K. the first time, we'll fall out and have a smoke. If not, we practice it a second time and then a third, and so on. Understand?' They evidently understood as it was right first time and we just lolled about until it was time for tea.

The great day came for the village parade, where we were accompanied by the Fire Brigade, the Boy Scouts, the Girl Guides, and Uncle Tom Cobley and all. We were inspected by Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent. *([48] Princess Marina lived at a house called "Coppins" in Iver and was often involved in village events, especially after her husband, the Duke of Kent, the King's youngest brother, was killed in August 1942.)* I accompanied her and was wondering if she would think 'Who is this tall handsome officer. I am in need of a military attaché.' But, alas, she never did. After the parade was over someone had laid on a barrel of beer for the men but they were more keen on getting to Slough to see their wartime sweethearts. I went to the local pub where the landlord told me that he had taken photographs of the parade and would let me have some.

Soon after this I received a posting to another company which was engaged in humping petrol cans somewhere near Aylsebury. The workings of this company were rather in a mess because it lacked a Captain or a Quartermaster Sergeant. I met the Q.M. from Group in the stores, which needed attention. We spent the afternoon going through a list of items which were supposed to be there but which were missing. The Q.M. became very disgruntled about this and some of this spilt over onto me. When I was leaving my old company the Captain said that it might be for promotion. A Colonel appeared and interviewed me, but he didn't seem to be in a very good mood. Evidently, if there was going to be any promotion, it wasn't going to come my way.

However, the Major was an affable old soul and tried to cheer me up. He informed me that he was the most senior of all the Majors in the Army List, which wasn't much to boast about as it meant that every other Major had passed over him to Lieutenant Colonel. We were billeted in the outbuildings of a large house, which was owned by a well-known theatrical personality. The men slept in the stables and the officers in some former storerooms. The owner made a complaint about the men shaking their blankets under his windows, which did not go down well. One night the Major took me out for a drink and we set forth at Light Infantry pace up a lane to a pub called 'The Bugle'. He

proceeded to buy two pints and demolished his own very quickly. Then I bought two more, only to see him pour the next one down equally rapidly and then set off home at a furious pace. I was hoping he wouldn't take me out drinking again. Fortunately, I was soon transferred to another company at Brackley in Northamptonshire. From there I used to catch the train up to London on a Saturday night and go to the Hammersmith 'Palais de Dance' where Joe Loss' orchestra would play. I often missed the last train back from Marylebone station and had to spend the night in an empty carriage until the newspaper train pulled out early in the morning.

One morning I had to take two sections to Peterborough to load material for the Middle East. Enquiring about our billets, we were told that the men would be occupying an empty shop and that I would be staying in the Deanery. I was surprised – I never thought that I would sleep in Cathedral buildings! At breakfast I used to come down feeling very out of place in my battle dress and boots.

I cannot remember all my postings but about this time I received a letter from Millie who was thrilled to hear that I had been made an officer. She showed more enthusiasm for my role than I had for moving from one boring job to another. I then saw an A.C.I. stating that officers were required for some Motor Boat Companies of the R.A.S.C. This interested me and I could already picture myself with a cap at a Beatty angle saying 'Stand by, to go about' and under cover of darkness land secret agents in various parts of occupied Europe. I subsequently received a letter from the War Office to attend an interview. This was the first time I had been there and I looked forward to the visit with a mixture of interest and trepidation. I soon found myself sitting in a corridor with the other applicants. Typists bearing cups of tea passed us by, mere Lieutenants, seemingly beneath their notice. Eventually I was called to face the interviewing board, which consisted of a Lieutenant Colonel R.A.S.C., a Commando Major and a Naval Captain. I felt like the young Cavalier boy being questioned by the grim Roundhead officers in the famous Victorian painting 'When did you last see your father?' but I put on my broadest West Country accent and tried to sound like an Elizabethan Sea Dog. I was asked if I had any experience with motorboats. I told them I had been on the Bristol Channel at one time during my time in the Territorial Army *([49] Ted's uncle Lambert Sale was an officer in the Territorial Army (Gloucesters) and got Ted involved as a teenager in Bristol),* which had also included an exercise in building pontoon bridges between Chesil Beach and the mainland on the Dorset Coast on our annual camp. *([50] Ted described this elsewhere: "I was a newly appointed lance-corporal and one night a sapper and I were left to guard the engineer stores. I like to tell people I commanded a garrison on Chesil Beach. In the morning we used a small motorboat and went put-put up and down the Fleet.").*

I never did get to hear anything from the War Office because, on leaving the building, my knee gave way again while descending the stairs. I was once more in hospital, where I discovered that being an officer seemed to merit better treatment than that dished out to a private. It was a very pleasant hospital at Ottershaw *([51] This was probably Murray House)* in Surrey and I was operated on by a surgeon from Guy's at Christmas 1942. I was now beginning to see class distinction from the other side. I came round from this operation to see a beautiful face framed with golden hair looking down at me. For a few seconds I thought I had made it to the Eternal Kingdom. However, it turned out that this angel was a voluntary helper who was married. During my convalescence I was able to take a gentle stroll to a local pub called 'The Otter'. As an officer I was not made to wear the dreadful blue suit and red tie inflicted on other ranks, officers kept their uniform and there was no official time of return.

On my discharge from hospital I was sent to a Pioneer depot at Lees Mill, an old requisitioned cotton mill, near Oldham. I arrived in Manchester where I had to change trains. On my enquiring where to go, a gentleman not only directed me but also took me across the city centre to Manchester Victoria Station. They seemed to be very nice people up north. While stationed at Lees, I went with a Captain to the local pub on a Saturday evening. We got into conversation with a middle-aged chap, during which the name of Tommy Thompson arose. He was a journalist who wrote humourous pieces for the 'Manchester Guardian' and our companion told me that he had one of his books and would lend it to me. I tried to desist but he seemed very eager to lend it. The house was on our route home and was in an ordinary row of terraced houses. There was no entrance hall and the front door opened straight into the front room where, tucked up and sound asleep, was his grandmother. Having borrowed the book, I was then told the next day that I was to be posted elsewhere on Monday. *([52] In an earlier article for the Pioneer Magazine Ted wrote: "I arrived on Friday and was posted on Monday. I should have known, Smoke at Slough.")* I impressed on the Captain the need to return the book for me and I could only hope that he did so.

'Landing in deep water, I had to grab a couple of the under-sized men and drag them ashore'

I cannot now remember all my subsequent postings but each one seemed to take me a little farther north. I have a confused memory of various activities such as forced marches, climbing ropes and various other uncomfortable actions. At one stage I was at a combined operations school at Dundonald on the west coast of Scotland. A genial general told us that we were booked for the Second Front. "You," he said to us in conclusion, "will make History." I kept a grim military face on me. I don't like making History.

We were to be part of a Beach Group. This was a unit that had to organise the beach after the initial landing. It was made up of various units: Royal Engineer and Pioneer Companies, Royal Army Ordnance Corps, naval and Air Force detachments, plus a battalion of infantry to protect the perimeter of the beach. Here we were billeted in a large house with a commando unit who liked to let off their surplus energy playing rugby with someone's cap, scrambling over armchairs, settees, tables, and anything or anybody who got in their way. I was introduced to landings, wet or dry. On the former you had to scramble ashore from a landing craft and on the latter you had to go to the water's edge and pretend that you had just disembarked from a craft.

A Pioneer section consisted of one sergeant and twenty-six men, and I had two sections. They seemed more like men to me than the fog bound imps of the Smoke Companies. Being Pioneers they were all shapes and sizes, big and small, hulking and undersized, and rough and ready. There were ex-infantry men like myself, cast out because of wounds, ex-dockers and stevedores, and even a few ex-jail birds. Yet a nicer bunch of blokes you couldn't have met. When we had a break, I used to sit down in the middle of them and find out what they did in Civvy Street. One little chap offered me a Woodbine one day and after we'd lit up I asked him what he was in Civvy Street. He was frank enough. "A burglar, Sir." "Really," I replied, as casual as if this was one of the jobs stuck up outside the Labour Exchange, because by now nothing about the Pioneers surprised me. "That must have been interesting. But is there much future in it – I thought crime didn't pay?" "It did where I was concerned, Sir," he said. "I had fifteen years of it and only went down once." After that, I often used to chat to him. Among his specialities had been knocking off pub takings on a Saturday night. It broke my heart to hear of the brewers being robbed.

They used to dig out some odd types for commanding Pioneer Companies. At Dundonald we had a dealer in foreign stamps and he would sit in his office and after signing a few letters, sort out his stamps before sending them off to clients. I thought it was pretty good – the Army paying a man to carry out his civvy job. After the war I occasionally saw his adverts in a stamp hobby magazine. One morning we practised a wet landing not far from camp and the sea became rough as we landed – there had been some argument amongst the naval types as to whether we should go out in such bad weather, but they had been overruled by their commander. Landing in deep water, I had to grab a couple of the under-sized men and drag them ashore. After we had all got ashore I discovered that an idiot had dropped his rifle. There was no way I could go back with a rifle short so we had to stand about shivering on the beach while the unfortunate individual floundered about in the sea searching for his rifle. After a lengthy time, the rifle was discovered soaking wet and we could start off. The wind was coming in from the sea in a series of knife-edged gusts, and with this behind us we made good time. I set a rapid pace along the track in order to try to keep the men warm and laden with arms, ammunition, Mae Wests *([53] Inflatable life jackets),* equipment, picks and shovels we squelched down the rough road to the camp. Back there, I opened the door of the Company office. The C.S.M. sat by the stove reading his paper and our philatelist Major sat there processing his orders for stamps. The wave of hot air from the stove hit me as I entered. I felt wet and miserable so I slammed my hob-nailed boots loudly on the concrete floor, saluted and said 'Permission to dismiss, Sir?' At this very moment a powerful gust of wind blew into the hut and blew all his stamps off the table. The Major jumped up and screamed 'My Penny Pink! I've lost my Penny Pink!' As he was scrambling about on the floor, he looked up and snarled at me to get out, so I got out.

Eventually the Major was replaced by a younger one and I don't think this one liked me either. A detachment had to go up to the Kyle of Bute to a remote place with an unpronounceable name to build a road.

The new Major and the Captain were both unwilling to venture into the wilds of Bonnie Scotland, so I was sent along with two other subalterns. As I was the senior I was put in charge. Where the road went I do not know and it is probably still there, ending in the middle of nowhere. The other subs got annoyed because I didn't take a working party out. I explained to them that I had the administrative work to look after and on our return they complained to the C.O. that I failed to get immersed in the daily duties.

After a while we moved to Portobello on the east side of Edinburgh where a number of us had to sleep in an empty garage. Soon after this we had to take part in another exercise at Gullane. The Army would never let you alone for five minutes and playing at soldiers was never a comfortable game. This was a 'dry landing' where we dug holes in the beach, which we were supposed to occupy all night. A sadist of a superior office had ordained this to supposedly toughen us up. It was more likely to give us galloping consumption. A howling wind came in off the Firth of Forth, seeming to cut you in half almost, and at the back of the beach Military Police had been placed to ensure that no-one escaped. On our entry to the beach I had noticed a large comfortable hotel. I thereupon tidied myself up and played the oldest trick in the book – walking about with an envelope so that you looked important. I took from my pocket a long letter from Millie and smoothed it out. Then I set my cap straight and, looking very regimental, I set out, boldly marching past the M.P.'s, and went into the hotel. After I had been well fortified by a number of whiskies I returned to my sand-hole and slept like a top for the rest of the night.

I soon found myself in another Company, where I don't think the Major here liked me either because he kept sending me on courses. Perhaps he thought I made the place look untidy. The first course was in a stately home near Kineton in Warwickshire *([54] This was probably Compton Verney, a Robert Adam mansion, which was requisitioned by the Army during the war and the grounds used as an experimental station for smoke-screen camouflage, and other training courses. The officers were housed in the main house, the NCO's in the annex, and the men in Nissan huts in the woods)* where we learned about operating a smoke machine, which, if my memory serves me well, was called the Haslar, *([55] His memory was correct: Haslar Smoke Generators consumed fuel oil and water at 85 and 70 gals per hour respectively)* a device which looked as if it had been designed by Heath Robinson. This course, like many others, was not to be of the slightest use to me in my subsequent military career although I later learned that some of these devices had been used in the Rhine crossing. My main memory of this episode is that I was approached by one of the other officers who asked me if I might care to join a theatre party at Stratford. This raised my hopes of seeing something by Shakespeare at the bard's birthplace – I had never seen a play by Shakespeare. However, my hopes of finding culture were to fall flat, for all I saw was Enid Stamp-Taylor in 'Is Your Honeymoon Really Necessary?' *([56] Enid Stamp-Taylor was an English actress who played in musical comedies and revues and was, from the late 1920's, particularly well-known for her film roles)* There is an account somewhere of someone who wanted to find out what the wartime soldier was reading, and who walked the length of a troop train for this research. Most of the other ranks were sleeping, and the second largest group were the card players, whilst a few read either a newspaper or a comic. At the rear of the train an officer sat reading "No Orchids for Miss Blandish". *([57] By James Hadley Chase. Published in 1939 – a brutal thriller involving kidnap, torture and rape)*

Disappointed in our Stratford outing, I returned to my unit and it was not long before I was sent on another course. On this occasion it was a mine clearance course. Perhaps my C.O. was thinking, 'Alas, poor Hayball, he shouldn't have made that mistake.' However, the course was mostly theoretical, including some rather disquieting stories about anti-personnel mines. These were the little dears that detached different parts of your body when you stepped on them. Luckily, I never had to be involved in mine clearance. On my return to the unit I was made the Company Messing Officer. I did not know why as I had never shown much interest in the Company's rations other than in eating them. This seemed likely to entail my being sent on another course. I had visions of writing 'The Soldier's Encyclopaedia' after the war with all this knowledge that was being imparted to me.

'We learned about operating a smoke machine called the Haslar.'

Sure enough, I was despatched to the Army School of Cookery at Aldershot, which was mostly a fortnight's eating. Most of the instructors were ex-Lyons managers since the army had finally got round to the idea that something had to be done about improving the soldiers' diet. I cannot remember much about the lectures apart from one concerning the unexpired portion of the day's rations. It seemed that when a soldier was sent on a posting after his breakfast he was entitled to the rest of his day's rations. The instructor was incensed about the way soldiers were treated in this respect. 'What does the soldier get?' he exclaimed. 'Two large hunks of bread and a lump of cheese! He deserves better than that! The railway tunnels around Aldershot are full of cheese sandwiches!' This gave me a vision of Alice and the Mad Hatter trying to drive an engine with a U.S. style cowcatcher at the front in an effort to clear a tunnel clogged with discarded packets of sandwiches. *([58] Ted produced many humourous drawings and paintings, but although he mentioned his plan to paint this scene on several occasions, he never did paint it).*

The advantage of this Messing course was that everybody got out of the school as soon as the last lecture was over. I went into the mess one evening and found it deserted except for an A.T.S. officer who was reading a book. No-one ever reads books in an officers' mess. As I got nearer I noticed that it was a poetry book, which made me think that there was something about this lass and I fell into conversation with her. The upshot was that I later took her to the pictures and during the interval learnt that her family owned a chain of shops all over the U.K. I rather fancied being a millionaire's son-in-law. 'I say, Hayball old chap, are you playing golf today?' 'Sorry, old man, we're off to Goodwood in the Bentley. I'm driving because the chauffeur has taken the Rolls in for a service.' So much for my dreams. Like so many others, this failed to materialise. When I asked her if she wanted to go out on another evening she refused. As she was Jewish, she may not have wanted to associate with a heathen such as me.

The course plodded on and one of the lectures was on mess tin cookery. We were given the raw materials and a soldier's mess tin and told to prepare a meal under field conditions. One had to forage for material with which to make a fire and this resulted in a pile of damp twigs, leaves and bits of newspaper. The food produced was horrible, being only slightly heated and otherwise uncooked. I tasted a spoonful but it was vile so I slung the whole lot over a nearby hedge. I had purposely placed myself as far as possible from the other students in order to be the last visited by the instructor. When he reached me I was cleaning out my mess tin with bunched grass. He enquired how the meal had been. 'Delicious,' I replied, 'I didn't know mess tin cookery could be so good.'

I returned to my unit after the course was over. Luckily, no report on my progress had been sent. However, it was not long before I was off again on yet another course and I was seemingly becoming the most educated subaltern in military details in the British Army. This time the course was at a large ordnance depot at Donnington in Shropshire. *([59] This was the Central Ordnance Depot at Donnington, which moved there from Woolwich Arsenal in the late 1930's).* I was to take part in an Engineer Stores Recognition Course, which was held in a large Nissen hut. The interior was lined with shelves containing several hundred varying components needed in military engineering. I had to walk round the hut trying to memorise the names of each item. I cannot remember the names of the various objects, which had titles such as 'double edged rotating screws' or 'angular bridge erection brackets'. There was a Royal Engineers corporal in charge and there was to be a test the following Friday. This course filled me with despair as I gazed at this abstruse and confusing collection of ironmongery.

