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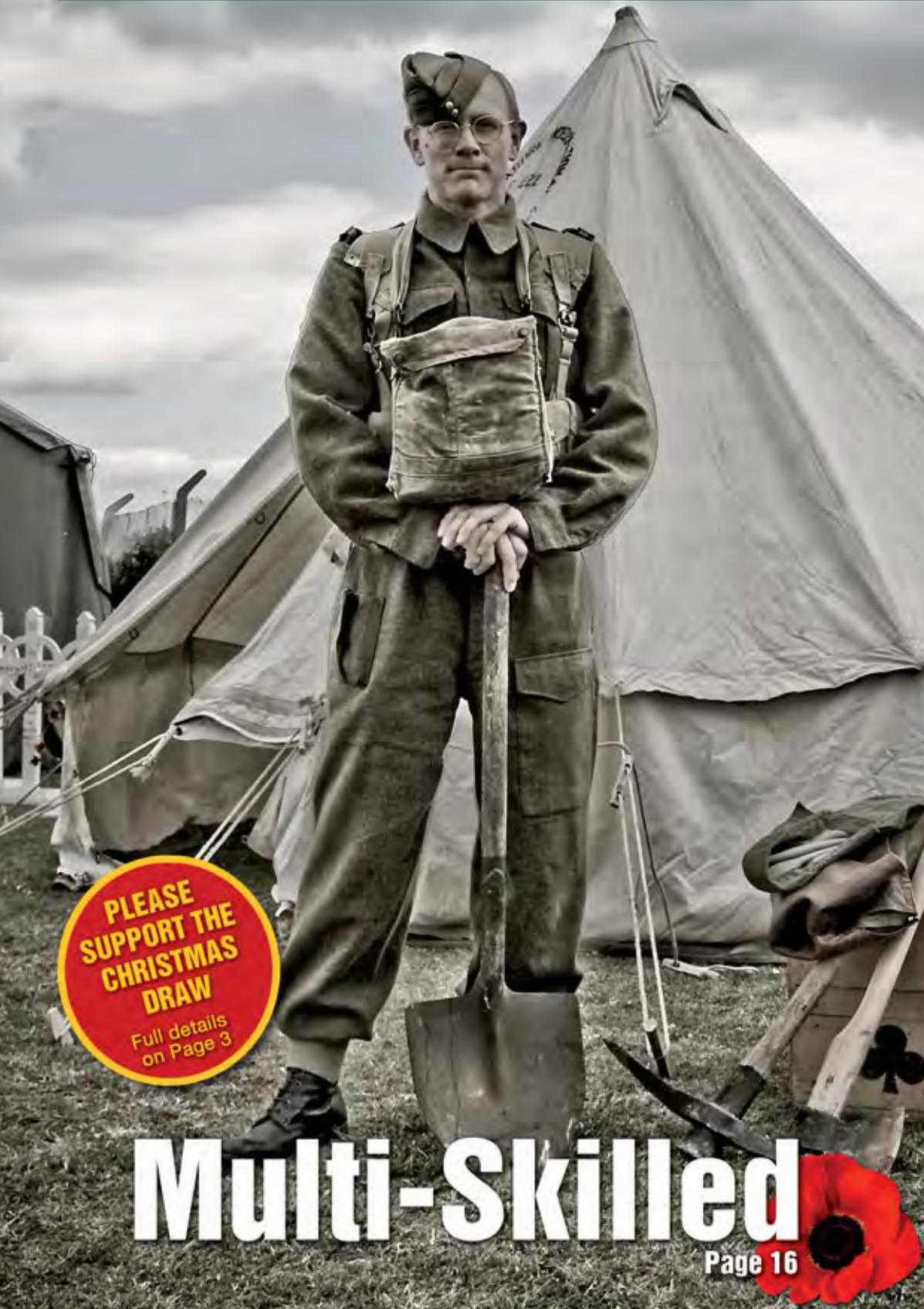
the newsletter of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

# Pioneer



October 2011

[www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk](http://www.royalpioneer corps.co.uk)



**PLEASE SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS DRAW**  
Full details on Page 3

# Multi-Skilled

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**Best Soldier Award**  
Page 4



**Reunion Weekend**  
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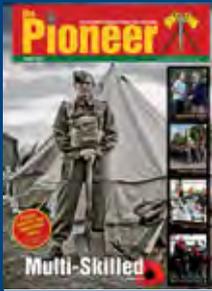
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Page 9



**Rest in Peace Stevie B**  
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Picture: Paul Brown



### Front Cover

Reunion Display, WWII Uniform  
Picture: Paul Brown



### Back Cover

Reunion Display, WWI Uniform  
Picture: Paul Brown

**T**he Reunion Weekend this year achieved record attendance, with approx 650 ex Pioneers there to greet old friends and comrades - 289 of these wanted a bed!

Most of the weekend went well except for a few hic-cups with the accommodation. Dougie Durrant did not want to sleep in the room allocated as it did not have a bed - it was in fact the toilet! Another member was allocated the drying room - these things happen to test us. You can see on pages 28 to 33 from the photographs and the comments that everyone had a great time. This is mainly due, once again, to 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC (and especially 206 Sqn who organised this year's event). The Veterans Football Team are to be congratulated on reaching the final of the knock-out competition.

Once again on page 63 we publish a list of personnel whose deaths have been reported to us since the last Newsletter.

One of the most tragic was that of ex SSgt Steve Blenman at the early age of 44 after a battle with an aggressive brain tumour. Steve had an infectious smile and personality, this was high-lighted by some 450 turning up for his funeral on 7 Sep 11. Ex Cpl Derek Bunting sadly preceded Steve's death by one week at the early age of 35.

I am pleased to report that the number of Newsletters returned "Gone Away" has reduced and most members are now informing us of change of address. In fact during the last month

we have had thirty two notifications of change of address - is this because the Newsletter is about to be distributed? We recently made contact with a member who asked for the Newsletter to be sent to him. When he was informed that we were already sending a copy to an address we were informed he had moved from that address 22 years ago. It was nice of the new occupants to have informed us, maybe they enjoyed reading our Newsletters.

As usual with this Newsletter we are enclosing Christmas Draw tickets, please give this your fullest support. It is intended this year that all profits should be used to re-furnish our War Memorial at St David's Barrack's which sadly requires major remedial work. We also intend to include a new plaque showing the names of all Pioneers who have died on operations since World War 2.

We always require interesting articles for the Newsletter, have you considered writing about your experiences. In the next issue, we did not have space in this one, it is intended to write about the Pioneer involvement in the Suez Operations in 1956. Were you involved, can you give us details? All information would be welcome, do not worry about grammar etc, we will edit it for you.

Finally may I thank my son for, once again, producing such a high quality Newsletter, I know it is the envy of many other Associations.  
**Norman Brown**



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## PAST EVENTS



■ THE 65th Past and Present Officers Dinner was held on 29 July 2011.

Because of the deployment of 23 Pioneer Regiment the Past and Present Dinner was brought forward from its usual date in October to the 29 July 2011. Because of this the numbers attending were slightly down from last year - it was, of course, also the start of the school holidays.

Col S Whelton, former CO of the Regiment, was principal guest and gave an interesting speech on the implications of the Defence Review. The Commanding Officers' of 23 and 168 Regiments also gave an update on what their Regiments had done and were about to do - this was much appreciated from the "Past" members attending.

■ THE FOLLOWING attended Founders Day at the Royal Hospital Chelsea: Maj N Smith, WO2 K Cheung and LCpl Wild (all from 206 Sqn), Mr N Brown, Mr I Dewsnap, Mr DN Bryant, Mr J Kear and Mr & Mrs P Tubridy.

The reviewing officer was HRH Prince Harry of Wales. The Prince, a British Army Captain who is training to become an Apache helicopter pilot, toured the institution's infirmary, meeting staff and residents before attending the celebrations which commemorated the opening of the hospital by King Charles II in 1682. In a speech to mark the occasion, Prince Harry praised the residents for their "extraordinary military service to our country".

He added: "The Royal hospital - this world famous place - represents all that is great about our country, beauty, tradition - and the wisdom that goes with that - selflessness and duty."

The Prince added: "I do have some experience of soldiering. The comradeship that comes with it is one of the things I treasure most in life. The Army, for me and thousands like me, is a family. In that respect, for veterans coming here, it must be like coming home. That is why this place matters, and always will."

He finished his speech by stating that the In Pensioners march much better than his brother!

■ THIS YEAR the RPC Nostalgia Group held its reunion at the Clarendon Hotel in Redcar. This account was sent in by Neil Taylor...

"The lads started arriving on the Friday and Sooty, Kev and myself were there to meet them and a few drinks were quaffed in the bar and old friendships were renewed.

That evening we held a fancy dress evening to coincide with Help for Hero's evening that was being held by the Clarendon Hotel and the lads did us proud.

We all made an effort and a great night was had by everyone and most, if not all, got up on the karaoke and gave us all a song. Even Sooty gave us his rendition of "My Way" at the end of the night (well into the wee small hours actually).

Our proceeds, along with the money raised by the Clarendon Hotel will be donated at a later stage as we do every year.

Allan Sooty Sutcliffe has asked me to thank all the members of the group who attended and we are looking forward to seeing you all again next year for 2012 reunion of the RPC Nostalgia Group."

# Best soldier

This year the award was presented to Pte Jonathan Marc Chamberlain



■ Lt Col D Fletcher presents the Award Trophy to Pte Chamberlain

Picture: Paul Brown

EVERY year the RPC Association awards the Friend Memorial Trophy to the best soldier in either 23 or 168 Pioneer Regiments RLC, this year the award was presented to Pte Jonathan Marc Chamberlain (518 Sqn) during the Reunion Weekend.

His citation for the award is as follows: During the exceptional reporting period Pte Chamberlain deployed on HERRICK 13 as a member of Force Protection (FP) Troop, attached to 13 AA Regt. He took to the pre-deployment training like a natural and was singled out as one demonstrating potential with a lean for natural leadership.

Due to shortfalls in the Force Protection ORBAT at Lance Corporal rank, Private Chamberlain emerged as a natural candidate to step up into the post, he tackled the additional responsibility placed upon him with a verve and confidence that matched his more senior counterparts. In FP Troop he was employed as a Section 2IC and as a Vehicle Commander, commanding groups of up to five men in isolated OP locations in some of the most hostile areas of Helmand Province. Taking on responsibility far in excess that which

would be expected from somebody of his rank, Pte Chamberlain has excelled; working to a level commensurate with a senior LCpl.

Delivering a blistering performance all year, he achieved a Joint Force Commanders Commendation for his work whilst deployed on HERRICK and has been unfaltering in his reliability. He strives to input his full effort into every task to ensure it is completed on time, and will always ensure it is done to the highest possible standard. A trustworthy and reliable individual, Private Chamberlain has a strong grasp of command has been outstanding at motivating the rest of the Privates' throughout the duration of HERRICK 13. He is always willing to sacrifice his own time in order to help those who are not as adept at learning as himself and he has been invaluable to his Troop hierarchy.

For an exceptional performance by showing leadership, technical proficiency and self motivation at a standard far in excess of that expected of a soldier of his seniority and rank, 25207249 Private Jonathan Marc Chamberlain is recommended for the Royal Pioneer Corps Friends Memorial Trophy.



■ Association members marching to the church service

Picture: Paul Brown

# Largest reunion ever

It is estimated that over the weekend 650 Old Comrades attended

**O**NCE again we were blessed with magnificent weather for the whole weekend. Personnel started arriving at approx 0830 hrs and a steady stream kept arriving until 2200 hrs. It is estimated over the weekend that approx 650 Old Comrades attended, 289 of which had requested a bed – this must be the largest attendance ever!

As usual the weekend started off in the Corporals Club with a “Bring a Boss” to which all Old Comrades were invited. They were better organised this time with a bar in the car park, this certainly helped the bar upstairs.

During the evening what started with a small trickle of people making their way down the hill to the Sergeants Mess became a torrent. Over 450 people crowded into the Mess and Mess Gardens with the three bars working non-stop until the early hours. 350 portions of fish and chips had been ordered in advance and the chefs managed to supply these with little queuing. Many war stories were re-told and everyone enjoyed meeting former comrades and mixing with those still serving.

During the evening a DVD was played

which contained a message from ex SSgt Stevie Blenman, this was a very poignant moment as Stevie was in St Kathrine’s Hospice at Banbury. Despite the serious nature of his illness he remained cheerful and apologised for not attending and hoped everyone had a great weekend. This bought a tear to many eyes! Sadly Stevie passed away shortly afterwards and further details can be found in the Last Post page of this Newsletter.

At 1030 hrs all Old Comrades formed up outside the Scully Club (Unit Dining Room) to be marched on by Mr Geordie Dewsnap who still thinks he is a Drill Sergeant – though a little rusty! The Old Comrades still showed the large number of spectators that they were still capable of keeping in step and with 3 Association Standards leading the way they marched proudly to the War Memorial. Following the church service the Old Comrades were marched off and, as usual, did an eyes left as they passed Regimental Headquarters where the COs of 23 and 168 Pnr Regts together with Lt Col J Starling the acting Chairman of the Association took the salute. Following this a group photograph was taken on the

steps of the Officers Mess.

Everyone then made their way to the Sergeants Mess where the Annual General Meeting of the Association was held, the minutes of which are shown on page 56. Lunch followed and then everyone made their way to the sports field. Here the Regiment had provided many displays and stalls, and the obligatory beer tents! A six-a-side football competition was held and the Old Comrades excelled themselves by going through to the final. Unfortunately they lost the final 4-2 but did not disgrace themselves. It was said that they performed better this year because their manager, Keith Burrows, was on holiday in Cyprus! All stayed on the field for the evening entertainment where a live band and a disco entertained everyone and the beer tents, once again, were kept busy. The Regimental Chefs again excelled and provided a wonderful BBQ and a choice of curries. All attending commented on how good the standard of food was.

A large thank you must be made to the CO and men of 23 Pnr Regt RLC and especially to 206 Sqn who organised such a grand event.

## FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE FIELD of Remembrance** will open on Thursday 10 November 2011 at 1100 hours, when a short service will be held.

Members attending the planting of crosses at the Corps Plot (Plot 167 - please note new plot number and also a possible change of location) are asked to arrive before 1030 hrs. It has already been confirmed that tickets are required for admittance to the field, tickets can be obtained from RPC Association. 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 Field will be open daily from 9am to 5.30pm Saturday 12 Nov 2010. Following the Field of Remembrance a 'London Lunch' is to be held.

■ A LONDON lunch will follow the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey on 10 November 2011.

It will be held, as usual, in the Marquis of Westminster, Warwick Road, London (approx 400 yards from Victoria Station). Attendance at this Lunch has increased steadily in the last few years, and new faces are always welcome. 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 who always have some enjoyable yarns to spill! Booking can be made the Association at the usual address.

■ **ONCE AGAIN** the RPC Association has been allocated 30 tickets for the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall on Sunday 13 November 2011

Attendees should be on parade (on Horseguards) by 1010 hrs ready to march onto Whitehall. A number of these tickets have already been allocated but any Member who wishes to attend should apply to the Association at the usual address. The tickets are allocated on a first come first served basis. Following the march it has become the custom for a large number to have lunch and then a leisurely chat (with one or two beers) during the afternoon in the nearby Civil Service Club in Old Scotland Yard.

This year we hope to have maximum attendance as it has been noted that the larger contingent's get a mention from the TV Stations.

■ **THE NORTHAMPTON** Branch of the Association will once again be holding a Christmas Function.

No date or location has yet been arranged but it will probably be in January 2011 when bookings are much cheaper!

Details will be circulated to Branch members in a Newsletter. If you live in the Northampton area and are not on the distribution list for these please contact the Association.

■ **THE WOS' & SNCO'S Pnr Reunion Club** will once again be organising a trip from Bicester to Twickenham for the Army v Navy Rugby.

The date for next year is 28 April 2012. Details will be sent to Club members in early January 2012.

■ A NOTE for your diaries - 6-8 July 2012 - Pioneer Reunion Weekend.

Full details and a booking form will be shown in the April 2012 Newsletter.

# Plaque unveiled

At former site of Simpson Barracks, Northampton



■ The two plaques at the former site of Simpson Barracks

Picture: Supplied

The following account was sent in by the Nostalgia Group

**O**NCE again on 27 August 2011 the RPC Nostalgia Group Members made our way down to Northampton to the little but picturesque village of Roade, just a stone's throw away from the former site of the site of the RPC Training Centre, "Simpson Barrack's", now Simpson Grange estate.

Here we held our annual BBQ at the home of Kevin "Digger" Young, and his good lady Annemarie and their son Scott, but also this year there was to be an event that had taken a lot of effort, time and many phone calls to set in motion. This was the addition of the old badge of the

Royal Pioneer Corps to the memorials at the entrance of Simpson Grange.

Some four years ago the idea was put forward during a discussion between the owner and moderators of the group to try and have the former badge of the Corps added to the memorials and tentative enquiries were made to ascertain how we could go about this task, firstly could we raise the funds to have the two plaques made as we as a group have no funding at all and secondly but most importantly who actually had them built and could we gain permission to make the additions.

After talking to the Controller of the Association, Mr Norman Brown, we gained enough information to move forward a step or two but even then we



■ Unveiling of the new plaque

Pictures: Nostalgia Group

were faced with an uphill climb but our determination and love for our former Corps was a driving force for us to continue in the task at hand.

We contacted the Northampton Borough Council and asked them if they had any information on the construction of the memorials and we came up trumps so the ball was at last in motion.

Our next task was to have two plaques commissioned and made and to send Kevin to take measurements of the position where we hoped the plaques would be mounted.

We all agreed that these two plaques were to be a temporary measure until we could raise the funds for us to have a more permanent pair of plaques in marble attached to the two memorials

Contact was then made with Mr Tom Appelyard BEM to ask for permission to make the addition to the memorials, and after we sent photographs to Mr Appelyard for his approval we were given permission to go ahead.

We checked with the council to ask if we needed any other permission to make the additions and we then set the wheels in motion.

The date was then set to make the announcement on both the Association face book page and the RPC Nostalgia Group face book page and the main Face book page that the unveiling would take place on the 27th August 2011 at 1000hrs and that all past and present pioneers would be welcome.

On the Friday night we sat in the garden at Kev's home and had a few beers and

apprehensively discussed the event that was to take place the following morning and I can tell you there were a few butterflies and amazingly we all hit the sack very early.

The next morning we all rose and the lads made their way into Northampton town to the "Giggling Sausage" to have our last "O Group" and breakfast and have one more run through of the mornings schedule and then make our way back to Kevin's home to get changed and head off to "Simpson Grange" Both memorials were draped with the flag of our great country and then we waited. Slowly old Friends and former Pioneers arrived at "Simpson Grange", Mr Norman Brown arrived along with Mr Tom Appelyard BEM and the most well known Drum Sgt Major of the Corps Mr "Dusty" Bryant and many other well known faces from our former Corps so at just after 1000hrs the unveiling began.

We held a minutes silence for two former members of the Corps, Steve Blenman and Derek Bunting who had sadly passed away during that week.

Then after a short speech we Mr Tom Appelyard with the aid of two girls from Northampton High School the memorials were finally unveiled.

Could I on behalf of the RPC Nostalgia Group thank everyone involved in all the hard work which has brought us to this point and finally thank the ladies of the Nostalgia Group for their help and support throughout this task namely Mrs Annemarie Young, Mrs Elizabeth Sutcliffe, Mrs Gabby Barlow and finally Mrs

Jeanette Taylor, as without them none of this would have been possible

"We all can't do without our better halves".

**The following article appeared in Northampton's Chronicle and Echo Newspaper**

**E**X-SERVICEMEN who started their army careers in Northampton will be honoured with a plaque at a former barracks in Wootton.

The new plaque was unveiled at the former Simpson Barracks in Wootton, Northampton on Saturday, to recognise the Royal Pioneer Corps who trained at the base from around 1960 until its closure in 1993.

Leading members of the RPC Nostalgia Group organised for the plaque to be put in place with support from more than 1,000 former pioneers via a Facebook site for the organisation.

A former Regimental Sergeant Major of the depot at Simpson Barracks, Tom Appleyard, granted permission for the plaque to be put in place and officially opened it.

Kevin Young from Ashoton, Northampton, who helps to run the RPC Nostalgia Group, said: "Northampton is where we started our army career and the plaque will be a lasting reminder for us.

"The Pioneers are from all around the world but Northampton has always been a special place for members and they say it feels like coming home."

The plaque includes the former badge of the Royal Pioneer Corps which dates

## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THANKS TO** all members who supported the derby draw.

The following are the winners. May I thank all who participated in the draw, the profits help to finance the work of the Association.

**1st Prize £1,000** - Mr H Stanley  
Ticket No 11931  
Gotham, Notts

**2nd Prize £500** - E Smith  
Ticket No 14677  
Streatham

**3rd Prize £200** - Mrs B Wafforne  
Ticket No 22424  
Brecon

**4th Prize £100** - Mr K McDonnell  
Ticket No 02651  
Fareham

**5th Prize £50** - Mr SM Snell  
Ticket No 02619  
South Shields

■ **SCOTTISH** Armed Forces charity Poppyscotland and The Royal British Legion (TRBL) which operates in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, have merged to create the largest Armed Forces charity in the United Kingdom.

Under the terms of the merger substantial additional investment will be committed to Scotland to make significant improvements to the support services for veterans and their families living north of the border.

Poppyscotland will continue to operate as a distinct, separate charity within the TRBL group of charities. The Poppyscotland brand will not change and the Scottish poppy and Scottish Poppy Appeal will remain in place, with funds raised from the campaign being used exclusively to support the Armed Forces and veterans' community in Scotland. The manufacture of Scottish poppies at Lady Haig's Poppy Factory in Edinburgh will also continue.

■ **ONE OF** Britain's oldest charities has merged with leading military charity SSAFA Forces Help. The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association Forces Help has taken on the charitable objectives and assets of The Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation which has supported Britain's Forces and their families for 156 years.

The Royal Patriotic Fund Corporation was established by Queen Victoria in 1854 for the families of those killed in the Crimea War. The Fund raised money for the relief of widows and orphans of sailors, soldiers and Marines who died on active service. Two years ago, a decision was made to close the Royal Patriotic Fund, with its remaining assets to be administered by SSAFA Forces Help in accordance with the Fund's objectives.

■ **OVER** 200 events were held in the UK to celebrate the third annual Armed Forces Day in June.

An estimated 100,000 people supported the national event in Edinburgh, where activities took place over the weekend. Celebrations took place up and down the country for Armed Forces Day including Plymouth, Cardiff and Manchester. Armed Forces Minister Nick Harvey announced that Plymouth will host the fourth Armed Forces Day on 30 June 2010.

from 1946 to 1964.

A new badge was introduced in 1984 when the corps changed its name to the Royal Pioneers and this badge was already in place on the plaque which the old badge has now been added to.

Mr Young said: "The majority of people involved in the RPC group joined the Corps under the old badge and we wanted to mark that."

"This will be a lasting mark and we are making history. We are making something our grandchildren can look at."

Pupils and staff from Northampton Girls' School attended the event and had compiled information about the Pioneers which will be placed in a time capsule and buried at the site in the future.

*(Ed note: Mr Tom Appleyard has asked me to print the following to put the record straight):*

I was never the RSM Simpson Barracks, I was the RSM 187 Company, RSM Candhar Barracks Tidworth and RSM Port Stanley Falkland Island, but not RSM Simpson Barracks. Also I never give permission for the new Plaque to be incorporated, I informed the Group that I did not have a problem with the old badge being mounted. I may have acquired the funds and had the original stones erected but they are really nothing to do with me they belong to all past and present members of the Corps.

### **When the new plaque was first announced Maj Taff Teague made the following comments on facebook**

Although I generally agree with the new Plaque at Simpson Manor however there are a few points that need to be taken into consideration before mounting the plaque:

- It was decided that the 85-93 badge would be used within the design, two badges the Northampton Regiment and the Royal Pioneer Corps the then current badge.
- The RPC did not move to Simpson Barracks until 7 Nov 1960.
- Taking into consideration the dates on the new plaque why 1946 when we did not move to Northampton until 1960.
- Until 1960 the Barracks was called Quebec during the summer of 1961 the War Office agreed to rename the barracks Simpson. It was not universally welcomed by the people of Northampton. They had just lost their County Regiment and the removal of an honoured Battle Honour within the area.
- The badge on the new plaque is of the Labour Corps 21 Feb 1917-1921, Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps 17 Oct 1939-1940, Pioneer Corps 22 Nov 1940-1946 and Royal Pioneer Corps 28 Nov 1946-1985. Also it is mounted with the Queens Crown that would make it 1952-1985.

So what is the aim of new plaque is it to recognise the RPC service in Northampton then your date is wrong and should read 1960-1985. If it is to recognise the service and existence of the RPC then the date should be 1917 (or 1939)-1985.

If the plaque is to recognise the RPC then all the Pioneer organisations would need to be taken into consideration too. So to recognise the 9000 LC dead and the AMPC/PC 10000 dead and are not

forgotten.

As a keen historian of all the above Pioneers organisations including, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. We need to make sure that the information presented is correct for future generations of Pioneers and military historians.

### **After further comments regarding the proposed plaque Maj Teague made the following comment:**

Just so you clearly understand me. There is no one more proud to have served under the Blackpool Tower than me.

The Cap Badge you are using is on display at the National arboretum there is no finer place to display it. But as a Regimental Historian for Pioneer History the dates need to be accurate.

If your plaque is to indicate that the RPC served at Simpson Barracks wearing the 39 badge then the dates should be 1961-1985. If it is to indicate the existence of the RPC then the date should be 1939-1993 and contain the 1985 cap badge.

I have no real issue where your plaque goes but it must be accurate. Otherwise those Pioneers who served from 39-46 who earned the 'Royal' will not be represented nor those who served from 85-93. The current plaque at Simpson Manor represents our total history without dates. By the way I have yet to find a memorial for the Labour Corps 1917 1921.

I will leave you with a statement made by Major EH Rhodes-Woods wrote in his book A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45 published in 1960. Concludes the Battle of France 1940 (where my Uncle served as a Pioneer). In which it sums up everything what it means to me to be a Pioneer Past, Present and Future:

"The Corps was born on 17th October, 1939, by the publication of an Army Order, but it was during the forty days and nights of bitter travail on the beaches, the highways and in the fields of France that the esprit de corps, without which a military formation is nothing, blazed into existence. For six weeks, using borrowed weapons; Pioneers had fought shoulder to shoulder with the flower of the British Army and found none their superior. A long, hard road still lay ahead of the Corps before it was accepted, grudgingly, into full brotherhood with the long-established, jealous clans of which the Army is composed, but the men of the B.E.F. had set a pattern which was to be repeated time and time again in the years that followed and the debt owed to them by later generations of Pioneers is immeasurable."