Filled with gloom at the prospect of never being able to get through the ensuing test, I decided to drown my sorrows at the local hostelry, where I met the Royal Engineers corporal. I bought him a couple of drinks and expressed my fear at the prospect of dismal failure. 'That's alright,' he said, 'Stand near me next Friday.' The test soon came and armed with an examination sheet, pencil and a studious expression, I circulated the hut. The Corporal would stand next to one of the exhibits until I reached it. 'Battery for bi-focal arc illuminator,' he would whisper. Again, I've made up the nomenclature, but you can catch my drift. I entered the number on my sheet and this performance continued until I had completed the test, on which I could easily have scored one hundred per cent. I resisted the temptation to gain too high a score, however, and purposely made a few mistakes, as they might have begun to smell a very large rat.

I returned to my unit and a few days later the results of the test came through. My score was eight-two per cent along with a report that I had shown great enthusiasm, been very keen to learn, tried hard and worked well. 'Eight-two per cent?" enquired the major suspiciously, 'You got eight-two per cent?' 'Yes, Sir,' I replied, ' Just my natural aptitude,' as the Major's scowl grew even deeper.

Some time later I was detailed as the junior member of a court martial at

Southampton. The accused was a member of a Docks Operating Company, which was unloading an American ship, and among the cargo were many things which were in short supply in the U.K. One item was razor blades and the accused had helped himself to quite a tidy number of these. He had then gone to 'The Dolphin', a large pub in Southampton, with his loot and had approached someone and offered to sell some. In order not to produce the items in public, they then went out to the toilets. He showed the razors to the would-be purchaser, who promptly arrested him. He was a detective inspector of the Southern Railway Police and I couldn't imagine why the accused had been so stupid. The arresting officer had 'Copper' stamped all over him with his bowler hat, blue Melton overcoat and large boots. The inevitable outcome was that the defendant was found guilty and sent down for a stretch.

Chapter 6:
The Real Thing At Last

By the middle of 1943 things had started to go in our favour. Hitler had received a bloody nose at Stalingrad and Monty had outwitted Rommel at El Alamein. There was much agitation for a second front to be opened in Europe after the disastrous Dieppe Raid in 1941. Pearl Harbour had been bombed bringing the United States into the war, and they subsequently set up their base at Bristol.

In early 1944 we moved south to a suburb of Bournemouth called Westbourne. The men were billeted in empty boarding houses and the officers in a requisitioned house. It was a nice place – I remember it had a green bathroom. Westbourne seemed to be full of prosperous citizens from London and other cities who had fled the Blitz. They didn't seem to want us; we made the place untidy and reminded them of the war. All this time we were doing landings up and down the South coast. Sometimes we sailed from Portsmouth, other times from Southampton.

I cannot now remember the company, but we were then placed in a Beach Group at a camp. This was composed of a Royal Engineer's Company, a Pioneer Company, R.A.M.C. and Ordnance detachments. There was also a Beach Master (usually Naval) and a battalion of infantry to defend the Group's perimeter. Our task would be to lay the wire mesh roads from the water's edge, through the dunes to the interior roads, and also the laterals connecting them. A few sections would cover other jobs such as salvage, sanitation and grave digging. Our infantry were Irish from Liverpool and we were woken each morning by their Irish bagpipes. One of their cooks found a long tube and hung his pots on it. His fire made the tube grow warmer. Finally, it exploded and the Liverpools were short of a cook. The tube had been a Bangalore Torpedo used for blowing a path through wire. *([60] Bangalore torpedoes are a simple explosive device used for clearing booby traps and light obstacles such as barricades and barbed wire. They were originally invented at the time of the British Empire's conquest of India. The torpedo is man portable and consists of three different sections: a nose which is smoothly shaped for penetrating obstacles, empty sections of piping to give the device the required length and explosive sections normally filled with an explosive such as TNT. Each section apart from the nose is normally about 6ft long with a 3" diameter. Bangalore Torpedoes were widely used in both World Wars).* Our time was spent in laying roads, doing forced marches and other strenuous activities. One evening another subaltern and I went out for a drink, which turned out to be like trying to obtain water in the middle of the Sahara. The local pubs were crowded not only with the members of all three services but also with about every nationality serving the Allied cause.

My companion – a Scottish stonemason called Jack Kemp, another lieutenant – suggested that we take a walk into the country. As we left the town's outskirts we walked past rows of jeeps, trucks of every type, and some large amphibious vehicles, as well as armoured cars and tanks. It took quite a while to get past this mass of military hardware, but eventually we were clear and seeing a bosky little lane on the right, we tried it. About five hundred yards further an idyllic picture was revealed to us. It was a typical English village with its cluster of cottages, a church, a green and, most importantly, a village pub! Today I cannot remember the name of either the village or the pub, but I will always remember the scene inside. There were just a few locals and behind the bar stood 'mine host', a large, jovial man. On the counter was a large carved Buddha, which bore some resemblance to its owner. He gave us a hearty welcome and, guessing where we were bound, refrained from asking any questions. We knocked back a few pints and it turned out that the landlord was an old navy man who had served in A1, the very first British submarine. He became annoyed about an incident which had happened recently. 'Had a chap in here the other week who said he was the cox'n of A1. He never was! I knowed who the cox'n of A1 was,' he added. 'Bill Jones was! I remember when he lay a-dying in Haslar Hospital. They put the screens round him.' He was incensed about the imposter who had claimed to be coxswain of A1. After closing time he took us to the kitchen where we were treated to more beer and sandwiches. About midnight we took a beery farewell of him and reeled back to camp. After the war I read an account of A1. She was launched in 1902 and was the very first successful British designed and built submarine. Some eleven members of her crew were drowned in a collision with a ship in 1904. Although she was subsequently recovered, she never went to war and finally vanished in trials in 1911 while being operated by an experimental clockwork autopilot instead of a crew. The wreck, located off Selsey Bill, was rediscovered in later years and was given official protection. *([61] This was in 1989 when a local fisherman snagged the wreck by chance. Ted kept a newspaper report of this discovery).*

We were now part of 3rd Canadian Division and wore their flash and an anchor for Beach Group. Shortly before D Day we went to a Canadian concert. I cannot now remember all the features but one of the most moving parts of the concert was at the end when the whole audience rose and sang 'O Canada, we stand on guard for thee.' A few days later the Captain was posted to another company and Jack and I were interviewed for his post. What I should have realised when I left O.C.T.U. was that I ought to have spent some money on lessons on how to speak like an officer and a gentleman. Instead I could only speak my native Bristol, an accent which has never enjoyed much social prestige, *([62] Ted never lost his Bristol accent, and in later years when he was teaching, his pupils derived amusement from the intrusive Bristol 'I', which caused Ted to say "I've got an ideal" whenever he broached a new idea to his classes. He always felt that when in the army he had often been patronised by his officers because of his accent, and that it blocked possible promotion)* and I never could hit it off with senior officers anyway. Jack got the Captaincy.

Just after this we were relieved of our usual camp duties by American troops. One morning I was returning to camp in a jeep when I saw a GI walking back, so I told my driver to stop and I offered him a lift. He was a very young soldier, no more than about eighteen years of age, and was effusively grateful. I don't think I have ever received so many thanks in my life. 'Real good of you, Sir, to give me a lift and I sure appreciate it, Sir. Saved me some walking, Sir.' And so on. I never received so many 'Sirs' in all my service career. I asked him where he was from – although I have now forgotten exactly, I think it was from the Mid West and when we put him down outside his camp he gave me a salute which would have made the Guards jealous. I often wondered whether he got home to his ma after the invasion to eat some more of her apple pie or whether he was left in a French grave. I hope he made it home. Another time I found a huge coloured sentry guarding the camp entrance with a bazooka anti-tank weapon. On seeing me, he tossed the thing up as if it were a matchstick and presented arms. I returned the salute and felt like a General in Command. What he was intending to do with this piece of ordnance I cannot imagine, unless he was expecting a panzer to be trundling down an English country lane.

'At Bournemouth Montgomery gave a pep talk and later Eisenhower inspected our unit.'

The last exercise before D-Day was at Bracklesham Bay and we marched through a working-class district of Southampton to the docks. We were kitted out as for the real thing and while we were loading the landing craft some working class mothers came from their badly bombed streets and pressed their skimpy rations and jugs of hot tea on my men. I told one of them that they didn't really need it as they had their own rations on them. However, she insisted that she wanted to help our lads – 'Anything for the boys', she said. I thought that these were my kind of people.

At Bournemouth Montgomery gave a pep talk and later Eisenhower inspected our unit. He asked a man in the rear rank what he did on the beach. Flustered, this individual could only open and close his mouth several times before gulping out 'Work, Sir.' After this illuminating conversation, Eisenhower passed on. Churchill also passed through our camp but I only saw him from a distance.

The final preparations for 'Overlord' *([63] Operation Overlord was the codename given to the Allied invasion of France scheduled for June 1944. The overall commander of Operation Overlord was General Dwight Eisenhower)* were now being made. After the Bracklesham Bay exercise we had been moved to a closed camp at Chandler's Ford, Hampshire where we were penned in until we boarded our landing craft – the only way out was across the Channel. One morning the officers of our group were taken into a marquee and briefed. There was a sand model of our

intended landing place spread out before us with all the places marked with false names. I remember Caen was 'Poland'. I was presented with a bag containing three maps in cardboard tubes. I had strict instructions never to let these out of my sight and I had to carry them wherever I went to meals, on parade, even to the W.C. One of these now hangs on my eldest grandson's wall. *([64] Percy has this map, and Ted gave his second grandson Harry the chart showing 56 formation signs of the troops involved in D-Day, which was issued to men so that they could familiarise themselves with these before the invasion (it is dated 8th May 1945).).* Eventually, the day came when we set out to liberate Europe and we boarded our landing craft at Portsmouth. We knew it was the real thing – we always carried full kit and ammunition but this time we had also been issued with French francs.

I always admired the way those Sub-Lieutenants of the Royal Navy strode about their landing craft with its small crew with all the assurance of an Admiral in command of the Mediterranean Fleet. I settled my chaps as well as I could, given the limited space of this vessel. We also had two Majors with us. I gave these two worthies their maps and they said not a word. We pushed off and hung around in the Channel. Then the skipper told me the show was held up, but eventually we were under way. Sometime in the night I was seasick. This was unusual because I'm usually a good sailor, even when it is on the rough side as it was then. This turned out to be the only time in my life that I was sick at sea, so it must have been nerves.

As we neared the French coast I could already hear the guns ahead. The sea was full of ships and to the rear the old Warspite, *([65] HMW Warspite was built at Devonport, Plymouth and launched on 26th November 1913. After service in World War 1 and in early battles of World War 2, during which she sustained significant damage, Warspite was deployed at Normandy with only three functioning main turrets. She also took part in the bombardment of Brest, Le Harve and Walcheren)* a veteran of the battle of Jutland, was thundering her huge shells over our heads. We were supposed to land between nine and ten but it was some hours later when we got ashore. The Navy gave us a lovely landing. *([66] Ted landed on 'Juno' beach as part of the second wave behind the Canadian infantry. Juno spanned either side of the port of Courseulles-sur-Mer, with a landing area that was six miles wide. The level of the tide, however, meant that obstacles were obscured by water. The Canadian landing had begun badly, with a third of the landing craft destroyed or damaged by mines and obstacles. 'Juno' was divided into three sectors – 'Love', 'Mike' and 'Nan'. Each of those was then subdivided again into three further sectors 'Green', 'White' and 'Red'. Ted landed on 'Mike Green').* The ramp was lowered and when we stepped off we didn't even get our feet wet. The beach was covered with the litter of war, wrecked amphibious vehicles and dead Canadians. Facing me was an enemy pillbox and lying on the slope leading up to it were the bodies of two Canadians, an officer and a private of the Winnipeg Rifles. With my section behind me, I made for the nearest exit from the beach. I did not notice at the time that 144 Company had dropped its ramp on an underwater obstacle which had been mined. The ramp had been blown back and had wounded several men, including the Company Commander. *([67] The landing craft, bearing half of 144 Company, including the company commander, struck a mine while approaching the shore and, with 12 killed and 27 wounded, was forced by the tide to return to England. The survivors returned, after being re-equipped, to rejoin their unit a week later.'(Rhodes-Wood p.231)).*

Until we had laid our roads, the heavy lorries could not get ashore. We set to work making a road from the water's edge, through the dunes to the village of Graye-sur-Mer. We roughly smoothed out a track, laid coir fibre matting, placed wire mesh on top and anchored it by driving metal plugs through the mesh. The chaps were good – they worked like Trojans. Presently we had finished the track that led from the water's edge across the beach and through the dunes to the village road behind. Then we took a breather as the first of the wheeled transport came ashore and passed slowly along our chicken wire road. We then started on the laterals which connected the exits. I slung a sledge hammer most of the day until I was exhausted, but I began to feel that this war was getting somewhere. *([68] Some officers watched their men at work – while Ted was generally reluctant to participate in what he considered unnecessary tasks, when something needed doing he always played his part).* We worked until long past nightfall and then dropped our tools and bodies and slept where we had fallen. When I awoke at daybreak, I told the senior N.C.O.'s to rouse the chaps and an Irish sergeant named Hourigan went round to give them a little shake. They sat up yawning and stretching their stiff limbs. Presently everyone was awake except for one blanketed form which he began to shake, until a Cockney voice said 'You'll take a long time to wake that bloke. That's a dead Canadian!' Hourigan mumbled something under his breath and crossed himself.

'There were other dead on the beach, drowned sailors and soldiers from casualties at sea.'

There were other dead on the beach, drowned sailors and soldiers from casualties at sea and I thought of Davies' poem about the dead sea boy. However, the Canadian losses had not been as bad as those suffered by the Americans. I saw only four dead Canadians on our section of the beach. *([69] The Canadians actually suffered heavy casualties. German light infantry occupied villages beyond the coastal dunes and while the Canadian assault troops got across the beach they were then mown down by German fire. Juno was the most heavily defended of the Normandy beaches and the first waves of troops suffered a 50% casualty rate. However, at the sector of the beach named 'Mike, Green' casualties were less than elsewhere).* One I can remember was a Canadian signaller lying flat on his face. He had his radio on his back and its slender aerial was bent over his head like a kind of memorial standing out against the sky.

I had two sergeants: Sergeant Hourigan, who was always cheerful and pleasant, and another one, whose name I cannot recall, who was a Bristolian who disliked me intensely. I cannot think why as I had never shown any favouritism between them. We just didn't seem to get on, so as far as possible we kept out of each other's way.

Rommel had been improving the defences on this coast and some German concrete mixers had been left there. These were different in a number of ways to the British type and the Royal Engineers in our beach group were struggling to set them in motion. Hourigan strolled up and to their surprise showed them how to operate them. They thanked him profusely. It turned out that he had worked for a German contractor before the war when they had been engaged on improvements to the River Shannon. *([70] This was probably the great hydroelectric scheme at Ardnacrusha. Over four years a huge labour force, working from four special camps, built concrete weirs, bridges and dams to harness the power of the River Shannon. The contractor was Siemens-Schuckert, and in summer 1929 crowds from all over Ireland flocked to County Clare to see the scheme reach completion).*

That day the Germans reminded us that there was a war on. Sometime in the morning, a single enemy aircraft came over and released a bomb on one of our beach exits. I heard the explosion and then saw the plane swoop along the beach firing its guns. I did a rugby tackle into a nearby shell hole and heard the bullets swishing into the sand. As the plane disappeared, I went to the exit and did what I could to help. The bomb had fallen slap into the middle of an anti-tank platoon. Among the infantry casualties had been some of ours. The company quartermaster and the company clerk would normally have been stationed at C.H.Q. in the village behind the beach but for some reason they had visited the working party at the exit, with the result that the quartermaster was slightly wounded and the clerk seriously injured, and died as he was being loaded aboard a boat for England. The lance-corporal clerk was our first fatal casualty. He was a member of the Plymouth Brethren, as were many others in the company. We passed a collection round in order to put a tablet in his memory in his chapel in Plymouth. After the dead and wounded had been cleared away I walked back down the beach and we got back to our work.