He finished his book with:

"In November 1946, His Majesty King George VI decreed that in recognition of its services the Corps should in future enjoy the distinction of "Royal," and past and present Pioneers are proud of the fact that in the long and glorious history of the British Army no other corps or regiment has earned this signal honour in so short a period of time.

The Army Council decided in 1950 that the Royal Pioneer Corps should be retained in the Active Army of which it now forms a permanent part."

"LABOR OMNIA VINCIT"

Your fellow Pioneer



■ Heather Woods on the nearest treadmill with soldiers from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC

Picture: Supplied

# Endurance fundraiser

## Soldiers raised cash for the new 23 Pioneer Soldier Benevolent Fund

**S**OLDIERS from 23 Pioneer Regt RLC have run a kilometre for each of their hero comrades who have died in Afghanistan.

The most poignant, however, was kilometre 348 as it represented Warrant Officer Class 2 Charles Wood, who was one of their own.

Charlie deployed on Operation HERRICK 13 on 6th November 2010 as an Advanced Search Advisor. Trained to coordinate all aspects of Improvised Explosive Device (IED) detection, he was assigned to lead the clearance of a route

through the Khushdal Kalay area of the Helmand River Valley to increase the freedom of movement and safety of the local population. In the early afternoon of 28 December 2010, with the task nearing completion, Warrant Officer Class 2 Wood was caught in the blast from an IED and killed.

His widow, Heather, joined soldiers outside Tesco, Bicester to run the 348th kilometre in honour of her husband.

It is the third year running that members of the Regiment have staged an endurance fundraiser in the town. On

both previous occasions WO2 Wood was one of the organisers and participants. Mrs Wood said: "Never in a million years would he think I would do this, there was more chance of me doing a marathon shop around Bicester village than running anywhere, but this is a way to carry on that baton."

Soldiers raised cash for the new 23 Pioneer Soldier Benevolent Fund, which will support families of soldiers killed in action and injured troops, and national charities Help for Heroes and the Soldiers Charity ABF.



## NEWS IN BRIEF



■ IN 1921 a few ex-servicemen gathered to consider how the men who had served their country in the Great War could be better represented and supported.

This was born from the fact that 3 years after the war the promised homes for heroes were not materialising, many had found the jobs they left had disappeared, or that their injuries from their service meant they could no longer work. This led to veterans being almost permanently unemployed. Large numbers were destitute, despondent, and desperate - some too fell into drunkenness. For many, the march led not to Tipperary but to prison, Poor Law institutes or being locked in mental hospitals. This small group of men could not know that the next few years would add further to the strain and difficulties not just for ex-servicemen but for people across Britain, its empire and the globe. By the time the Legion celebrated its 10th anniversary in 1931, it was already a charity that had great relevance to the public and started to grow a branch network that helped to do good work for individuals and champion veterans' causes.

Over the next 40 years the British Legion grew in size and stature. With the Poppy Appeal - the Haig Fund in its early days - and the Remembrance parade at the Cenotaph it had grown to be a household name. The welfare work it carried out was gratefully accepted and universally respected. Its branch membership network, bolstered by another group of world war veterans, and those from Korea including National Servicemen ensured it had the ability to influence and inform across all levels of society. Its recognition was completed with the Queen graciously allowing it to become the Royal British Legion (RBL) in 1971. But from this high point concerns and worries rapidly appeared: the membership was strong but the Armed Forces was smaller, and was the public losing interest in Remembrance, and had organisations like the RBL become old fashioned and dated? It is arguable the 1982 Falklands War - in a way that the conflict in Northern Ireland never did (or was allowed) - showed the public what our service personnel do. The 255 casualties, and many wounded some with dreadful burns and injuries refocused attention and helped the RBL showcase its work and restate its place as the UK's guardian of Remembrance.

It was the 1990s when the RBL really started its true renaissance. It finally used technology - albeit slowly - and grasped that celebrity could be a tool for good: the Spice Girls brought the Poppy Appeal to a whole new generation, others have followed and annual totals have continued rising. Its campaign for the reinstatement of the 2 minutes' silence was masterful and wanted. Iraq and Afghanistan added to the clamour and the workload.

It is not all rosy. The RBL must continue to attract new members. It has an image problem being seen by many as old and old fashioned - the Riders Branch is a great development. It needs to better publicise its work locally and nationally with its powerful logo: the poppy; it must help the public see that wonderful organisations like Help for Heroes - who I suggest have helped the RBL change too - complement each other. But as we celebrate 90 years be very proud of the organisation because helping our mates is as important today as it was in 1921.

# Successful dinner night

Farewells were said to John Paterson and Colin (Dinger) Bell



■ WO2 Colin (Dinger) Bell and family at the Dinner night

Picture: Norman Brown

**A** VERY successful dinner night was held in the WOs & Sgts Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC on the 3 September 2011 (although because of the numbers attending the meal itself was held in the Scully Club). It was also an opportunity for the new RSM, Wayne Fuller, to meet members of the Reunion Club.

Although the number of non-serving members of the club was low a brilliant night was held. The meal was in the form of a carvery and the unit chefs' produced an exceptional meal, with a wonderful and varied menu. In fact the only complaint of the night was there are not enough Ladies toilets in the Scully Club!

On return to the mess a band and a disco entertained until the early hours. We hope for a larger attendance next year especially from the non-serving members

of the Club.

During the night farewells were said to Mr John Paterson, who sadly is retiring after 12 years as the WOs & Sgts Mess Manager. Although on his retirement he has already been elected as a Life Member of the Mess so we should still see him quite often.

Farewell was also said to WO2 Colin (Dinger) Bell who retires after 24 years as a Pioneer. Over the years Colin has been a great asset to the Club and has already confirmed that he is willing to continue as Assistant Treasurer. He has also helped organise many Association Weekends and Reunion Club functions - his knowledge will be sorely missed. We wish him well in civilian life and hope he attends future functions.

More photographs from the dinner night can be seen on page 34.



■ Memorial to the RLC and forming Corps, National Arboretum (main)

Pictures: Supplied

# Grove Rededication

## Large numbers of Pioneers were in attendance at the National Arboretum

**T**HE Logistic Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum was rededicated on 19 September 2011.

The heart of the Grove is the memorial to The Royal Logistic Corps and its Forming Corps. The original memorial was a hexagon constructed with brick with slate slabs on each face and the whole surmounted by a Celtic Cross.

Each slate slab is engraved respectively by:

The Royal Logistic Corps  
Royal Corps of Transport  
Royal Army Ordnance Corps  
Royal Pioneer Corps  
Army Catering Corps  
The Royal Engineers (Postal & Courier Services).

The inscriptions read as follows:  
The Royal Logistic Corps was formed on 5th April 1993 from the following:  
Royal Corps of Transport  
Royal Army Ordnance Corps  
Royal Pioneer Corps  
Army Catering Corps and  
The Royal Engineers (Postal & Courier Services)

The Royal Logistic Corps inherited from the Forming Corps the role of providing

close and general support to the British Army in peacekeeping operations and in war.

This millennium tribute commemorates all those men and women of The Royal Logistic Corps and their predecessors who served in these Corps and whose individual tributes are recorded around this monument

This plot is planted with the following trees of significance to those Corps commemorated here:

Acers, Cherry, Mountain Ash, Pride of India, Almond, Chestnut, Nyasa Tupilo, Walnut, Apple, London Plane, Oak, Wellington, Redwood.

The Pioneer section reads "This tribute is to the soldiers and officers of The Royal Pioneer Corps and its predecessors who served from 1917 to 1993. They come from the United Kingdom, British Empire, Commonwealth, China, Egypt, Ireland, Macedonia and other countries. 26,806 died while bearing arms for peace and freedom. Labor Omnia Vincit"

The original subscriptions remain but the Logistic Grove, its entrance and the memorial, has now been enhanced, in part to make good severe flood damage in

early years of the Arboretum.

Some of the original trees named on the Monument were found unsuitable to the conditions and have been replaced. Individual trees have also been planted.

The Grove was rededicated by Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal, Colonel-in-Chief The Royal Logistic Corps. She also planted a commemorative tree.

A large number of Pioneers were in attendance including Colonel A Barnes (who laid a wreath on behalf of the RPC Association), Colonel M Baker (with a number of Pensioners' from the Royal Hospital), Maj S Hanson-Church, Capt K Jessop, WOs K Cheung, C Bell, S Belcher-Marks and K Hussain, Mr N Brown, Mr I Dewsnap (Standard Bearer), Pte J Campbell, Pte J Stringer and Mrs H Wood.

A marching contingent was also provided by 518 Squadron.

A reception and buffet in the marquees followed the service and the Colonel-in-Chief spoke to many of the guests.

Personnel then had the opportunity to visit the National Memorial - WO2 C Wood's name has now been inscribed on the wall.



■ A RARE George Cross won by Corporal James Scully, Pioneer Corps has fetched twice its estimate and sold for a world record of £72,000 at auction.

Corporal Scully refused to leave a man and woman trapped for seven hours inside their bombed out home in Liverpool on a March night in 1941. Props put in place to hold the debris gave way and despite being able to escape, Cpl Scully stayed and used his back to take the weight.

■ MEMBERS OF the Armed Forces will be presented with a medal to mark Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee in February 2012.

The commemorative medal designed to mark the Queen's 60 year reign on the throne will be awarded to members of the emergency services, Prison Service and the following Armed Forces personnel:

Members of the Armed Forces (Regular and Reserves) who have completed five full calendar years of service on 6 February 2012.

Living holders of the Victoria Cross and George Cross.

Members of the Royal Household. The MOD will issue detailed qualifying criteria applying to their personnel later this year.

Designed by Timothy Noad, the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal depicts a formal image of the Queen on one side, while the reverse shows a hexagon with a crown and royal cipher, inscribed "1952 to 2012", commemorating Her Majesty's reign, and finished off with a red ribbon and white/blue stripes.

■ HAVE YOU claimed your medals and veterans lapel badge?

All current campaign medals and previously unclaimed World War 2 medals are issued by the SPVAs MOD Medal Office from their offices at Imjin Barracks.

Significant investment in personnel and JPA technology, coupled with the laser engraving machines allows prompt delivery of Medals to Service Personnel, veterans and their relatives.

The Medal Office receives around 200 applications a week for historical medals for Service back to World War 2.

Each request needs to be thoroughly investigated before awarding the requested medals.

If you haven't applied for your medals yet - call 0800 169 2277 to get more information on how to apply.

SPVA is also responsible for the distribution of the very popular HM Armed Forces Veterans Lapel Badge of which over 800,000 have been issued to date.

The lapel badge was launched in May 2004 and was initially given to first and second World War veterans travelling back to the battlefronts that year under the Heroes Return Scheme.

It has now become a symbol identifying veterans as a distinct group within the community and one that deserves special recognition and thanks.

The veterans lapel badge has since been opened up to all veterans and can be obtained by contacting the Veterans UK-Helpline on 0800 169 2277 or visiting the Veterans-UK website which is [www.veterans-uk.info](http://www.veterans-uk.info)

A veteran is anyone who has served in the Armed Forces, apply for your badge today.

# Success on the battlefield and the sports field

Latest news from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC



■ Director RLC presents the Sir Cecil Smith Cup to WO2 Rob Berton

Picture: Supplied

THE REGIMENT have had another successful 3 months both on the battlefield and the sports field.

522 Sqn troops continue to support OP HERRICK. It has been a busy period for Comd Sp Tp attached to 45 Sqn, 2LSR. The Tp has continued to fulfil its demanding operational requirement as Force Protection Tp for Cdo Log Regt CSLR. As the Afghan summer has reached its peak, the Tp has found itself tasked not only providing FP to the numerous CLPs all over Helmand, but also with a variety of jobs outside of its traditional role. In true Pioneer style, many of the lads have attempted to beat the Royal Marines at

their own games of both Op BRONZE and Op MASSIVE, with SSgt Avant and LCpl Davidge coaching in both respects. The Advanced Search teams have recently moved locations in theatre and are starting to filter home for some well earned R&R. The Mortuary Affairs team has recently conducted a RiP.

Pte Cockfield deployed as an Advanced Searcher attached to the Counter-IED Task Force.

He formed part of a specialist team responsible for marking IED's for subsequent clearance by EOD operators. He received his 'Commanders coin award' for his dedication to this



■ Pte Cockfield (left), Pte Chamberlain (right) with their awards.

Picture: Supplied

dangerous and unforgiving task.

Pte Chamberlain was awarded a 'Commander Joint Force Support's Commendation' for his work providing Force Protection to CLPs. Throughout the tour Chamberlain was selected as JACKAL commander and acted as Section 21C. For the duration of his six month Operational period he demonstrated a level of performance above and beyond what could be expected from such a Junior Pte soldier.

As part of the celebrations on Corps Open-Day, 23 Pioneer Regiment lined up against 17 Port & Maritime Regiment, to compete for the title of "RLC Champions" and ownership of the Sir Cecil Smith Cup. With conditions perfect for running rugby, both sides played an expansive and entertaining game, with 23 Pioneer taking an early lead through tries from Pte Hull (2) and LCpl Kava.

Despite a late rally from their opposition, 23 Pioneer held on for an 18 – 10 victory.

Over the period of 15 – 20 May, the Regiment held a JNCO cadre. The Cadre was held in Sennybridge. With easy access to both Sennybridge Tng area and to the Brecon Beacons National Park, this proved to be an ideal environment for providing a physically and mentally demanding exercise which included the "Fan Dance".

With over 80 JNCOs and selected Ptes taking part, the exercise proved to be a great success. Congratulations must be extended to Cpl Ravenscroft, who the DS adjudged to be the top student.



■ L/Cpl G Young, JNCO Cadre, Sennybridge, Wales

Picture: Supplied



■ **ONLY ONE** person correctly identified the Cuneo Mouse in the April edition of the newsletter - did we make it too hard?

The mouse was on page 6 under the leg of the front soldier in the mud and to the left of the small picture on the right.

Congratulations to Tony Lunn how he found the mouse can be seen on the letters page. Your prize will be with you shortly.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse. Terence Cuneo painted 'Sword Beach' which shows the activities of the pioneers who were among the first British troops to land on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day.

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse which was his trademark and somewhere in this Newsletter we have hidden a Cuneo mouse and it's not the one on the top of Page 66. We have made it a little easier in this edition so get spotting.

Names of correct entries will be entered into a draw and the first 'out of the hat' will win a prize.

It is intended to draw the winning entry before Christmas (the same date as the Christmas Draw). Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by Friday 16 December 2011.

■ **LITTLE BOOK** proves a big success. Published using funding from the Veterans Challenge Fund, a new information handbook of Service organisations has become an essential guide for the Armed Forces Community.

The Confederation of Service Charities (COBSEO) launched its 2011 handbook of Members.

There are around 180 members organisations ranging from the larger charities, TRBL, SSAFA FH, Seafarers UK, ABF-The Soldiers Charity and the RAF Benevolent Fund, through the medium sized charities including St Dunstan's, BLESMA, Combat Stress, Help for Heroes, Forces Pension Society, Officers' Association, Royal Navy and Royal Marines Charity and Royal Air Force Association to smaller charities and Regimental Associations.

The handbook is designed to be an easy and complete reference identifying COBSEO's member organisations, contact details and scope of operation. It provides information on what each member organisation does and the specific needs they cater for, with a page devoted to each organisation. More than 2,000 books have been issued and the online version has received over 1,000 visits a month.

The online version of the handbook can be found at

<http://www.cobseo.org.uk/our-members/member-organisations/> and there is a web-based search engine which enables users to easily search and access the handbook, using keywords or phrases.

For example, if an individual searches for help with housing, the search engine will provide those member Service charities which could provide that specific help.

For further information, or to request a copy of the handbook (£5 each to cover production costs, including postage and packaging) please contact Sophie Lucas on 0845 504 6633 or email [officemanager@cobseo.org.uk](mailto:officemanager@cobseo.org.uk) or website [www.cobseo.org.uk](http://www.cobseo.org.uk)

# Multi-million pound home

## The latest recovery and assessment centre



■ **Josh Campbell** (third along)

Picture: Supplied

**T**HE MINISTRY of Defence, Help for Heroes and other service charities working together to help Britain's wounded, injured and sick Servicemen and women.

The first injured personnel have moved into Tedworth House, the newest of the Army's Personnel Recovery and Assessment Centre.

Key facilities such as temporary residential accommodation, classrooms, catering facilities and a gymnasium were up and running, which will allow up to 26 recovering Armed Forces personnel to move in during July.

Tedworth House, set in the heart of Tidworth Garrison, Wiltshire, one of the Army's largest Garrison towns, will provide comprehensive support to wounded, injured and sick personnel and their families, for life.

Help for Heroes have committed £32 million to the renovation and running of

Tedworth House, which will be one of five Personnel Recovery Centres (PRCs) across the UK that make up the Army Recovery Capability (ARC). These centres will, within a military environment, deliver co-ordinated support to recovering personnel from across the Armed Forces.

One of the first to move into Tedworth was Private Josh Campbell, 21, from 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, who was injured in Afghanistan when the vehicle he was travelling in struck an improvised Explosive Device (IED).

He said, "It's been really tough since I was injured in 2009 but the treatment I received at Selly Oak and Headley Court has been brilliant and the support I get from the Personnel Recovery Unit has been fantastic. I am also grateful for the assistance I've received from Help for Heroes and I'm really looking forward to taking advantage of all the great support facilities Tedworth House has to offer."



■ Buffer Zone, Nicosia

Picture: Paul Brown

# Training for Op Tosca

168 news by Maj Jules Forrest-Anderson RLC, Chief Military Observer & Liaison Offer

**T**HERE EXISTS a somewhat surprising fact that despite being the longest running British Army operation there is no specific PDT or OPTAG for Op TOSCA

Units are responsible for organising all their own PDT, and are then inspected by a small team currently serving as part of UNFICYP.

23 Pioneer Regiment Group PDT was divided down into a number of blocks. The first one being mobilisation of the troops in 2 tranches via RTMC Chilwell. Once 'mobilised' the Group formed up at Bicester and conducted a 3 day All Rank Briefing (ARB), led by a small team from HQ UNFICYP and the in-place Sector 2 URR, 3 R ANGLIAN Gp. The final phase of PDT was the FTX & MRX which took place at Nescliffe Camp. A lot packed into a small timeframe - short and sharp.

Whilst at Nescliffe Camp, we were to cover a whole range of important topics from physical training to public order training. Whilst there a UN Validation Team came over from Cyprus to lend a hand and give advice on all subjects regarding training and day to day life in the Buffer Zone. One of the most

important things we were to concentrate on was getting drivers qualified to drive SUV 4x4 vehicles. This task was undertaken by the MT Section lead by the MTWO and his staff. We managed to get a total of 168 people qualified to a high level in Cross Country Driving. At the same time we sent SNCOs and WOs away to become public order instructors, a Team Medic Cadre qualified over 60 TMs, and approximately 30 people gained lifeguarding qualifications. Don't laugh - Brits lifeguard for the pool at UNFICYP HQ which has a positive diplomatic effect, and without lifeguards at Ledra Palace (our main base) to allow us to swim morale would be significantly lower than it is. Aside from that training varied from stripping and assembling foreign weapons to bicycle maintenance to armoured fighting vehicle recognition.

After a brief period of pre-deployment leave period the Regiment headed out to Cyprus via South Cerney and RAF Brize Norton. As in the UK we have mandatory training conducted by the UN that we have to complete. Various Officers, NCOs and Private soldiers have undertaken a number of courses up at UN HQ. The

subjects are varied, and some of them are very different to what we are used to; HIV and AIDS is one of the top subjects that members of the Regiment have to be trained in and we have now three dedicated AIDS and HIV counselors within the Regiment Group. The other subjects are more familiar and they range from Mine Awareness to First Aid, Map Reading, Safe Driving, Air Ops and Communication and IT.

While the pre-deployment training had prepared us well, nothing could have prepared us for the eerie feeling of entering the buffer zone for the first time, surrounded by buildings displaying the scars of the 1974 intervention and left to decay ever since - the only life being that of the manned OPs of the Turkish Cypriot Security Forces and Turkish Mainland Army to the North and the Greek Cypriot National Guard to the South - each street and each building with its own story and place in history.

Each day brings a different challenge to each and every one of us. The Regiment is in good spirits and thoroughly looking forward to the next six months and the challenges that they will bring.



**Multi -**

**Skilled**

**E**ARLIER this year it was announced as part of the Defence cuts that both 206 Squadron and 522 Squadron were to be disbanded. Since the Pioneer Corps was formed on 17 October 1939 it has been shown how versatile and multi skilled Pioneers have been, the purpose of this article is to highlight this versatility.

There were Pioneers with the assault parties at Wellington's bloody sieges of Ciudad Redrigo and Badajos. There were Pioneers in the frozen, wind-swept trenches before Sevastopol in the Crimea. Pioneers toiled and sweated to break their way into defiant Delhi; to hold the forces of investment at bay in besieged Lucknow.

It was noted during World War One that Pioneer Battalions were wasteful with labour often in the wrong place at the wrong time. The Labour Corps, our predecessor Corps, was therefore formed in 1917 and quickly became one of the largest Corps' in the British Army – full details of this Corps can be found in the book "No Labour, No Battle" by John Starling (this book is available from the RPC Association). Seven weeks after the declaration of war in World War Two the Pioneer Corps was formed (originally called Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC)). Although retaining the badge of the former Labour Corps they had attained the stature and dignity of a separate Corps.

Regimental traditions were formed which stood comparison with the proudest records in our military annals.

On every front, from the Albert Canal to El Alamein, from Medjez el Bab to Caen, the Pioneer displayed a readiness and a resource which the men in the other branches of the Service recognised and paid tribute to.

In November 1946, only seven years after its formation, His Majesty King George VI decreed that in recognition of its services the Corps should in future enjoy the distinction of "Royal", and past and present Pioneers are proud of the fact that in the long and glorious history of the British Army no other Corps or Regiment has earned this signal honour in so short a period of time.

Since World War 2 Pioneers have been involved in every major operation from Korea, Suez, Cyprus, Aden, Northern Ireland, the Falklands and Iraq. Following the formation of The Royal Logistic Corps Pioneers have still been involved seeing service in the Balkans, Iraq and Afghanistan where they are currently serving.

### World War Two

On the return of the Pioneer Corps Companies from France in 1940 where they had proved themselves on many occasions, 10,000 Pioneers were allotted to Home Forces for employment in Home Defence. 9 HD Groups and 34 HD Companies were organized for this purpose and employed on guarding aerodromes and vital points.

This duty continued till August 1941 when they were absorbed into HD Battalions and the remainder returned to normal Pioneer work. During 1940/41, apart from in Depots, priority tasks consisted of clearance of bomb damage, construction of defences and aerodrome construction and repair. As the work on defences progressed there was a gradual switch over to construction of AA sites and accommodation for Air Defence Great Britain, which continued for a long period owing to the many changes necessitated by

the increasing and improved AA armament.

A Pioneer Corps Group formed part of the Orkney and Shetland Defences from 1940 to 1944. Besides their operational role these Pioneers were employed in building the causeway which linked up the four adjacent islands with the Orkney mainland and sealed the eastern entrance to Scapa Flow.

The construction of large Ammunition and Stores Depots, such as Nesscliff, Bicester, Kineton and Long Marston involved a considerable amount of railway track laying under the direction of Transportation, the erection of huts and hangars and road construction.

During 1942 and 1943 large numbers of Pioneers were employed in connection with the construction of US Depots at such places as Egginton, Sudbury and Honeybourne.

The preparations for the invasion of France and work in the United Kingdom connected with the subsequent maintenance of 21 Army Group involved the employment of many Pioneers on specific tasks. Six thousand five hundred tons of ammunition were landed on the beaches on D-Day, 80,000 tons during the first ten days, and units of the Corps were mainly responsible for the unloading, stacking and issuance of this immense tonnage.

By 12th June a million gallons of petrol, oil and lubricants had been stacked in depots on the beaches, this again being largely the work of Pioneers

The first mobile laundry and bath units, operated by men of the Pioneer Corps, reached Normandy on 18th June. These functioned with forward units, often under fire, providing troops with baths and changes of clothing.

A field salvage unit and a salvage collecting centre, both manned by Pioneers, landed on 14th June and ten days later six salvage dumps were in operation and enormous amounts of material being reconditioned for re-issue or return to the U.K. The first Base Salvage Depot was opened on 24th July, the total amount of serviceable stores returned to Ordnance by that date being 7,328 tons.

Six Fire Fighting Companies, each consisting of a Headquarters and two first-class fire brigades, functioned during the assault, sea fire defences being provided by one Fire Boat Company and six fire boat sections. These, too, were manned by men of the Pioneer Corps.

During the critical weather in June sections of the British Mulberry were kept afloat by continual pumping from fire boats, which also carried out much salvage work among shipping.

Five Airfield Construction Groups, R.E., each with two Pioneer companies on its strength, had landed early in the campaign and by the end of June an emergency landing-strip and ten airfields had been constructed in beach areas and handed over to the RAF for operational use.

Engineers and Pioneers alike read with amusement, not entirely free of indignation, the reports in the British Press that this work was being done by "highly trained commandos of the RAF Regiment."

The preparation of 'Pluto', the cross channel petrol pipe line occupied. 208 Company at Dungeness for ten months and 13 Company on the Isle of Wight for nine months. They were employed on trench digging, pipe laying, the erection of

pumping houses and camouflaging.

The Royal Navy was responsible for the laying of the sea lines, but as the end of the sea line was dropped in the sea anything up to 100 yards from the shore, the Pioneers had frequently to grope about for it waist deep in water and drag it up to the end of the land line.

Many Pioneer Companies were employed at different times on work in connection with the building of the Depot at Marchwood, great sections of the quays and concrete pontoons for Mulberry Harbour being constructed there.

A large force of Pioneers was employed in the preparation of the assembly areas in Eastern and Southern Commands; hundreds of miles of roads had to be widened, hard standings made, and hutted and tented camps erected.

6 Non-Combatant Corps (NCC) Company was permanently employed at the Army Post Office, Nottingham. The NCC was attached to the Pioneer Corps and was organized into Companies under Pioneer Corps Officers and NCOs.

In addition there was the handling of many thousands of tons of War Stores of all types and later the handling of stores for air despatch.

In addition to the above the Pioneer Corps were also to carry out Special Tasks:

### War Debris Clearance

When the intensive bombing of London began in the autumn of 1940, it was of vital importance that the public services and essential communications should be maintained. A force known as Special Force London comprising 3,200 skilled R.E. personnel and 8,000 Pioneers was brought into London. The Pioneer increment consisted of 6 Pioneer Corps Groups, 28 Pioneer Corps Companies and 1 NCC Company under a DDL. All the Headquarters were concentrated in the County Hall to ensure close liaison. 4 Groups were situated on the north side of the Thames and 2 on the south.

Salvage Dumps were established at depots of Borough Councils and in the public parks. Salvaged materials were sorted on the site and sent to the various dumps according to their classification.

Pioneer Companies were relieved by fresh Companies after 4 months duty on this work and were finally withdrawn by 5th April 1941. Pioneer casualties amounted to 25 killed, 1 missing, 75 wounded. Similar assistance on a smaller scale was rendered after air attacks on Coventry, Birmingham, Liverpool and Manchester.

### Smoke

In the autumn of 1940 it was decided that smoke screens should be provided for vital targets. Owing to the shortage of civilian labour Pioneer Corps Companies were organized into Smoke Companies. Nine such Companies were first formed, equipped with smoke pots, and operated circuits at Nottingham, Derby, Newcastle, Slough, Cheltenham, Newport (Mon) and Accrington. The long hours of standing by during the lunar periods from dawn to dusk were very trying for the personnel, until huts were eventually provided on the circuits where the men could get some shelter while waiting. Smoke Companies were under the control of the Directorate of Labour but were placed at the disposal of the Ministry of Home Security during the

**'8,000 Pioneers were brought into London for work with Special Force'**

lunar periods. This dual control was not always satisfactory.

Owing to increased demands for screening ports and other industrial targets the smoke ceiling was raised to 10,000 at the end of 1941 and a DADL, who was responsible for the organization and training, was added to the staff of the Labour Directorate at the War Office.

In the spring of 1943 the operation of smoke screens was taken over by AA Command from the Ministry of Home Security. The DADL was upgraded to ADL and carried out his duties at AA Command H.Q.

The Haslar, a mobile smoke producing machine, began to appear in September 1941.

It consisted of a 3 ton Bedford towing unit with oil and water tanks and a trailer fitted with the smoke production unit and small tanks. It weighed 12½ tons and had an overall length of 45 feet.

Though it was a cumbersome machine to drive, its smoke production was far more effective than the pot generators. It was later superseded by an American machine called an Esso. As Haslars became available Mobile Smoke Companies were formed.

A Smoke production School was established at Compton Verney in September 1941.

Effective smoke screening of Plymouth and other Southern ports was carried out during the concentration prior to the invasion of Normandy. Smoke screens were also used in all theatres during the war and also during the crossing of the Rhine.

### Firewatching

In July 1941 it was decided that firewatching at the Western ports – Glasgow, Liverpool and the Bristol Channel Ports – should become an Army responsibility until such time as a civil organization could be provided for the purpose. 11,000 men were enlisted into the Pioneer Corps for this duty, and were organized into Companies, approximately 14 sections strong. The role of these Companies was to provide sufficient firewatchers nightly to deal with incendiary bombs and small fires caused by them, with stirrup pumps and to report any unattended fires.

They were not expected to take part in fire fighting operations. The Companies were billeted outside the dock areas and brought in nightly.

Huts and other accommodation were provided for them within the dock area where they could sleep ready to man their posts immediately an alert was signaled. Personnel did on an average five nights on duty and one off.

To meet a nightly commitment of 1,000, 1,700 men were required in order to allow for nights off duty and the usual overheads. These Companies were available for labour during the day within the vicinity of their billets, but this condition together with the fact that they could only work for about 4 hours severely limited their usefulness.

The firewatching at Liverpool was not carried out in the dock areas but in the warehouse areas, where the cargoes were stored pending dispatch by rail.

As the manpower situation became more serious and labour demands continued to increase, efforts were constantly made to obtain the replacement of these Companies by civil organizations as was originally arranged.

Regional Commissioners and Port Authorities were very loathe to part with the Companies on account of the non-co-

operative attitude of the dock workers and the fear of pilfering.

The numbers were grudgingly reduced from time to time but it was not till the end of September 1944 that the Firewatching Companies were completely dispensed with.

### Special Repair Service London

In the summer of 1944 a Pioneer Corps Group of 7 Companies was brought to London to assist in conjunction with RE Units in the rehabilitation of houses damaged by V1 and V2 action. The work was carried out under the Ministry of Works. The first policy adopted had been to provide first aid to render the houses habitable. Later a more extensive scale of repairs was adopted. The Pioneers worked in small detachments providing the unskilled labour for the RE artisans.

On the withdrawal of the Artizan Works Companies RE the skilled labour was provided by civilian workmen, 40 - 50 civilians being allotted to each Pioneer Company.

### Phoenix

In July 1944 it was found that a further 30 caissons would be required for the Mulberry Harbour. 22 of these were to be made in the Thames area by civil contract. Owing to the shortage of civil labor, the urgency of the task and the frequent attacks of flying bombs, it was decided to bring in a Pioneer Group and 6 Companies. Work commenced on 25th July and was satisfactorily completed by 30th October 1944.

### Civilian Tasks

The policy adopted with regard to the employment of Pioneers on civilian tasks was that Pioneer labour was primarily intended for Military tasks but that it might be employed on civilian tasks, when the work was considered to be essential for the National War Effort and civilian labour was unobtainable.

All applications had to be submitted to the War Office through the Ministry of Labour who confirmed the fact that civilian labour was not obtainable.

This prevented the possibility of friction with the TUC. Payment to the War Department for the loan of Military Labour was regulated by Army Council Instructions.

### Assistance was given in cases such as:-

- GPO Christmas Mails.
  - Central Electricity Board, extension of the grid system.
  - Railways at peak periods when congestion occurred, which immobilized rolling stocks.
  - Milk processing, when food supply was affected.
  - Gas Production when shortage of labour made the supply inadequate.
  - Agriculture, when food supply was affected.
  - Assistance in Trades Disputes was confined to the execution of work, the interruption of which would have an injurious effect on the War effort.
  - Assistance was also given in Docks when congestion arose at peak periods owing to shortage of labour, not due to trade disputes.
  - Labour Requirements and Manpower.
- Though the formation of new Companies proceeded steadily until by February 1944,

77 Group HQs and 417 Pioneer Corps Companies were in existence, the demands for labour in the United Kingdom and for Armies overseas exceeded the supply.

In November 1943, 7 Group HQs and 50 Companies proceeded with 1st Army to North Africa. A further Group HQ and 19 Companies accompanied 1st Canadian Division for the invasion of Sicily in July 1943.

The original demands for No. 21 Army Group could not be met in full in spite of reductions in allotments to Depots in the United Kingdom and the return of 52 Companies from North Africa.

At the same time a considerable proportion of the work carried out in the United Kingdom was directly in connection with

the maintenance of 21 Army Group. It was decided therefore that the allotment to that formation should be some 50 Companies less than their demand, but that a War Office Reserve of 50 Companies should be built up at home, which would be available for service on either side of the Channel, as the Quarter Master-General might direct.

This reserve was built up by the release of some of the Firewatching Companies, the relief of Pioneer Corps Companies in depots by Italian Working Companies brought from North Africa and by the formation of new Companies at the Centres as the intakes made this possible.

By May 1945 this War Office Reserve consisted of 47 Companies, 11 of which had been handed over to 21 Army Group and one to Force 135 for the Channel Islands.

### Prisoners of War Working Companies

The allocation of Prisoners of War to the various Departments and Ministries was made by a Committee which met at the Ministry of Labour.

The allotment to the War Department was 11% of the total number received in this country.

In the autumn of 1943 the Italian Prisoners of War allotted to WD were organized into PW Working Companies of 10 sections with a British Cadre of 4 Officers and 29 ORs. 23 such Companies were formed.

During the winter and spring 1943/44, 68 Italian Companies were brought from North Africa to replace Pioneer Corps Companies proceeding overseas.

After the armistice with Italy, co-operator status was granted to those Italians who wished to avail themselves of it. Non-co-operators were removed from the Companies. The Pioneer Corps Cadres were reduced to 3 Officers 8 O.R.'s with 2 Italian Officers per Company. Co-operation removed the restrictions on PW Labour imposed by the Geneva Convention.

Six Italian Working Companies were disbanded and reformed as Italian Artizan Works Companies RE.

In January 1945 German PW Working Companies were organized with a Pioneer Corps Cadre of 4 Officers and 66 ORs for a Company of 425 - 525 PW. By V.E. Day, 12 such Companies had been formed.

### Reduction at end of War

The author of "The War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1946" Major HR Rhodes-Wood ended his book by describing the reduction in the Corps at the end of the war:

Slowly at first, but with gathering speed, the Corps in North-West Europe began to

## '7 Group HQs and 50 Companies proceeded with 1st Army to North Africa'

dissolve as the older men in its ranks took their release from the Army in the early age and service groups, to be followed by units earmarked for transfer to the Far East for the war against Japan and returned to Britain for refit. The disbandment of Groups and companies began and by the end of the year almost one-third of the units that had served in 21 Army Group had passed out of the active list and into history.

And as in Europe so elsewhere throughout the world. From Ramree Island off the coast of Burma where 5 Group (Lieutenant-Colonel R. N. Moore, M.C.), which had brought so much distinction to the Corps in the defence of Boulogne in 1940, was serving out its days, to the Channel Islands where 34 Company (Major F. J. A. Bishop) had landed with the relieving force on 12th May, 1945; from the Western Desert, the countries of the Far and Middle East, Greece and Italy, Pioneers of many nationalities were turning their eyes and their thoughts homeward.

The Corps, which at its peak had reached a strength of 444,591 all ranks, and whose officers and men had recruited and controlled a further million in its Civil Labour Units, had completed the greater part of its task.

Almost ten thousand Pioneers, 3,500 of them on the British establishment, were not to make the return journey home and their names are inscribed on the many memorials in England and overseas erected in honour of those who died on active service.

## POST WORLD WAR 2

As mentioned earlier Pioneers have been involved in every major operations, they also served in Australia, Sharjah, Bahrain, Cyprus, Aden, Hong Kong, Gibraltar, BAOR, Egypt and the Falklands to name a few.

Although post-war service was in the main confined to the large static stores such as Long Marston, Bramley, Bicester, Kineton, Nescliffe, Longtown, Old Dalby, Melton Mowbray and Didcot they also performed unusual and varied tasks, examples are:

- **13 Coy** – Sea Dumping (ammunition). Including dumping ammunition from Milford Haven which had been declared unsafe to move by rail! Also dumping thousands of tonnes for the Royal Navy.
- **21 Coy** – Helping with Christmas mail in London
- **27 Coy** – Flood relief when sea wall was breached at Chapel St Leonard and Mablethorpe.
- **71 Coy** - Working in London Docks during dock strike
- **206 Coy** – Restoration of Stratford Canal for National Trust.
- Fire fighting during firemen's strike
- Saving hospital equipment following a large fire in Coventry
- Fencing a 'bomb impact' area – 3 miles of fencing
- Assistance to Hereford and Worcester Fire Service with heath fire
- Assistance with flooding at Tewkesbury
- War Graves in Falklands
- **251 Coy** – Salt mining in Cyprus
- Deep Sea Dumping of 3 tons of confidential files in Cyprus – a failure since the files were washed up on the shore and had to be destroyed by burning!
- Port construction at Akrotiri

## 'Sea dumping of ammunition which had been declared unsafe to move by rail!'

- **260 Coy** - Clearing of Flyingdale Moors, Yorks – in the first 6 months 2,300 acres of moorland had been cleared
- Clearing Ross Links Range 73 missiles recovered
- **371 Coy** – Working in London Docks
- **405 Coy** – Range clearance at Trawsfynydd – some 3,500 acres of land
- Road building at Bisley
- Constructing a riding school at RMA Sandhurst
- **516 Coy** – Detachment at Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle
- **518 Coy** – Key point guards in Cyprus including Central Prison during riots
- Electrification of Lantu Island (Hong Kong)
- Clearing Malta Ordnance Depot
- Extending Lu Keng-Wu Tang road (Hong Kong) by 1,000m
- Refurbishing Rushmoor Arena
  - Clearing 2 mile road through forest in Canada
  - Supporting refugees in Sovereign Bases and moving furniture
  - Molligan Guard Force, Northern Ireland
  - Building MMTR, 5.2 kms road and NATO Obstacle Course in Canada
  - **522 Coy** – Lifting railway track at Nescliffe – laid 11 years previously by Pioneers
- Europa Road Project – Gibraltar

## POST 1993

*The following has been supplied by Major Billy Dilkes:*

### Pioneer Capabilities

The Pioneer trade has undertaken some significant changes during the last 25 years. A relatively independent organisation and huge in numbers as the Royal Pioneer Corps with its infamous "Blackpool Tower" cap badge, but sadly perceived by many as the general "Humpers and Dumpers" of the British Army.

I have heard all the nicknames and comments back in the day from Grave Diggers to Chunkies... And, as I look back through the history of the Corps and especially the last 2 decades, I am fulfilled with pride and honour to have had the opportunity to serve with so many great men.

In 1986 when the Royal Pioneer Corps joined the Queens Division, the trade attracted some real quality. With our new infantry cap badge and the khaki beret, the Pioneers went through a brief period of redundancy before amalgamating 522 Coy (Kineton) and 187 Coy (Northampton) with the already established 518 Coy at Bicester. 144 HQ's Coy and later 206 Sqn would be re-formed to complete 23 Pioneer Regiment.

However, in April 1993, the Royal Pioneer Corps would be replaced in the Queens Division by the Gibraltar Regiment and the Royal Pioneer Corps would be disbanded and replaced as 23 Pioneer Regiment, becoming part of the enormous Royal Logistic Corps.

Our 3rd and final beret would be introduced with the pioneer "Crossed Axes" being the centre part of the new cap badge.

Over 18 years later the Pioneers have never really been fully understood by everyone but our time is now. We have supported every major Operation in recent years, deploying as a Regiment on Op TELIC 1 in 2003 and continued to provide lower level support until the withdrawal of

Iraq. Our commitment to Op HERRICK in Afghanistan remains enduring and will continue for the foreseeable future.

The Pioneers remain on every commander's wish list prior to any deployment and listed below are some of the reasons why:

### Background

On completion of phase one Training, the Pioneer soldier reports to the Pioneer Trade Wing at Princess Royal Barracks Deepcut to complete his Pioneer Class 3 Trade Training course, the aim of this is to train selected RLC soldiers to carry out duties of Pioneer Soldiers in peace and war in support of CSS Ops worldwide to all three services. All basic Pioneer capabilities are covered during this course, lessons taught include basic field engineering, combat power tools, carpentry and joinery, bricklaying, concreting and field defences.

Every Pioneer passing out of Deepcut will have completed numerous assessments in each field as well as the mandatory MATT training, and each soldier will have been deemed current and competent in all capabilities prior to completing the course.

When the Pioneer trade training is complete, each Pioneer will have the foundation knowledge of Pioneer skills and capabilities.

These skills will be advanced and continually assessed throughout the development of the soldier.

### Defence Skills Course

The Defence Skills Course is a four week continuation training course conducted at Deepcut. The course is designed to advance the Pioneer Soldier further in the infantry Role in preparation to support the infantry during operations.

A large emphasis is placed onto individual and support weapon systems throughout the course, the Pioneer will be trained on all weapon systems that include the Claymore, Grenade, Rifle, Light Support Weapon, Light Machine Gun and the General Purpose Machine Gun.

The Defence Skills Course deploy for a ten day battle camp, including five days operating in an infantry role being covered during this period.

This consists of the following: basic tactics up to platoon level, patrolling skills and various battle lessons.

During the final five days of the Battle Camp the course will operate on live ranges.

A number of marksmanship stages will be learnt, all weapon systems that the soldier has been trained up on will be fired live with all stages covered. They include Stage 1, Stage 2, Stage 3, Stage 4 and Stage 5(LFTT) being the end result with a live fire team/section attack being the consolidation of the ten day battle camp.

### Continuation Training

The continuation training for the Pte Pioneer Soldier will continue over the next 3 years or until the soldier achieves Class 1 status.

The Pioneer Record of Achievement course is a two week course that has been designed to revise and teach more in depth subjects that were covered during Phase two training.

This course cannot be completed until the soldier has completed twelve months in rank and has achieved one Pioneer Specialist Qualification.

Week one is conducted at the Pioneer trade wing where all Pioneer field engineering Skills will be covered and week two is an infantry orientated exercise

that is designed to keep the Pioneer current with field craft skills.

The Pioneer class one course can only be completed after two years in rank and with two pioneer specialist qualifications being achieved, the course is two weeks long and conducted at the Pioneer Trade Wing at Deepcut.

The course will run concurrently with the Pioneer Class 3 course, which allows natural progression for the Class 1 soldier in supervision and planning of tasks.

### Pioneer Specialist Qualifications

The Pioneer has many specialist qualifications to pursue, to name a few, currently available include the Infantry Assault Soldier/Assault Pioneer course.

This course covers Explosive Method of Entry, Mine Warfare, Field Engineering, Force Protection, and Water Supply and Demolitions. This course is open to all ranks in the Regiment.

The All Arms Carpentry and Joinery and All Arms Bricklaying and Concreting courses are both three months long and are both delivered by the Royal Engineers at Chatham.

If a Pioneer Soldier is deemed to have considerable natural flair in these fields they will have the opportunity to attend these courses and become subject matter experts in each field.

Many of the JNCOs and SNCOs of the Regiment have completed Section Commanders Battle Course (SCBC) and Platoon Sergeants Battle Course (PSBC) at Brecon. This has allowed continuity when conducting exercises or operations or when in support of the infantry.

### Operational Specific Tasks

Currently 23 Pioneer Regiment is involved with supporting operations in Afghanistan, the roles currently being undertaken are as follows:

### Herrick Search Team (HST)

Herrick search team consists of a team of 7. The break down is as follows: 1 x Herrick search advisors (HSA) which is normally a SNCO or Officer who is in charge of the planning of the search which is to be conducted; 1 x Cpl who puts the plan into action and controls the searches when they are on task; 1 x LCpl (Scribe) who is to make sure that the team has all the right kit for the search and all is in working order; and 4x Pte's who are the searchers.

The Training covered prior to deployment consists of a 4 week course at DEMMS South in Chatham where the team is taught how to use all the equipment that a search team will use out in theatre, how to conduct a route search, compound search, area search and also person and vehicle searches. After completion of the course the teams deploy to Jordan to conduct more realistic training in the heat and similar terrain. The teams are licensed on this exercise prior to going to theatre.

When the teams arrive in theatre they conduct further training through RSOI and then with teams in theatre designed to train up the incoming personnel. All information is passed on at this point including TTPs and any other matters that have affected their tour.

The deployment for the teams is for 6 months, operating in various AO's during the operation and working alongside many different Infantry Units and nationalities. Some teams are based at Camp Bastion were the High Readiness Force (HRF) is located and their sole job is to be on stand by to react to 9 Liners that come in. They

deploy by Helicopter to any of the AO's where a search team is needed.

While based out in the Patrol Bases and Forward Operating Bases teams carry out extra search training for the Infantry Barma teams and also the ANA as well as conducting routine searches.

### Command Support Troop (CST)

The Regiment are currently supplying the CST Troop for Op Herrick. It consist of 22 soldiers and a troop commander, each Troop will complete eight months training for this responsibility prior to deployment with their main role for the 6 month deployment will be the escorting and protecting of the Combat Logistic Patrol's (CLP's).

Many other tasks fall within the remit of the CST Troop. They include the assistance in planning of each operation, navigation and safe passage of the CLPs and the marking and avoidance of all Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs).

### Mortuary Affairs

The role of a Pioneer with the mortuary affairs begins with training at Albins funeral directors in London. This week consists of the following: Introduction to the mortuary, anatomy of the human body, introduction to embalming, the embalming process, introduction to autopsy, interest period at Guy's & St Thomas hospitals and introduction to the dressing of a military coffin.

The role of the Pioneer when deployed is to be integrated within the hospital working within the Mortuary for the duration of their tour in the Role 3 Hospital in camp Bastion.

This includes a number of tasks, including extraction of battlefield casualties from a battlefield ambulance, sanitization of casualties/deceased equipment and personal effects, familiarisation of foreign/British weapon systems, assisting Deployed Medical Director (DMD) in death certificates and body mapping and Storage of personal effects of casualties/deceased.

The final role of the Pioneer within the hospital is the collection and stowage of local nationals/ANA and ANP deceased that have been collected from the wards. The safety of the hospital staff are also a concern of the Pioneer Team as they operate as part of the hospital rapid reaction force.

### SUMMARY

In summary the Pioneer is a fully adaptable and capable soldier that can support peace time and war fighting operations effectively.

Nowhere else within the Armed Forces can you find such a multi-skilled set of soldiers.

The Pioneer is capable of many varied tasks through the training, professionalism and ethos embedded in all soldiers of all ranks.

### Snippets from the history of Pioneers: Maltese Pioneers

These were raised by General Aberbrombie to serve in Egypt in 1801. Total strength 540 men. Entitled to the Military General Service Medal bar EGYPT – the following claimed the medal 3 officers and 30 ORs. Claims were made for the medal by survivors in 1847. (notes on SOTHERBY'S 23 Nov 77 Lot 501).

### Railway Pioneers

Originally the Cape Pioneer Regiment. They were mining employees from the Rand. Joined when war broke out in South Africa in 1899.

They were raised by Major L I Seymour (who was killed when a bridge was attacked on 14 July 1900 whilst the line to Johannesburg was being replaced).

### DEFINITION OF A RPC SOLDIER AND A RPC COMPANY

In 1970 the DAPL, Brig CF Walker, wrote to all units and gave them the correct definition of the Royal Pioneer Corps soldier and company, they were:

#### Soldier

A disciplined soldier, fully trained in the use of arms and a specialist in logistic support duties involving both manual and mechanical ability.

The soldier is available for a wide range of production support duties, security and "infantry type" tasks.

#### Company

A self contained operational unit with the flexibility to complete projects at a section or sub section level. Equipped and trained to operate independently either in a specialist RPC support role to any Arm or Service in peace or operations, security duties and infantry type tasks.

The support makes provision for a variety of skilled activities by soldiers who have a varied special to arm training background; can operate all modern equipments and mobile conveyor systems in support of operations or to overcome peacetime manning difficulties.

The output of the company can be increased by the use of locally recruited civilians working in an integrated role with the Pioneer Dutyman..

### THE PIONEER FLASH

In 1993 the Royal Pioneer Corps was amalgamated into the newly formed Royal Logistic Corps. Prior to amalgamation the RPC wore the distinctive Khaki Beret which was surrendered on amalgamation.

The CO 23 Pioneer Regt tasked his Sqdn Commanders to produce a distinctive insignia to denote the Pioneer CEG. Initially to be worn by members of 23 Pioneer Regt.

A number of suggestions were made including the crests now hanging in the Officer's & Sgt's Messes.

OC 187 (Tancred) Company (Maj J A Starling) and 2IC (Capt R G Bennett) decided to copy the Army of Service Stripe worn in World War 2.

This stripe was worn on both sleeves of battled dress apart from personnel in Southern Command (who wore the Southern Command Flash – a shield with the Southern Cross in Star but backed by the Arm of Service Colours).

The only major change was the flash was twice the thickness of the original (1/2" and not 1/4")

The design was agreed during a CO's O Group in April 03 and Capt R G Bennett arranged for manufacture.

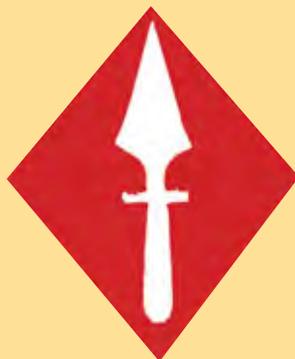
Five Flashes were issued to each soldier, paid for by the PRI. It was to be worn on Shirt Sleeve Order, Jumpers and DPM.

Eventually other Pioneers not within the Regt (170 Coy and HQ NI) also started to wear the Flash. ■

**'The Pioneer is a fully-adaptable and capable soldier – nowhere can you find such a multi-skilled set of soldiers.'**

**1<sup>ST</sup> CORPS DISTRICT  
PIONEER *Trades* SCHOOL**

**87. (C) COY.  
PIONEER CORPS**



# This booklet I was recently given to the RPC Association. I found it so informative that I have decided to reproduce it, I hope you, the reader, also find it interesting...

Report: Walter Wilts  
Picture: Walter Wilts

**D**EAR Mr Brown, I hope that the attached booklet will be of interest to your association. I have also enclosed a photograph of Major Laws taken in 1946 and a section of the 'Northern Echo' which reported the setting up of the training school. Ernest Laws lived in Darlington and after his demob he worked at the Northern Echo. He died in Darlington at the age of 50 in 1963. His wife died two weeks ago; he was a cousin of my wife and we found the booklet while sorting through her effects. Yours sincerely, Walter Wilts.

The brochure was issued to mark the occasion of the visit of Brigadier JB Hillary CBE, Director of Labour, War Office to 1 Corps District Pioneer Trades School on 22nd March 1946.

The object of this booklet is to give a general outline of the work and activities of 1 Corps District Pioneer Trades School, being administered by 87 Cadre Coy Pnr Corps at Gelsenkirchen, Ruhr.

The photographs have been inserted to show actual conditions under which the students work on the various subjects.

It is essentially, as the title implies, a Trades School, and most of the work is of a practical nature.

A certain amount of theory is, of course, necessary in the early stages, but since the Course is only of four weeks duration as much practical work as possible is done in the period.

Some of the subjects are in the basic building trades and tied up with one central building project at present in the hands of the bricklayers. The Carpenters are busy on the construction of doors, window frames, timber fittings etc in the School workshops and later as the main building nears completion it will be their task to complete roofing, floors, interior woodwork etc.

The painters are already busy painting and graining the doors, furniture etc constructed in the Carpenters Shop, and some excellent work is being turned out by completely inexperienced students.

The Electricians are taught all the intricacies and problems of house wiring, thus they will take their place amongst the other students in the actual completion of the building.

The remaining subjects i.e. MT Mechanics; Electrical & Acetylene Welding; Machine Tool Operating; Tinsmithing & Metal-working; Wagon Repairing; Instrumental Repairing are all extremely useful subjects and all students soon become engrossed in their particular subjects. The School is fortunate in having such an excellent staff of Instructors and all are in a position to answer any problems which may arise in their particular subject.

After about a fortnight it is possible to pick out those students who are likely to make good tradesmen at the particular vocational training they have chosen and there are many requests for a second and even a third month's course. These requests are given every consideration and after consultation with their respective instructors those students who merit another month's course are retained.

Reports are issued weekly by the instructors and a final report is given for entry in the student's AF W5335.

## THE BIRTH AND GROWTH OF A UNIT SCHOOL

When the order regarding education schemes for soldiers awaiting demobilisation was published, many people wondered how those were going to be conducted from the Pioneer angle.