By day we were usually left alone by the Germans but at night the Luftwaffe went after the shipping lying off the beach, with an occasional bomb hitting the land. The sky was full of whistling bombs, anti-aircraft bursts, tracer bullets and flaming onions. *([71] This term came from an anti-aircraft gun used by the Germans in the First World War, the name referring to both the gun and, especially, the flares that it fired. The term came to be used for any sort of anti-aircraft fire that used a visible tracer. The Germans called the original weapon a 'lichtspucker' (light spitter) because it was designed to fire flares at low velocity in rapid sequence across a battle area. It had five barrels and could launch a 37 mm artillery shell about five thousand feet (1500 m). To maximise the chance of a strike, all fire rounds were discharged as rapidly as possible).* After a while, life on the beach became a little easier as far as work was concerned. Caen had not been taken and fresh troops kept piling up in the bridgehead. Hourigan and I cast around for some more comfortable quarters than our holes in the sand. Just off the beach was an empty cottage. I took one small room for an office and sleeping quarters, and piled as many as I could of the chaps in the other rooms. They couldn't all get indoors so the remainder had to fix themselves bivouacs in the garden. The place was rather crowded and became even more so when a Bofors gun *([72] The Bofors Gun was a light, rapid-firing 40 mm anti-aircraft cannon*

which had an effective range of about 12,500ft and fired either armour-piercing or high-explosive shells, giving the 'string of flaming onions' effect) crew pulled in alongside my outside wall. One day I was told that we were to receive a beer ration. This would consist of 'a reputed quart for each man', something that I had never heard of before. The 'reputed quart' turned out to be a large pint. There were no takers among the large number of teetotal Plymouth Brethren amongst us so there was a surplus of unwanted ale. We gave out some extras and then found that there was still an ample supply.

Sergeant Hourigan went down to the landing craft and, to his surprise, discovered a fellow 'townie', a coxswain from Cork who managed to procure some Navy rum. That night, Hourigan and I sat on two ration boxes in the ruined cottage, heedless of the noise going on around us. There were bombs whistling down, ack ack going up, and in the garden the Bofors gun. Whenever this was fired the tiles on the roof seemed to bounce up and down. Amidst all this pandemonium, we were sitting as drunk as skunks when Hourigan said 'Sure, sorr, this war's too good to last.' He may have had the best approach to getting through the war by blotting it out whenever possible.

144 Company on our left were short of officers because of their unfortunate landing and an officer had to be posted to them. Of course it was Ted Hayball. They were situated in the town of Bernieres, the charm of which was not enhanced by the Germans on our left flank being in possession of a large railway gun. This monster was hidden in a tunnel and they would wheel it out at night to fire a couple of shells into Bernieres. After a couple of months we moved slowly up the lines of communication, through the ruins of Caen, past the wreckage of the Falaise Gap *([73] The battle of the Falaise Gap marked the end of the Battle of Normandy, which started on Jun 6, 1944, and ended on August 22, 1944. Montgomery had organised a trap for the retreating Germans as they travelled through Falaise: this was a pincer movement in which the British moved in from the North and the Americans from the South. By 19 August the encircled area – the 'Falaise Pocket' – was just ten kilometres, within which were the last remains of fifteen German divisions, wandering and lost troops, an enormous pack of tanks and other logistic vehicles. Although perhaps 100,000 German troops succeeded in escaping the Allies due to the delay in closing the gap, 40-50,000 were taken prisoner of war and over 10,000 killed. The roads were virtually impassable because of destroyed vehicles and weapons, and bodies of men and horses – a harrowing scene. Much of this destruction had been meted out to the trapped German armies by Allied fighter and bomber aircraft, such as the rocket firing Typhoons of the RAF and the USAAF Thunderbolts),* sleeping in fields. Half of the Company worked for an R.A.F. petrol unit and the other half for Canadian Ordnance.

'144 Company were short of officers because of their unfortunate landing.'

Chapter 7: Operation Infatuate
1st - 8th November 1944

It was now October 1944 and the beach and France lay well behind us. I was with Canadian Ordnance in Mechtem, a small town in Belgium when the Major rolled up and said 'Antwerp's been on about you.' I wondered whom I knew in Antwerp. He continued 'You're to take two sections and report to the Staff Captain at the Grand Hotel in Bruges.' In due course, we arrived at the hotel and any thought about being accommodated in the best bedrooms were soon dispelled. The sentry at the entrance saluted and as I returned the salute I glanced at him, then did a quick double take look again. The outstanding feature of his dress was his headgear, a green Commando beret. My blitheness passed and a deep feeling of foreboding fastened upon me. The interior of the hotel was stiff with commandos. I reported to the Staff Captain who gave the directions for getting to our new accommodation. I went outside where the chaps had also seen the sentry and asked me what we were in for. I replied that it was just a job to which came the rejoinder 'We know – we're in the soup again,' except that they didn't say soup. The billets were a former German prisoner of war camp full of timbered bunk beds. After I had seen the men settled I slung my kit into a civilian billet across the road.

Eventually it was disclosed what we were in for. Antwerp had been captured but the estuary that the port was situated on, the Scheldt, was overlooked by enemy guns on the island of Walcheren. This island had to be taken so that the port of Antwerp could be used. *([74] It became imperative that Walcheren be taken to enable the Allies to use Antwerp to supply their advancing armies. Antwerp, with the largest harbour in Europe, had fallen to the Allies on September 3rd but was still unable to be used. The two other islands held by the Germans – Breskens and South Beveland – had been taken in the third week of October. Walcheren was defended by a garrison of 10,000 German soldiers, about thirty batteries of artillery, mine-fields and barbed wire).* I once read a book entitled 'Top Secret' by Ralph Ingersoll. *([75] Published in 1946. Ingersoll wrote that Eisenhower had to order Montgomery three times to attack Walcheren).* He had been a U.S. Army staff officer and the book was particularly interesting in its examination of U.S./British relationships and, in particular, the friction between Eisenhower and Montgomery. Apparently, when Eisenhower had given the order to Montgomery to take Walcheren, he ignored it, causing Eisenhower as Supreme Commander to pull rank and compel 'Monty' to obey the order.

I was wondering why they always picked on me for some dodgy job and concluded that they thought that there was a reasonable chance that I might not come back. However, the powers that be must have had second thoughts and considered that the job was a little too much for me. In a short while, Captain Rowe, Lieutenants J. Phillips and J. Fowlis turned up. We started a wearying series of route marches and physical jerks. Captain Rowe was a quiet, conscientious kind of chap but he nevertheless had the same idea as all my other superior officers – if in doubt, send Hayball. During the ensuing discussion he pointed out that the landing on the island would be on a short steep beach and that they thought a few handcarts might be useful. Our job was to unload the stores when the Marines had taken the beaches.

Who 'they' were I never enquired, but I didn't like the sound of short, steep beaches or the odd suggestion about handcarts. I always seemed to click for some kind of strange, daft or diplomatic job. This might involve being despatched to some unheard of place in the middle of the night to placate an irate Burgomaster or to explain to a steely-eyed military police sergeant that the pioneer involved in a fracas with a local civilian couldn't possibly be one of ours. Had German Intelligence been up to the mark they might have been wondering why an obscure subaltern of 144 Company Pioneer Corps was making purchases of handcarts in Bruges in October 1944. They would hardly have been more puzzled than I was, or the Belgian wheelwrights were. The Army suffered from a delusion that I spoke Flemish. I gave the first wheelwright a few cigarettes and he also took a few more for 'presently'. His carts were veritable examples of Flemish craftsmanship but unfortunately I had to decline them. I couldn't possibly imagine them being pushed up a steep slope, loaded up with petrol or ammunition, by some of our undersized Pioneers. After four more packets of cigarettes and five more wheelwrights, I found what I required, these being two small, strong, but light, carts.

Shortly after this, on an evening at the end of October, we were briefed. The assault on Walcheren was to be carried out by the 4th Special Service Brigade, and three Royal Marine Commando units among other troops were to land at West Kapelle. The attack on Flushing was to be made by the 52nd Lowland Division and 4th Commando. Two sections of the 144th under Lieutenant J. Fowlis would go in at Flushing while the remainder of the detachment under Captain Rowe, Lieutenant Philips and myself would land at West Kapelle at high water plus one hour on the morning of November 1st. *([76] The RAF had already attacked and destroyed the dykes on Walcheren, but there was enough solid ground left for the Germans to defend, and the task of invading made more difficult by the water. It had been Montgomery's view that it would not be possible to take Walcheren at that time of year).* Our Group Commander Colonel Seldon came down to see us before we sailed. He was another old Gloucester, whom I recalled as the Commander of 'C' Company of the 1st battalion while I was in India, where I was holding up the rear rank of 'B'.

The following afternoon there was a parade before the march to Ostend. The Commandos were a magnificent sight – young, fit and well trained. I wondered how many of them would still be alive the same time the next day. Our Pioneer sections were short, squat, weighted down by their packs and equipment. The Commandos moved off and following them came our rag, tag and bobtail sections. At that moment a glow of pride in the old Pioneers ran through me. I felt as if I loved every damned scruffy one of them. A lorry was waiting for me – I was being sent ahead to supervise the loading of our three landing craft – and I tossed my equipment into the back and set off. At Ostend I was supposed to have the services of some sections of another company but they were nowhere to be seen. I eventually traced these elusive pimpernels behind some crates on the dockside. It was five o'clock and the corporal said that it was their knocking off time, but I gently informed him that the rights of the common man were temporarily in abeyance until the cessation of hostilities. The three crafts were moored side by side and as soon as we loaded each one up, the Navy started

taking them downstream for refuelling, to the dismay of my unwilling helpers who felt that they were being shanghaied into a third front. When we returned to our mooring the boats had been changed around and stores which were in the process of being moved across from number one to number three were now on number one which was the outside vessel and had to be moved back. I felt as if I was trying to walk up a descending escalator. Eventually, the boats were fully loaded, including our precious handcarts, and I could only hope that everything was in the right place. Among the items was a green canvas folding boat, which I put on our craft. If there were any spare boats about, I was making sure they were near me.

The troops arrived and bedded down for the night as well as they could, as comfy beds are in short supply aboard a landing craft. The skipper approached me and said, 'I say, old chap, I shall be on the bridge all night, would you care to have my bunk?' I gratefully accepted. For some hours the war slid by unknown to me but sometime during the night we set off. *([77] They set off at 3.15am).* When I awoke and went out on deck to find us out in the waters of the Scheldt, a dull grey morning, and plenty of activity. The weather wasn't bad and the sea comparatively calm. I forget when 'H' hour was but I can remember us cocking our ears for the first sound of gunfire. It was only a distant mutter at first but it gradually got louder. This was not the first time the British forces had been at Walcheren. There had been a bungled expedition in 1809 against the French, where we had been forced to evacuate with enormous losses. It is not one of the most glorious pages in our naval and military history. The 28th Regiment (1st Gloucesters) had been in that expedition. Now here I was, leaning over the rail, probably the only ex-member of the 28th in this second expedition. I was unaware of the distinction at the time, being busy wishing I was elsewhere.

The Scheldt was heavily mined and was to take no fewer than sixteen sweeps by a hundred vessels after Walcheren had been taken to clear a channel to Antwerp. You would hear a loud bang and know that another landing craft had bought it. The sea was crowded with craft: landing craft, gun boats, rocket ships, motor torpedo boats, and some I couldn't recognise. I could hear the boom of the old Warspite's guns just as I had heard them on D-Day, her shells sounding like rumbling tramcars as they passed overhead.

I went forward to see the troops. We also had some Commandos from Brigade H.Q. with us. I found 144's Pioneers in the British soldier's usual state of good-humoured misery, after a tough night spent trying to sleep in odd spaces between stores. Our three craft, which were moving in line astern, now changed formation. Jim Phillips' craft went ahead of our own and C.S.M. Herman brought up the rear. After a while I walked aft. A few more boats bought it and I saw a rocket ship shatter in a vivid flash of flame. I began watching a blazing ship with rescue craft around it, but hardly had I done so when I heard a loud explosion. Someone came running up shouting 'Sir, Mr Phillips' boat has been hit!' I ran forward and I could see that she was already well down in the water and had swung broadside on. The stern was high up and crowded with troops. Men were jumping into the water. The sea began to fill with bobbing heads. Our skipper steered towards them and there was a rattle of chains as he lowered our ramp, but they were still some distance off. I looked round and saw the folding boat. A Commando corporal and myself grabbed it and kicked the struts into position. Another commando and Private Hart of 144 helped, we shoved it down the ramp, and the four of us were instantly afloat.

For some strange reason I thought of the owl and the pussy cat in their pea green boat. The sea was not very rough and we bobbed gently up and down over the waves. We managed to pull some men out of the water until eventually we heard a voice calling for help. I would not have reached the man in time as my swimming was of the 'puff, splash and paddle' variety. However, the Commando corporal immediately whipped off his jacket and boots. He dived over the side and tore through the water to grab the man. The others threw their weight on the opposite side of the boat while I helped them both in. The rescued man was a diminutive veteran of the First World War, Corporal Rae. He lay on the bottom of the boat, coughing and spluttering up seawater. 'Cheer up, Corporal,' I said, 'Old soldiers never die.' 'This one nearly did,' he gasped.

By now the sea around us was empty of heads. Some had been rescued and some had gone under. Our boat was now well down in the water and I was beginning to visualise us heading for the bottom of the Scheldt. A rescue craft came up and hove to alongside us. We shoved the rescued persons up the rope ladder and then climbed up ourselves. The Commando corporal politely stood back to let me ascend but I said 'After you, corporal.' Nobody was going to rob me of the chance of being last to leave the ship, my only sea-going command in World War Two. 'Jolly little party,' I said with an assumed British Officer's sang-froid to the seaman at the top. 'Party be ……' growled the matelot.

I looked over the side. Wreckage from various boats went floating by – boxes, planks, stores, and, amongst them, calmly and serenely, some of our precious handcarts. As our men were taken down below, I asked the skipper if we could have a small ration of rum. He looked a bit odd at my request and said that they had other things to do than dish out rum to us, although we did get some. Some of the sailors stripped Corporal Rae of his wet clothes, wrapped him in a blanket and seated him in front of the galley fire. We came alongside another craft and vessel there was an explosion that rocked our vessel. The boat reeled in the resultant waves but was untouched. Suddenly, like a greyhound out of a trap, Corporal Rae shot through the serving hatch, minus his blanket. He was halfway up the companionway before I grabbed him. 'It's all right Corporal,' I said as I comforted him, 'Everything's under control,' although I wasn't sure that it was and could have done with a little comforting myself.

'I found 144's Pioneers in the British soldier's usual state of good-humoured misery.'

Eventually we were transferred to another landing craft (LCT) along with the other rescued men, who included Jim Phillips dressed only in a greatcoat. We were now told that we were all to be sent to a hospital in Ostend. My heart lifted at this news as I was now to be well out of it as I was classed as a survivor. The hospital thought me to be a strange kind of survivor, for I had not even got my feet wet. As I slept that night, some of the wounded officers complained – they thought that the war was horrible enough without having to listen to my snoring. The next morning Jim Phillips, dressed in pyjamas, came looking for me to tell me that Captain Rowe had been brought into the ward. I cannot recall what his exact wounds were but I believe he suffered serious injuries to both legs as well as internally. He had gone ashore with a recce party of senior officers and their amphibious vehicle had run over a landmine, killing or wounding most of them. Not only had the Germans laid mines in the sea, they had sown them in the beach.

Captain Rowe was in another ward and not looking very good. He was concerned that our men were now ashore without an officer and he asked me to return. In my opinion, C.S.M. Herman was perfectly capable of taking command but the Army was a bit fussy about such things. Just my luck to be senior subaltern. So I discharged myself and went down to the docks. At the harbour I met Major Orchard-Lisle, a staff officer of the Commando Brigade who was just going out to our forward positions. We caught a boat out and, off West Kapelle, I transferred to my original landing craft where the skipper said that my action had been very plucky. The run in for a landing had been made the day before but our craft had been driven back by enemy batteries. They were now going in again and this time made the landing. We began to unload stores, petrol and various supplies.

One of our sections under Sergeant Brian was already there and had done very well. They had gone in with the boat's Captain and had spent most of their time, whilst they were working, dodging heavy shellfire. A Canadian supply officer who had been on our other boat came to see me and said he wished to bring C.S.M. Herman's conduct to my attention. His craft had been hit by shellfire and Herman had gone out under fire and dragged wounded men to cover. So I wrote out a citation and the Canadian officer and I both signed it. For this and for subsequent work, C.S.M. Herman received an M.B.E. The C.S.M. worked like a Trojan as he drove the men, German prisoners and himself. At one point while we were unloading the weather grew worse and we had to withdraw the German prisoners who were unloading. But the C.S.M. and I were pig-headed and determined to get the rest of the petrol off, working up to our waists in the waves. The craft swung sideways on, the vessel very soon becoming flooded as it was knocked about by the waves, with the ramp banging up and down. Laden with jerry cans, I was knocked over by a wave and would have fallen under the banging ramp if he hadn't dragged me clear. Eventually we were forced to abandon the operation but most of the stores were unloaded. That night we were all very wet and weary so I went to the Canadian supply officer and got a rum ration. On the next day I went back for some more to be informed that we had already had four days' rations previously. I explained that the Sergeant major had accidentally kicked the bottle over. The Canadian gave me an odd transatlantic look but still gave me some more rum.

For several days, in atrocious weather, we guarded prisoners, buried the dead and loaded amphibious craft, some of which went up the line with supplies. *([78] Harry Ratner describes doing this work, wading knee high amongst reeds and scrambling over half-sunk landing craft to retrieve bodies or parts of bodies, and having to*

search bodies for identification. (Ratner. P.101)). Eventually the weather abated and someone cried 'A ship!' We all rushed down to the water's edge like so many Robinson Crusoes. An officer put his glasses up to it and announced that it was a derelict. One of our men died of exposure and a corporal was caught in the blast from an anti-tank mine when a vehicle went over it. Anti-tank mines were thickly clustered over the beach but as long as you kept away from moving vehicles you were safe. Luckily, the corporal's face returned to its normal size after a few days in the dressing station.

The battle for Walcheren lasted about four days and then we heard the good news that the Germans had surrendered and that we were being evacuated. One evening we were loaded into Buffaloes *([79] The Buffalo was an amphibious tracked troop carrier designed by the US Army and first used by the British Army in the Walcheren landings. It had a watertight steel hull and was propelled on land and in water by its tracks; it was powered by a seven-cylinder air-cooled engine, giving a maximum speed of 25 mph on land and 5.4 knots in water. British Buffalos were normally armed with one 20 mm cannon and two .5 machine-guns and up to 6,500 lbs of cargo could be carried)* and set out across country for Flushing. This turned out to be one of the worst experiences of the whole show. The R.A.F. had bombed the island and most of the island was flooded. The Buffaloes often had to leave the strips of sand and plunge into the water. The flooding was not of uniform depth and frequently we hit a sand bar. The Buffalo fell into one shell hole after another. As it lurched in then grudgingly crawled out we were alternately flung backwards and forwards off our feet. This monster did everything bar stand on its head, and I was scared rigid that it would turn over and pin me into the mud with two dozen Pioneers on top of me. Night came down while we were still ploughing around and the nightmarish journey continued. Eventually the propeller got itself trapped in barbed wire, which brought our faltering progress to a full stop. We went to look for a night's lodging and to our relief discovered a German gun emplacement complete with beds, stove and a bottle of Jerry rum. Someone fried up chips and German corned beef and then we settled down for the night. Everyone was glad to be free of the vehicle and the place was full of laughing men, smoking, and stove fumes. At this point I felt that the war was on its last legs.

In the morning we managed to get the Buffalo disentangled and off we went. The ride was a little better in the daylight but at Flushing there was a heart stopping moment when we made a steep descent down the side of a canal, which felt like being on the big dipper at Blackpool. We crossed the waterway and climbed up onto the harbour wall. We were all flung into a confused tangle of arms and legs at the rear of the vehicle. When we had sorted ourselves out we found we had reached Flushing harbour. We didn't stop to thank the sappers for the ride but piled sharply aboard a landing craft when then took us across from Flushing to Breskens. There, on terra firma, we beheld the 3 tonne trucks of 144 Company waiting invitingly for us. I subsequently learned that our other sections under the command of Lieutenant Fowlis had done well. It appears that at one point they helped to turn a captured gun on the enemy. Out of the seven sections engaged, 144 had lost about 33-40 men killed, wounded or drowned.

Chapter 8:
When in Doubt, Send Hayball

Just after I returned to the Company in Merchtem, Belgium, I was invited to an R.A.F. party, which turned out to be rather rough. However, I was so relieved to be still inhabiting the land of the living that I somewhat overindulged and can remember little about the occasion, although it was said later that I was poured into a 15 cwt truck. Consequently, I was hardly in the pink the following morning when the Major informed me that we were going to Bruges to see the Marine Commandos. I demurred but was overruled. As we set off, he twisted round in his seat and growled, 'I should hate to see you getting an MC!' I have no idea why he took me there because he disappeared into the inner sanctum to chat with the Marines and left me alone in the mess. On his return we had lunch there and afterwards as I was grabbing my greatcoat from the peg I blacked out.

'Out of the seven sections engaged, 144 had lost about 33-40 men killed, wounded or drowned.'

When I came round I was in the Bruges Military Hospital. In response to the medical officer's questions, I told him that as a child I had suffered from a mild form of epilepsy known as petit mal. I did not fall down but just stood there with my mouth gaping open. My mother failed to notice the condition at first because I usually stood about with a blank look on my face. When she eventually realised that something was wrong with me she took me to our doctor who informed her that I had petit mal and that I would grow out of it. I was subsequently taken for several hospital appointments but was simply told that I would grow out of it each time. The fit at Bruges was the only one I suffered from during the war and since then I have only had two further occurrences. As long as I keep taking my medication I will not suffer another one, but they have not yet invented a cure for old age.

After a short stay in hospital, I was discharged and went to convalesce on the Belgian coast. While I was there I met another convalescent officer who had been in our Beach Group and who had been transferred to another Battalion. He said that each time he took part in an attack he wondered how many men he still had with him.

After my convalescence, I returned to the old mob. Somehow, the M.C. never turned up and I could imagine some chap at the War Office saying, 'What, him? A hero?' As some recompense, a short while later I was sent on three days' leave in Brussels and I took a sergeant and three privates with me. I told them to meet me in three days' time outside my hotel at 9.30 am for transport back. Another hotel had been arranged for the sergeant and privates. I intended to have a restful and refreshing three days in the city where I would visit the museums and art galleries and maybe attend a concert. I rose the following morning to go down to breakfast, when out of the opposite room came two Canadian lieutenants. They gave me a cheery greeting and invited me for a drink. I told them that I thought it a little early in the day but they swept this aside explaining that their division had just liberated 75,000 litres of German ersatz rum. I went with them into their room and they had a carboy of the stuff wrapped in a wicker container. I sampled a drop and it nearly blew the back of my head off. It appeared this pair had come to Brussels to buy up supplies for their Divisional Mess and that afterwards they were going on to Paris. It seemed to me that some people were having a cushy war.

We had hardly seated ourselves in the dining room when they started to demand champagne. 'Champagne,' they cried. ' We want champagne!' There were a few senior officers present who raised their eyebrows at this unseemly behaviour but they were usually reluctant to get involved with drunken 'Colonials'. So we finished a bottle and then quite a few more. I was no longer sure who was paying and at some point in the proceedings I had an urge to sing. There was an orchestra there playing soft peaceful background music so I asked the conductor if he would play 'I can't give you anything but love, baby.' We all burst into a raucous rendition of the popular song. I cannot remember how the proceedings ended but I eventually went back to bed and slept it off. When I woke up the two Canadians had gone.

I remember going out to the Waterloo battlefield site and looking for the spot where the Gloucesters had fought *([80] The Gloucestershire Regiment was particularly proud of its service during the Napoleonic wars. It was unique in the British Army for the Sphinx badge worn on both the front and back of its soldiers' headgear. This and the legend 'Egypt' is a reminder of how the regiment fought literally back to back to defeat Napoleon's armies at the Battle of Alexandria in 1801. Subsequently, the Gloucesters were the only unit to be mentioned in despatches at the Battle of Waterloo)* but there was not a great deal to see other than a souvenir shop. Wellington had said when he revisited the site, 'They have spoilt my battlefield'. After three days when I was due to return, I went outside to meet the sergeant and the three privates. The latter were there but the sergeant was missing. We waited for a while but he still failed to turn up. I reported this on our return, and my superiors seemed to take rather a dim view of the affair, as if I had personally encouraged him to go missing. They probably noted in my records 'He tends to be careless and has lost a sergeant.' However, the wandering sergeant was apprehended some time later. Although he had a wife at home, he was having an affair with a Belgian woman and had obtained employment driving a tramcar!

Around this time a letter came through from the Commandos' H.Q. stating that the C.S.M. and I had been admirable leaders and the men had worked courageously and well under shellfire amidst adverse weather conditions. My C.O., however, never showed me the letter and I only found out about it due to the company clerk leaking me a copy. The old Marine Brigadier who had sent the letter had been very nice to me. Many years later we were on holiday in Europe and I saw his obituary in an English paper I had bought. The outcome of his report was that the C.S.M. received an M.B.E. and I received the Grand Order of Nothing. Many years after the war I was to revisit Holland and I discovered that Walcheren was no longer an island, having become attached to the mainland by reclamation. *([81] In 1944 the Scheldt area was a low-lying and sparsely inhabited agricultural region. Since then the coastline of the region has changed considerably through land reclamation, including that of*

the channels around the island of Walc).

My two sections were now working for Canadian Ordnance. *([82] There was a large range of work done by Pioneer companies during this period, as this extract from Rhodes-Wood explains: "Conditions with companies varied considerably from 224 Company (Major PB Jaggers) working all out at the BSD at Diest, where for twenty-nine hours the men kept going without a break and only managed five and a half hours rest in the forty-eight hour period covering 30th September/1st October, to 244 Company at Antwerp where, Major LSS Woolcott reported, the unit had no permanent tasks and did no more than odd jobs until the end of December").* Their company was stationed at Weelde station on the Belgian-Dutch border, with the international line running through the middle of the cookhouse. Sergeant Brian and I had a wooden hut for an office which carried two signs saying 'Officer i/c Pioneers' and 'Officer i/c Civilian Labour'. I had a notion that if I put up enough signs I might improve my rank and status. I had heard about a chap in Cairo who held some minor post. He managed to obtain a jeep and a driver first. Then, as he was responsible for some stores, he gained a storeman, and because stores have to be moved, he gained a truck and another driver. According to the tale, he eventually finished up as Lieutenant Colonel in charge of a large depot. I expect that this fairy tale had been made up by some character like me who never seemed to advance any further along the ladder of promotion. At one point a fire engine appeared and as some of my chaps were supposed to be able to use it, I now had another sign to put up – 'Officer i/c Fire Unit'. I was actually only meant to command my Pioneers and keep an eye on the civilian workers.

However, that was not all because the Canadians used to sometimes offload various other jobs onto me. These might consist of the writing of a summary of evidence for a court martial and other clerical jobs, to the extent of my wondering whether they could manage the English language. However, I didn't make too much fuss as they were not a bad bunch of blokes. One day the Adjutant approached me and informed me that they would be making me the local defence officer. I was already beginning to imagine another sign on our hut but then he began to tell me the reason for this appointment. 'You see,' he explained, 'We're a little worried about the 3rd German Parachute Division. Intelligence tell us that they haven't been committed to battle yet and the line is rather thinly held at this point.' He then went on to say that they would be giving us some extra arms. In due course they produced a couple of Bren guns and also two PIAT's, which were a hand-held anti-tank weapon and wouldn't have been much use unless the enemy found a way of landing tanks by parachute. The uselessness of these weapons was compounded by the fact that no ammunition was ever provided for them. Our chief means of defence were to be two ancient armoured cars which were like tall dustbins on wheels and by the look of them had probably been used to put down riots in Cairo in the nineteen twenties. We christened them 'Pick' and 'Shovel' after the Pioneers' insignia.

Fancying myself as Lawrence of Arabia, I attempted to drive one. It had a slit only two inches wide to look through and the result was that we ended up in a ditch, the Canadians having to drag us out. I duly put up my 'Defence Officer' sign on the hut, hoping to impress. The next day the Major came along and drew my attention to all the signs. 'What's all this rubbish?' he growled. I told him that they denoted my many responsibilities at which he sniffed and drove away. Thankfully, the German 3rd Parachute Division didn't pay us a visit.

Just before Christmas 1944 the major called me over to Company HQ, which was situated just over the Dutch border. For some obscure reason, it was located in Baale-Hertog, a small, detached portion of Belgium. *([83] Baarle-Hertof is made up of several small Belgian enclaves totalling about 3 square miles and is located about 22 miles west of Eindhoven in the Netherlands, completely surrounded by territory of the Netherlands).* I wondered what kind of daft errand he wanted to send me on now. On my arrival it transpired that he wanted to have the scattered sections of the Company assembled at headquarters for their Christmas dinner. The difficulty was that there was no venue large enough, but just across the road there was a large seminary for the training of Catholic priests. The Major wanted someone to approach the Principal and ask if we could use their large hall for our dinner. I suggested to him that perhaps he should go instead as a Major's request would carry more weight, but he seemed very reluctant to go himself. I believed that he thought he might be polluted by creeping Catholicism. I duly set off to open negotiations and on my introduction to the elderly abbot who was in charge of the institution he seemed most agreeable to our use of the hall. He asked me to sit with him for a spell and produced a large bottle of wine. His English was quite good, so we sat and chatted, having a most pleasant time until we had drunk all the wine. I got few thanks on my return other than the major grumbling about how long I had spent there. 'Well, Sir,' I explained, 'it took some stiff negotiation.'

On Christmas Day 1944 we were all assembled for the men's dinner to do the waiting as was the custom and then, in the evening, we had the officers' dinner, which we celebrated with more than usual enthusiasm. Afterwards I retreated to a blissful drunken sleep. Several hours later I was dragged from the arms of Orpheus by a vigorous shaking. It was the major's batman who yelled 'Sir, it's parachutists!' My heart gave a backflip into my boots as my brain began to click. I hurriedly pulled on my trousers and boots and went out onto the landing. I could hear feet clattering on cobbles and pounding down stairs. There in front of me staggered the Major in an advanced state of drunkenness, wildly shaking a revolver and bawling 'Every man out! We'll defend this village to the last round! Look sharp about it!' I managed to remove the revolver from him before he blew someone's head off. He seemed to think he was defending Rorke's Drift. *([84] A famous battle defending a mission station during the Zulu war).* I still had a head that was bad enough without all this clatter and shouting. Please let me wake up, I prayed. Down below was a scene of utter pandemonium with men shouting and running about, and one of the armoured cars had been started up. Startled villagers looked on from their doorways. It appeared that a sentry in the street had seen some white circles in the sky and thought they were parachutes. Eventually, someone had the sense to put their field glasses to these blobs and reveal that they were, in fact, anti-aircraft shells bursting in the sky. The enemy was making one of his last futile air attacks. *([85] This was possibly part of 'Operation Bodenplatte', Goering's last big air strike in the West in connection with the Ardennes Offensive. Although many Allied aircraft on the ground were destroyed in the attacks, the Germans also suffered severe losses. Many of these were caused by accidents due to the inexperience of the poorly trained young pilots).* We stood the men down and by the time I went back up the Major had retired to his room. I heard the tinkle of a glass as he treated himself for delayed shock. What the old abbot across the road thought of all this performance I could not imagine. He probably opened another bottle of wine to calm his nerves.

'The enemy was making one of his last futile air attacks.'

The next morning I returned with my section to the Canadians. All went well until they unloaded another lieutenant onto me. I cannot recall his actual name but I called him Wilkie. The main problem with Wilkie was that he couldn't be content with a quiet peaceful existence and seemed to think that he had to discover information that would be of use to the Army's Intelligence Service. He must have been reared on a diet of Sherlock Holmes and Sexton Blake. He was very keen to know everything – so keen that he was a pest. I explained to him that the men unloaded boxes from lorries and trains and then loaded them onto other lorries and trains. This seemed rather mundane to Second Lieutenant Wilkie. I agreed with him but it was better than being shot at. After being wounded in 1940 I was not eager to repeat the experience. To keep him happy I gave him the men's mail to censor. Normally I only skipped through the letters to see whether any location was revealed but Wilkie could not restrain his natural curiosity. He soon discovered who had received a 'Dear John' letter or that 06 Smith's wife had run off with the milkman.

But this was not enough to keep him busy. He told me that on the road between Antwerp and our position there were gangs of British and American deserters who would waylay a lorry and steal its cargo in order to make lucrative deals on the blank market. This may have been true, but it was not our job to deal with it and I told him to report the matter to the Military Police. He seemed to be disappointed with my lack of investigative zeal.

He made further investigations and informed me that there was an estaminet in the nearby town of Turnhout where these criminals congregated and thought it should be investigated. I bluntly told him that if he did, his lifeless body would probably be discovered floating in the local canal. A short while after this the Canadians became concerned about the loss of stores. They suspected that the Canadian sentries were involved in the pilfering of these goods, so it was proposed to employ my men on guard duties instead. They seemed to have some notion that British sentries might be more honest. I was a little dubious about this but the chaps didn't mind as it was easier doing these duties than humping heavy boxes about.

Meanwhile, Wilkie was still carrying out his amateur detective work. He decided to go undercover one night, so he dressed himself in a private's battle dress and sallied forth into the night. Where he went I do not know but he later returned to camp having failed to make any outstanding discoveries. As he entered the depot the

British sentry challenged him. After he had answered satisfactorily, the sentry said, 'How did the soap go?' Wilkie was furious at this joke - suggesting that he had been involved in black market activities - and wanted the sentry to be court-martialled. When I questioned the man he said that Wilkie has misheard and that he had actually said 'Had a good time, Joe?' It was just a matter of Wilkie's word against the sentry's, and a higher authority might wish to know why an officer was wearing a private's uniform, so the matter was dropped. After this incident Wilkie was quiet for a time. However, inside the depths of his investigative mind, some cogwheels were beginning to turn. He approached me one day and said in a quiet, mysterious voice, 'There's a house near here.' 'Yes,' I replied, 'they do have houses in Holland.' He frowned at this but continued despite my interruption and went on to tell me that he had noticed a Dutch soldier was entering this house every night. Then the man would leave the house in the morning and later return. I suggested that the soldier probably had a pass but Wilkie said that he would hardly have a pass every night.