Here is an account of how Major E Laws then OC 146 Coy Pnr Corps set about the problem.

At the time of this order, his CO together with several others, were employed as Mine Guards in the Ruhr and of necessity were scattered in innumerable detachments over a very large area. This was one difficulty which had to be overcome. Accordingly it was decided to find accommodation on the Mine premises where his HQ was billeted. This done, the next step was to formulate a syllabus, but what form was this to take, what was going to be the reaction of stout Pioneers to Arts, Crafts, Drama, Local Government, who were almost all practical men who were used to handling tools and making anything from Airstrips to Bailey Bridges?

Having discussed the problem at length with his 2IC, Capt HH Green, the decision was obvious, it would have to take the form of a Trades School. Enquiries and reces were made and it was found that on the surface of each Mine were workshops where the apprentices used to be trained in their trades before commencing work underground.

These shops, well equipped for the training of Carpenters, Welders, Machine Tool Operators, Motor Mechanics etc, were all standing practically idle. The whole problem was solved. With all these facilities available, Major Laws realised that here was an opportunity for organising a School for Pioneers on a Group basis. He then approached the Officer Commanding 44 Group Pioneer Corps, Lt Col KM Wills (now Col Wills, DDL 1 Corps District) and obtained his blessing on the project, which was to be put into operation as soon as possible.

Instructors were readily available from Coys within the Group for the Bricklayers, Carpenters, Painters and Motor Mechanic's Course. In addition German craftsmen were employed to assist in the tuition of Machine Tool Operating, Plumbing, Welding, Smithing etc.

By then all the admin arrangements had been completed. Coys quickly went into action and were soon sending in their nominations to the School for the first course which was to commence at an early date. At this stage, unfortunately for the School, Capt HH Green who had done such good spade work in the organisation, went home on release. A new Chief Instructor had to be found and in his stead came Capt KG Johnson BSc. He took over on the first day of Course No 1.

After the School had been running for some weeks it was decided that instead of having the students in the building trade scattered around the Mines at various workshops and sites it would be better to have then concentrated on one particular job.

It was here that Capt DR Roe, an officer of 146 Coy PC, and a builder in 'civvy street' showed his prowess. Could he draw up plans for a bungalow type of building to be used part Sgt's quarters and part recreation room and mess for the NCOs

and men attending the courses? Capt Roe could, and he did.

The Education Officer at Brigade HQ was consulted and he approved wholeheartedly of the plans and smoothed out the way for the supply of materials. With his backing, CRE proved a most affable individual, cement, bricks and timber were pouring into the Mine. On the day in which a start was to be made on the construction of the building, 146 Coy had a visit from Brig L Misa DSO OBE, Director of Labour, Rhine Army, and he cut the first sod in the project.

The School on a unit basis was not to have a long life. 44 Group moved, 60 Group came along to keep a watch-full eye on things and 146 came under the hammer for disbandment, but it's existence was revived bearing the elegant and proud name of 1 Corps District Pioneer Trades School.

It was then that things began to happen, 87 Cadre Coy was brought in, under the command of Major Laws to run the school, there were more Coys from which to draw the students and more sources from which materials could be drawn. By reconditioning an old DP Camp new workshops were created adjoining the Coy HQ and under the expert eye of the Officer and NCO Instructors, the whole organisation was really going great guns.

The fourth monthly course is now in progress and the scope of subjects has been increased to Carpentry, Bricklaying, Painting Decorating and Signwriting, Tinsmithing and Metalwork, Electrical, Electrical and Acetylene Welding, Machine Tool Operating, Motor Mechanics, Wagon Repairing, Instrument Repairing, Surveying and Chemistry. The latter two subject are of two and three months duration respectively.

The school suffered a loss in late January when Capt KH Johnson departed on release, he had given very valuable service to the organisation and build-up of the School. However, the School continues to make progress with Capt DR Roe in the capacity of Chief Instructor, with an additional officer, Capt PJ Rudd of 320 Coy PC, who has settled in as Assistant Chief Instructor. The closing of 45 Group School at the end of February provided five extra Sergeant Instructors and much valuable machinery and materials. At the commencement of Course No 4, the School was employing 2 Officer Instructors, 13 Sergeant Instructors, 2 Assistant Instructors and 6 German Civilian Technical Instructors.

1 Corps District Pioneer Trades School continuing under the administration of 87 Cadre Company Pioneer Corps, is a happy organisation, weekly cinema shows in the School Cinema, dances and other forms of entertainment are a regular feature of the welfare side, a quiet room, games room and Regimental Canteen is also available.

Nor merely for the air of contentment around the place but for the keen interest which is taken by the students, numerous requests are continuously being received to continue on a further course – this surely is a good advert. As one man recently put it "After five years in the Army attending courses for this and that, at last I am learning something useful and getting my hand in on my old job".

**Major E LAWS, March 1946**  
**OC 87 Cadre Coy Pioneer Corps**



### BRICKLAYERS COURSE

Much has already been said in this booklet about the School building project, a project which was drawn up with much forethought in order that students, in all stages of experience might gain the maximum of practical knowledge, having been designed to incorporate the various types of bonding, wall depths and domestic building design. Thus all students gain experience in practically every phase of the trade.

Outside building is, of course, dependent on the weather, which at this time of the year is not always favourable for construction, and for this reason, work of a practical nature is done under cover at the Larger. At the Larger we have a spacious building where students are taught that there is a great deal more to bricklaying than just 'slapping' one brick on top of another, it is here that they are introduced to the mysteries of footings, bonds, quoins etc. The syllabus included the properties and selection of materials; Siting; Damp-proof courses; Fireplaces & flues; Simple arches; Partition walls etc. For students who have been selected for a further course there is still more advanced brickwork such as Cavity walls; Piers, Chimney stacks; Floor and Wall tiling.

There is room at the Larger which has been specially prepared with samples of all types of brickwork and design, here students find a great deal to interest them and many of their problems on construction are settled by personal reference to the various types of brickwork set up here. The instruction is conducted by two Sergeant Instructors and under the expert eye of Capt DR Roe, who is a building expert.

It is noteworthy that the students are not called upon to do any labouring, a gang of German labourers are employed for this purpose. All tools are of the English pattern and materials are adequate.

The course is of particular benefit to tradesmen who require a refresher course prior to their return to 'Civvy Street'.

### CARPENTERS, JOINERS AND CABINET MAKERS COURSE

- This course has three particular functions:
- To give the pre-vocational student practice in the use of his tools and elementary woodwork
  - To give the student in the refresher stage an opportunity of extending his knowledge in the trade and getting his hand in prior to release, and
  - To provide the student with a working knowledge of the various carpenter's machine tools.

The scope of the school provides facilities for the training of 24 students at a time. Supervision is carried out by three Sergeant Instructors who are fully qualified in all phases of the trade.

The workshops located in the School Larger are spacious with adequate lighting, heating and ventilation. The workshops contain benches for 20 students, whilst the adjoining workshop allows for 4 machinists. Each student is issued with his own scale of tools. The machine shop houses modern planning machines, circular saws and a wood-turning machine.

For the beginner much time is spent in acquiring the use of his tools and the making of simple joints, after about 10 days he is able to go onto the manufacture of simple furniture etc. The tradesman is usually able to work from drawings provided and it is this section of students who are responsible for making such items and doors, window frames and heavier

furnishings for the School building project.

The syllabus also provides for the fixing of woodwork to brick and plasterwork; floor and roof construction and method of erecting rafters and purlins.

The results of each course are always very satisfying to the instructors as many fine pieces of furniture are turned out by comparative beginners.

### MOTOR MECHANICS COURSE

This Course has proved the most popular in the whole School and there is always a much greater demand for vacancies than can be accepted for any one month's course.

The workshops are equipped to accommodate a maximum of 30 students of all stages of experience. Three Sergeant Instructors are employed to supervise and instruct in this subject. The syllabus is most comprehensive including the engine and engine defects, fuel supply, engine lubrication, cooling system, lighting system, ignition, transmission, in fact if it concerns an internal combustion engine it is dealt with in the School workshops.

Equipment and tools are in plentiful supply for all students. The pre-vocational students have, of course, to take a number of lectures on the various component parts of the engine before they actually work on the engines provided.

Students in the Refresher class are immediately introduced to a number of stationary engines on blocks for complete stripping and reassembly.

All engines are 'runners' and consist of the following – one Ford V, four 6 cylinder Mercedes Benz, one 6 cylinder Bedford, one 4 cylinder Fordson, one 4 cylinder Austin, one single cylinder Matchless and one single cylinder Norton, thus the students are able to get an insight into the working and build-up of all the normal types of engines.

Two Bedford chassis are situated in the workshops, these are used for instruction in mounting and fitting of the engine to the car. It is not possible to give driving instruction on this course owing to shortage of transport. When the students leave this course we are always confident that they do at least understand the internal combustion engine.

### ELECTRICIANS COURSE

Perhaps more time is spent on theory in this subject than any other subject dealt with by the School, since the knowledge of electricity is very vague with the majority of the students when they arrive for the course.

Tuition in the subject is conducted in a well equipped workshop and classroom by a Sergeant Instructor and a German English-speaking technician.

The course has a capacity for 16 students and is divided into two sections, the Sergeant Instructor dealing entirely with practical work whilst the German Instructor concentrates on theory.

The workshop is equipped with various wiring panels which have been erected on the walls of the workroom, thus the students have an opportunity of studying the various wiring systems and also the practice of building up their own wiring circuits.

The syllabus includes the study of magnets and magnetism, cells and batteries, conductors and insulators, electrical measurement, electrical energy, series and parallel circuits, house wiring, the principals of the electric motor, electric bell and circuits, cables in common use and their protection, simple lighting

circuits, measurement of illumination and efficiency, distribution of AC and DC and the Grid system, the telephone system is also explained. The syllabus also provides for a visit to the Rheinelbe Mine Power House and Telephone Exchange, here the electrical machinery and equipment is explained to the students and they have an opportunity of seeing heavy electrical machinery in operation. A number of AC and DC electric motors are provided for stripping and reassembly. Tools and materials are adequate for all students.

Whilst the syllabus looks formidable the students, after having the principals explained to them, soon find an extreme interest in the subject, and after the first fortnight are able to understand some of the most complex electrical terms.

The month's course is not intended to turn out a qualified electrician, but it does give the student a working knowledge which can't be put to very good use in an emergency around the home.

Eventually the students on this course will do all the electric wiring and installation on the School building project.

### **PAINTERS, DECORATORS AND SIGNWRITERS COURSE**

This is an extremely interesting course for two reasons, firstly, the refresher student is able to get in some very useful practice before his release and secondly, the pre-vocational student is given a good all round grounding whether he wishes to take it up as a business proposition or to be in a position to do his own painting and decorating around the home. The School can only take twelve students. The preliminary instruction is conducted in two large workshops, situated in the larger where every facility is available for students to pursue their subject, it is here that doors, furnishings etc from the Carpenters shop are brought for decoration and much professional looking work is turned out.

The syllabus is comprehensive and includes the preparation and blending of colours, the use and care of tools, brushes and appliances; the preparation of old and new surfaces and procedure in painting; plain and decorative painting; methods of varnishing and enamelling; graining, the use of brush and comb for oak, walnut and mahogany designs; distemping of plaster surfaces, preparation of walls and application; colour matching, simple colour schemes, broken colour effects; stipling in several colours, blended effects and panelling; design and cutting of stencils, space filling and cutting of panel borders and corner pieces; Signwriting – exercise in Roman and block lettering; Marbling, the use of the pencil for simple marble effects. Only the theory of paper hanging can be taught in the School as material for this angle of the trade is unobtainable.

Once the student has acquired the use of his tools and method of application he is switched to more practical work and much fine work has been done in and around the School by the students attending the courses, the furniture, intended for the school building, is on view in the School display room and all pieces have a very professional touch about them.

The School Cinema, recently completed, is an excellent example of the nature and class of work taught at the School, this is a first class job and would do justice to the interior decoration of any 'Odeon'.

### **WELDERS COURSE**

The student on this Course has the choice of either Electric or Acetylene

welding. Tuition is carried out at two adjacent Mines and conducted by two German English-speaking technicians. The number of students which can be taken for this course is small because of the necessity for strict individual supervision by the instructors in the early stages of training. However, a fairly comprehensive syllabus is covered, Oxy-acetylene programme includes the principals of welding; safety precautions; the hydraulic valve; properties and manufacture of oxygen and acetylene gas and blow pipes.

The Electric welding syllabus includes all Electric plant; butt flash; seam and contact welding; electrodes and fluxes; general defects in welds; slag inclusion; expansion and construction.

### **MACHINE TOOL OPERATORS' COURSE**

On this course the students have an excellent opportunity of learning the rudiments of a well paid trade. The workshops are situated at an adjacent Mine where many items of machinery of all types and sizes are at the disposal of the School. The course has a capacity for six students and tuition is conducted by German English-speaking tutors.

The student is immediately introduced to machines such as, planing and slotting, milling and turning machines etc.

These machines take a good deal of understanding, so the student usually remains on one type for the complete 4 week's course, by which time, if he is keen, he has a pretty good working knowledge of it. Suitable students who request a second course are usually transferred to another type of machine for further experience.

Many fine pieces of work have been turned out by complete novices at the job, with great accuracy. The Course itself is however of special benefit to the refresher student who wishes to get "his hand in" at his job prior to his return to civilian life.

### **TINSMITHS AND METALWORKERS COURSE**

The Tinsmiths Course has been a popular subject with the School for some considerable time, however recently the subject of Metalwork has been introduced to great advantage and is in fact stealing some of the popularity of the tinsmithing.

The subject is one which requires great patience by the student and only by his patience can the necessary skill be acquired. The combined subjects have a capacity for 6 students. The Course is conducted by a Sergeant Instructor who is an expert at his job and has every facility at his disposal in the workshops for teaching his class of students some of the most exacting work in the trade. The metalworkers syllabus includes filing, cutting and drilling, coldbending and riveting, screw thread tapping, the complete manufacture of small hand tools suitable hardened and tempered also spanner which is case-hardened and finally the entire manufacture of a small engineer's or fitter's square.

It will be noted that the Metalworker's syllabus does not cover a great deal of ground but this is explained by the fact that a hand metalworker's job requires great accuracy and care and of necessity his job is slow. The Tinsmith's syllabus is likewise limited because of the practice required in the early stages of his preliminary training including cutting, bending and shaping of sheet metal; soldering, brazing, silver soldering etc. Such items as milkcans, glue pots, paint pots and household utensils are made by this section of the course.

The workshops at the larger are





adequately equipped with all the necessary tools for each student and heavy equipment includes an electrically driven forge with anvil, a multispeed drill and emery wheel, all of those are a great asset to the preliminary training of the students are in everyday use in UK.

#### **INSTRUMENT REPAIRERS COURSE**

The workshops of this most interesting trade is situated at Rheinelbe Mine and are responsible for the repair of instruments used in the mining industry.

The students on this course are strictly limited to 2 on each course owing to the necessity for individual supervision in the early stages. They have at their disposal all the necessary tools of the trade and tuition is conducted by a German English-speaking craftsman. It is a subject which calls for a great amount of patience, careful working and good eyesight.

At first the student is given filing exercises, passing from that to making small parts for door locks, clocks and switch board components. Later he does more intricate work on the repairing of voltmeters, ammeters, manometers and other instruments in use at the Mines.

A certain amount of theory is taught, dealing mainly with the instruments which came into the workshops for repair.

#### **WAGON REPAIRERS COURSE**

This course is carried out in the workshops at Rheinelbe Colliery, which are very well equipped, and where, as can be imagined, there is no lack of work for the students. All students for this particular course can be assured of a very full month, with a great variety of jobs. In the first place the wooden parts of the trucks which come into these workshops either need complete renewal or extensive repair. Then, in the chassis, there are couplings, buffers, bearings and axles to be inspected and repaired, involving the use of oxy-acetylene apparatus, while soldering also forms an important part of the work.

German wagons differ a great deal from their British counterparts, but the principals of repair are the same and those who have asked for a refresher have found this course very valuable. The course is of one month's duration and has a capacity for three students. Instruction is carried out under the supervision of a German craftsman aided by a German interpreter.



#### **MINING AND LAND SURVEYING COURSE**

This is a course for which there are adequate facilities at Rheinelbe for the refresher type of student. This course is of three month's duration and has a capacity for two students for that period. The syllabus deals mainly with mining surveying and general drawing office practice.

A Secondary school education or a certain amount of night school work is necessary for those students who are desirous of availing themselves of this course.

#### **CHEMISTS COURSE**

This course deals mainly with Mining Chemistry i.e. coal and its by-products, it is not elementary and only students with a reasonably high standard of education or School Certificate should apply for this course. The laboratories are situated at an adjacent mine and four students can be taken for a minimum period of two months.

For those interested in chemistry it provides an exceedingly instructive course. ■



# Reminiscing

## Terry recently made contact with the Association after many years

Report: Terry Martell  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**P**LEASE find enclosed, three episodes in my early Pioneer life, which you may put in the magazine, if they are relevant.

All this has made me realise that we should value our time, it will not come back again and we will only have memories to fall back on.

1. I would like to describe a story of the year in which Cpl Mick Gavin won the Pool Bull, I think the year was 1972. It was the time of the Annual Corps Shoot at Brington Ranges. Mick was, I hope still is, one of those characters the Corps always seemed to throw up. He was a Training Corporal at Simpson Barracks and if he was not born an Irishman, he should have been because he had the luck of the Irish.

His Platoon always got the measure of him after a while and could see through his training NCO exterior to the kind caring man he tried to keep hidden.

In those years the issued rifle was the 7.62 SLR, a massed produced weapon of strength and reliability rugged enough to cope with all types of battle conditions from the Radfan Mountains in Yemen to the streets of Northern Ireland. It was designed as a fire suppression weapon not as a marksman's weapon, but in my opinion a better weapon than the American armalite. Anyway, this was the weapon we had to use, the "Zero" could not be relied on. It had iron sights and no scope, if you could shoot well with it it was because you were a natural shot, which Mick had a reputation for being one.

The Pool Bull was a little side competition that was supposed to be a fun shoot amongst all the serious business of the annual shoot. It was set up as follows, a small bull was marked anywhere on the target which had to be hit spot on. I do not think anyone had yet won it, however a kitty was built up, winner take all.

I was in charge of the Butt Party and we were extremely busy raising and lowering the targets to a strict schedule and the Pool Bull kitty was always shared amongst the Butt Party if it was not won. During the practice sessions I marked a target and had a little wager that even with all the rounds put on the target it would not be hit. Many of the Butt Party would not believe me saying that with all the rounds fired, it was bound to be. The practice ended as the mark was not touched, so the guys believed their kitty was safe for another year.

I placed the bull mark on the target, it was only just bigger than the hole a round would make going through the target. The competition started, shortly afterwards I stared at the target, the bull had been cleanly shot right through the middle, the round had not even touched the sides.

I was nearly lynched by the Butt Party when I announced I would have to award the hit, they could see their pot going up in

smoke. I stopped the shoot and announced that the pool bull had been won.

Confirmation came back that it was Mick Gavin who had won it. The boys in the Butt Party did not mind then. Mick was a popular NCO at the Training Centre and the Butt Party were all recruits. They looked at the result as one up for Northampton, however, my decision cost me NAAFI breaks all round.

2. I was undertaking my PQ1 Course at Bicester, two of the other Corporals were in contention with me for top marks in the exams, Dick Ledgeway (who later became RSM at Northampton and Terry Cotter (who was then RSM's clerk at Northampton). We were tasked to put on an evening night exercise on the training area.

Having put our heads together the three of us decided to do a night vision/night sounds presentation. We briefed the rest of the class on what the plan was. Dick was going to give the lecture on night vision, how the eye is formed i.e. rods and cones, while Terry and I set up the incidents. After Dick had given his lecture it was my turn, I settled the class down on the groundsheets while I started. As the light was fading I told the class about how as the light faded colour goes first, then shapes would become important mentioning the shapes of the trees and bushes etc.

At this time Terry was marching up and down a little way away in full battle kit. I asked the class to observe what was happening how Terry was beginning to merge into the background but how you could still tell he was on sentry duty by the silhouette he produced. When the light had fully gone Terry switched to the next phase i.e. cocking a rifle and digging with a shovel and I asked the class to tell me what they identified.

This was all going very well and the class were learning well. The last incident was to be the lesson on preserving night vision where possible by closing one eye. Two of our instructors were tasked to come up with full headlights on in a Land Rover after a signal from me. Just then a Hercules flew over with full lights blazing obviously setting up for a night paratroop drop over Weston on the Green. One of the Corporals from the course, unfortunately I cannot remember his name but if he reads this he will remember, identified the aircraft and said how clever it was to involve the RAF as a training aid – as if!

The approach of the Land Rover was then a bit of an anti-climax.

3. During my Promotion Cadre at Bicester we were all on the square doing "Taking you a stage further in your foot/arms drill", the class was under the supervision of the CSM of the Training Team, WO2 Baxter. He had been in the paras before being injured in the Radfan Mountains in Aden and was no longer able to meet para requirements for service so had transferred to the RPC.

While we were on the square a Hercules flew over lining up for a drop on Weston on the Green, which as anyone who has been on that square knows, can be seen plainly. WO2 Baxter, who was near me, stopped his lesson and turned to face the dropping zone in rapt attention, when the drop had been completed he gave a sigh and turned to the class.

This WO2 was no pussycat and his wrath had been felt by all of us at some time during the course. I don't know what made me do it but as he turned I said with some sympathy, "Those were the days, Sir." And fully expected a rifling for my cheek. He turned and looked at me and agreed.

This was when I knew that he was a human being, a nice man just doing his job to train us. My respect for him was increased and I knew the Corps was the better for him being in it.

At the end of the course we were all interviewed individually about our performance. I had previously been in the Royal Army Pay Corps, left for civvy street, did not like it and re-enlisted. However, the RAPC were not taking any more people at that time and the recruiting officer offered me the Royal Pioneer Corps in the rank of Corporal, I had been a Sergeant in the RAPC. I knew of the RPC from an encounter with some of them at Dhekelia, Cyprus some years before. However, the upshot of my interview was that I had done well and could keep my two stripes but that if ever I wanted to become a "Chunky" I had to rid myself of my gentlemanly Pay Corps ways!

Some weeks later I had to return to Bicester and called at the Training Team offices, Sgt ?, one of the Training Sgts, had promised me some training aids to use at Northampton and they had not yet come through.

I went loudly into the Training Office demanding to know where they were. I heard a voice behind me saying that's just what the world needs another "Chunky" has been born, it was the CSM. I came away, with my aids, feeling proud of myself. I belonged! ■



■ WO1 (RSM) Pete Baxter

Thank you Norman for a great weekend meeting the old Chunkies (yes you know who you are lol) and thanks to 23 Pioneer Regiment keep the colours going. Great weekend thank you from my wife and myself, see you all next year.

**Key Broome**

Fri was a great day and night, sorry I couldn't do Sat, getting old you know and a baby girl to love. Will make whole weekend next year, thanks 23 another great time.

**Stephen Smalley**

The accommodation was excellent Norman many thanks. Fantastic weekend; great to catch up and see old mates. Big thanks to 23 Regt and all still serving for making me welcome. Cheers lads. So thank you again see you all soon.

**Mark Holyoak**

Thanks for another great weekend Norman. Massive well done to all the Vets that took part in the football tournament still the fire in the belly hopefully not to many sore legs and heads! lol

**Paul Scott**

Thanks again Norman for a great weekend only one criticism not enough tables and chairs/benches for BBQ, thanks for all your hard work

**Jed Bourne**

I would like to say a big thank you to Norman/Paul for a GREAT weekend, nice to see old faces again, look forward to next year

**Graham Hurdman**

Thanks Norman for a great weekend we really enjoyed ourselves spot on, roll on next year, nice to see old and new faces.

**Rob Bailey**

Well a big thank you to Norman Brown and everyone at 23 Pnr Regt for all your hard work and making us so welcome. I had a great time at the reunion, seeing my old buddies, see you all again next year!!!!!!

**James Upfield**

Thanks for a great weekend Norman and of course the lads of 23 Pnr Regiment. My head is still in Bicester somewhere so if you find it send it back to me please as this one still hurts.

**Dougie Durrant**

Thanks Norman great weekend looking forward to next year

**Mark Irwin**

Dear Norman, May I say what a wonderful time I had at the Reunion Weekend and am looking forward to next year. Both the food and accommodation were excellent, please thank everyone for their efforts

**Stephen Hall**

Thanks again Norman for a great weekend thanks for all your hard work

**Alan Whisker**

Well what can I say... FANTASTIC!!!! Thank you to all concerned in setting up and the very smooth running of the Pioneer Reunion! I had a thoroughly great time, my son went bonkers in the 'gun' tent I guess seeing the real thing is far better than Xbox and my daughter well she built a wall and used the 'Tonka with a crane! This was my first reunion I've been to since I left in 2002, but I'll be back next year for sure (don't think Zane would forgive me!) Thank you once again from Amanda, myself and both my kids Zane and Tallulah-Maisy.

**Glyn Evans**

What a great weekend. Thanks guys, see you next year

**Eddie Butler**

Another great weekend Norman and Paul

**Gary McQueen**

Had a great weekend count me in for next year along with my wife.

**Stephen Valentine**

Enjoyed this year's Norman, saw a lot of old faces and it was nice to catch up thank you. Will definitely be attending next year's thanks.

**Jay Layton**

Many thanks for the weekend and all your hard work to make it work

**Rod Curtis**

Had a great time down at the Reunion yesterday, travelled down there & back and no mishaps such a smooth ride cheers Neil. Saw some old mates, Henry Palmer, Fred Grundy, Bill Appleby one of my old friends from Kineton Dog Section few stories here wasn't there Bill, plus too many more friends to mention. Did hope to see Bob Scott again but sadly he could not make it due to his wife's illness, also missed Jim Dobbyn, better luck next year. Thanks must go to Norman for such a great Reunion so good we are all going for the Weekend next year. Good to see you all, and see you all next year

**Allan Sutcliffe**

Hi Norman thank you for a great weekend, it took me a week to get myself back together, thanks again.

**Stephen Small**

Fantastic Norman, see you next year, cheers mate

**Andy McDonald**

Thanks Norman, another successful time well done see you next year

**Alfred Cox**



Hi Norman done another great job at the weekend had a great time, all the best see you next year.

**Snapper & Chris Dedman**

Thank you Norman, I had a good time at the reunion and it was good to catch up with all my old friends. So thank you again and see you next year

**Kevin Young**

Hi Norman / Paul, thanks for a brilliant weekend nice to meet you in person, this was my first reunion it was great to be back with the family after so long. Met loads of lost mates, very uplifting. Thanks to 23 pioneer Regt for all the efforts, once again thanks.

**Taff Powell**

Norman Brown Thanks again for a fantastic weekend it was very emotional seeing old faces and friends. Thanks to everybody who worked hard to make the weekend a success.

**Pete Woods**

Had a great time at the reunion, and can't wait to attend the full weekend next year. It was great to catch up with some of the guys

**Mark Prince**

Thanks for a brilliant weekend Norman really enjoyed myself and it was good to see the old boys showing the younger ones that they can still pack a pint or 10!

**Jay Layton**

Norman Brown thanks for a great weekend, hope to see you all next year.

**Tony Cursons**

Had a wonderful afternoon on Saturday at the Pioneer Corps reunion weekend, even though I was doing DJ for the evening, I really enjoyed seeing many of the lads, especially the chefs!! To the Association, many thanks for having me along to do the disco, I think everyone enjoyed themselves and I hope you will consider booking me for next year!

**DJ Bobby**

Norman you did it again fella, superb weekend. Good to see new faces this year. Although I was total all weekend. It was brill a massive thank you Norman and for all who helped with the organisation.

**Lee Wilkinson**

Hi Norman many thanks for a cracking weekend see you next year

**Roy Lathwood**

Picture: Paul Brown

Reunion Weekend 2011

# Reunion Weekend 2011



Very busy mess garden on the Friday evening

Picture: Paul Brown



Taff Teague smiles – someone bought him a pint!

Picture: Paul Brown



Stevie Blenman wishes all a good reunion

Picture: Paul Brown



COs 23 & 168 with Mr N Brown

Picture: Paul Brown



Sarah Baker and Heather Wood still sober

Picture: Paul Brown



All enjoying themselves

Picture: Paul Brown



It's her turn to buy the beers

Picture: Paul Brown



Leroy dressed up for the occasion

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Old friends meet

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Most look as if they are enjoying themselves

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Geoffrey Crook meets old friends

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Lenny Henry celebrates his promotion to WO2

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Did she win the raffle?

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Selling raffle tickets

Picture: Paul Brown



■ What a motley collection!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Smile with the CO

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dave Ravo keeps them entertained

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The joke must have been a good one

Picture: Paul Brown



■ RSM presents Lenny Henry with his leaving gift

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Popeye also gets a leaving gift

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Wreath is laid at the War Memorial, Sunday morning

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Preparing for Group photograph

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Group photograph – who moved from the empty chair?

Picture: Paul Brown



■ All smiles and no beers!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Six a side football competition

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Six a side football competition

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Riot control demonstration prior to Op TOSCA

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Riot control demonstration prior to Op TOSCA

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ex RSMs Fox and Thomas with wives

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Tug of War competition

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Tug of War winners

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Football winners

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dick Fitzsimmons enjoys his first time in the Mess

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Bookings can be taken – not recommended!

Picture: Norman Brown



■ The short and tall of it!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ John and Maureen Paterson – retired at last!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ First picture ever of Cheung smiling!

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Dinger and G entertain Micky

Picture: Norman Brown



■ Dining-in of WO1 (RSM) Wayne Fuller

Picture: Supplied



■ Clan "Ross" at Twickenham

Picture: Supplied



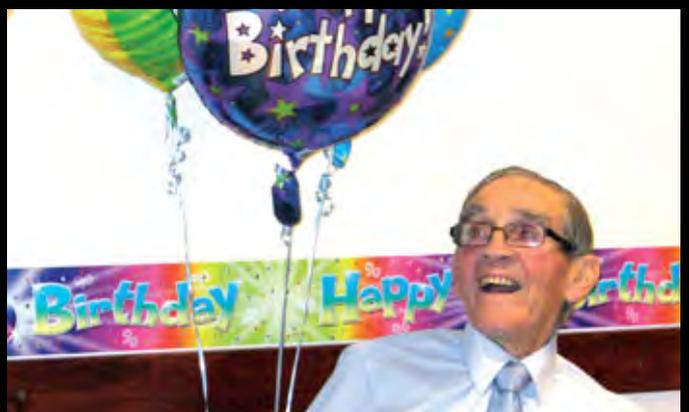
■ Pioneers at Founders Day

Picture: Supplied



■ Nostalgia Group Reunion

Picture: Supplied



■ Lt Col Biggs celebrates his 90th birthday

Picture: Supplied



■ RSMs Dining In Crazy Hats competition

Picture: Supplied

# THE PIONEER



8 CORPS DISTRICT

DECEMBER

1945



# I recently obtained a copy of the magazine you see on the left, from 8 Corps, Pioneer Corps, dated December 1945 and thought it would be of interest to print some of its contents.

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: The Pioneer, December 1945

**W**HAT a host of memories that the word 'Christmas' brings back – childhood days when we hung our stocking up in great hope of their being well filled by Santa Claus: later childhood when more practical toys were hoped for: youth, and the hopes of parties: married life and the desire for reunion with other members of the family

To those of us who are Christians – or trying hard to be such – it is more than all that. It is the Birthday of Him who “came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man”. God becomes Man. Why? Think out the answer some time, will you? Part of the answer is that you and I might know the purpose of living and how to live the best life. As a call and challenge to you, I quote the words of Walt Whitman, which seems particularly appropriate:

“All the past we leave behind. We take up the task eternal, and the burden, and the lesson, conquering, holding, daring, venturing, so we go to the unknown ways, Pioneers! O Pioneers!”

Best wishes for a Happy Christmas.

## MESSAGE FROM PADRE KING HQ 8 CORPS DISTRICT



■ Colonel D Marshall CBE, DDL

Here, in this issue of the “Pioneer” we have yet another link in our great family. It is true to say Pioneers have been a very large family scattered, during the years of war, to every part of the world in which the British Army has operated. No other Branch of the Service has had so many varied tasks to tackle.

During my tours the green and red sign of our Corps has always been a sign of “Welcome”. No matter whether it has been the sign of Group, Company, PCLU, or some other smaller unit in the great set-up, it has always led to help, if required, cheerfulness and co-operation. I believe that family and team spirit has been the secret of our success.

Our success is not of our own measuring. All employing Services have been warm in their appreciation of our cheerful acceptance, speedy and efficient completion of their many difficult demands.

Release and other changes are now greatly depleting our family, which will soon be little more than a token representation of the British Army of the Rhine.

To all of you who are going back to civilian life within the next few weeks I say “Well done”. I say, too, remember kindly those you are leaving behind, for knowledge that you still think of them will help them to keep the flame of “spirit de corps” brightly lit. To those who leave for service elsewhere I say “Thank you”, and keep up the standard we have always been proud of in 8 Corps.

And now, to Pioneer Officers, NCOs and Men of 8 Corps District, I send all good wishes for Christmas 1945 and for the new year. Let us be thankful for the first festive season after six years of war, and let us look forward to 1946 with courage and determination.

**December 1945**  
**Deputy Director of Labour, HQ 8 Corps District BAOR**

## LABOUR OMNIA VINCIT

The PIONEER, as we all know, has seldom received full credit in the Press for his part in winning the War, Yet it is true to say that the War could not have been won without the Pioneer.

He has built up from scratch a reputation second to none. He has contributed a new chapter to the history of a campaign. He has been in the thick of the many battles, landing with the assault troops in AFRICA, SICILY, ITALY and FRANCE, and has played a major part in the successful prosecution of the War.

Thus it was that on D-Day, twenty-three Pioneer Companies (7,000 men) landed in France. By the end of the initial stages on D plus 2, these numbers had practically doubled. Many of the men waded ashore in full equipment.

Some had to swim, some, unfortunately, were drowned. Others took part in fighting operations to clear strong points.

The many and varied tasks carried out, often under difficult conditions, included the laying of flexible causeways from landing craft to shore, clearing beach obstacles, making roadways, forming beach dumps of ammunition, petrol, Ordnance stores and RASC supplies. Airfields were constructed, smoke screens were laid and casualties evacuated by Pioneers.

The Pioneers, too, played a big part in the construction of the petrol pipelines, which were subsequently to cross the Rhine. One Company alone laid 66,200 pipes, weighing 10,000 tons, over a distance of 251 miles.

Another Company, working ahead of the 25-pounders, helped to build a railway line from Mook to Groesbeek and was actually on the railway station a few hours after it had been cleared by the infantry.

The first British airfield in Germany – 1,200 by 40 yards – was constructed by Pioneers and Sappers in seven days. The first Allied bridge across the Rhine – Waterloo Bridge – was constructed by the Royal Engineers, assisted by Pioneers, in the record time of 13 hours under heavy fire and in bad weather. Pioneers, too, played a big part in building the longest railway bridge constructed in any Theatre of Operations during the War – measuring 2,600 feet in length – from Griethausen to Spijk.

In the crossing of the Rhine, some 25,000 Pioneers assisted directly in the preparation of the operation, setting up dumps, repairing roads, working with the

leading Sapper Field Companies on approaches to the river crossings and construction of bridges. These men alone manhandled 254,000 tons of stores.

## GENERAL DEMPSEY'S TRIBUTE

Much could be said of the feats of individual units during the campaign if space permitted.

Much will certainly be recorded in the Official History of the War. But perhaps the greatest tribute was paid by General Dempsey, who commanded Second Army during the Campaign. He wrote on 22 October 1944:

“I take this opportunity of expressing my appreciation of the unselfish devotion to duty and magnificent results which had been achieved by all the Administrative Services.

In particular I wish to make mention of the work done by the Pioneers who have set a splendid example in keeping with the highest traditions of their Corps.

The energy, co-operation and devotion to duty which have been displayed by all concerned with the maintenance of Second Army have made a vital contribution to the victories of this campaign”.

## PIONEERS IN EIGHT CORPS

Pioneers have served with distinction in 8 Corps since the first days of the invasion but it was not until the occupation commenced in June of this year that a special branch of Labour was set up at Headquarters 8 Corps to co-ordinate and direct all Pioneer and Civil Labour in the District.

Previously 8 Corps Pioneers, were commanded by Lt Col W Giles OBE and 60 Group Pioneer Corps. Colonel GE de Pass DSO OBE was then DDL Second Army and directed Pioneers in all the Corps. The allotment to 8 Corps varied but 280 and 67 Coys were the longest serving.

Colonel D Marshall OBE, formerly Director in Canadian Army, came to 8 Corps in June.

At that time there was a force of 4 Groups and 17 Companies. One Group and 7 Coys worked in Hamburg and the remainder in Schleswig Holstein Province. One feature of this alteration in the disposition of companies was that personnel of many units were together for the first time since they landed in Normandy.

Notably, 325 Coy, which, on occasions, had had detachments extending over hundreds of miles and in three countries. Naturally there have been changes from time to time and the maximum number of companies employed at one time reached 24.

The increased use of Dienstgruppen units, of which there are now 32, and civilian labour, the total of which is slightly over quarter of a million, is allowing for the disbandment or disposal of many Pioneer units.

Today there are only 14 companies remaining, and that figure will be still further reduced by demobilization and calls from other areas.

## DEMOB STATISTICS

Demobilization is having a striking effect on the Pioneers in this District. Over 2,000 men were in release groups 20 to 25 only. The rate of release is shown in the

following figures:-

RELEASE GROUP	NUMBER OF MEN RELEASED	NUMBER OF OFFICERS TO BE RELEASED
20	215	-
21	420	6
22	335	6
23	312	11
24	403	17
	<b>NUMBER OF MEN TO BE RELEASED</b>	
25	505	19
26	653	26
27	413	10
28	304	10
29	217	10
30 to 34	530	12

'B' releases have not greatly affected those figures of 220 applications received up to the beginning of November, only 107 men have accepted.

### LET THEM GO

Officers have not been quite as fortunate as was originally expected. They were despatched along with other ranks up to release group 20 but officers of release groups 21 and onwards have been subject to freezing. While this is not a popular decision, judging by resultant correspondence, the freezing has now been generally accepted as in inevitable necessity. At least there is consolation in the knowledge that D Labour, Rhine Army, is determined to recommend that no officer is kept long than absolutely necessary, and further, that the motto of "A" Branch, HQ 8 Corps is "Exeunt quam celerrime" or "Let them go as quickly as they can". Even the Minister of Labour seems to have adopted those words as a motto!



■ Major RP Ponton, 167 DPLG & Miss Dorothy Day ATS

The Bridal Party after the wedding at the Garrison Church, Hamburg, of Major RP Ponton, 167 DPLG and Miss Dorothy Day ATS

### ATS BECOMES DP – Major Ponton – Pte Day Married

There was great excitement in Pioneer circles in Hamburg on Saturday 24 November, when the marriage took place between Major Reginald P Ponton, OC 167 DPLG, and Pte Dorothy Day, ATS, Rhine Army. Service was solemnised at the Garrison Church, Hamburg, by Rev EH Etherington CF. Appropriate music was played on the organ by Gnr EJ Bishop.

Maj Ponton, who is at present commanding a Displaced Persons Labour Group, has been in command of a number of Pioneer Units, including 291 (which he brought across to France on D+14), 53, 44 and 167 Companies. He met his bride while both were doing duty in Hamburg. The bride wore a traditional white gown and was given away by Lt Col ENS Miller

OBE. She was attended by three ATS friends, Doreen Patricia Wyatt, Peggy Murdoch and Peggy Bullied, who were in white dresses relieved in blue.

Major JJ Mould (7 PCLU) was best man and the groomsmen Capt NI Figg and Lts McGillivray and JH Read.

Among the guests were the Commander 8 BSA (Brigadier AWB Becher CBE MC), DDL 8 Corps (Colonel D Marshall OBE) and OC 98 Group (Lt Col H Johnson OBE). Messages of goodwill received by the couple prior to their departure on a honeymoon at Travenmunde included some interesting ones from the Poles, Estonians and other nationals of the DPLG.

### REGIMENTAL ASSOCIATION PROPOSED – HAVE YOU A PRIOR LOYALTY

Efforts are being made to form a Pioneer Corps Regimental Association from past and present members of the Corps. It is hoped to eventually form branches of the association in all parts of the British Isles in order that ex-Pioneers may get together to talk over old times, have social activities, and, if necessary, give help to those who need it.

It is obvious that such an organisation can only be formed if it receives the support of sufficient interested officers and men to warrant the work and expenditure which would result. It is appreciated there are many officers and men in the Pioneer Corps who have been transferred from other arms and who may consider they have a prior loyalty. In spite of that fact, however, it is considered there are sufficient original Pioneers and others imbued with the spirit of the Corps to allow for the formation of a worthwhile association.

Those who are interested in the project should forward their names and addresses to the Honorary Secretary, The Holiday Camp, Prestatyn. Subscriptions are as follows:

	Life	Annual
Officers	£5	5s
Other ranks	£1-10s	2-6d

There are benefits of an all embracing nature, details of which will be forwarded to all those writing for them. These benefits will, of course, increase in proportion to the growth in membership. So far 1,059 officers and men have indicated that they are desirous of being members. That is not enough. Why not be one of the first 10,059?

(Ed note: the Association was formed in 1946 and since that date 21,664 have joined – the 'active' list currently stands at 2550.)

### GENERAL ALI FRIEND RETIRES

Some weeks ago Maj-Gen ALI Friend CB CBE MC, Director of Labour, War Office, relinquished his post. He had been in that position since the early days of the war, guiding and co-ordinating the work of Pioneers in all parts of the world. He had travelled to every country where Pioneers were working to see how they worked and what they were doing.

On his departure he addressed these words to all Pioneers:

"I am now relinquishing the appointment of Director of Labour, War Office, which I have held since the early days of the war.

I have watched the Pioneer Corps develop since December 1939, and the outstanding work it has done in the United Kingdom and overseas in every theatre of war.

We can all feel very proud to have been members of a Corps which has made such

a large contribution to the final victory, and effort which is due to the wonderful team work of all ranks.

I want to thank you all for the great support you have given me and I wish you all the best of luck and success in the future".

He is succeeded at the War Office by Brig JB Hillary CBE, former DD Lab, Rhine Army, who in turn is followed at BAOR by Brig LE Misa DSO OBE, previously DDL 30 Corps and prior to that OC 56 Group.

### CUPID'S ARROWS STRIKE HARD

Cupid has been playing with the officers of 167 DPLG for in less than a month three of the five Officers have "taken unto them a spouse".

It all started when Lt AS McGillivray went on leave and was married to Miss Ada Helen Marshal at King's College Chapel, Aberdeen. Then, not to be outdone, Capt NI Figg, second-in-command, journeyed to Helmond, Holland for his wedding with Madme Marie Louise Deffers Ouaghebeur.

### YOUR STORY

Disbandments have caused the disappearance of a number of Coys which have done outstanding service throughout the war years. Brief historical notes show some of the magnificent work they have achieved.

### 'D'DAY BOYS

58 Company (Disbanded on 16 Nov 45). Formed in 1939 the coy proceeded to France and was evacuated through Dunkirk. It was then employed on camp construction, ammunition and supplies. The coy landed in Normandy about mid-day on 'D' Day and was employed as a bridging coy. Before Caen it lost 2 killed and 27 wounded and then served in Antwerp during the "V" days, finally coming to 8 Corps in August where it has done guards and general administrative duties.

### TWO TRIPS TO FRANCE

18 Company (Disbanded on 16 Nov 45). Formed in France in 1939 the coy was evacuated on the capitulation. The coy was then reformed and did duties on the docks during the Blitz period, later assisting in camp construction preparatory for the invasion. Embarking for this theatre on 16 June the coy has been employed on roads, demolition, petrol and food supplies. Two died of injuries and 3 were severely wounded.

### ARFICA-ITALY-NWE

209 Company (Disbanded on 22 Sep 45). Formed in 1940 the coy has had a long career of active operations. Serving in Africa and taking part in many difficult battles, the unit was amongst the first to land in Italy. After 14 months overseas the unit returned to Scottish command for training and re-fit. Landing on 'D' Day the coy was employed on stretcher bearing and clearing the dead from the beaches. The coy was then transferred to the work on Mulberry and later Dieppe. After a short rest in Brussels the coy came under command of 8 Corps for road repairs. During this period three men were killed, one died of wounds and nine were wounded.

### CORPS COMMANDER'S THANKS

62 Company (Disbanded on 30 Nov 45). Formed in Manchester in Nov 39 the coy proceeded to France later that month. Suffering severe casualties the coy was evacuated only 70 strong. The coy was reformed at Clacton being brought up to

strength from survivors of 81 Company. It then served in Scottish command, spending two winters in the Orkneys. The coy, under command 12 Corps landed in NWE on 26 Jun. Working in the FMC the coy toiled day and night against regular interference from enemy aircraft. The Corps Commander visited the unit and expressed thanks for its magnificent work. Throughout the campaign the coy worked with corps troops in forward areas, suffering casualties and gaining a number of decorations.

#### **FIRST IN SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN**

67 Company (Disbanded on 16 Nov 45). Formed in Kent in 1939 the coy proceeded to France and was split into detachments for the defence of ferries on the Seine. Half the coy was evacuated on the ill-fated "Lancastria" and six men lost their lives. Re-fitted and re-inforced the coy went to Scotland to assist in erection of defence works. During Jan/Feb 41 sections of the coy were formed into flying relief columns to take supplies to isolated S/L and gun sites in the Orkneys. Later part of the company was loaned to the LMS for signal maintenance. This party was mobile and lived in a specially fitted train. The coy landed wet in this theatre on 18 Jun, earmarked for FMC work with 8 Corps. Frequently under shell fire and on one occasion actively engaged against a "pocket" of the enemy at Le Beny Bocage, the coy was fortunate to have few casualties. The Coy had the distinction of being the first Pioneer unit to enter Schleswig-Holstein, being well forward with amn, petrol and sups for 8 Corps troops.

#### **AIRFIELDS IN FOUR COUNTRIES**

164 Company (Disbanded on 17 Nov 45). Formed at Skegness in Apr 40 the coy was known as D1 Defence Coy and took part in the defence of the East Coast. After various duties in different parts of the country and taking part in exercise Harlequin, the coy landed in France on D+2. Lt Cram was killed when a craft in which he was travelling was torpedoed. Twenty five Ors were saved. Several casualties were sustained while the coy was constructing airfields at Coulombs. After helping to clear the Falaise gap of debris the coy went from one airfield to another throughout France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, finishing on the Pion airstrip.

#### **MILES OF RAIL TRACKS**

266 Company (Disbanded on 27 Nov 45). One of the detached Pioneer Corps Coys this unit has had a long and on occasions hazardous career. Working with 157 Railway Construction Coy this unit has been responsible for re-habilitating miles of railway track across France, Belgium, Holland and Germany, finally finishing in Hamburg when they helped in re-starting the port rolling stock.

#### **IN THE ARDENNES**

76 Company (in course of disbanding). Formed in Jan 40 the unit worked in all kinds of jobs in England until it came across to France in Sep 44.

Employed on loading bridging stores the men worked long hours of shift work, and with the advance of the road and railheads moved to Brussels. They were called upon to take part of the line against the Germans in the Ardennes until relief came from the 50th Division. For thirteen weeks they toiled at the bridging dumps used for the Rhine crossings, and it is interesting to note that in the peak period 60 men handled

1,900 tons of stores in 12 hours. The company was later moved to Hamburg where it has performed general tasks.

#### **AIR-LIFTING PIONEERS**

349 Company (Disbanded on 16 Nov 45). Formed in 1943 the coy was employed on construction of dumps, camps and ranges in various parts of England. Landing in France on D+6 various tasks of road repairs, bridging and amn loading were allotted. Later the coy was under command 12 Corps and performed many tasks, including bridging the Seine – when 3 men were killed by enemy fire. The coy also operated on airfields in France and Belgium, handling thousands of tons of amn, petrol and sups during the Second Army Advances and the Arnhem casualties. The OC and several men received honours and awards for their work.

#### **LIFE IN A DPLT – FUN BUT SOME TEARS**

Cigarettes are not only useful in the black-market it appears, for quite recently they were used as a threat to prevent an "International incident" in Hamburg. It was alleged that Italians from a Displaced Persons Labour Group had been in a brawl with locals. The Italians got the worst of the encounter and returned to their camp for reinforcements. It was only a threat by the British OC to stop their issue of cigarettes, which persuaded 800 irate Ities to refrain from descending on Hamburg to seek retribution with brush handles, rubber hose and sand filled stockings.

There can be some amusement in organising a DPLG of 1,200 Italians. Especially so, when 80 women appear on the scene in a body and clamour for their "husbands", or when the party is found to include 32 Chinese. When efforts are made to document the party and explain the British way and purpose without interpreters. When a Union Jack is placed over the HQ and the nations place a dyed bed-sheet over the cookhouse. When the Union Jack is illuminated with a searchlight and the nations reply by putting a bicycle lamp at the foot of their flag-pole. When the band play an enemy national anthem and the leader says, "We could not play God Save the King, so we did the next best thing".

But it is not all fun. There are tears and surprised happiness of those who are offered a decent meal after five or six years of black bread and watery potato soup. There is the unhappy task of trying to encourage people not to hide food in their bed and explaining, "There will be another issue tomorrow".

Joy there can be in a DPLG, in seeing a person gradually become "human" again, in seeing the improvement in health, and, maybe, in re-uniting those who have been separated for too long.

#### **UNUSUAL STRENGTH INCREASE – JUSTICE IN HAMBURG**

While 112 Company is the only Pioneer Company ever to have a battle ship on charge, (that happened off the Normandy beaches), 98 Group is the only one ever to have three members of a German U boat on strength. The Huns in question were part of a crew which sank an Allied merchantman and then tried to get rid of the survivors by the aid of automatic rifles and grenades. Their efforts were almost successful but one or two of our Allies lived to tell the tale.

When these Huns were brought for trial in Hamburg before a Military Court they were "on strength" of 98 Group. To Major NG Blatchford fell the task of charging the

prisoners, and 76 Company provided the Guard. Later at the trial Capt T Terry (332 Coy) was Court Officer and his orderlies were from 341 Coy. The findings of the court, after confirmation, were transmitted to the prisoners by Lt Col Johnson,

#### **BENEVOLENT FUND PASSES FIRST £100,000 – COL GREENWOOD'S NEW APPEAL**

When the Pioneer Corps Benevolent Fund was first instituted a figure of £100,000 was suggested as a target figure. As a result of the splendid response by officers and men in all theatres that total has now been exceeded. A new target has been fixed at £120,000, and a drive is now in motion to ensure that figure is passed.

To those who have never had need to seek the assistance of the Funds its activities, are not, perhaps, well known. The aspect of its work has been over a wide sphere and since the inception of the scheme a total of £5,932 has been paid to assist Pioneers discharged from the services or wives and families of serving soldiers. In eleven months of 1945 over 2,400 applications have been considered and assistance given in more than 1,250 cases, at a cost to the fund of over £3,255.

Col H Greenwood VC DSO OBE MC, honorary secretary of the fund and commander of 12 Centre Pioneer Corps, has been touring the districts of BAOR addressing units on the work of the fund. He was unable to visit every unit but that was only because of shortage of time.

"Eight Corps had done its fair share, in this splendid effort to exceed £100,000" he said, "but we are determined to add another £20,000 to that sum so that we can really do something for those of the Corps who need it".

#### **DID YOU KNOW .....that?**

From available records the Pioneer Corps dates back to 1346 when it took part in the battles of Crecy and Poitiers under the command of the Black Prince. The role of the Pioneers in those days was an extremely hazardous one for explosives were unknown and the Pioneers had to tunnel under the foundations of towers, using pit props. When the whole structure was undermined pitch was used to set fire to the props and thus cause the collapse of the tower. Pitch was not confined to the Pioneers for the defenders used the commodity along with boiling oil as a means of frustrating the attackers. Many bloody battles ensued and for this reason the Pioneer was armed, in addition to bill-hook, spade and tunnelling tools. By his bearing in battle the Pioneer was held in general esteem.

In the days of Queen Elizabeth the Pioneer was lavishly dressed in "Pale blue cassock, white doublet and hose, shoes, garters, and ornamental lace points, sword, dagger and girdle, with close fitting headgear".

Towards the end of the reign of Good Queen Bess the task of the Pioneer was of much less importance, due to the discovery of gunpowder and the introduction of artillery. In this way the Pioneer gradually became part of the force of the Surveyor of Ye Kynges Works – later the Corps of Royal Engineers.

#### **PIONEERS RE-BORN**

In Cromwell's time the Pioneer practically ceased to exist in the Roundhead Model Army, and his duties were more or less confirmed to fatigues. Fortunately with the restoration of the monarchy the Pioneer was restored to the position of distinction he had honourably

occupied in the past. He was incorporated in the founding of the first Regular Standing Army and was allocated to the Artillery in 1685.