To keep him quiet, I let him have a sergeant and a couple of men. They lay in wait and arrested the chap on his next visit, and the result was another embarrassment for the intrepid sleuth. The Dutch soldier was in a unit that was stationed very close to his home, so instead of sleeping in barracks he quite naturally went home instead. The sergeant who had gone with Wilkie was muttering about going on 'a bloody wild goose chase'. I rather envied the Dutch soldier and his nine to five war.

One day the Major took me to visit the R.A.F. unit who ran the petrol dump where some of our chaps worked. Apparently, they wanted me to see the Burgomaster of a nearby village for some reason. I can no longer remember what the purpose of this was but they seemed to think that my ten words of Dutch would make an impression on the aforementioned official. So I was provided with a jeep and a driver, whom I found out later was an ex-lorry driver. In the winter jeeps were sometimes crudely boarded up making them look like rabbit hutches on wheels. We then drove along the top of a long Dutch dyke at a pace which I found to be a little too fast for my liking, the vehicle bouncing on the cobbles as we roared along. The, all of a sudden, he managed to get into a high speed wobble and instead of slowing down he wrenched the steering wheel from side to side as he tried to regain control. As a result we soon flew off the road and into the dyke with a mighty splash. We hit some shallow water and both of us burst through the wooden sides. My left thigh hit a projecting bolt, which had been used to fix the boards on the side of the jeep. I climbed out of our water filled jeep and dragged the driver out of the water and up the bank by the scruff of the neck whilst calling him all manner of choice names. Then I discovered that the bolt had torn its way through my battledress trousers and thigh, which was now bleeding profusely. I found my field dressing and, taking down my trousers, put the dressing and plaster on the wound. I made myself respectable in case a Dutch maiden came along, while the idiot who had brought about our present predicament kept mumbling about how sorry he was. I told him to shut up.

We waited there until a lorry came along and then got a lift back to the R.A.F. depot where I had a few comments to make regarding their choice of drivers. The Major was still there and I informed him that if there were any more stupid errands to run he would have to do them himself. I was taken to an R.A.F. dressing station where the wound was cleaned up. However, after a number of days the wound did not seem to be making any progress. By this time, the R.A.F. had moved out and a Canadian dressing station was located nearby. The Canadian M.O. inspected my wound and told me to get onto a stretcher. *([86] Ted used to tell this tale about how it was the Canadian, rather than the RAF medical team which realised that he might be at risk of losing his leg).* So I found myself back in Bruges in a hospital where the officers' ward was on the sixth floor. I remember being carried aloft like a sacrificial object by four small German prisoners.

Every night the officers received a small tot of whisky. This seemed rather paltry so I got an orderly to find me an empty bottle and I carefully poured each tot into it. The war was now on its last legs and I meant to have a good drink on V.E. day. It was in this hospital that I heard the splendid news that Germany had surrendered. *([87] German forces in Holland, Denmark and NW Germany surrendered on May 4th 1945, followed on May 7th by the full surrender*

of Germany). V.E. day at last and I could drink my whisky. I later heard that for the cheering crowds throughout Britain licensing laws were abandoned and pubs were open all day. Just my luck to miss all that!!

The young M.O. who was looking after my leg was rather concerned about the scar and said that they might be able to do something about it in case I decided to become an actor or a ballet dancer! The prospect of tottering on my points in 'Swan Lake' amused me. I would probably plunge through the ice. I assured him that tidying up my scar was not necessary, as any display of my scar tissue would involve the downing of my trousers.

On my discharge from hospital I was sent to a nice little convalescent depot on the Belgian coast. There I met an officer who was in the Liverpool Irish Battalion, which had been in our Beach Group. Subsequently the battalion had been broken up and used as reinforcements for various infantry battalions. Luckily his wounds were not serious. In due course I returned to my old Company, where the old Major was preparing to depart, and his leaving gave me thoughts about the future. The wartime squaddy would have a gratuity on leaving. However, I had longer service and if I signed up for another two years I could go on half pay and receive a larger gratuity when my demob number came up.

It was shortly before the July 1945 elections and arrangements were being made for soldiers to vote.([88] *It took three weeks to collect and count the votes from the thousands of troops across Europe, with the result – an overwhelming victory for the Labour Party – declared on 26th July. It was believed that the soldiers' votes contributed greatly to the Labour Party's success*). It was naturally the main topic of conversation in the mess. *([89] The army ordered that meetings be held to explain to the soldiers what the election was about, and centrally-produced information was read out to the men by their officers).* Our new C.O. informed us that the only political party that he had ever belonged to was the British Union of Fascists. I was appalled at his bragging about being a supporter of fascism after the Nazis had just drenched Europe in blood and I told him exactly what I thought of him. As a result I was posted, as majors have to be respected even if they are Nazi sympathisers. I found myself on a supply dump watching lorries going in and out. I decided against the further two years.

Eventually in October 1945 my demob number *([90] There was a system of points for demobilisation with more points for longer service, and for those with wives and children. Although single, Ted's service, and perhaps medical condition, meant that he was out at a fairly early stage – October 1945 – and well before some of the troops who mutinied in spring 1946)* came up and I departed to a transit camp in Tournai, the very place where I was first wounded five years previously. This is where I came in I thought. My only memory of the place is of a large major with a musketeer's moustache striding across to the piano. I expected him to play a rousing regimental march but you can sometimes be wrong about people. He played Fats Waller.

In December 1945 I was back in England at Folkestone where we handed in our arms and other kit. In addition to my Webley revolver, I also had a long-barrelled Navy Colt and on reflection I could have got a reasonable price for it in recent years, but all I wanted at the time was to say goodbye to the army, to the war, and to being an Officer and a Gentleman. *([91] Officers were allowed to keep their revolvers but Ted chose to give his back. He told Connie later that he had had enough of war and wanted nothing more to do with it).* After this I went to Olympia to get my demob outfit, and with this I stepped out into Civvy Street, thinking that I had been lucky not to have been stuck in the desert, Singapore or Burma. I had decided to take the lump sum instead of the half pay. It amounted to around £800, which was a fair wad of notes at that time, and when it arrived I would punch a big hole in it, including a trip to the U.S.A. to see Millie.

Afterword

Ted did spend much of his £800, visiting not only Millie in America, but also Norway and the South of France before taking up a place at Gaddesdon Emergency Teacher Training College in Hertfordshire. Stagnation in education during the war and the requirements of the 1944 Education Act had created a shortage of teachers, and emergency training colleges offered a one-year intensive course. Ted thoroughly enjoyed his year at the college, and made a life-long friend, Harry Owen, playing the ugly sisters in a college production of 'Cinderella' with him. Subsequently, Ted taught in primary and secondary schools in Buckinghamshire and London, before making a final move to a Leicestershire

primary school where he became responsible for helping pupils who had fallen behind in learning to read. He devised a method of teaching reading, which pre-dated a system widely used in schools today.

In teaching reading Ted used his artistic skills, for Ted was a prolific amateur artist, and he has left behind many paintings, pottery models, and wood carvings. He often used any materials which came to hand to produce original works. Many friends cherish collections of the humourous Christmas cards he made every year, for, as can be seen from Ted's account of the war, humour was Ted's forte. Ted was a life-long socialist and anti-fascist. He believed that the war against Hitler's Germany was necessary, but his hatred of war itself never left him. He was also more traumatised by his wartime experiences than his memoirs admit, and, like many ex-soldiers, spoke little about the war for some years. He attended several peace marches in London in later life, and resigned from the Labour Party in 2001 in protest against the Iraq war. Ted and I were married in 1951, and we had two children, Dick and Jane. In the fullness of time there were three grandsons, of whom he was immensely proud. Ted's hobbies included writing as well as art, and several of his short stories were read on Bristol and Leicester Radio, and many appeared in print. He loved humourous verse, and wrote a number of such poems himself. Travel also continued to be important to him and together we visited New Zealand, America, Russia, Greece, and many other European countries during his long retirement.

Paradoxically, deeply as he hated war, Ted loved the army. He joined his father's regiment – the 'Glorious Gloucesters' – at the age of twenty. His father had been killed in the First World War, and after his mother became ill Ted was homeless except for living with relatives. The army became his home: in fact, he later said that when he was recalled in 1939 he felt as though he was going home. He contacted his old regiment on several occasions and was a member of the Pioneer Corps Association. He attended the fiftieth anniversary celebrations of D-Day in Normandy, and laid the wreath for the Pioneer Corps on the war memorial in the British Army Cemetery in Normandy. With other veterans, he received a medal from the mayors of Lower Normandy "en reconnaissance de la part qu'il a prise a la liberation de la Region, de la France et de l'Europe". Ted also read widely in military history, and created a collection of dolly peg soldiers wearing authentic uniforms which was exhibited in a local museum. His hero was William Cobbett, by and about whom he had a large collection of books: Cobbett had also been a soldier, was self-educated, anti-establishment and a man of varied talents.

Ed Drawneek returned from the Silesian prison camp at the end of the war, and married his Russian girlfriend. Ted and Ed remained firm friends, but Ed sadly died at the age of fifty. Ted's brother Pete and his wife Megan remained in Bristol, where Megan still lives. Ted lived to the age of 96. In India, on the day he took his examination for his First Class Certificate of Education, the rest of his platoon were on exhausting manoeuvres. When they returned to barracks and found Ted lying on his bed reading, they said 'You lucky beggar!' And that was how Ted thought of himself. He knew that if he hadn't been wounded in 1940 he would have been with the Gloucesters who made the stand at Cassel, and either killed or captured. He was lucky to get out of Calais just before it fell, and while he returned to France in 1944, his medical condition meant that he spent the intervening years on home duties. He used to say, when a very old man, "I'm a lucky beggar". There are surely worse ways to look back on a long life.

Constance Hayball
January 2009

Bibliography

These are the reference sources we used to help us with the footnotes of Ted's memoirs.

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Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum website: www.glosters.org.uk ■

Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...

CARROL WHITE RECOVERIES

In late 1945 in Lunneburg soldiers from the Pioneer Corps and the Royal Army Service Corps were in the cast of a show called The Carrol White Recoveries (pic 1 above). The officer in charge was Carrol White. Where are the other members of the cast? Please contact Mr Frank Shipley c/o RPC Association

HARRY TAYLOR

I wonder if you could possibly help me with a couple of queries, please?

I recently found an old photograph amongst my late grandmother's possessions.

My grandfather is the Sergeant holding the shield (pic 2 above). We would dearly love to find out more about him and about the photograph - for instance, where and when it was taken, and I wondered if you could possibly help? Perhaps if you would be kind enough to print it in your Newsletter,it might jog someone's memory? That would be wonderful, if so.

I have attached copies of the front and back of the photo.

The shield is very difficult to read, but it seems to say: "Royal Pioneer Corps, Training Centre, Company, ???? Platoon, ??????????" There are signatures on the back - the legible ones include: M Mundoon, D J Lewis, P Hayward, A Garden, J Cocker, J R Goodier, G Hawkes, C Leadwood, B Roscoe, G Jeffrey.

In the bottom right hand corner is a signature with the surname of either Barron or Barrow, and Halifax is written underneath that.

Unfortunately, we have no further details on my grandfather, other than that his name was Harry Taylor. He may possibly have originally hailed from Somerset. It's a long story, but my grandmother and he met during World War 2.

As far as we can make out, when he went off to active duty, my grandmother discovered she was pregnant, panicked and married someone else - she was very young and scared.

He did give her his dog tags, but we cannot find these and believe that they may have accidentally been thrown out my aunt (who was unaware at the time about my real grandfather) after my grandmother's sudden death.

My grandmother did originally have my real grandfather's address (with his permission) and offered it to my dad when he was younger, so he could contact him if he wished.

At the time, my dad did not take up this offer as he didn't want to hurt his stepdad's feelings. Now my dad has cancer, and he regrets very much never having found out more about his real father. Hindsight, as they say, is wonderful!

The fact that we have now found this photo is more than we had ever expected or hoped for, but uncovering any more details at all about my grandfather would mean the world to my dad. If you could help us in any way, no matter how small, I would be extremely grateful.

Contact:
majorb@ntlworld.com

With kindest regards and best wishes,

Susan Cook

More Lost Trails continued on page 63...

■ A Pioneer dog handler and his guard dog pause during a patrol – Nov 1966 Picture: RPCA Archive

Blast from the Past

Do you recognise anyone from these old photographs from the past?

■ **HMS Pioneer in Sydney Harbour 1946** Picture: RPCA Archive

■ **Ptes Lavender and Clough, Aden.** Picture: RPCA Archive

■ **228 Coy on Faroes Islands – SNCOs** Picture: RPCA Archive

■ **Course at Pioneer School, Northampton** Picture: RPCA Archive

■ **HM The Queen's visit to Northampton 12 Nov 82.** Picture: RPCA Archive

■ **Members of 187 Coy with prisoners in 1st Gulf War** Picture: RPCA Archive

Norman Carling and the Battle for Caen

My father's record of his experiences on landing on day 2 at Normandy

Report: Rev Graham Carling
Picture: Rev Graham Carling

REV GRAHAM Carling (son of Norman Carling) forwarded his father's notes on the Battle of Caen and wrote:

"As promised, I attach my transcription of my father's record (Norman Carling, 13079335, served 16 Jan 41-27 Nov 45) of his experiences on landing with the Canadians on day 2 of the Normandy campaign. Your records may show that he was a lance corporal and that he prepared for the campaign in France and Germany apart from being involved in the construction of parts of the Mulberry Harbour units, by going on a number of courses that gave him medical skills. From what he said to us when on leave and following his demob, he was considered a medical orderly under a qualified doctor who, I understand, was his Captain.

Apart from an odd word or two and comments made during our watching TV broadcasts about the war in Europe, the text that I have sent is as much as we know about his experiences in France, Belgium and Germany. For many years he received Christmas Cards from someone he must have befriended in Belgium and finally to have received a black-edged card, the wording we couldn't decipher, but must have indicated the death of that person.

In addition, I have attached a copy of the first page of Dad's notes and a page from his Paybook that shows the medical courses that he attended that would help him whilst in Europe with his fellow Pioneers."

We left Leigh-on-Sea, Friday, June 3rd, 1944 and arrived same day at Brantwood Marshalling area. Received two-day packs, tommy cooker and change of underclothes.

All English money changed to French. Left Brantwood on Saturday, June 4th for Tilbury, embarked on T.S. Devonshire, pulled out to the Thames Estuary and at anchor opposite Southend until Monday June 6th. Afterwards we found out it was "D" Day. Whilst on board I was put in charge of stretcher bearers under the ship's M.O. life on board was a monotonous affair. Set sail on Monday afternoon and awoke on Tuesday to find ourselves sailing around the Kent coast, the Cliffs of Dover soon came into sight — unforgettable!

When we got into the Straights we met our convoy of destroyers who put down a thick smoke screen. Jerry was curious and sent a few shells over, most of which were over–range, thank goodness and dropped harmlessly. One ship, however, was hit and had 60 men killed and injured and put back into Tilbury.

We had our first sight of the French coast on Tuesday morning, the houses and hotels were easily visible and appeared to be badly smashed up but the church at Berniers-sur-Mer was unhit and the spire rose proudly into the sky.

At 3.0 p.m. we were transferred into landing craft and when all were aboard, set off for the beach. Before leaving the Devonshire I was on the top deck and had a look around. I was amazed at the sight all around me and will never forget it. Cruisers, destroyers, M.T. boats, troop ships, transport barges: in fact, all manner of ships imaginable were packed on the sea on all sides as far as the eye could see. More remarkable was the absence of enemy aircraft. I couldn't understand how they could have missed such a plum!

I understood afterwards they were very wary of the good old Spitfire in the day and only had a go at night.

We set off for the beach and arrived there at about 6.00 pm where the Canadians, who had preceded us, had had a very tough time. The RAF had missed two pill boxes and the German machine gunners had kept quite quiet until the first troops had passed and waited for the second group in and shot them to pieces before turning round and decimating the first group. There weren't many of the poor lads left and when Jerry saw Red Cross men helping the wounded out of the water, he sprayed them too. The Canadians were fighting mad and rushed up to the pill boxes. Jerry saw the game was up and came out to surrender, but the Canadians didn't give them time they slashed (sic) them up.

We drew up to the beach at Graye-sur-Mer and had to wade ashore waist deep in the sea and with full equipment on. It was here that a lot of my cigarettes that I had purchased on the ship at duty-free prices were spoiled!

We collected the company together and had a roll-call, not realising that Germans were just up the road and a tank battle was in progress less than four miles away and set off to march to our marshalling area. The signs and traffic system at Graye-sur-mer were poor and we lost the other half of the Coy after we took a wrong turning. After a fruitless search for the rest of the Coy we decided to push on and rested at the side of the road opposite a Maize Field where we changed our wet clothes for dry and had a bit of bully beef and biscuits. Then we went into the maize field and dug ourselves holes to sleep in; by this time it was almost dark, too dark to light our tommy cookers and make tea, anyhow. We got out our blankets and overcoats and tried to make ourselves comfortable.