Under William III the pioneer wore red coat and breeches, woollen stockings, shoes and buckles, neck cloth and leather cap. Officers carried the long sword and two pistols, NCOs halberds and men broad bladed axes. With the infantry the Pioneer wore uniform similar to the Royal Fusiliers (Seventh of Foot) but with a mitre cap similar to that of the Grenadier.

He was armed with a carbine, short sword and hatchet. It was the Pioneers privilege to take part in the assault, concentrating on earth works, stockades, building rough camps and carrying out to the fullest extent his role of handyman.

The first regiment to maintain a Pioneer detachment was the Foot Guards, and in 1749 the 42nd of Foot (The Black Watch)

included a Pioneer detachment on the strength of the battalion.

With the re-organisation of the artillery and the engineers into separate corps in 1772, the Pioneers were allocated to the Sappers, and up to the last war they virtually ceased to exist with the exception of the Pioneer detachments forming part of the Infantry battalions. In 1916 Pioneer battalions were formed and operated in the Field until 1918, and it may be accepted that this was the first real step since a similar project was put before Parliament in 1759 towards embodying the Pioneers as self-contained units within the organisation of the Army.

#### THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Throughout the military history of the Empire the Pioneer has figured, but for some unaccountable reason has failed to rouse Public Interest, he was served

continuously under world famous Princes and Generals such as Edward the Black Prince, the Dukes of Marlborough, Wellington, General Wolfe, Clive of India and military names that are both legion and legendary.

So from Crecy and Poitiers and the centuries intervening the Pioneer as been in the van of our Armies or with the rear of our rear-guards, as in the case of the First Battle of France. All will remember the Pioneers, who, armed only with rifles and failing to hold the Panzers in May 1940, immobilised them with railway sleepers thrown in the tracks as they roared past through the lanes of Western France.

But that story you know as we now know that whether in cassock and surcoat, or battle dress and field pack, tropical kit or parapack the Pioneers has justified for all time the splendid motto – "Labor Omnia Vincit". ■

# Military Curriculum Vitae

After completing basic training at Simpson Barracks he joined 518 Company RPC

Report: Major Nigel Hill, RE  
Pictures: Major Nigel Hill, RE

**P**TE N S Hill enlisted into the Royal Pioneer Corps on 30.1.84. After completing basic training at Simpson Barracks in Northampton he joined 518 Company RPC based at Graven Hill Station in Bicester.

From there he deployed to the Falkland Islands, Ascension Island, Germany (Federal Republic), Northern Ireland, Norway and many UK locations over the course of the next 5 years. 18 months of this period was spent with 8 Regiment RCT in Osnabruck, Germany. 18 months was spent on security duties in Northern Ireland. During the period Pte Hill completed a JNCO cadre and a number of driving (HGV 3 and 2) and signalling courses. Pte Hill left the Royal Pioneers on 22.12.88 and returned home to Jersey in the Channel Islands.

On 18.4.89 Pte Hill enlisted into the Jersey Field Squadron Royal Engineers (V), in its formation year and converted to the title of Sapper. On 17.5.89 Spr Hill was promoted to LCpl, and then full Cpl in 1990, in that year Cpl Hill completed exercise Cambrian Patrol in Wales for the first time. On 1.6.91 Cpl Hill was promoted Sgt and completed a SNCO Cadre in September 1992. In 1993 Sgt Hill completed exercise Cambrian Patrol for the second time. During 1994 Sgt Hill

completed a Range Management Qualification (stage 1-3), in addition to the Royal Engineers (V) Field Sergeant Course, and qualified B1 Combat Engineer. Also in that year Sgt Hill was promoted to SSgt. In July 1995 SSgt Hill completed the Royal Engineers Demolition Safety Officers course and also completed exercise Cambrian Patrol for the third and final time. On the 9.10.98 SSgt Hill was promoted to WO2 and became the Squadron Sergeant Major. In 2002 WO2 Hill wrote Ex "Militia Challenge" for 90 local competitors raising £11,000.00 for local charities, also in the same year WO2 Hill was the project officer for the Squadron deployment to Belize, a large construction project in conjunction with the Jersey Overseas Aid Committee. In 2003 WO2 Hill wrote Ex "Militia Challenge" again for 54 local competitors raising £5,000.00 for local charities, also in that year he attended the Advanced Watermanship Safety Officer Course at RSME Brompton Barracks. On 15.10.03 WO2 Hill was commissioned to the rank of Lieutenant in the Corps of Royal Engineers, occupying the position of Operations Officer and being responsible for recruiting and recruits training within the Jersey Field Squadron Royal Engineers (V). In September 2004 Lt Hill planned and conducted the regimental cadre for 73 Engineer Regiment RE (V) at Warcop Camp. On 15.10.04 Lt Hill was confirmed in his rank and promoted to Captain (gazetted in

December 2004). On the 1.09.05 Captain Hill took post as B Company Training Officer at Southampton University Officer Training Corps. In September 2006 Captain Hill completed JSC (TA) finishing in the top quartile of his syndicate. In February 2007 Captain Hill led a high profile humanitarian construction task to Soma, in the Lower River Region of The Gambia, in support of the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire's Millennium project to refurbish Soma Lower School, he was awarded the Lord Lieutenants Certificate for Meritorious Service for this deployment by Mary Fagan (the Queen's cousin) who is also the Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire. In September 2007 Captain Hill took post as an SO2 in the Brigade Headquarters of 16 Air Assault Brigade, whilst being part of CVHQ RA.

During the next 3 years Captain Hill supported various higher formation exercises in the UK and Germany, as well as supporting 7 Armoured Brigades pre-deployment training for Afghanistan in Kenya in 2009. On 21.11.10 Captain Hill was promoted to substantive Major by the No 6 board.

Captain Hill is a Graduate Member of the City and Guilds Institute and holds a diploma in Leadership, and is also a full member of the Chartered Management Institute

Decorations - GSM – Northern Ireland, VRSM + 2 bars, Jubilee Medal. ■



# 847 Smoke Company

A short history of 847 Smoke Company, Pioneer Corps which was formed in 1941

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**T**HIS is a brief history of 847 Smoke Company (SM) Pioneer Corps. The Unit came into being on 5 December 1943 at Bouzereagh, Algiers, when three Smoke Companies were formed from 820 and 822 Smoke Companies. All men of 847 Company came overseas originally with 820 Company and any account of the new formation is therefore a continuation of the activities of the parent Unit.

820 Smoke Company was formed in the UK in July 1941, its War Establishment being 8 Officers and 296 ORs. Starting as a "Pot" Company it later changed over to Haslars and until being mobilised for service overseas provided an Ack-Ack Smoke Screen for Barry Docks.

**EMBARKATION** Mobilisation orders were received on 15 December 1942 and under the command of Major EJ Pyke, the Company sailed in the "Durban Castle" for North Africa on 24 January 1943. Few of the drivers who took the Bedfords and Haslars from Barry to Glasgow are likely to forget their first experience of long convoy work, the mud at Wellington, the ice on Shap and the snow in Scotland, all testing their skill and endurance to the utmost.

**ALGIERS** Disembarking at Algiers on 1 February 1943, Nos 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 Sections with Lieutenants Quail and Kavanagh were attached to 807 Smoke Company in El Biar, Algiers, later being joined by Capt Hollingsworth. HQ with Nos 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 Sections, on disembarking marched from the Dock Area some twenty miles to a staging area at Sidi Mousa, where they spent the next twenty-three days in the comparative comfort of the orange groves of Monsiour Jais.

On 6 February 1943, Major EJ Pyke and Lieutenant ED Eyland went to Bougie, where, enjoying the hospitality of 152 Company, they proceeded to recce the Dock Area. Having successfully relieving 152 Company from their barn-like billet the Sidi Mousa contingent, after a train journey of 2 and a half days, moved in.

**BOUGIE** Smoke operations began on 2 March 1943, and continued until 18 July 1943. No 24 Generators or "Pots" were used for the first 10 days, after which Haslars were put into operation, proving most successful.

**DJIDJELLI** During this period a Smoke Circuit was laid by men of the Company at Djidjelli in order to screen the activities of Combined Operations, who were preparing for the Sicilian landings.

**BONE** On 1 April 1943, the Algiers detachment had moved to Bone, that much bombed forward port, where they lived a precarious existence, "Smoking" continually every night until moving to Philippeville.

**PHILIPPEVILLE** Moving by road HQ and the five Bougie Sections joined up with the rest of the Company at Philippeville on 21 July 1943. Here, until 4 August 1943, the Company were engaged upon night smoke operations screening the Dock Area and Oil Refineries. It was during this period that advantage was taken of the magnificent bathing facilities at Stora.

**ALGIERS** On 8 August 1943, the Company again moved, this time to return to Algiers, where smoke duties were taken over from 807 Company, who had been called forward for the Italian campaign. Smoke Haslars were handed over to the French, who continued the screen.

24 Esso Mobile Smoke Generators replaced the 48 Haslars, and it was at this point, with a decreased War Establishment of 6 Officers and 184 ORs, still under the command of Major EJ Pyke, that 847 Smoke Company (SM) came into being.

Originally "P" Smoke Company, it was later re-designated and carried on without further alterations until the cessation of hostilities in Italy.

The next two months were spent in training with the new machines and the electrical deployment of No 24 Generators, until on the 26 February, when the Company moved to "Z" Reception Camp preparatory to being called forward to Italy.

**ITALY** In the comparative comfort of the "Winchester Castle" the Mediterranean was crossed. Disembarking at Naples on 14 March 1944, the Company moved by rail to Bari to be billeted in Porcelli Barracks. For the next six months smoke duties were carried out here, the Port and Oil Refineries being screen nightly.

**CUCCURANO** On 21 September 1944, less a rear party of 1 Officer and 14 ORs the Company moved by road to Ancona and then on to Cuccurano, a small village five miles west of Fano.

This was to be Company HQ for the next 4 and a half months. Here training was once again carried out, this time for tactical smoke screens for use with the Eighth Army. During this period various platoons went off to differing sectors of the front, the most important of these operations being for the attacks on Faenza and Bologna.

**FAENZA** On 7 December 1944, Lieutenant FL Betts and 25 ORs with 6 Essos and trucks reported to 5 Corps, Staging that night at Ferli they moved the following morning to within one mile of Faenza.

Here troops at Berwick Junction, which was under enemy mortar fire, were saved by the use of smoke.

For their participation in this "show", Lt FL Betts was subsequently awarded the MC and Pte G O'Sullivan the MM.

**BOLOGNA** The Light Platoon with Lieutenant S Higgins went on 10 March 1945, to San Clemente – south of Bologna, later being joined by Lieutenant AA Banks and "C" Platoon. Here for five weeks from dawn to dusk a smoke screen was laid over the Sillario valley screening SP guns, troop movements and the dumps built up for the final assault on Nologna.

**LAKE TRASIMENE** HQ still remained at Cuccurano whilst "B" Platoon with Lieutenant R Crammond covered the amphibious training of 9th Armoured Brigade on Lake Trasimene. They were followed by "A" Platoon with Lieutenant FL Betts MC and Lieutenant ED Eyland, who, on arrival carried out training with 755 American Tank Battalion.

These operations – the tryout for the Po crossing – lasted one month and "A" and "B" Platoons finally rejoined HQ on 14

April 1945.

**FINAL DAYS** Sgt Coleman and four operators with two Esso generators went on 3 April 1945, to Cesenatico Airfield near Cervia to act as smoke markers for the mass bombing attack on enemy positions which led to the break-through to the Po.

The last movement of the Company before the cessation of hostilities in Italy took place on 18 April 1945, HQ being established at Cervia.

The Po crossings proved to be the last smoke operations that the Company was to be engaged upon. "A" and "B" Platoons proceeded on 21 April 1945, to Consandolo – south of Ferrara – to take up positions. It was only found, however, necessary to smoke once for half an hour and on 1 May 1945, all personnel were withdrawn to HQ.

VE Day found the Company under 24 hours notice to move and thus passed quietly.

With the handing in of all smoke equipment on 8 May 1945, the "smoke" career of the Company was over and from then on it was to operate as a GT Company for the Pioneer Corps of the Eighth Army.

Major EJ Pyke, who had commanded the Company throughout the whole of its tour overseas, left on 28 May 1945, to subsequently take command of 64 Group, the command of the Company passing to Major B Cheeseman.

## APPENDIX "A" – IN MEMORIAM

Private George Pownner – Faenza – 8 December 1944

Private George H Miles – San Clemente – 28 March 1945

Private Albert H Stuckey – San Clemente 23 March 1945

## APPENDIX "B" – HONOURS AND AWARDS

Military Cross – Lieutenant FL Betts  
Military Medal – Private G O'Sullivan  
Mentioned in Dispatches – Major EJ Pyke CSM T Price  
Sgt E Coleman  
Sgt JR Howitt  
Cpl R Rowlands

## APPENDIX "C" – OFFICERS WITH COMPANY ON EMBARKATION - 19 JANUARY 1943

Major EJ Pyke  
Captain KL Hollingsworth  
Lieutenants FL Betts, AH Pendleton, ED Eyland, AG Quail, F Goodacre  
P/OR V Seig (Met. Officer)

## OFFICERS WITH COMPANY ON FORMATION OF 847 SMOKE COMPANY - 5 DECEMBER 1943

Major EJ Pyke  
Captain KL Hollingsworth  
Lieutenants C Holt, FL Betts, VR Holding  
Second Lieutenant AA Banks

## OFFICERS WITH COMPANY ON CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES IN ITALY - 8 MAY 1945

Major EJ Pyke  
Captain FL Betts MC  
Lieutenants AA Banks, ED Eyland, S Higgins, EF Port. ■



# Pte Stanley Johnson

The family of Stanley Johnson (957612) very kindly donated his medals, 3 war diaries and other memorabilia to the Association. Here are his diaries.

Report: Pte Stanley Johnson (957612)  
Picture: Norman Brown

FROM Association records we know that he was born on 27 August 1919 and enlisted into the Royal Artillery on 12 December 1939 and was transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 16 December 1940 and was posted to 814 Company. He was later posted to 847 (Smoke) Company (during which he kept the diaries), he served until 12 April 1946. He was separated from his wife from Jan 1943 until Jul 1945. Forward to first diary:

Allies landed in North Africa on 27 November 1942. We arrived 1 February 1943. Housing conditions very bad for Arabs, certain Jewish quarters very good. General conditions very bad for Arabs. No clothes, soap and main food seems to be fruit. Hard biscuits which we don't like too much are very acceptable to them. When we have clothes to sell, they fight among themselves to be the highest bidders.

Sights I've been in North Africa:

Youngster walking on the stump of his heel with no foot.

Women walking like a dog with shoes on both hands and feet.

Men walking with his hands on the ground behind him like an ant.

Young chap about 18 with his right hand grafted to his ankle and walking like that.

Arabs with only a walking stick walking with his wife who had a bundle on her back it would take a good man to carry for a distance.

Arabs riding on donkeys so small that they have to lift their feet slightly to stop them trailing the ground.

If they took off their clothes I swear they would never get them on again. They wash with hat and coats on. Flying beetles about 2 times the size of a bee come in swarms every night for one hour before dark. There are monkeys and leopards in the district.

In Phillipville in the riots between the Congolese troops and the Arabs there were some nasty sights. The Congolese troops got out their rifles and were shooting and beating the Arabs to death with belts and big sticks. They hit them and kicked them in the face until dead. Knifed them to death and mutilated them out of all recognition such as lopping off an ear. Our lads in town at the time could do nothing because they were not armed and didn't know what it was all about.

The MPs were turned out to get us all back to barracks and by nightfall British troops were patrolling the streets. It wasn't a very pleasant feeling for us when we were out on night duty as we only had a party of 30 men but eventually was OK.

Some of our lads, on the scene of battle, if they were anywhere near an Arab when a Congolese ran up he would salute our lad and say "OK, Jonny" and then proceed to beat the Arab. One of the lads in my section saw an Arab beaten to death in front of him, first by hitting him with a pick and then lashing all over the head and then throwing a great rock and smashing his skull. He couldn't to anything about it. The French seem to think it has to happen now and again to keep the Arabs in check.

## DIARY ONE

**18 Jan 43** – saw Dilys for last time

**19 Jan** – Left Barry station 6 o'clock.

Travelled all night to Emb port

**20 Jan** – arrived Emb port 1400 hrs straight to boat by ferry. Name of boat – Durban Castle

**21 Jan** – still in dock. Boat rather crowded but food good.

**22 Jan** – Boat drill twice daily for the whole voyage.

**23 Jan** – Plenty of chocolates, fags and biscuits in canteen

**24 Jan** – One sergeant taken off boat because of broken ankle – lucky chap. 5 days in dock or port

**25 Jan** – set sail from Scotland 2400 hrs

**26 Jan** – a bit rough when the night comes. Slept through the night OK

**27 Jan** – Feeling a bit green as the sea has a big swell. Boat station is on the forecastle which is just like a giant switchback. Manage to keep it down OK.

**28 Jan** – Ran into squalls. On guard, can't hold out. Sick five times on sentry. Stuck it out although feeling fit to die.

**29 Jan** – A lot better today, Sickness over and as hungry as a horse. Never missed a meal.

**30 Jan** – Handed all our English money in to be exchanged to French.

**31 Jan** – Franc dropped from 300 to 200 to the pound. We gained 100 frs to the pound by having our money changed yesterday.

**1 Feb** – Arrived Algiers 1800 hrs. Baggage party. Worked till two o'clock next morning. Slept on the boat.

**2 Feb** – worked all day on baggage. Kept in transit camp.

**3 Mar** – Joined the rest of the company tonight at a farm near Eucalyptus. 18 miles from Algiers. Arabs ride about on donkeys not much bigger than a dog, they are a comical sight.

**4 Feb** – Billeted in wine vaults, in the wilds but good billet.

**5 Feb** – Food is good but biscuits are very hard. Plenty of fruit

**6 Feb** – Shoeshine boys are a nuisance as they continually pester you.

**7 Feb** – Arabs in bad way as regards clothes and soap, always buying clothes from us.

**8 Feb** – Life easy but routine gets monotonous. Route marches every day.

**9 Feb** – Marched to Sidi Massouk, 4 kms away.

**10 Feb** – Marched to Sidi Baraki, 6 kms. Wine is terrible stuff. Lots of the lads get drunk and it sends them fighting mad. It is more of a drug.

**11 Feb** – Curfew all over country all the time. 1st Army order, be in by 8.30 p.m.

**12 Feb** – Same routine. Churchill flew to Mausm Blanche an airfield only about seven kms from our billets.

**13 Feb** – Visited Maisan Carne nearest town. Nothing there, returned early.

**14 Feb** – Wrote to Jim, Albert and Ernie, also mother and dad

**15 Feb** – Wrote to J Peachey

**17 Feb** – Bread for the first time – does it taste good. Spent most of time here playing cards or housey-housey

**18 Feb** – Have written to everybody now

**19 Feb** – visited Algiers, spent most of time in N canteen, nice place but bare. Saw the Prefecture where Darlen was assassinated.

**21 Feb** – Still more drill

**22 Feb** – On the move tomorrow.

Everything packed ready

**23 Feb** – Up at six o'clock. At Maison Curree Station by ten. Waited on train until 2300 hrs before moving

**24 Feb** – Still on train. Slow travelling in the mountains, can walk as fast. Biscuits again

**25 Feb** – Arrived Bougie 0600 hrs.

Baggage party again. Transit camp by 1500 hrs

**26 Feb** – Left transit camp for billet nearer town.

**27 Feb** – Visited town. Nice picture palace for troops but town absolutely bare. Arabs in same condition. Shoeshine boys worse than ever.

**28 Feb** – Start smoke tonight. Haslars not ready yet, so using emergency generator pots. Easy work and sleep all night apart from sentry duty.

**1 Mar** – Can't go to pictures as parade is early. Parade six o'clock. Detailed for smoke for the whole week

**2 Mar** – Nothing to say. They say there is 32 ships sunk in this port.

**3 Mar** – Still waiting for mail from home. Made bed today with wood and iron bands scrounged from sawmill. Best drink is champagne, only three frs a glass.

**4 Mar** – Bath today second this week

**5 Mar** – 'Pay-day'. Received bottle of Whitbreads for 14 frs, tasted very good

**6 Mar** – Received first letter from Dilys.

Only took 12 days to arrive. Contents rather worrying as don't know what has happened. Been ill but don't know how bad.

**7 Mar** – Slept in the morning and played cards in the afternoon.

**8 Mar** – Last day of smoke. Day work for one week we hope. Went to pictures tonight – good show. One of lads drunk, took rifle and ammo off him just in time or someone would have been shot.

**9 Mar** – Still worried about what is happening at home. Don't know yet if Dilys has lost baby or not

**10 Mar** – Spent most of day driving round in truck. On orders that we get extra 4d per day overseas money. Controlled by paymaster at home. Saw some scorpions. Bite by big one and you die in two minutes. Bite by small one and die in two hours. Just like a miniature lobster.

**11 Mar** – Stripped No 9 Haslar for maintenance and night duty. Stayed in tonight. Raining

**12 Mar** – Daily routine of cleaning. Pay day. Raining again.

**13 Mar** – Mail getting better and will now get regular. Dil a lot better. Still raining.

**14 Mar** – On guard in the tents this afternoon. Arabs a nuisance. Stopped raining this morning touch wood. Still cloudy but very warm.

**15 Mar** – Lads lit up last night, cleaning today. I'm on smoke tonight as found men out of each day section has to go in each night. Raining hard again.

**16 Mar** – Washing and sewing this morning with an hour in bed. Battle parade in the afternoon. Properly browned off. Went out tonight just down the road. Only had two drinks and back to billet. Played cards for rest of night.

**17 Mar** – More red tape from them in England. Have to polish all brass work on the Haslars. Waste of time and valuable material. Men risk their lives bringing petrol and stuff over here while we waste it. If anybody tells me the world is civilised after this I'll tell them what I think about it and them.

**18 Mar** – On guard on the jetty this morning until dinner time. Start night work tonight for one week. Lousy weather. Must be rainy season as it's done nothing else for the past week.

**19 Mar** – Made bed in trailer, had a good sleep while out on smoke. Quiet night hope same again tonight. Just have to wake up to do two hours guard.

**20 Mar** – Fine day today. Wish I could get some up to date news from home. Still worried about Dil.

**22 Mar** – Nights is easiest job as we sleep most of the time when there is no raid on. Sleep again in the evening. Only bugbear is the guard.

**23 Mar** – Some excitement tonight. Raider over, plenty of gunfire but nothing dropped. Had bath today. Lit up tonight during raid but only for half an hour.

**24 Mar** – Lit up again early this morning test for new GOC. Jim had a narrow squeak last night. Bit of shrapnel hit his tin hat and just caught his shoulder, nothing much but could have been. Bougie is a bad place for malaria and typhus. The season starts next month when a few hundred people are supposed to die.

**25 Mar** – Finish week of smoke tonight. Managed to get to the pictures again. Not a very good show. Old Billbody film. Can't smoke in the cinema.

**26 Mar** – Get more disgusted each day at condition of the Arabs. Saw youngster with foot off walking on the stump of his heel. The French ought to hang for allowing them to walk around like that.

**27 Mar** – On duty all day at the fort today. Nothing to do but watch the test until the night party come tonight. Very monotonous. Will be scatty if we stay here much longer.

**28 Mar** – Weekly medical inspection today.

**29 Mar** – Nothing new today same old job of cleaning the Haslars.

**30 Mar** – Received air mail letter from Dil dated the 20th. I know definite now that she has lost it. I'm worried about the operation she mentioned I only hope it is not serious. Sent 6 pound home, through my credits.

**31 Mar** – Went to the pictures last night. Start our week of nights again tonight. It's a day previous this time and I'm expecting we'll burn.

**1 Apr** – Didn't burn last night. Bath today, received two air letters news a little better. Am feeling more cheerful.

**2 Apr** – Fresh meat for first time. The usual bottles of beer, Tennants, not very good.

**3 Apr** – Fresh meat again. My turn as number 1 have been driving all week. Weather is mixed, sun shining one minute and cloudy and rainy the next.

**4 Apr** – Inoculation today, one each Sunday for three weeks for typhoid and malaria.

**5 Apr** – Weather is getting warmer. Paraded in shirt sleeves. Soon be getting tropical kit.

**7 Apr** – Taffy March left us yesterday to go to the other half of the Coy who are now at Bona. Last night of smoke tonight. Have been in the same Coy as Taff for 2 years. Typhus has broken out in the town. Only a few cases but we'll have to watch ourselves. Not allowed to mix with the Arabs. Apart from disease we can get lice from them.

**8 Apr** – On the fort tonight. Free issue of fags from the NAAFI bought from Coy profits.

**9 Apr** – Pay day and the usual bottle of beer. Didn't go out tonight but played cards instead.

**10 Mar** – Afternoon off for 1st time. Went for a couple of drinks after tea, champagne 3 frs a glass. Weather is very warm now. Get issued with tropical kit on the 22nd.

**11 Mar** – On jetty today. All day and nothing to do but watch tents and see the Arabs don't walk away with them. Get inoculation during the week as I've missed it Friday.

**12 Apr** – Draw my tropical kit today, good fit especially the shorts. Aeroplane crashed into the mountain, pilot bailed out safely.

**13 Apr** – Ordered a souvenir in marble today. Nice job costing 140 frs. Went to the pictures and saw 'The Lady in Question'.

**14 Apr** – Mail received everything OK at home. Had inoculation and FFI today. Weather very hot the last few days.

**15 Apr** – The usual routine of smoke, sleep in the morning and mess around in the afternoon until time to go on duty at 6.45.

**16 Apr** – Raiding attack, about six British officers killed near the Haslar park. Rotten mess.

**18 Apr** – Vaccination and 3rd weekly inoculation the last I hope for a while. I only hope the vaccination doesn't make a great hole like some of the lads have got. The MO is a butcher for these things.

**19 Apr** – Wore tropical kit for first time outside. Not too bad but still very warm.

**20 Apr** – Last night of smoke tonight only do two more nights during the week as reinforcements.

**21 Apr** – On the fort tonight, sooner than I expected. Got marble souvenir from the man today sending it tomorrow.

**22 Apr** – Took first two anti-malaria pills to be taken twice a week. Went to the pictures. Drew mosquito nets.

**23 Apr** – Have to start using anti-mosquito cream every two hours on nights.

**24 Apr** – Didn't go out today, raining. Vaccination going OK.

**25 Apr** – Short raid tonight but not much. Mosquito nets keep the flies out OK.

**26 Apr** – Two more anti-malaria pills today. Taste rotten but I won't refuse anything out here. Heavy storm.

**28 Apr** – FFI today.

Vaccination marked a success. Start smoke tonight for another week. Weather has been dull and rainy for part week.

Smoke is not so easy now as we have to stand by our machine until half past ten at night and from 0530 until

0630 in the morning.