We had hardly got down when over came Jerry and I saw the second sight I shall never forget --- hell let loose in the air!! A/A fire was everywhere, there seemed to be a sky full of tracer and ordinary shells bursting all over the place and it seemed impossible that Jerry could get through without being hit but he did. The racket was tremendous. Needless to say, I didn't sleep that night. I dived for the hole we had dug once, but another two blokes got there first and instead of being below ground level, I found myself three feet above it.

The night passed very slowly and with the dawn we got another big thrill. Four Messerschmitts came over machine gunning at hedge height. I, in common with lots of others, thought we were in for a bashing, but up popped a Spitfire and I saw one Jerry crash, then another, then a third and the fourth turned tail and flew over our heads so low we could see the pilot. He hadn't time to stop, he was in a hurry. Good old Spit pilots! After this little episode we got out our tommy cookers and cooked our first meal in France! Dehydrated beef, which made a palatable stew, tea and biscuits and not bad either.

After breakfast, Jerry was about again and the A/A started up again, not half so impressive in the daytime, but just as noisy. It was here we had our first casualties. A shell came down, struck a tin hat and a water bottle exploded, shrapnel hitting one bloke in the thigh and also on the side of the head. The head wound was only superficial, so I left it to the First Aid man and dressed the wounded thigh. There appeared to be a piece of shrapnel in the wound, so I packed him off to the FDS on a stretcher – he went to England the same night, lucky – perhaps – but I want to go back in one piece as I came out.

After this bit of excitement we collected our kit and went to locate the rest of the coy and eventually found them at Curseulles-sur-Mer, in a wood. They had had a few surprises in the night, but no damage. The day was spent in making ourselves comfortable: two of us erected a Heath Robinson kind of shelter with some ground sheets, digging in about a foot. Everyone was in the same boat, no materials to make a bivouac with.

We were still on the 1–day pack, rations not having arrived and were becoming expert at manipulating the tommy cooker which, by the way, is an interesting little gadget.

The next day, we were out to work, clearing up the mess in the town, made first by the R.A.F and the navy and then by the tanks and infantry going through. A lot of the people had evacuated, but they began to trickle back now and didn't know how to take us. Jerry apparently had given them a good time and there was no evidence of the "starving French" as we had been given to understand. They were well fed, well dressed and contented people: they didn't want the English and the Americans interfering with their way of life.

All this time we didn't know what progress the Yanks were making on our right flank, but someone said they were going well, facing comparatively light opposition. The armour seemed to be in front of us in the Caen area.

At this time we heard what a grand job the airborne lads had done at Benouville,

by taking Pegasus Bridge over the Orne, but unfortunately their casualties were very heavy. Some of our infantry, too, got to Caen in the first few hours of "D-day", but ran into three divisions of Jerry who were on manouvers, so the practice was turned into reality and owing to us being short of infantry we were driven back to the hills north of Caen. But Jerry was held here, that is what mattered most in the early days, we waited, men, tanks and artillery . . .

On the 9th, we started work in earnest, some of the coy working on a bridge over the Suelle and others widening corners where it was a tight squeeze for tanks and big vehicles. I was on such a job at St Aubin-sur-mers and here saw batches of prisoners being brought in. They looked a very dejected lot on the whole and surprised that we had broken their famous Western Wall so easily.

The church at St Aubin seemed very little damaged, just a small shell hole in the steeple.

It was here that we had our first French wine and coffee, neither of which appealed to me! The café was behind a shop, whose shop front was blown clean away but girls were doing a 'business as usual' at the rear of the premises. We had a good look at a Jerry fort on the promenade and it seemed impregnable from the sea.

However, this one had been knocked out from the back: the Canadians had got round and put it out of action. Great lads, these Canadians, they fear nothing.

Another day I had a party of men repairing the road near Coursuelles Market Square, and in the afternoon had a very pleasant surprise. A jeep pulled up outside a Naval office where we were, then a private car pulled up and I was very surprised to see General Montgomery step out, but more surprised still to see King George follow him. I sprang up and gave them a salute which was acknowledged! The King had been on a tour of the front.

I remember one trip of 12 miles for iron girders that took us within two miles of the line. We had to pass over 'York' and 'London' bridge, two Bailey bridges over the Orne at Benouville and the Pegasus Bridge that our airborne troops had captured on D-Day and the RE's had made serviceable. They were still under shell fire but fortunately, Jerry couldn't just find them, he was either too short or too long with the range.

We stayed here (?Courselles [GC]) until the 23rd June, on which day we packed up and were taken by truck to Hermanville, a village not far from Queen Beach and were told to dig well in here, so we made a dugout four feet deep and covered the top well up, about two feet of soil being piled on the timbers. It was as well we did for we were nicely in range of Jerry's long range guns that kept popping them over at all sorts of odd times.

He did quite a lot of damage with it. One day he put the water point out of action and many a time he had the road workers busy diving for cover. While working round here, we saw where all our gliders had landed on D-Day and it was remarkable how they had all dropped together. There were dozens of them in one field and every field for about a square mile had them in.

We had a remarkable experience here one evening. I was walking down the camp when I heard a swish developing into a roar and I dived into a hedge. There was a tremendous explosion about four hundred yards from our dugout. When we went to inspect the crater we had a shock. It was quite big enough to put three double-deck buses in comfortably! Bits of shrapnel we found were of aluminium which gave us the opinion that it may have been an aerial torpedo, aimed at shipping in the sea. The smoke-screen had probably put them off their direction. The smoke screen had been very handy on many occasions.

Whilst at this location we did quarry work as well as road work and had the usual visit from Jerry aircraft every night, besides the old guns making things lively.

Our artillery was around here, firing on the German positions at Caen and just before our boys went in and took North Caen we were in the middle of the barrage, 1600 guns firing almost continually for a day and a night: it must have been hell at the receiving end. Then, one of the best sights I've seen up to now: 2000 heavy bombers going over to bomb Caen and Colombelles, it seemed a never-ending stream of aircraft going over. We saw the markers go down, then the incendiaries (all the while, the air was thick with flack) then came the heavy bombs, the ground under us, four miles away, shook and clouds of dust and smoke extended from Caen right to the sea, a distance of 12 miles! It must have done our boys at the front good to see that lot!!

About this time, I was put in charge of eight pioneers to work on the water point in the village, it was a good job, we were kept busy, turning out, on average, 60,000 gallons per day.

We kept the job until our next move on the 29th June to Ecardi (?) a village at the top of the hill from 'York' bridge. The job here was building a first class road from the bridge to the main road at the top and a first class road it was too.

We were only two miles from the front here and had a lot of trouble with Jerry mortars: fortunately for us, he didn't get a mark or we could have caught a cold. His aircraft still visited at night, too, so we dug in again. We were also surrounded by our artillery which blazed away night and day, the supercharged guns making a terrific snap. I found it awkward to get to sleep here, as many others did.

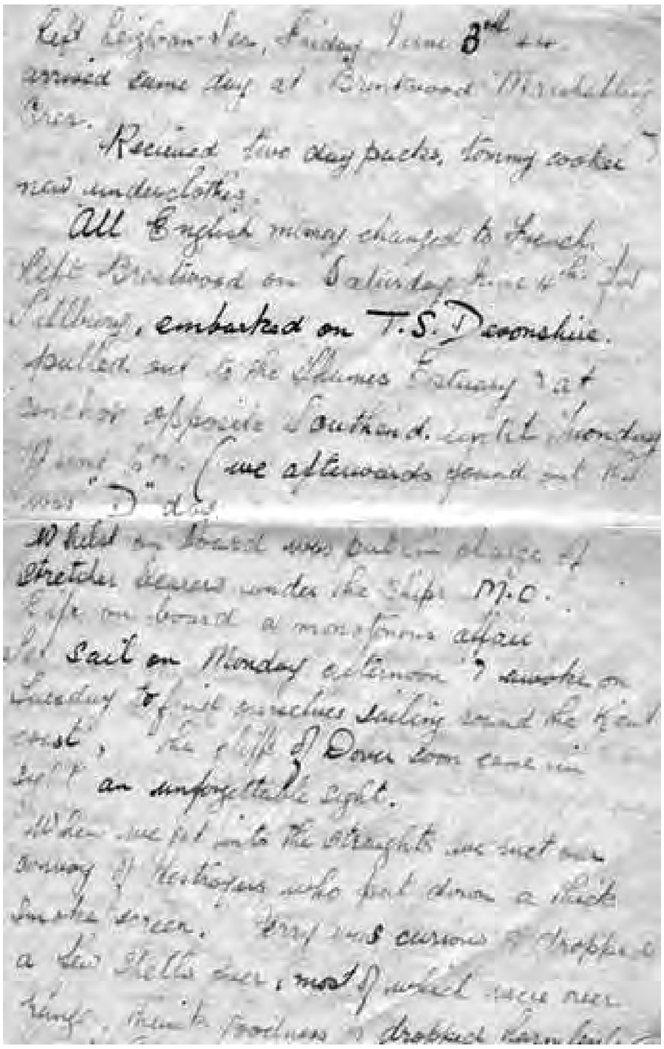
The company worked on this job in shifts with the RE Company and the job was completed up to schedule. We had the next move to Escoville on August 4th.

From D-Day 3 we had fed from Compo packs – a good method of feeding – each case contained grub, cigarettes, matches, chocolates, sweets, tea, biscuits etc., (even toilet paper) for 14 men for one day. They were very welcome after our dehydrated packs, but personally, I found the canned meat and stews too greasy and they upset my stomach.

Round about this time we received our first issue of bread and didn't it taste good after all this time on hard biscuits (my mouth was sore with chewing them). We also got some dry tea, sugar and tinned milk which were also very welcome after the Compo tea which has a queer taste – and fresh vegetables.

So to go back – at Escoville, we were again only a short way from the front and within mortar range, so "dig in" was the cry again. This time we risked it without putting soil on the top, just having our tarpaulin tent fashion over the dugout and the earth piled high at the sides.

Escoville, too, was a very noisy place: we were right in the middle of 'heavies' again and they kept up a continuous barrage day and night. They didn't keep me awake, this time, but they were a darned nuisance just the same. It was here that I had my first contact with 'shell shock' or 'battle exhaustion' as it is now called. One of our Corporals, who had been rather nervous for quite a time, got a good dose of it. Every time a gun cracked, he jumped: it took four of us to hold him down. I strapped him to a stretcher and got him away. Afterwards I heard he had got to England the same evening (I nearly said, 'Lucky fellow', but I don't want to go back that way. I want to go back whole and in one piece as I came out, then I'll be satisfied!) ■


Left Leigh-on-Sea, Friday June 3rd 44
arrived same day at Brentwood Marshalling Area.
Received two day packs, tommy cooker & new underclothes.
All English money changed to French.
Left Brentwood on Saturday June 4th for Tilbury, embarked on T.S. Devonshire.
Pulled out to the Thames Estuary & at anchor opposite Southend until Monday June 5th. (we afterwards found out that was "D" day)
Whilst on board was put in charge of stretcher bearers under the Ship M.O.
Life on board a monotonous affair
Set sail on Monday afternoon & awoke on Tuesday to find ourselves sailing round the Kent coast, the cliffs of Dover soon came in sight, an unforgettable sight.
When we got into the straights we met our convoy of destroyers who put down a thick smoke screen. Jerry was curious & dropped a few shells over, most of which were near [illegible], thanks goodness & dropped harmlessly [illegible]

It may be the last time I undertake such a task

Ältester Schüler zu Gast im Comenius

Frederic **Edwards**, ehemaliger Commerschüler und gebürtiger Oberkasseler, erzählt aus seinem Leben.

OBERKASSEL (RP) Kurz vor den Osterferien besuchte der älteste Schüler des Comenius-Gymnasiums, Frederic Edwards, seine alte Schule. Der in Oberkassel geborene 87-Jährige berichtete Schülern aus seinem Leben, das er als deutscher Jude Fritz Ludwig Meyer begann und das durch den Aufstieg der Nationalsozialisten einen dramatischen Verlauf nahm.

Als Zehnjähriger 1932 wurde Edwards, der heute in London lebt, am Comenius-Gymnasium, das damals Dr. Hans Mosler leitete, eingeschult. „Mosler lavierte sich durch die damalige neue Zeit." An anderen Schulen dagegen habe es anders ausgesehen. „Als mein Bruder 1934 bei einem Autounfall auf der Luegallee ums Leben kam, schickte seine Volksschule an der Lankerstraße keinerlei Beileidsbekundungen." Zu dieser Zeit bekam Edwards aber auch offene Abneigung zu spüren. Er spielte vor dem Elternhaus an der Wildenbruchstraße mit zwei Freunden, als ein sechster Junge vorbeikam, auf den Boden spuckte und rief: „Judenhaus". Edwards: „Bis heute stelle ich mir die Frage, wo der Junge diesen Ausdruck gelernt hat." Aufgrund der sich verschärfenden politischen Entwicklung schickten seine Eltern ihn im Oktober 1935 auf ein Internat in England, und so wurde aus Fritz Meyer Frederic Edwards. Wenig später gingen seine Eltern gerade noch rechtzeitig ins Exil. Zum Glück hatten sie noch kein „J" in ihrem Pass. Andere Familienmitglieder hingegen fielen dem Naziterror zum Opfer. Wenige Jahre später war Edwards als britischer Militärangehöriger an der Landung der Alliierten in der Normandie beteiligt. Auch über diese Zeit und über die Erlebnisse im Düsseldorf der Nachkriegszeit sprach er mit den Schülern. Edwards, der immer wieder zu Besuch nach Oberkassel kommt und auch 2008 Gast der Feierlichkeiten zum 100. Geburtstag der Schule war, ist es ein großes Anliegen, jungen Menschen ein anschauliches Bild über den Nationalsozialismus zu geben. „Das hat er mehr als erreicht", sagt Lehrer Markus Bollmann.

■ **F H Edwards at his old school** Picture: Mr F H Edwards

I HAVE read the review of Dr Fry's and Willy Fields book "Dachau to D Day" in the latest issue of "The Pioneer" (thanks for sending it, much appreciated). Some of the story mirrors my own experience in the advance into Germany in 1945, when I served with 30 Corps.

I was also a guest at the Emirates Stadium for the launching of the book, and we could have met there. May be, there will be another opportunity to meet.

In the meantime, Willy celebrated his 90th birthday. I am off to Germany, to Dusseldorf, where I am the oldest surviving ex student of the local High School. At the request of the school, I do some talking on recent European History, i.e. on the Nazi Period. I was photographed last March, and it appeared in the local Newspaper, as per copy.

It may be the last time that I undertake such a task, as I do feel age creeping up, but I do my best to remain active.

F H Edwards

Randy Andy

■ **D & E Platoon, 19 BDE, Colchester, 1967-1972** Picture: Mr R E Andrew

I AM TRYING to locate members of my old D & E Platoon 19 Brigade, Colchester from 1967 - 1972. The photograph shows the Platoon on Exercise in Malaya in 1970. Members of the Platoon knew me as Randy Andy. Please contact Mr RE Andrew, c/o Royal Pioneer Corps Association at the usual address.

Mr RE Andrew

Proud Pioneer Burma Veteran

THANK YOU for the October issue of the Pioneer Magazine and congratulations on a wonderful publication.

I enclose a leaflet which may be of interest. I attended the Officers Annual Dinner on 24th September 1965 as shown.

The Royal Pioneer Corps

OFFICERS ANNUAL DINNER

I have received Newsletters and Magazines from that time, and they are always welcome.

I became a life member of the Association at that time. I enlisted in the AMPC at Caistor, Norfolk in 1940, and served the Corps up to 1946. My first Company was 146, and from there commissioned and served in Kenya at Nanyuri, and from there to Ceylon and Burma with East Africa 5 Group.

I sent a copy of a message from Lord Mountbatten, to Major Crook and it was published in a Newsletter in 1996, saying "What a wonderful contribution Pioneers had done in the defeat of the Japanese."

I am a proud Pioneer Burma Veteran now in my 90th year and enjoy receiving the Magazine. With every good wish to all Pioneers Past and Present

JRL James

Corps Motto

WHILE I was walking around Leeds city centre, I found myself in the square that contains the railway station, as well as some very impressive buildings and statues.

Having a good look around I spotted on one of the buildings seven crests all bearing different mottos, the one to the right of the front door stood out immediately, as it contains the Corps motto "Labor Omnia Vincit". On doing some research I found that the buidling (now a nightclub) was actually built in 1899 as a branch of the Midland Bank. I wonder how many more buildings around the country carry the same motto?

Bob Setterfield

An honour

■ Will Ross, Jenny & Paddy Tubridy

Picture: Supplied

THANKYOU so much for organising a truly professional reunion dinner.