**29 Apr** – Two more pills today. Stand to in French Barracks tonight until 1230 hrs. Half the company bad with sickness and diahorea. MO says it's the pills working but myself I think it was food poisoning, I was not affected.

**30 Apr** – Pay day again with the jug of beer ration. Had a walk to canteen.

**1 May** – Stood to in French Barracks all night. Called out on the sector about 10 o'clock. Dangerous road on the face of a cliff. Thunderstorm again, not for long though.

**2 May** – Electrical storm tonight, lightning continually flashing with hardly a break. On guard in the pouring rain. Never seen lightening like it before. Two generators blew up alongside our truck. Sick of this weather.

**3 May** – One pill today. Lads bad again who were bad last time. It must be the pills, that is why we are only getting one each day four times a week now.

**4 May** – Another pill. We have tea with them now when we take them at 2 o'clock, I don't mind how many I take for buckshee tea.

**5 May** – Finished nights for another week. FFI today. Went to cinema today, Saw Boris Karloff in "Before I Hand" a Buster Keaton film and a small EFI show. EFI means Expeditionary Forces Institute.

**6 May** – Another pill.

**7 May** – Another pill. No beer on pay parade today. On the fort tonight. Raining pretty heavy again.

**8 May** – Air raid but nothing dropped but fireworks out at sea, someone getting a hammering.

**9 May** – Heard that Tunis and Bigarte have fallen to the 1st and 8th army.

**10 May** – Pill. On PAD tonight. Air raid but nothing much.

**11 May** – The number of prisoners in Tunisia have affected our rations. We are on half bread and half biscuits now. War here almost as good as finished, 100,000 prisoners.

**12 May** – Some 8th army units have come here for a rest. Hope Jim and Ernie arrive here. Met a chap called Vickers who I used to go to school with, pleasant surprise.

**13 May** – Pill. Jim's wife has had a letter from the War Office telling her that he was wounded. It was just a shrapnel scratch in an air raid. War in NA finished.

**14 May** – Some AA guns on jetty with us. Chaps have told us a few tales about the

## ‘A bit of shrapnel hit his tin-hat and just caught his shoulder’

fighting. They have had a rough time.

**15 May** – 8th Army lads are painting the town red. They haven't been in civilisation for months. Lit up for an hour tonight. 170,000 prisoners in last count.

**16 May** – Pill. Met Knobby Clarke from Slough. Told to expect a lot of air raids now by the Brigadier. Have to patrol now in case of paratroops.

**17 May** – Pill. Saw ENSA show. Air raid last night lit up for 20 mins. AA lads gone from Jetty.

**18 May** – FFI. Visit to pictures but came out half way though as I had seen big picture. Place crowded with men still painting the town red.

**19 May** – Saw some Italian and German photos and souvenirs. They seem to have done well in the way of entertainment in the desert.

**20 May** – Another pill. I write about pills to check how many I have altogether.

**21 May** – On duty tonight on jetty. Pill today.

**22 May** – Disinfected blankets today. Managed to get into the cinema to see a French show, pretty good.

**23 May** – Stayed in today as it is too hot to go anywhere.

**24 May** – Pill. On the fort today, very hot.

**25 May** – Pill. Bath today and a walk round. The weather is getting hotter and hotter.

**26 May** – FFI. A swarm of big flying beetles round the truck, killed a lot. Start smoke tonight.

Flying beetles are very big and don't buzz around you as if to attack. A few snakes round here and monkeys on the mountain.

**27 May** – New pay sheet put up, I am getting as much now as a Lance Corporal. Pill. Driving this week on nights.

**28 May** – Had photo taken today, get them on the 1st June. Pill.

**30 May** – Went swimming this morning and afternoon. Doing well but got badly sunburned.

**31 May** – Pill. Am red raw all over my chest and stomach, even my feet are sore. Can hardly bear my boots on. It is agony with my clothes on.

**1 Jun** – Pill. In agony with my stomach chest and legs. If it keeps like this I'll have to report sick although it is a crime. Got my photos.

**2 Jun** – Dodged the FFI today as the MO would have said something about my body which is just the same. Would never believe that sunburn could be so bad. We only get paid once a fortnight now.

**3 Jun** – My body is a lot better today but my ankle is still pretty painful and swollen.

**4 Jun** – Pill. Saw concert tonight played by men of the 51st Division of the 8th Army, they played in the desert, very good.

**5 Jun** – Went sick this morning with rash on my mouth, have to go again on Monday. Not too bad. Saw the 126th Regt AA military band with Drum Major, very good.

**6 Jun** – Warned on the orders that the malaria carrying mosquitoes are now breeding and we have to take care. Before we came this place was known as Death Valley.

**7 Jun** – Pill. Need to go sick again today, face a little bit better but have to go again Wed, definitely impetigo.

**8 Jun** – Pill. Air raid tonight, bit hot while it lasted. Two lads killed. Plane brought down.

**9 Jun** – Start nights tonight. Mouth a bit better, scab ready to come off. Killed 123

flying beetles tonight.

**10 Jun** – Pill. Had some cherries today. Saw show with Leslie Kenson, Vivian Leigh, Dorothy Dixon, quite good. Practice tonight with guns, incendiaries and of course SMOKE.

**11 Jun** – Pill. Killed 46 beetles. No pay today, as we only get paid once per fortnight. Mouth better now.

**12 Jun** – Killed 106 beetles. Learned yesterday no more green envelopes, the one privilege a soldier serving abroad has taken from him. Can't speak privately to Dil now.

**13 Jun** – Went swimming today water very warm. Didn't stay in long as it was very dirty.

**14 Jun** – Pill. Lit up last night as there was a raid. Nothing dropped. Guns firing all morning for practice what a racket.

**15 Jun** – Pill. Storm tonight 2 balloons brought down.

**16 Jun** – FFI. Company started a library and I got a good book and finished it tonight. I wish we could get home pretty quick as I'm worried about Dil. She is lonely and miserable I can tell by her letters. I only hope that she keeps herself well and doesn't worry too much. If she is well and happy things are easier to bear.

**17 Jun** – Pill. Air raid at Dizelli, nothing here though.

**18 Jun** – Pill. Pay parade today. Felt a bit nostalgic at present, I wonder what Dil is doing right now.

**19 Jun** – On pots tonight. Night passes quietly and nothing to speak about.

**20 Jun** – Air letter from Deil she is more cheerful now.

**21 Jun** – Pill. Letter with photo of Dil and Laurie. Dil's photo is really good and I like it as much as any I have, she certainly looks good and I miss her more than beer.

**22 Jun** – Pill. Nothing happened. Plenty of fruit and tomatoes and cucumbers now.

**23 Jun** – FFI. Start week of smoke tonight. Short warning early morning lit up for few minutes. A lot of troops passing through Bougie nowadays. Boats out in the bay laden with troops and trucks. Ready for another move.

**24 Jun** – Pill. Reconnaissance plane over this morning. Wouldn't be surprised if we have raid tonight. Cherries, tomatoes and cheese for tea, I'm enjoying the teas lately.

**25 Jun** – Pill. Bought pint of French beer in canteen today. Not too bad.

**26 Jun** – On orders about all of us out here getting the African Star. I shall be too ashamed to wear it.

**27 Jun** – Exceptionally hot today. Went bathing last night and it was grand. Can't regulate my breath yet but will do it before I've finished.

**28 Jun** – Pill. Have been taken off the Haslars and the whole section is on the generators on jetty. That's the Navy's doings. Went swimming again tonight, met sailor from Brunswich there called Dick Codd.

**29 Jun** – Pill. Swimming again tonight, am getting on well should be able to swim before I leave here.

**30 Jun** – FFI. Came off work this morning then 24 hr duty tomorrow. 24 hrs on 24 hrs off. Apart from rifle parades, sick parades and others. Have to be down the jetty by eight o'clock battle order. Have asked to be on section on jetty near boat off which Dick Codd is.

**1 Jul** – Pill. On duty all day on jetty until 12.30. One and a half hours guard after that and stand to again at 5.30. Relieved at 8.00 hrs. Been on board Dick's boat for

dinner and supper, listened to the ships radio on bridge.

**2 Jul** – Pill. Pay day. Met Dick tonight, had a couple of bottles of beer out of N canteen. Bottle of English beer today on ration.

**3 Jul** – On duty on jetty again. Let of this morning. On board Dick's boat most of the day. Swam in 25 feet of water with life jacket on though. Still don't know whether I'll be better to learn to swim though I'm not scared of the water like I used to be. I take the plunge OK and can do a few strokes on my own.

**5 Jul** – On duty on jetty. Aboard Dick's boat for dinner and supper. Swimming again in the corner of the dock. Destroyer pulled in tonight with load of survivors off sunken boat in Med.

**6 Jul** – 2 Pills. Gas chamber. Saw concert by RA regiment, very good. Had a bottle of beer from Naval canteen.

**7 Jul** – On duty again. Most of time on Dick's ship, rest of time in the water or sewing. Worse part is the night as we don't get much sleep from the stand to and the guard. We stand to on a night from 20.00 hrs until 22.30 hrs. In the morning from 05.00 hrs and 06.15 hrs and we do a 2 hr guard in between.

**8 Jul** – Visit to the pictures to see Wild Geese Calling and Desert Victory, again.

**9 Jul** – Pill. On duty again. Green envelopes started again. Supper of bacon pies and chips on Dick's boat.

**10 Jul** – Visited French cemetery today it was a lovely sight. Sicily invaded by Allied troops this morning. Rumours flying round again that we are going home. I only wish it was true.

**12 Jul** – Go to the rest camp today it's on the coast and all we have to do is go for our meals. Swim when the red flag is not flying

**13 Jul** – Food is good here. Only want Dil to make things complete. Had Irish toddy.

**14 Jul** – Dil may have to have operation I only hope not, if so I hope she keeps her chin up and doesn't worry too much.

**16 Jul** – Very long day lolling about and swimming.

**17 Jul** – Same as yesterday. One of our lads in hospital with malaria.

**18 Jul** – Saw Dick for last time today as he moves tomorrow. Our last night of leave.

**19 Jul** – Pill. Airmail from Dil everything OK for now. Finish rest camp today, just in time as we move tomorrow.

**20 Jul** – Started on moving today. Coast route over mountains very tricky, sometimes the road overlooks a drop of hundreds of feet. Puncture in trailer tyre, repaired but blew again after a few miles. Slept on roadside and then lost the convoy now as we had to change the tyre twice again. Passed through Setif and Chadaeuval.

**21 Jul** – Tyre OK and making good speed now. Two hours dusk driving, pulled into field for night. 3 miles from Constantine. Only 56 miles to go now. Saw my first camels yesterday. Scenery very lovely but very barren just miles and miles of clear plains with nothing in sight. When we stop no matter where, Arabs appear from nowhere, always on the scrounge.

**22 Jul** – On the road this morning with only our Haslar and despatch rider, good speed, passed through Constantine. Lt Charles bought four more trucks up before stating our destination, Phillipville. All vehicles parked on small square. Sleep anywhere tonight. Was ready for my tea, hadn't had any since early morning. Ready for bed too.

**'Told to expect a lot of air-raids now'**

**23 Jul** – Cleaning trucks all day getting ready for action. Went to billets in big school at four o'clock. All parades for the rest of the time, no rest. On smoke on pots tonight. A long walk to circuit up hillside.

**24 Jul** – Pill. Rooms very crowded, all equipment to be scrubbed. On smoke tonight with rifle as usual and gas mask, tin hat and small pack.

**25 Jul** – Black Congolese troops have arrived in the town today while I was there. Arabs shot and beaten to death with sticks by the dozen. There were some rotten sights. British troops called out at the end, Martial law.

**26 Jul** – About 50 Arabs killed and over 200 injured yesterday in the fight with the black Congolese troops. Mussolini resigned today. It can't last much longer, I hope.

**27 Jul** – Italy continues to fight. How long for I don't know. 10 of our chaps down with malaria. Very bad here.

**28 Jul** – Went to the Garrison cinema to see "Angels over Broadway" years old. Cinema not a patch on the one at Bougie in fact it's a proper bug hole. The Arabs have special time to go in the other one but that doesn't look too clean either.

**29 Jul** – Pill. Another man down with malaria.

**30 Jul** – Pill. Brownd off. My first night off tonight since we have been here and I get detailed for guard on the Haslar park. We man pots and Haslars here.

**31 Jul** – Came off guard nine o'clock this morning. Up to now I'm off tonight but would not be surprised if detailed.

**1 Aug** – Night off last night had a good sleep. Greasing the trucks and trailers this morning. On duty tonight again. Rumoured that we move again next week.

**2 Aug** – Pill. Walked up the big mountain this afternoon. Talk about sweat. On nights for certain for another week.

**3 Aug** – Pill. Kit inspection today, complete for a change.

**4 Aug** – Last night on smoke, tonight, I think, we are moving on Friday. Inspection by the Group Commander today.

**5 Aug** – 2 Pills. Last night was the last night of smoke we do in Phillipville.

**6 Aug** – Convoy started this morning I am not in it this time but go with the main party on Sunday unless am detailed for advance party tomorrow.

**7 Aug** – Everything ready to move. On guard in evening from 3.30 hrs until 5.00 hrs. Had to stay nurse maid to 2 fools tonight, had to separate them from fighting.

**8 Aug** – On our way to Algiers. Breakfast when we came of guard at 7.00 hrs, left Phillipville 7.15 hrs. 27 men in our cattle truck. Passed through Constantine in the evening. What a lark to sleep, only done 95 miles.

**9 Aug** – On the move all night. Reached Lift this morning at 8.00 hrs, breakfast there. Still 120 miles from Algiers.

**10 Aug** – One bloke drowned last night, what a mess. Woke up to find us in Masson Burree just outside Algiers. Good going driving the night. Arrived Algiers 1 o'clock billet in Bucyone ell Biar suburbs of Algiers.

**11 Aug** – Working on Haslars all day. Night off tonight. Went into Algiers Forces Canteen. This is a good place, I saw picture in Yaska camp tonight, open air at 11 o'clock. The Major got a lot of men out of hospital before their time as he doesn't want to leave any behind. 3 lads went in on the last day in Phillipville. Hope for their sakes they rejoin the company. Rumour very strong that we are going home.

**12 Aug** – Pill. Driving all morning for petrol. On nights training on Haslar.

Detailed to give operating demonstration to a General with Jim this afternoon.

Cancelled at last minute after wasting my afternoon off cleaning it. Drove 12 miles tonight to get to point, one of the convoy got lost and what a trip involved we had to find it.

**13 Aug** – Pill. 809 left here yesterday. We got their billet and beds already made. On nights for a week

**14 Aug** – When on guard the last night at Phillipville 500 fags were stolen, today the guard were refused their issue because of that. I've put in for an interview with the Major about it. They are not going to victimise me for doing my duty. I'm no Rooky.

**15 Aug** – Broke wheel on small cart last night, horse drawn. It was the drivers fault as he ran into my trailer. Had to make out my first accident report and make a statement.

**16 Aug** – Nothing done about our fags, had to let it drop as may get myself in trouble on my own.

**17 Aug** – Pill. Had a rabbit supper from the French people I know, it was lovely and just like being at home. Sicily fell today.

**18 Aug** – For 1 Franc we can get from Elbiar right down into Algiers. A good long ride. Plenty of life and a fair canteen. More Yanks than British here. Each night we take haslars out a journey of 10 miles.

**19 Aug** – Pill. Sent parcel off to Dil with bug powder, rouge and hairnets. Got duty free label. Night off. Went to Algiers to see Yankee Doodle Dandy, good shows.

**20 Aug** – Pill. On pots on the promenade tonight.

**21 Aug** – On duty on the promenade tonight. Escorted drunk Yankee screaming to MN Club as he was scared of being knifed by some Arab. Plenty of bites on my wrists.

**22 Aug** – Watch ENSA show in the billets, damned good. Barry Foreham and his band of Radio Paris fame. Best ever open air show in Yankee camp.

**23 Aug** – Pill. Went round to look for some lemons but was unlucky. On pots on the jetty tonight.

**24 Aug** – Pill. On pots on F Sector tonight. Last week on haslar tomorrow night. Didn't go out today.

**25 Aug** – Started nights on haslars tonight. Had supper from the French people we know. It is a nightly occurrence now as she always has it ready for us. We do a two hour guard again now. The beat stretches about 6 or 7 hundred yards.

**26 Aug** – King George the 5th in dock. Pill.

**27 Aug** – Bad raid early this morning for 2 and a half hours. Not many bombs but what a barrage. It was hell let loose for a time. Naval officer said that the smoke men Pioneers had saved the fleet. Marvellous smoke screen. Spent most of time under haslar away from shrapnel. Concert in the camp today. Birthday too.

**28 Aug** – The concert was pretty good but typically English. No life to it. Quiet night tonight which surprised me after last night.

**29 Aug** – Got some lemons last night 57 Francs. Send them tomorrow.

**30 Aug** – Pill. A message on our orders congratulating us on our smoke screen on Friday night, sent by a Brig General. Sent lemons today.

**31 Aug** – Pill. On duty tonight. 24 planes took part in raid, should be off duty now for 4 nights.

**1 Sep** – Haslars finished for week.

**2 Sep** – Pill. Had a walk round town

today. Went to pictures in the NAAFI tonight, saw "Pittsburgh".

**3 Sep** – Pill. Attended 4th War Anniversary service in billet. Whist drive tonight, took first prize of 200 Francs. Italy invaded by 8th Army.

**4 Sep** – On duty tonight on K sector. Lost that two hundred Francs at cards, money doesn't stay with me for long.

**5 Sep** – Pill. Nothing to say, 8th Army doing well in Italy.

**6 Sep** – Pill. Saw picture show in Yankee camp, quite good.

**7 Sep** – On duty in F sector tonight.

**8 Sep** – Pill. Took over billet orderly for a week no night duty at all. Capitulation of Italy announced, it was

signed on the 3rd but kept back until now. Occupying German troops still fighting.

**9 Sep** – Pill. Saw ENSA picture show in camp tonight. Good picture but spoilt by the reels being too short.

**11 Sep** – Saw another picture today.

**12 Sep** – Very hot today with Sirocco wind from the desert. 101 degrees. Hottest day of year, talk about heat.

**13 Sep** – Pill. Received airmail from Dil, she has had a letter after 3 weeks from me. I don't know what's wrong with the mail back to her.

**14 Sep** – Pill. Have been billet orderly this week, finish tomorrow. Have seen a picture every night up to now. No show tonight, so it spoils a good record.

**15 Sep** – Start our week on haslars tonight. Arabs are fasting for the month of Ramadan. From 2nd of Sep until 2nd of October they are not allowed to eat drink, smoke or associate with their women, fast starts in the morning till 2000 hrs.

**16 Sep** – Pill. Arab fast finishes by the bang of a cannon and then they dash around to the cafes to have a good feed.

**17 Sep** – Pill. We still get a supper from the French people, they are very good. One chap surprised us tonight by giving us a drink of Cognac, that was good.

**20 Sep** – Pill. Inoculation for JEV again. FFI.

**21 Sep** – Pill. The suppers on the circuit has been stopped now as we can't leave our machines, worst luck.

**22 Sep** – Our last night on smoke tonight. On duty on car park as picquet.

**23 Sep** – Pill. One man of 1 Det sick today so I have to take his place on haslars. Saw Wee Georgie Ward on concert in the camp today. It was a very good show.

**24 Sep** – Night off. REs held their own concert in our camp, enjoyed it and it was raining hard so it saved me getting wet.

**25 Sep** – On duty on jetty. Saw picture on board the Maidstone, submarine parent ship berthed alongside jetty.

**26 Sep** – On duty tonight on haslars.

**27 Sep** – Pill. War news pretty good, Russians captured Kiev.

**30 Sep** – Complete day off today for us and 1 Section. On duty on jetty tonight, rained again, very cold.

**1 Oct** – Our Cig ration cut down by 14 this week on account of so many troops being abroad.

**2 Oct** – Show on in the camp for REs called the Bachelor Girls. It was very good and we have it again for our Company next Saturday.

**3 Oct** – Only on haslar work this morning, the rest of day off.

**4 Oct** – Pill. Saw picture in the camp not very good but passable, "My Sister Eileen".

**5 Oct** – Pill. On the jetty again but weather was fine for a change.

**6 Oct** – Last week of haslars tonight have

**'Very hot today,  
101 degrees,  
hottest day of the  
year.'**

monotony all over again. It doesn't look as if the pills are going to stop, as the malaria season is almost over now.

**8 Oct** – Pill. Smoke cancelled after we had been lit for an hour because of heavy rain. Could not believe it at first. It was a Colonel that got it cancelled.

**12 Oct** – Pill. Last night on haslars tonight.

**13 Oct** – Night off tonight. We have been re-inforced by 50 Maltese chaps, so we should have a few more nights off now. About time too as we are all pretty browned off with it.

**14 Oct** – Pill. Finished work on haslar last night. Off tonight. Saw picture at Yankee camp.

**16 Oct** – On duty on jetty. Saw "Mrs Miniver", very good.

**20 Oct** – Start tonight on haslars for the canal. No guard for me and my mate, so I will start the week well.

We have a night off guard every 5th night we are on.

**23 Oct** – Sent airgraph to Dil as greeting card for our anniversary.

**24 Oct** – No mail. Picture show on today. Something wrong with projector, a washout.

**25 Oct** – Pill. Picture show on today, another washout.

**26 Oct** – Pill. Dil has had an operation on her throat. I hope everything's OK.

**27 Oct** – Went sick this morning with diarrhoea. Got A&C which means excused all duties. Sent £12 home by remittance.

**28 Oct** – Went sick again A&C for another day. Only went four times today, feel a bit better.

**29 Oct** – Pill. Only got AUB this morning (light duties) go again, hardly a day off duty any way.

**30 Oct** – Did a little job in the Officers' Mess this morning and then finished for the day. Diarrhoea worse today, went 7 times during the day and 2 during the night.

**31 Oct** – Another 4 visits this morning before seeing the MO. Admitted into hospital with emparititis. On dysentery diet for first day. 12 pills per day and 2 drinks made up of pills.

**1 Nov** – Had my thumb and fingers pricked for blood tests 4 times altogether. On light diet now, good food and a nice bed. Stomach a lot better.

**2 Nov** – Have 12 pills per day. 1 Sergeant and 2 of our lads admitted again today. Jim is one of them.

**3 Nov** – 18 pills as usual and 2 drinks, lot better today expect to be up tomorrow. I could stick this for a week or two as it's a proper rest. No night work or anything.

**4 Nov** – Only 6 pills today. Up tonight for a while.

**5 Nov** – Sent off box of oranges to Dil. Ward nearly empty now, me and one of the chaps have to do all the work. Best we do ourselves a bit of good out of it.

**6 Nov** – On discharge parade today, go back to the Company tomorrow.

**7 Nov** – Discharged from hospital today on Haslars tonight.

**8 Nov** – Pill. Sent off Xmas greetings to family and friends.

**10 Nov** – We are leaving these billets to go under canvas soon. Saw the camp today – what a mess.

**11 Nov** – Dil has received the lemons.

**12 Nov** – Pill. Our last pill today. They are not giving rations out until Monday as we are moving under canvas. What a time of the year to do that. Trust the Army.

**13 Nov** – Letter from Albert, still in Africa (E). In the wilds so I'm better off than him.

**15 Nov** – Moved under canvas yesterday. It was fine yesterday and we got in OK but during the night it poured down with rain and continued all this morning, everything wet through.

**16 Nov** – Ground was almost dry last night when it started to rain again and we had a job keeping our things dry. I've had to rig my groundsheet over my bed to keep it dry. It rained all night again but stopped when we went on parade.

**17 Nov** – Start our week of haslars tonight and for once I'm not sorry. We finished with pills last Friday. We left our last camp to let the RAF have it. Rumour very strong that the Company is being split up and most of us drivers are going to Italy on Yankee SO machines. Hope I go as I may see Jim and Ernie.

**18 Nov** – What an anniversary. Rained all day and on duty just the same at 5 o'clock. Received

anniversary card from Dil, it arrived right on the date.

**19 Nov** – Nothing much to report. Rain stopped for a time at dinner time but it was so cold we had to wear our overcoats. Rain started again in the afternoon and was on all night.

**26 Nov** – Received parcel today from Dil with pipe and writing material. Very good pipe!

**30 Nov** – French taking over all our haslars tomorrow. I drove one out tonight for the last time with two Frenchmen aboard to show them the point.

**1 Dec** – Have finished with haslars for good now. French have complete control of all of ours.

**2 Dec** – Working all day on cement mixing for building a Nissen hut. Slept all night after a bit of hard work for a change.

**3 Dec** – Received airmail from Dil she knows I've been in hospital but not what was wrong. I hope she doesn't get too worried.

**4 Dec** – Having easy time lately. Did practically nothing this morning. Afternoon off. Strong talk of some of us going to Italy.

**5 Dec** – Working on Nissen hut this morning off in the afternoon. Rumours are pretty strong that the Company will get split up. Don't know what's going to happen to us. Wish I did.

**6 Dec** – Working on Nissen hut this afternoon.

**7 Dec** – Day off today. Went to the Empire in Algiers.

**8 Dec** – Nothing to report. Passed time away playing cards. It's a long way into town from here. We have to walk or hitch hike to the bus terminus which is about 7 kms and then its nearly 7 kms into town. Bus fares have gone up here as we pay 2 and a half instead of the 1 for it as it used to be.

**9 Dec** – On shooting range today. I had highest score in the section only 15 out of 20 though. Our range only 30 yards.

**10 Dec** – Still raining. Didn't do a parade today because it was coming down without a stop.

**11 Dec** – Rain still coming down in torrents. Off tonight went to see Alice Faye in "Hello Friar". Just got back in time as it poured down just after I got back.

**12 Dec** – Break in the rain just for a while but more to follow. Just 4 yrs today since I joined the Army.

**13 Dec** – Inoculated today with TAB and TJ, 24 hrs off.

**14 Dec** – Day off today and tomorrow with the section 24 hrs off for the inoculation, didn't finish until dinner time.

**15 Dec** – Saw Carol Livis today in YMCA giving auditions for services to broadcast home for Xmas day. Quite a good show. Also saw picture called the "Hard Way". Day off with the section. Just 3 years today since I was transferred from the RAs to Slough.

**16 Dec** – Doing well for mail this week, Dil still doing badly though as she has only received a parcel of bad oranges.

**17 Dec** – Got Africa Star ribbon today. Read of Flight Sgt Jim Baley given the VC he landed an aircraft at Bone where half of our Coy was.

**18 Dec** – Address changed to (P) Smoke Coy yesterday. 820 is finished now. About 80 of the lads have gone away. Out of 2 Coys we are forming 3.