Jenny and I enjoyed our weekend at Bicester and, despite the freezing weather, were honoured to be invited to the 23 Pioneer Regiment's Medals Awards Ceremony and to their Freedom of Bicester Parade through Bicester in the afternoon.

It was good to meet all the lads from the past, and to be involved with all the new members of the Mess, and we look forward to meeting you all again at your July 2010 Reunion.

I was quite surprised to see all the changes in the barracks and it was quite an eye-opener when we first drove in. The square, of course, hasn't changed but the surroundings have changed so much with new buildings and the roads around Bicester town to the camp. We also drove down to Ambrosden to look at the old married quarters and I was still able to pick out my old quarter and to show Jenny where I used to live.

We were honoured to be able to have a photo taken with the outgoing RSM, Will Ross, and we attach a copy in case you might wish to publish it in your next RPCA Newsletter. I was very pleased to have known him, during those brief hours. He seemed to be a very good RSM who took pride in his men and who would care for their welfare. It's a pity that I wasn't able to know him longer however he did say that his replacement was similar to himself so I look forward to meeting the new RSM when next visiting the regiment.

Thanks again for all your hard work in making this Reunion Dinner such an enjoyable one for all past members of the Corps. It certainly made me realise what I have been missing all those years

Kindest regards

Paddy & Jenny Tubridy

I only wrote the facts as I remember them

I CANNOT understand why Cpl McDonough became livid about the article that I "wrote" and which you kindly published in the Apr 09 Newsletter.

I only "wrote" the facts as I remember them, and as I never once "wrote" anything critical about what he did in 1966, his reaction is beyond my understanding.

I "wrote"hoping for a response from any member of the two teams that took part in the 522 display at The Royal Albert Hall in 1967.

I am utterly shocked that any member of the Corps could even contemplate having live ammunition in the presence of Her Majesty, let alone considering the implications of storage and transportation to the Capital. Eleven pages of what??? He cannot even remember the name of the Officer.

As a point of interest John, you can only talk drivel not write it. (According to the Oxford Concise Dictionary).

Bob Setterfield

the Pioneer

■ I HAVE just received my Pioneer magazine and it is very interesting as always. With reference to George Lineham's circus, I was one of the team and it was very good.

One of our stops was at the Tangmere Airfield, where I was stood on a wooden pallet on the forks (at full height) of the fork lift truck which was on the back of one of the lorry's that we were using. One of the jets went over us, I nearly jumped of the pallet it was that low and noisy it felt like as if I had put my hand up I could have shaken hands with the pilot!

Brian Hockey (ex 518)

■ I SEEM to remember the OIC of the Albert Hall Pyramid party was Captain M J P Howard who was commissioned into the Corps from APTC. The STAR of the show was Cpl Joe Tappin.

John Robertson

■ I RECEIVED my Pioneer Newsletter today and as always you and your son have done a wonderful job. I read it from cover to cover. Thanks again see you in July 2010.

John Killeen

■ I WAS very interested in the latest copy of "The Pioneer" - Life and Death of a Rural Mansion, 'Horsley Hall' in your last newsletter. I did my 6 weeks training there in September 1952 and I well remember the hall, before being posted to 405 Coy, Corsham. The photographs and stories I love to see and read, wonderful newsletters. Thank you.

J Cave

■ SORRY LADS but I must come clean after keeping it a secret for so many years. It was me who hauled Jean Berry's (Rocket Sox) pink bloomers up the flagpole on the square at Simpson Bks. I just couldn't resist it, as it was just too tempting a target seeing her oversize bloomers hanging on the washing line at the back of the NAAFI with the back gates wide open! There was one positive aspect, they dried quicker! I remember the Sergeant Major and the Adjutant. were going mad the next morning looking for blood, which is why I never said anything.

Gaz Fox

come on, send us a mail...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o 23 Pnr Regiment RLC
St David's Barracks
Graven Hill
Bicester OX26 6HF

or email us at:
royalpioneercorps@gmail.com

Colonel Donald Dean VC OBE

The Victoria Cross hero of Boulogne with the BEF and then Madagascar

Edited by: Terry Crowdy
Picture: Supplied

THAT YPRES should be twinned with an English town is not surprising, but the choice of Sittingbourne, Kent is not obvious.
The man really responsible for this union in 1964 was the late Colonel Donald John Dean VC OBE, President of the Sittingbourne branch of the Royal British Legion, whose association with the Belgian town dated back to the First World War.

Donald Dean was born in Horne Hill, London on 19 April 1897, the son of John and Grace Dean. For generations the Deans had been Kentish brickmasters at Sittingbourne.

Donald was educated at Quenmore College and on the outbreak of war in 1914 he joined the Kent Special Constabulary, being then too young to be accepted in the Army. On his 18th birthday, 19 April 1915, however, he did enlist – Private 3692, Dean D J, 28th Bn London Regiment – the famous Artists' Rifles, and in due course went to France.

The battalion had gone to France in October 1914 and had become an Officers' Training Corps by 1915, firstly at Bailleul, and in April 1915, at St Omer. Among their duties was the provision of guards for the British base and headquarters there and at Montreuil.

On 4 October 1916, Donald Dean was commissioned into the 8th Bn Royal West Kent Regiment and soon became very efficient and popular young subaltern in this unit of 72nd Brigade, 24th Division. He always saw to the welfare of his men as well as their fighting ability, especially before going into action and in providing comfort for them afterwards.

After joining the regiment, the young man was to spend many months in the trenches and in the spring of 1917, with his battalion, was involved in the battles for Vimy Ridge in the sector around Givenchy. He was first wounded on 12 March and was to suffer three more serious injuries, particularly in the Paschendaele battles that autumn. In one attack he was wounded twice. He was Mentioned in Despatches.

The action for which he was awarded the Victoria Cross occurred in September 1918, in the heavy fighting around Lens. In the maze of trenches in the once prosperous coal-mining district, by then mere heaps of rubble, his platoon was holding an advanced post to the north-west of the town, in an enemy trench which had been captured on 24th September.

Dean took over the trench that night to find it ill-prepared for defence. Fortunately he immediately set about organising the consolidation of the post, as shortly afterwards the enemy made an attempt to oust the platoon. The men from Kent stoutly defended their precarious position and drove the Germans back before returning to work on their own defences despite continuous and heavy machine-gun fire. Soon after midnight another determined German attack was mounted but once more they were repulsed and throughout the night until six in the morning Dean and his brave band worked unceasingly.

Another enemy attack developed, this time supported with heavy shell and trench mortar fire, and once more, owing to the masterly handling of his command, Lieutenant Dean repulsed the enemy, causing heavy casualties.

Throughout the 25th and 26th the enemy again attacked and was finally repulsed with great losses. Five times in all (thrice heavily) was this post attacked and on each occasion the enemy force was driven back. "Throughout the period Dean inspired his command with his own contempt of danger and all fought with the greatest bravery.

He set an example of valour, leadership and devotion to duty of the very highest order." So ran the citation published in the London Gazette of 14 December 1918, announcing the award of the Victoria Cross.

Lieutenant Dean was decorated by King George V at Buckingham Palace on 15 February 1919,

After the war Donald Dean gave continuous and valuable service to the Territorial Army. He was promoted Captain in the 4th Bn The Buffs (East Kent Regiment) in July 1921 and in 1927 he became Brevet Major, gaining the rank of Major in April 1930.

Dean attended the famous 1920 Garden Party given by King George V and Queen Mary at Buckingham Palace to the recipients of the Victoria Cross. He was also present in November 1929 at the Prince of Wales' House of Lords dinner for VCs.

The Territorial Army Training Course of 1932, at the Senior Officers' School at Sheerness, included Dean and in March he took over command of the 4th Bn The Buffs with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.

He formed and commanded No.5 Group Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps at Clacton on 1st November 1939 and embarked at Southampton for Cherbourg 3rd December 1939 with the British Expeditionary Force.

During the grave days of May 1940, Donald Dean turned his non-combatant unit into a fighting force despite the initial dearth of weapons. They played a vital part in the defence of Bologne and covered the withdrawal of the Guards as they embarked on the beaches. During this time Colonel Dean was severely wounded and was actually reported killed, but he was successfully evacuated, on the last ship out of Bologne - the Destroyer Vimera, to England to recover and return to duty. His Group suffered 500 casualties out of a strength of 1,100.

Next came Madagascar where he was sent in 1942 to organize and supervise the despatch of the defeated Vichy forces to France. In 1943 he was engaged in the invasion of Sicily and then followed service in the Italian campaign: here he was Mentioned in Despatches twice more.

In the reorganisation of the British Army after the end of the Second World War Dean became the Hon Colonel of the amalgamated battalion of The Buffs and The Royal West Kent Regiment. The Queen's Own Buffs The Royal Kent Regiment, a position he was to hold for 18 years.

In 1923 Donald Dean was married to Marjorie Wood, the daughter of Mr and Mrs WR Wood of Sittingbourne, and they had two children, a boy and a girl.

Colonel Dean was appointed a JP in 1951, a Deputy Lieutenant for Kent in 1957 and in 1961 was appointed an Officer of the Order of the British Empire. The Queen of Denmark created him a Commander of the Order of the Danneborg.

In peacetime Colonel Dean was a member of the family firm Smeed, Dean, brick manufacturers and barge builders, and it was he who opened the Dolphin Yard Sailing Barge Museum at Sittingbourne.

Among his many interests was the building of St George's Memorial Church in Ypres in 1927. He was responsible for the provision of a plaque to The Royal West Kent Regiment in the church and when in 1955 the Friends of St George's was founded he became Vice Chairman, retiring in 1979.

In 1983 Colonel Dean was presented with the National Certificate of Appreciation, the highest award of the Royal British Legion, in recognition of his work for the Sittingbourne branch with which he had been concerned since its formation in 1921. He was Chairman for 50 years and died at his home in Sittingbourne on 9 December 1985, the last surviving land VC of World War One.

On 30 September 2010 a new book on the life of Col Dean is to be published, details will appear in the October Newsletter.

DONALD DEAN VC
Edited by Terry Crowdy
Not yet published, more details to follow

Hitler's Will

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

HERMAN ROTHMAN arrived in Britain from Germany as a Jewish refugee in 1939, on the eve of the Second World War.

He volunteered for HM Forces (initially in the Pioneer Corps) and then the Intelligence Corps, and in 1945 was posted to Westertinke and Fallingbostel prisoner of war camps to interrogate high-ranking Nazi war criminals.

When papers were discovered sewn into the shoulders of a jacket belonging to Heinz Lorenz, who had been Joseph Goebbels' press secretary. Rothman and a team of four others were charged with translating them under conditions of the deepest secrecy.

The documents turned out to be the originals of Hitler's personal and political wills, and Goebbels' addendum. Later, in Totenburg hospital, Rothman interrogated Hermann Karnau, who had been a police guard in Hitler's bunker, to establish information about the Fuhrer's death.

Hitler's Will is the amazing true story of Herman Rothman's remarkable life, including how he managed to escape from Nazi Germany before the War began and his role in bringing to light Hitler's personal and political testaments.

Herman is an Economics and Honours History Graduate.

Helen Fry is an honourary research fellow in the Department of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at University College, London.

Her previous books "The King's Most Loyal Enemy Aliens", "Freud's War" and "From Dachau to D-Day" have all been reviewed in previous Association Newsletters.

HITLER'S WILL
The true story of the German Jewish refugee who helped to bring Hitler's will to light.
By Herman Rothman
Edited by Helen Fry
ISBN 976-0-7524-4834-3

Churchill's Secret Soldier

Review: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

COLIN ANSON was born Claus Ascher in Berlin and raised a Protestant.

He was forced to flee Nazi Germany because his father, Curt Ascher, was one of Hitler's few serious political opponents during the 1930s. Curt stood up for his beliefs, was arrested by the Gestapo, imprisoned at Dachau and murdered there in 1937. In 1939, with his own life in danger, Colin found refuge in Britain, where he went on to join the British Army, initially in the Pioneer Corps (87 Company). He was selected for Special Forces, and trained with 3 Troop, the only German speaking Commando unit in the British armed forces.

He was attached to the Royal Marines and took part in the invasions of Italy and Sicily in 1943, surviving a near-fatal head wound, before participating in raids into Yugoslavia and Albania, and then in the liberation of Corfu.

At the end of the war, he was to find out who had betrayed his father, and the book includes an account of how he reacted to this discovery. Not only is German Schoolboy, British Commando a thrilling account of his valiant service in the Second World War, its description of Colin's childhood as the son of one of Hitler's most outspoken opponents provides a unique insight into the political maelstrom of 1930s Germany.It is an extraordinary portrait of a son's bravery and determination, continuing his father's legacy as he fought to defeat the Nazis.

GERMAN SCHOOLBOY, BRITISH COMMANDO
Churchill's Secret Soldier
By Helen Fry
ISBN 978-0-7524-4996-8

Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact...

IEUAN DAVIES
Just wondering whether you could help me. I am trying to find a guy called Ieuan Davies, he was in the Royal Pioneers, and he was also in the Judo Squad.

It would be really great to get in touch with him again, I went out with him in 1988 after meeting up with him at Biggin Hill Air show.

If you could possible let me know if he is on facebook.

Thank you very much for your help
Mrs Joanne Abbott (nee Grreene)
joanne-abbott@bigfoot.com

1 (SPANISH) COY
Francisco Haro is asking for anyone who served in this Company to please get in touch.
Franvera@haro43.freeserve.co.uk

ERIC BOLTON AND RAY (TAFF) WICKS
Could you help me to catch up with a couple of old buddies that I served with?

They were both members of 206 Coy.

The two individuals in question are; Eric Bolton and Ray (Taff) Wicks, they both lived in Bastion Avenue, Long Marston in 1979.

Thanks for any help that you may be able to give.
Thanks Chris Oram. c/o RPC Association

G JONES 13017155
I'm an ex-serviceman currently living in Moray having finished my career at RAF Lossiemouth and bit of a keen military history buff.

I have a question if I may ask, is to do with AMPC activities in my area during WWII?

Moray Coast. I was wondering if any of you 'ole boys recall working on the Moray coast immediately north of Lossiemouth, on what I think is coastal fortifications.

Namely there is a long serious of concrete blocks (5'x3'x3').

These blocks run along the coast that now follows the Lossiemouth golf course and finishes near the Lossie lighthouse.

The guys who made these coastal defences I think were Welsh, given that these defences were constructed 60+ years ago and quite weather/water beaten.

I can still see many references to their Coy's and Welsh emblems etc, one chap has clearly marked his block with is Name & Number (G. Jones 13017155).

It would be great to hear from anyone who can still recall those days, even better know who this G Jones is and if he is still about.

Maybe his family would be interested in knowing where their ancestor worked and left his mark.

I would be thrilled to hear from anyone.

Robert Brain
(Ed note: G Jones was born on 1 Jan 1910, if is still alive he would be 100 this year)

WANTED TO COMPLETE COLLECTION
A stay bright cap badge with the Kings Crown (already have brass).

Reasonable price will be paid, please contact
N Brown, c/o RPC Association at the usual address.

Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

GINNS, RONNIE VENIMORE
14646690 1 Oct 09 Huntingdon
Aged 84. Served RPC 12 Aug 43 - 22 Nov 48 and Northamptonshire Regt 23 Nov 48 - 22 Nov 53

MCGRANE MICHAEL
13119998 Ex SSgt 10 Sep 09
Aged 92. Basingstoke Served 4 Nov 44 - 28 Feb 62

DAVIES EDWARD
508326 Capt (Retd) 29 Sep 09
Aged 68. Westward Ho! Served 1978-1984

DAVIS CYRIL CLAUDE
13077109 11 Nov 09
Aged 91 Woodstock.
Served 28 Nov 40 - 13 May 46

BLANDFORD ALAN
23164630 26 Jun 09
Aged 72. Wyesham, Monmouth
Served Aug 55 - Aug 57.

DAVIES JOHN
23568212 5 Oct 09
Aged 70. Port Talbot

HOOPER LEONARD JOHN
13057212 11 July 09
Aged 92. East Grinstead. Served from 25 July 40 until he was invalided out in May 43

MERRICK JOHN
2222720 Major (Retd) 18 Nov 09
Aged 81. Telford. Former RSM, retired in 1983.

EVANS GEORGE
4183434 31 Oct 09 Bristol.
Bristol. Served in 307 Coy 1939-1946.

TRANENT ANDY
23888660 Ex SSgt 22 Dec 09 Edinburgh
Aged 65. Served in most RPC units but especially RPC Trg Centre and as CQMS of 187 (Tancred) Coy.

Dougie Durant writes: It is with great sadness that I notify all ex colleagues on the passing of Big Andy Tranent - Andy served with the Corps from the early 70's until the mid 80's (I think he served with about every Company).

Andy was without doubt a Unique Character,if you had met him you would know what I mean. Andy & I were from the same village just outside Edinburgh (Ratho), he even gave me a lift from Scotland to Northampton back in 1985 via a bus load of 187 Chunkies from Tidworth (I think that was my initiation)

My deepest sympathies go to his wife Doreen & his 2 daughters Donna & Denise

A True Pioneer who will be sadly missed

MOSS ROBERT STANLEY
23179587) 7 Nov 09
Aged 74. London E3. Served Sep 55 to Sep 56.

WOODLEY RONALD
13112205 8 Feb 09
Aged 87. Worcester. Served Apr 42 to Aug 45 (189 and 243 Coys)

HUXTABLE IVAN WELLESLEY
256667 Capt (Retd) 14 Jan 10
Aged 89. Leigh-on-Sea. Served 1 Jan 43 - 25 Jun 46

ROWLAND WILLIAM ERENEST STANLEY
13030612 Ex Sgt Aged 94 Dovercourt Bay, Essex.
Served 6 Jun 40 - 28 Apr 46 146 Coy

Mr George Pringle writes: William Rowlands, Bill to everyone who knew him, finished his 6 years Army service as a Sergeant in Apr 46, died on 12 Feb 10 at the age of 94 years. As Bill had been a member of the RPC Association for a number of years he was well known and noted for his straight talking at the Reunion Weekends.

During his service from Jun 40 - Apr 46 he was promoted from a Pte to a full Cpl within 6 weeks of enlistment. His Company, 146 Coy just missed the Dunkirk period as their embarkation leave was cancelled. As my first meeting with Bill will be printed soon in this Newsletter I will refrain from mentioning it here. Bill saw dangerous service with the 1st Army in North Africa and the 5th Army in Italy.

While awaiting the decision to sail the troops to North Africa, 146 Coy were stationed near Thurso to carry out training and exercises. It was here in Scotland the OC was ordered to execute a task of high importance, but would entail considerable difficulty.

The operation was to retrieve an RAF aeroplane which contained secret experimental work after it had crashed in the mountains. The RAF personnel admitted that they had failed to recover the wreckage of the plane so the Wing Commander had requested the OC 146 Coy to carry out this important mission.

The Pioneers climbed the mountains and brought down carefully the wreckage piece by piece until the job was completed. The OC was awarded the OBE and the Company the Freedom of Thurso.

After landing on the beaches of Salerno 146 Coy made their way inland and took up their position in a vineyard. Nearby was an orchard and some of Bill's platoon wandered over to pick some apples.

There was a series of loud bangs which attracted Bill's attention and he and another Sgt decided to investigate. They saw several bodies lying around amongst the apples and immediately knew that they had been booby trapped. Telling everyone left to remain still Bill and Sgt Dawbrey commenced to defuse the booby traps.

After succeeding they were told by their OC that they would be rewarded for bravery by being Mentioned in Despatches and awarded on Oak Leaf.

146 Coy returned to England to participate in the D Day landings in Normandy. After the war ended the Coy were deployed on the German/Austrian border.

Their duty was to ensure that German troops, especially the SS, did not cross the border into Austria and escape to safety and avoid the Nuremburg trials. Bill and I maintained a contact and his last letter to me dated 23 Jan 10 contained a paragraph which summed up Bill's feelings:

"Arthur (Sullivan) had done wonderfully well to travel as he does but there comes a time when one has to submit. I cannot do much now but I am very comfortable in my home (Alexander Court rest home for the aged). I would love to join you all at Reunions but it will never be. I was due to go to a celebration party but I had to cancel as I was so ill. My main thing is trying to cope with my bowel trouble which is quite severe at times but I am in a good home and happy.

I would like to do more but I am coming up to the age of 94 years but give all my friends my best wishes"

So another veteran dies but we will remember him.

In the October 2009 edition we Inadvertently published a photograph of Brig Freeman instead of Brig Walker, we apologise for this error. A photograph of Brig Walker is shown.

GENTLES JAMES CASEY
23846435 7 Sep 09 Glasgow
Aged 68. Served 1960 - 1966

SHAW LV
5959285 13 Feb 10 Greenford, Mddx
Aged 92. Served Jan 41 - Apr 42.
Joined RPC Association 12 Sep 47

SAVAGE JOHN WILLIAM
14950553 Ex Sgt 25 Feb 10 Enfield
Aged 82. Served Jun 45 - Mar 48

TODD JAMES
23864659 Ex SSgt 2 Feb 10 Northampton
Aged 66. Served May 61 - May 83.
A former Drum Major of Corps of Drums.

DUNCAN JOHN
13044976 Ex Sgt 21 Feb 10 Chislehurst
Aged 94. Served 27 July 40 to 13 Sep 46 and 6 Oct 47 to 23 Mar 52. A Normandy Veteran and also served in Egypt in 1950.

JESSOP RICHARD NEIL
24006428 Ex LCpl 12 Feb 10
Aged 62. Sutton in Ashfield

DILLON CHRISTOPHER JOSEPH
22644481 Ex Pte 23 Sep 09
Aged 65. Runcorn.
Served 6 Mar 52 - 28 Mar 54

O'DONNELL MAGNUS MAJ (RETD)
26 FEB 10
Aged 98. West Monkseaton, North Tyneside. Landed in Normandy with 75 Coy at 0950 hrs (Wetshod) and was also involved with the liberation of the Belsen concentration camp.

HARRISON CHRIS
24608381 8 Mar 10
Aged 48. Houghton le Spring, Tyne & Wear (served 1981 - 85)

WHYTE WILLIAM (BILL)
24175080) 26 Feb 10 Brechin
Served Mar 70 - Mar 92

LUCKETT JOHN CYRIL RONALD
14296455 Ex Sgt 4 aPR 09 Dover
Served 1944 to 1948 - Joined RPC Association 5 July 47

LANE GEORGE COLONEL MC MM
(FORMERLY LANYI DYURI (GEORG)
13802871 and 13116103
Aged 95. Born Hungary 18.1.15. Captain of Hungarian water polo team at Olympic Games 1936. Student at Christ Church, Ox. and Ldn. Uni. Journalist. Expulsion from UK 1939 countermanded after intervention by Eden, Margesson and Jim Thomas. Joined up 1939, Grenadier Guards chucked him out, served in PC, then SOE, transferred to 3/10 Commando, there first troop sergeant. Commissioned 1943. Commanded Op. Tarbrush/Onival 17/18.5.44. Taken prisoner, interviewed by Rommel. Held in Oflag 9. Awarded Military Cross, Military Medal.

COLONEL GEORGE LANE

Who has died aged 95, fought with SOE and was awarded an MC for his service with the Commandos during the Second World War; captured on a secret mission, he was invited to tea by Field Marshal Rommel, who, Lane always thought, courteously prevented him from being shot by the Gestapo.

During the lead-up to D-Day, an RAF fighter strafed a pillbox on the French coast. The aircraft carried a camera, and the scientists who examined the film were puzzled that the plane's rockets, which fell short, appeared to have set off underwater explosions. It was imperative to discover if this indicated that the Germans were using a new kind of mine on the beaches. Lane – a Hungarian-born lieutenant serving with 3 Troop, 10 Commando – led a hazardous reconnaissance mission that required a two-mile approach to a heavily defended coastline.

On the night of May 17 1944 he crossed the Channel in an MTB which dropped him near Ault on the north-east coast. He found that the Germans were fixing Teller mines to the tops of stakes. These would be submerged at high tide and would explode if they came into contact with a landing craft. Lane reported that the mines were not waterproofed and that the firing mechanisms had become so corroded that the explosion of the rocket had set them off. He was not believed.

He was ordered to return the next night, and the next – this time with a sapper officer, Roy Wooldridge, who was a mine expert. They found nothing but Teller mines, but had orders to photograph other obstacles on the beach using infrared equipment.

Suddenly, starshells illuminated the beach and Lane and Wooldridge, hiding in the dunes, came under fire from two German patrols. They were cut off from the others in their group who, unable to wait any longer, had left them a rubber dinghy and swum out to their boat. When the firing stopped, the two men returned to the beach and paddled out to sea as fast as they could. Although it was dark and pouring with rain, a German patrol boat spotted them. The two men jettisoned their photographic equipment before they were taken prisoner. They were told that they would be handed over to the Gestapo and shot.

For several days they were interrogated by German officers. Eventually they were bound, blindfolded and pushed into a car. They drew up at a castle, and Lane was shoved into a room guarded by a ferocious dog. His blindfold was removed and an elegant German officer arrived with sandwiches and real coffee.

Lane was then taken to a large library. Sitting at a desk at the far end was Rommel. The Field Marshal got up and invited Lane, who was standing to attention, to join him at a table which was laid for tea.

Rommel had experienced a lot of trouble with "gangster commandos", as he called them. "You must realise," he said, "that you are in a very tricky situation. Everyone seems to think that you are a saboteur."

Lane feigned ignorance of the German language, and was anxious not to arouse suspicion that he was not English-born. So he spoke like a Welshman and replied: "Well, if the Field Marshal believed that I was a saboteur he would not have done me the honour of inviting me here."

"So you think that this is an invitation?" Rommel rejoined.

"I do, sir, and I must say I am highly honoured." The Field Marshal smiled, the atmosphere became relaxed and the two men had a long conversation.

Later that day Lane and Wooldridge were taken to Fresnes prison, near Paris. There they were told that they would be hanged or shot. The screams from the other cells were terrifying, Lane said, but after two days the pair were sent on to the castle prison for officers at Spangenberg, Oflag IX/A-H.

There were 300 British officers in the castle. They had an excellent library and Lane studied estate management through a correspondence course. As the Allies closed in, the prisoners were moved out under guard. On the second night Lane slipped into a deep ditch. He then hid in a tree, but no sooner had he got settled than he saw a German soldier climbing up behind him. Lane cursed his luck at his swift discovery, but the man turned out to be a deserter.

He advised Lane to walk to a nearby hospital and wait for American forces to arrive. Lane did so. A doctor there said that the SS regularly searched the hospital, but was persuaded not to hand Lane over, after Lane insisted that the Americans were very close and that when they arrived, the doctor would need a friend. Lane then proceeded to round up some of the sick and wounded from his PoW column and bring them back for treatment. Two days later he was able to give the Americans such a good account of the doctor that they put him in charge of the entire hospital.

Lane got a lift to Paris, where he stayed with his brother-in-law. He longed for a hot bath. "I have lots of Chateau Lafite," said his host, "and lots of Dom Perignon. But I cannot provide you with a bath because there is no hot water." Lane said afterwards that he could have cried.

George Henry Lane was born Lanyi Dyuri, the son of landowners in northern Hungary, on January 18 1915. At the end of the First World War, that region was given to Czechoslovakia and George, aged four, became a refugee. He went to school in Budapest and then wished to see the world. He had no money but was an excellent swimmer and toured widely with the Hungarian Olympic Water Polo Team; he also worked as a freelance journalist for a Hungarian newspaper.

In 1935 Lane came to England and was studying at London University when the Second World War broke out. He volunteered to join the Army and was accepted by the Grenadier Guards. The Home Office, however, served him with a deportation order.

Lane had often stayed at Leeds Castle, the home of the American-born political hostess Lady Baillie, where he had met Anthony Eden and David Margesson, the government Chief Whip. With their help the order was rescinded, but he had to spend a year in the Alien Pioneer Corps doing manual labour.

Lane then joined SOE. After intensive training, he became adept in unarmed combat, weapons and explosives, parachuting and small boat handling. He went on missions to Belgium and Holland, but was not attracted by the prospect of parachuting into Hungary, so he transferred to 4 Commando under the leadership of Lord Lovat.

Lane joined X Troop (later renamed 3 Troop), all the members of which spoke German, and was commissioned in 1943. For one mission he had to parachute into northern France, rifle a safe in a German brigade HQ and bring back some important papers. A top safe breaker was released from prison for two days and taught Lane how to open it.

For another, he was part of a small group which was dropped behind enemy lines to examine a new gun sight. A report was wanted urgently, so they tied this to a carrier pigeon brought along for the purpose. The pigeon climbed into the sky and was heading for home when a hawk darted out from under the cliffs and seized it. Just as with his dashed hopes of a warm bath, the frustration of seeing so much effort wasted, Lane said later, nearly reduced him to tears.

During the war he had met Miriam Rothschild, the renowned entomologist, when recovering at her house after an accident. They married in 1943, and after the war he helped to run the Rothschild estate at Ashton Wold, Northamptonshire.

The marriage was dissolved in 1957 and Lane went to America. He joined a firm of stockbrokers in New York and studied at night school until he had passed the stock exchange examinations. He later opened offices in France and Switzerland. After he remarried in 1963 he lived in London, travelled widely and pursued a number of business interests. A great sportsman, he loved shooting in Scotland and in his native Hungary.

In 1984 he returned to the château where he had met Rommel for an article in The Sunday Telegraph, and 10 years later went back there for the BBC. He always believed that Rommel had saved his life.

George Lane died on March 19. His second wife was Elizabeth Heald, the daughter of Sir Lionel Heald, Attorney General in the last Churchill government. She survives him with a son and three daughters from his first marriage. ■

And finally...

A pint in enemy territory, a smelly 92 year old Pioneer, a thankyou, a German General and a hidden mouse!

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: RPCA Archive

I WAS recently sent to the RPCA by the son of Lt Swindlehurst (349 Coy) a copy of his late fathers photographs and his scrap book when he was in 349 Coy. The following are extracts from the scrapbook.

Lt Swindlehurst had not been an officer very long and was supervising with his Sergeant, bren gun training. His squad were rather raw and one in particular was nervous and had difficulty loading/preparing his gun, and his haphazard firing and accuracy were causing a problem. The Sergeant old him to cease fire and come to attention. Unfortunately, he stood up still clutching desperately the bren and pointing it at Lt Swindlehurst and was shaking like a leaf. The whispered orders were to turn slowly away and put the gun down, which the soldier eventually (minutes, rather than seconds, later or so it must have seemed!) managed - at which point he received a full verbal volley from both the Officer and his Sergeant.

Lt Swindlehurst had been assigned the task of constructing a water-tower, presumably not a very large one. His Corporal worked out what to do, as he had done similar work prior to the war. Work was just under way when a couple of "Engineer Chappies" turned up and said it was over elaborate and would require less wood. The Corporal was sure, and Lt Swindlehurst supported him, but the "Engineer Chappies" were adament, so the amended version was constructed. It was duly filled with water, but halfway through the tower slowly collapsed to the ground. Lt Swindlehurst got on the telephone and invited the Engineers to come and have a look at the "finished" tower. They did, but promptly turned their car round without stopping when they saw the outcome.

Near the end of the war, Lt Swindlehurst and a couple of other officers went for a spin in the OC's car (not an uncommon occurrence). They found themselves in a quiet little village in the countryside and stopped at a bar for a beer. Just as they were finishing their drinks, they noticed several faces at the door looking at them, and as they left a sizeable crowd had gathered. They realized that the village was intact, and that there were no other soldiers around. "We have actually captured this place, haven't we?", they wondered. They decided to effect a tactical withdrawal, just in case! They drove a few miles before coming across any fellow-soldiers!

THE RLC Benevolence Team now carry out all benevolence work on behalf of the RPC, ACC, RAOC and shortly the RCT. They often receive thank you letters from personnel who they have given assistance, the following are two examples:

From a 92 year old WW2 Pioneer

"To members of your organisation who have contributed to help me get my shower room, I wish you all the best in your activities in the future. My wet room does look lovely and I am getting great benefit from it. From August 2008 to August 2009 I wasn't able to have a bath so all my friends are grateful too!"

From the 72 year old widow of a National Service Pte

"Thank you all for the help and support that you gave me in replacing my central heating unit. I would have frozen to death this winter without your help."

GENERAL Kurt Freiherr von Hammerstein-Equord, a former C in C of the German Reichswehr wrote:

"I divide my Officers into four classes as follows:

The Clever, The Industrious, The Lazy and The Stupid

Each officer always possesses two of these qualities.

Those who are clever and industrious I appoint to the General Staff.

Use can be made under certain circumstances of those who are stupid and lazy.

The man who is clever and lazy qualifies for the highest leadership post, he has the requisite nerves and mental clarity for difficult decisions.

But whosoever is stupid and industrious must be got rid of for he is too dangerous."

Is this still valid today?

DID YOU spot the mouse in the October 2009 Newsletter? It was a bit easier to spot and it was on page 34. Look at the third window along and you will see it sitting on top of Sgt Leroy Brown's shoulder!

The winner claims to be Sgt Brimacombe but it is understood that Geordie Foreman informed him where it was.

A prize will be issued when the dispute is resolved!

Can you spot the mouse in this issue of the newsletter? (the one on this page does not count!).

The first person that emails me with the location of the mouse will win a prize!

Lt Swindlehurst 1944

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

■ Forthcoming events ■ Your stories ■ Letters ■ Photo Gallery
■ News from 23 & 168 Pioneer Regiments ■ Another unpublished complete story
■ Reviews ■ Pioneer Reunion Weekend Feature ■ And much more!

■ 438 Mobile Civilian Labour Group, Bracht, Germany. Picture: RPCA Archive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