**19 Dec** – Put into new sections today. I'm in C Heavy Platoon. A heavy platoon means that I'm on the new SO machine when they arrive.

**21 Dec** – Won first prize at whist again tonight, 160 frs. Weather looks like breaking.

**22 Dec** – Weather did break and it rained all night and all day today. Everything is muck now and what a mess. No tents will stand up to this rain and with us being on the top of a mountain overlooking the sea there is nothing to stop the wind and does it blow. It's a wonder the tents don't go with it.

**23 Dec** – Raining again this afternoon. Billett orderly for the day but weather too bad to go out.

**24 Dec** – Went to see "She's In The Army", very good.

**25 Dec** – Didn't get a drink last night so three of us decided to celebrate Xmas today. Went out before dinner. Don't remember coming back. Was flat out. Slept all day and missed my dinner.

**26 Dec** – Not feeling so good after yesterday. Had to laugh at what we were told of our antics yesterday. Airmail and photos from Dil her photo is great and makes me feel proud. Homesick too.

**27 Dec** – Have got over Xmas now. Its as far away as ever again.

**28 Dec** – Wrote airmail to Dil, nothing else to say only that she isn't getting half or a quarter of the letters I write to her.

**29 Dec** – Went to the Empire tonight to see Bab Taylor in Bataan. Good but a bit farfetched.

**30 Dec** – Nothing to report. Usual routine. Marching up and down all day.

**31 Dec** – Last day of year. Never expected to see it in N Africa. Tomorrow completes exactly eleven months out here. In that time we haven't done very much in our own eyes but I suppose we have been of some use in the eyes of the ones who count. The times we smoked during an actual raid were very small but we were on the job and we put a lot of time on duty. This last four weeks can be annotated as a rest from that or a rest for future things of which we know nothing yet. Maybe we will see Italy now. Our time left in this country is limited in my idea. Next move will be either to Italy or back home. Italy is the most probable but I live in hope that its home. I close this diary hoping that in the very near future I am back where I belong. At the side of my wife God bless her.

**2 Jan 44** – On convoy job for the Ordnance Corps. Didn't get finished until 8 o'clock tonight. What a job. On new Dodges and mine had to have a tow each time I wanted to start up.

**4 Jan** – On the Ordnance job again today, finished at 6 o'clock though.

**5 Jan** – 7 new Essos arrived, bit complicated but will be easy enough to learn.

## 'My wedding anniversary, it rained all day and I am on guard duty'

## Diary Two

**5 Jan 1944** – I am writing this diary more or less just as a memo pad for the dates of mail I send or receive, and of little events I think worthy of jotting down. In the period between the commencing of this one and the end of my last year's one events have been of little importance. We have passed our initial tests on our new machines the Esso and have had a really easy time of it. The few days, before I received the diary (12th Feb) have been pretty lively as our move is imminent. All the machines have been made ready for a sea voyage which will come off soon. Where or actually when we don't know. My guess is Italy but of course only the future will tell. If I'm correct I hope I see my brothers. In myself I don't care where I go but for Dil's sake the news I get from the letters say that I don't mean that. I just want to go home, God knows I do but Dil worries so God bless her.

I have a bit of responsibility now as I'm in charge of an Esso and have signed for all the tools and such like. The crew consists of 2 operators and 1 driver. How the duties will work out only time will tell when we get to our destination.

**8 Feb** – I have received up to now 200 fags from Pap, 200 from the Daily Mail and 200 from Dil which leave two to arrive yet.

**11 Feb** – Went to see "Come Live With Me" with J Stuart at the Vox.

**12 Feb** – Received this diary today in letter dated 12th Jan

**13 Feb** – Nothing happened to make a note of. Billet orderly today.

**14 Feb** – Bit of a snowstorm tonight, not enough to settle though. Very cold. Put extra tent on top of ours today just in time.

**15 Feb** – Plenty of rain everything mud around here. 200 fags from Dil.

**16 Feb** – Not much rain today.

**17 Feb** – 2 shows today. Went to see W Morris in "Jill Reid Comes Back" and the Empire to see "Esperango" with Joel Moren. Good shows. Back before 11.30.

**18 Feb** – Another 2 shows today. Empire to "Background to Danger" with G Raft. Bodisee to see Erol Flynn in "Edge of Darkness". Rained hard was lucky to get back without getting soaked.

**19 Feb** – Rum ration tonight which is only issued to men under canvas.

**20 Feb** – Rain still falling fast. This morning the ground was covered with snow.

**21 Feb** – Who called this sunny Africa. It has done nothing but hail and rain latterly, Rum ration tonight.

**22 Feb** – On guard tonight in the camp with Henry.

**23 Feb** – Received parcel of 200 fags from Dil and papers. That makes only the 500 packet missing now so that should turn up.

**24 Feb** – Letter from Erenie who says that Tom has come home. Good luck to him.

**25 Feb** – Met a chap from our street called Armstrong in the canteen just before we move tomorrow.

**26 Feb** – Moved to transit camp about 14 miles from Algiers. It's miles from anywhere, the sooner we leave here the better. Bed at 7 o'clock as we have no lights yet.

**27 Feb** – Have made lights out of cigarette tins and paraffin. Hole in the top with a piece of string as a wick.

**28 Feb** – 300 troops arrived in camp today straight from Angleterre. We had a bad storm last night and we had a whirlwind or something just as bad.

**29 Feb** – 14 of the marquees were blown down and it's a wonder ours stood up to

that wind. It was a bad storm with plenty of thunder and lightning. Some of our lads whose tents were blown down were wet through as it was pouring down with rain.

**1 Mar** – We had to work all day putting up tents for the new lads.

**2 Mar** – Weather has got a bit better now and am I glad. I don't want another night like the other one.

**3 Mar** – Received airmail from Dil they are getting a lot of raids at Slough now.

**4 Mar** – 9 men went on the boat yesterday as our advance party. We are definitely going to Italy now. About Monday I think.

**5 Mar** – Wrote airmail today with our change of address, now 847 (Smoke) Coy

**6 Mar** – Some Reserves came here last night and they went on the boat today, the lucky stiffs. Confined to camp tomorrow so we must be going very soon.

**9 Mar** – Raid on last night on convoy in Bay. We had a front line view of it. I only hope that we have a good crossing.

**10 Mar** – Changed money into BMA money yesterday. Move tomorrow so some mail to be written.

**11 Mar** – Boarded the Winchester Castle today at 10 o'clock. In luck all day. The American show "This is the Army" is on board.

**12 Mar** – Set sail at 8 o'clock this morning. Sea a bit rough at first. I felt a bit green this morning but got over it. Vesuvius is massive

**13 Mar** – Show tonight by the Yanks. Saw one or two who took part in the picture. Very good. We dock in Naples tomorrow morning. Weather pretty good now. Feel OK.

**14 Mar** – Docked at Naples, ashore by 4 o'clock went up to transit camp about 6 miles out. Raid tonight for nearly 1 hour – what a barrage. Can hear the guns at the front. Naples is in a terrible mess. Italians are nearly as bad as Arabs.

**15 Mar** – Moved out of camp this morning to Laten. Saw the volcano Vesuvius. Travelled all day and night passed through train wreckage most of the way. Everything a shambles near Naples.

**16 Mar** – Arrived in Bari 8 o'clock. Marched to billets 3 miles out. Ernie left here a few days ago now. I just missed him. Good billets. I would like to have seen Ernie though.

**17 Mar** – Good NAAFI in Bari with band as well. All the wagons are here now so will soon get cleaning them.

**18 Mar** – Had a look round Bari tonight. Very nice with two good canteens and two cinemas. Too late to see everything as we worked all day. Shops close early.

**19 Mar** – Worked all day around the camp today.

**20 Mar** – Had a walk round town but too late again for the shops. Hungary entered by Russians.

**21 Mar** – TEV inoculation today. The worst one I've had up to now. Stayed in tonight. Weather not too good.

**22 Mar** – Rained most of the day. Stayed in again.

**23 Mar** – Vesuvius erupted yesterday and is still on. It rained mud here today because of it. Danger to Naples.

**24 Mar** – More muddy, rain again today.

**25 Mar** – Vesuvius is a great danger at present. Expected to go any time. Naples in high danger, three days of prayer.

**26 Mar** – Worked all day yesterday and today getting machine ready for generators which starts next week.

**28 Mar** – Danger from Vesuvius passed

now.

**29 Mar** – Start nights tonight on Essos go out at 5 o'clock. Did my laundry today.

**30 Mar** – Night off tonight. Weather bitter cold last night. Worked until 5.30 tonight.

**1 Apr** – Nothing to report only weather is a lot better.

**2-5 Apr** – Routine the same as usual. Nothing to report. The Vesuvius is still active and is a sight which will be remembered by those who saw it. It is in the papers at home about the blackout of Bari. That was when I said it was raining mud.

**6 Apr** – Very bad storm last night.

**7 Apr** – Air raid tonight, only lasted few minutes didn't light up.

**8 Apr** – Had test smoke tonight. Weather lot better.

**9 Apr** – Another storm tonight, and what a storm too.

**10 Apr** – Air raid tonight, pretty lively.

**12 Apr** – Ernie has got home on 21 days leave, Bill is also at home. Night off tonight not going out though.

**13 Apr** – Weather warm. Get tropical kit next week.

**18 Apr** – Weather very warm. We have an Italian barber attached to the Coy.

**19 Apr** – Pen broke today – the nib.

**21 Apr** – Bought new nib for my pen. 40 lire.

**22 Apr** – Tropical kit today, very shabby. Indian stuff.

**25 Apr** – Raining today. Third on guard tonight.

**26 Apr** – Sent off Dils present yesterday in two registered envelopes. Raining again. 2nd on guard.

**30 Apr** – Received photo of Mary today, nothing else to report. Another night off. Not going out.

**1 May** – Very cold wind today.

**3 May** – Got radio now in the billet and it sounds good too.

**4 May** – Single German plane over this morning. AA had a go at him, nothing dropped.

**7 May** – I have organised a crib tournament today, 16 players. 50 lire entrance fee with 2 prizes of 500 and 300, I was knocked out in 2nd round. One of our lads is missing from last night, no trace of him yet.

**8 May** – Night off tonight. I didn't go out. Still no news of that chap Jones who is missing. Weather is still hot.

**9 May** – Jones has been located in NZ Hospital. He was unconscious for over two days, it is said that he was attacked by Italians when he was on his own on Saturday night.

**11 May** – Start using mosquito cream again. Time to put up nets in the billets.

**13 May** – Got new type of mosquito net today for bottom beds of double deckers.

**14 May** – Start to wear KD from today.

**15 May** – Went to the house of one of the youngsters off our front. Am having my KD pressed and pants shortened.

**16 May** – 4 lorry headlights stolen last night. Everything has been tightened up for us. Strict guards.

**18 May** – Went to see a ENSN play at the Reines theatre tonight called Laburnam Grove, very good.

**19 May** – Drop of rain today. Cassino fell yesterday.

**20 May** – Have arranged another crib tournament, prize 800 lire this time. Allies are advancing well in Italy.

**22 May** – Airmail from Dil she has to go into hospital. Explosion this morning shook the billets. Truck load of ammo went up and driver (English) and four Italians are missing. Similar explosion tonight at

**“Vesuvius is a great danger at present, expected to go any time”**

eleven. Hope that it isn't another one for the drivers sake.

**23 May** – Went to Nickolas house with Harry. Listened to paino and quite a pleasant evening. His father is an interneer in Kenya.

**26 May** – Inspection of trucks and Essos today. All OK.

**28 May** – Night off with Harry went to Garrison Theatre to see Services Cocktail Broadcast.

**30 May** – Air-raid at 0030 hrs for half an hour. Made smoke and a good barrage sent up for 6 planes.

Big lorry turned over on its side and turned right round just alongside our truck this morning. I was asleep and it was such a crash I thought it was a bomb. Good job it didn't hit ours or we would have known about it.

**1 Jun** – One of our Essos conked out in the raid so it means that four of us have only one machine. We will get one night off and one on. Knocked my middle finger in the truck last night, pretty sore.

**2 Jun** – Went to see Leiette Young and Allan Ladd in Chine Hit – good.

**3 Jun** – Off again tonight. Awkward to write as I have my finger bandaged as it is festering

**4 Jun** – Rome fell last tonight. English troops access the city.

**5 Jun** – Allied far past Rome . Jerry in retreat

**6 Jun** – 2nd front started today, going according to plan at the start. 582 Coy RASC move out of this camp go further up the line on supplies.

**7 Jun** – Allies have good foothold in France from Le Harve to Cherbourg. Still going according to plan. Must be a massive affair.

**9 Jun** – News still good. Allies landing still progressing satisfactory and also advancing here in Italy.

**10 Jun** – Raid tonight or I should say morning from 0330 until 0400 hrs. Nothing but flares dropped though and we didn't light up.

**11 Jun** – Went down to the beach yesterday. Can now say that I've swam in the Adriatic, won't go very often, nothing like Boujie in Africa.

**13 Jun** – Went down to the beach but the water was pretty rough and too dirty to enjoy it much.

**14 Jun** – News still good as far as the war is concerned. On third guard tonight

**16 Jun** – West to the beach again today but water too dirty for pleasant bathing.

**18 Jun** – Rest camp started taking 3 men out of each section.

**19 Jun** – Went down to beach today the water was good.

**21 Jun** – Went to see "This Happy Band" at the Garrison with Robert Newton, good.

**22 Jun** – Went down to the beach again.  
**23 Jun** – Airmail from Dil they are having a lot of flying bombs over there. Dil goes on holiday for a week so she will be away from it.

**24 Jun** – Night off with Harry. Went to pictures together this afternoon, back early as it was raining.

**26 Jun** – Cherbourg fell late tonight. 15,000 prisoners up to now.

**27 Jun** – Went to see Abbott and Costello in "Kit the Ice" at the Garrison. Very hot today.

**29 Jun** – A youngster ran under one of the trailers (not ours) tonight and I believe he was killed.

**30 Jun** – Very hot today. Went swimming.

Night off so went to see a French stage play at the Garrison Special Services Cinema.

Very good

**1 Jul** – Went swimming again today.

**3 Jul** – Beach again today. Went to see Charles Boyer in Gaslight last night. Didn't think much to it as I don't like him.

**4 Jul** – Lecture on "Britain after the war" this afternoon. Went to Garrison to see "I married a witch" then stopped to watch ENSA show called "Broadway!", very good too, nice and lively.

**6 Jul** – Off again tonight. Went out to the Garrison again to see "Mullins like us", pretty good. Raid early this morning, made smoke from 0230 to 0330 hrs – nothing damaged. 24 aircraft over last night laid mines in the bay.

**7 Jul** – Airmail from Dil, has received the parcel and lemons and money OK. She has also finished her holiday which is not so OK.

**8 Jul** – Letter from Dil with good news, Wally is safe and on his way home again.

**10 Jul** – Night off again went to see "Nine Girls" with Tom Hardy. Murder story but quite amusing.

**11 Jul** – Russians will soon be in Germany now. Flying bombs still going over England, will be pleased when the Allies capture the bases for these things.

**12 Jul** – Went to see Cary Grant in "Mr Lucky" also S African military band. Very good show. Didn't get back into camp until after 12. Rained all last night but fine today.

**14 Jul** – Airmail from Dil things are pretty hard at Slough so she wants to go home. I hope everything is OK and that she doesn't finish up by being bad,

**16 Jul** – Off with Harry for change. Went to Italian cinema but it was spoken in Italian instead of English as we thought it was "100 men and a Girl" with Donna Duston. Back early in camp.

**17 Jul** – Airmail from Dil, she is definitely going home as the doctor has signed her off work for 3 months. I hope everything is OK.

**19 Jul** – Laghan and Arema fell today. Went to see the American army stage show "This is the Army" with Gavin Barker in person, very good show.

**21 Jul** – Received airmail, things not too good at home and I wish I could get back.

**22 Jul** – Rumoured that the Germans in Berlin are revolting. Wish it was true.

**23 Jul** – Hitler has been shot at during the week but the only result was a few Germans being shot.

**24 Jul** – On 2nd guard tonight. Just right as we have a test burn at 2 o'clock in the morning and I'll be on guard then.

**25 Jul** – Unlucky this morning as we had a real raid from 12 until 12.30 and we had just finished getting up in time for us to go on guard so I lost some sleep

after all. Nothing dropped. Beach again today.

**26 Jul** – King is in Italy on tour, it said on wireless that he was eating ordinary army rations, I can believe that too.

**27 Jul** – Went to see D Lamour and Betty Hutton in "And the Angels Sing" at the Garrison, good.

**28 Jul** – The Brigadier is inspecting us tomorrow so we have had to scrub all our equipment and have a dress rehearsal. A lot of baloney.

**29 Jul** – Inspection lasted one and a half hours today. Brigadier very pleased and we weren't with standing in the rain all that time. Got 3 photos taken, sent one to Dil, my mother and her mother.

**30 Jul** – We had some operations on warning but nothing came of it. Which was OK by me of course.

**31 Jul** – Went to see "Thunderbirds" Preston Foster at the Garrison tonight, fairly good but nothing out of the ordinary.

**1 Aug** – Airmails from Dil, Ernie has been to see her. Went down the beach again for a change

**3 Aug** – On last guard. Long stretch of 3 hours as we still only have 3 men on our point.

**4 Aug** – Received airletter from Dil, Laurie has been wounded, I hope not too badly.

**5 Aug** – Went down the beach again today. Laval has been captured. This is where we joined up with the regiment when I was in France.

**8 Aug** – Went to see Jack McKay and Harry Brian in a stage show at the Yankee SS, pretty good.

**9 Aug** – Laval has been taken by the Allies. That is where I was with our advanced party not the main body of our regiment when we went to France in 1940 in the RAs.

**10 Aug** – Chronic pains in the stomach all night and all day today. Had nothing to eat.

**11 Aug** – Inspection yesterday, machine OK. Stomach a bit better today.

**12 Aug** – Went to the SS to see Bermuda Mystery with Ann Rutherford and Preston Foster.

**13 Aug** – Went down the beach this afternoon again. Allies still advancing.

**14 Aug** – I saw Chester Morris in Gamblers Choice at the SS tonight.

**15 Aug** – Down to beach. Allied landing in the south of France this morning.

**16 Aug** – Everything going well in the new invasion.

**17 Aug** – Beach again today. No mail. Dil maybe at home by now.

**18 Aug** – Saw "His Glory" with Bebe Daniels and Bea Lyons in person. Very good.

**19 Aug** – Allies doing very well in France.

**20 Aug** – Went to Bari Stadium to see the boxing tonight. Not so good. Joe Louis next week. Rained last night and had lightning.

**23 Aug** – 9 Poles came to the billets today to learn the Essos. Paris fell this morning to French Forces.

**24 Aug** – Marseilles fell yesterday and Armenia capitulated to the Allies.

**25 Aug** – Still fighting in the streets of Paris but nearly ours again. Went to see Melvyn Dunford in "Our Wife".

**27 Aug** – Went to see Joe Louis today, 40,000 in the Stadium. Very good turn out with two of his troop. 14 fights altogether. Lost my bathing costume on truck going back to the town.

**28 Aug** – On guard from 0055 until 0325 hrs. With only having 3 men on our machine we have to do 2 and a half hours.

**29 Aug** – More scrubbing and red tape as another General is visiting us on Thursday. Went to see Peter Lorre in "The Mask of Dimitrios" at the SS.

**30 Aug** – Battle training.

**31 Aug** – Generals visit cancelled.

**1 Sep** – Airmails from Dil, she will be in hospital now and maybe had the operation. Got Wally's address and am trying to get in touch with him.

**2 Sep** – Hungary and Romania now out of the war. Inspection by Maj Gen Nons OBE MC today. All OK. Raid for a short period tonight about nine o'clock. Lit up for about 20 minutes – nothing dropped.

**3 Sep** – Went down the beach again today. Wrote to Wally yesterday, then enquired in the office if they could find out

**‘King is in Italy on tour, wireless reported that he was eating army rations’**

where he is for me.

**4 Sep** – Went to see A Robertson, F Tuton and G Rogers at the cinema. British troops entered Brussels today.

**5 Sep** – Allies still advancing. British are 30 miles beyond Brussels, 130 miles advance in 4 days. Russia declared war on Bulgaria, Bulgaria asked for peace terms straight away.

**6 Sep** – Went to see Verity Beridge at the Garrison also saw EG Parkinson at the SS in “Mr Neville goes to War”. Yanks have entered German territory.

**7 Sep** – Answer from the OC of the camp Wally was at, he has been evacuated from there on the 18th of August so he should be home now.

**9 Sep** – Saw Jack Dalton in “These Important Years”.

**11 Sep** – Went to see Betty Davis and Claud Rains in “Mr Skeffington” at the SS.

**12 Sep** – Airmail from Dil, she has had the operation. OK but still in a lot of pain. Hope it turns out alright.

**13 Sep** – Allies are now fighting on German soil. Our duty is from 1720 until 0715 hrs. If on 2nd trailers it will be at least 0735, total of 14 hours so don't know what we will do in the winter.

**14 Sep** – Off tonight, just went for a stroll, back in camp early. Received one letter from Dil, they have at last found out what has caused all the pain in her side by X Ray. After all this time they had to find out after they had already made a useless operation. It's little wonder she is feeling bad about it. I am myself.

**17 Sep** – Arrived 8th Army rest camp at eleven o'clock.

**18 Sep** – Done nothing but play cards and darts all day. Had a swim dinner time off the pier and had a near thing when 2 mines exploded one against the steps.

**19 Sep** – Went to the aerodrome 15 AAF this morning. Had a look round a few liberators, fortresses and such like but didn't get a flight.

**20 Sep** – Did nothing all day but play cards and darts. Went to the theatre at night to see an Italian magician and hypnotist. He was very good.

**21 Sep** – Went to Barry with Harry this morning. Saw picture called Mary Straw, had seen it before. Airmail from Mrs Smith in hospital with Dil. Dil has had the 2nd operation and is OK for which I'm very thankful.

**22 Sep** – Went to the airport again with 2 of the lads. We had a trip in a Dakota transport plane for half an hour. Saw Barri, Malfotha and Bonletti from the air, quite enjoyed it. Saw picture tonight “One Hangmans Night”.

**23 Sep** – Went to see football match between British Army v Yugoslav partisans. The Yugoslav team hadn't been beaten for 2 years but they got thrashed today by 7 goals to 2.

**24 Sep** – Night duty is finished so we are ready to move. Don't know where to but we think its N Italy. Maybe Rimini as they captured it yesterday.

**25 Sep** – Everything ready to move. We are just waiting for the order now.

**26 Sep** – Received airgraph from Mary, she says Dil is getting on OK but I won't feel happy until I get a letter from Dil herself.

**27 Sep** – No mail yet from Dil. Hope everything is OK with her. We still don't know where we are moving to or when we are going. I don't mind if we stay here a bit longer as the rest at night is good.

**28 Sep** – Dils first letter since her operation today, Much better now. She has had a pretty serious operation, more serious than I had thought. Hope it doesn't

affect her in later life.

**30 Sep** – Airmail from Dil she is getting on fine now and I feel better myself than I have done for ages. Went to see S African show today.

**1 Oct** – Volunteered for church today for the first time and I think the last. It was a dodge to get down the town but we were rumbled – made to find our own way back to camp.

**2 Oct** – Went to the Garrison to see a S African stage show. Good but nothing to write home about really. We go back into battle dress from today.

**3 Oct** – Airmail from Dil, things are going a bit better for her now and she is getting on quite well. All her stitches apart from 3 inside her have been pulled out. Went to see “Passage to Marseilles” with Humphrey Bogart at the Garrison.

**4 Oct** – On the rifle range today 2 prizes. I had to have another go as 3 of us had the same score for the 2nd prize. I didn't win the 2nd shot but was just unlucky.

**5 Oct** – Rained all day today. Scrubbed equipment for a Brigadiers inspection again tomorrow. Greece was invaded today successfully.

**6 Oct** – Went to see “Shadows of Doubt” at the Garrison, not too bad.

**8 Oct** – I am on a party going to Brindisi in the morning with the Essos, so it will be a change.

**9 Oct** – On convoy to Brindisi with 12 trucks. 30 miles. Ran into a bad storm on the way back, worst I've ever seen. Just like being in the sea. Got back in camp at 2130, food and bed.

**10 Oct** – We move tomorrow by road. Our final destination this trip is Ancona. After that I don't know but I have a feeling that we are not going to have such an easy time in the future.

**11 Oct** – We moved off today on the start of our convoy. I will only be using this diary now for mail dates and such like as I've started my other one.

**12 Oct** – Spent the night last night at Jan Severo. Moved off at 0500 hrs this morning. Arrived at Ventus 5 o'clock.

**13 Oct** – Reached Guiliavara tonight spent night in holding near the sea.

**14 Oct** – Arrived at Fano after coming through Anema. We are now in the 8th Army area.

**15 Oct** – Our billets are brickworks but they have been damaged by bombs. We worked all day today making if comfortable for ourselves. No lights.

**16 Oct** – Bath and change of laundry at the mobile laundry today. Both here and on the convoy we have been pestered with thousands of wasps they get in our food and tea.

**17 Oct** – Potatoes for the 1st time in a week. Bacon for 1st in 4 days. Worked all day building cookhouse and such like.

**19 Oct** – All our Essos are here now from the docks at Ancona.

**20 Oct** – Spent day cleaning Essos.

**21 Oct** – Cleaning Essos again this morning.

**22 Oct** – Went to the town tonight, had a drink and talk with the people. They started asking us for things so will give them a miss for a time.

**23 Oct** – Route march this morning. Large convoy in from Bari unloaded trucks this afternoon of stores.

**24 Oct** – Baths today.

**25 Oct** – Spent morning filling up Essos.

**26 Oct** – Rained all day today. Went to Faro to the pictures to see “The Lady Vanishes”.

**28 Oct** – Set off on convoy this morning. What happens there will be recorded in my other diary as this not the thing for description or a detailed account of anything.

**2 Nov** – Arrived back off convoy tonight at 5 o'clock.

**3 Nov** – Got the morning off for writing.

**4 Nov** – Letter from Jim, he is now in Holland and seems to be having an exciting time of it.

**7 Nov** – Weather still fine but cold. No mail today. Billet orderly.

**9 Nov** – Snow in the mountains this morning. First time for years that it has been here so early in the year.

**12 Nov** – On guard this evening from 4.30 to 7.00 o'clock. D Troop went to Rimini this morning on detachment.

**16 Nov** – Smoke test today. Failure because of the wind being the wrong way.

**17 Nov** – Went to see Dave and Joe O'Gorman comedians with cast. Very good.

**20 Nov** – Detailed for convoy early in the morning. Reveille at 0530 hrs. Going to Falgino again and then on to Rome. Believed we will also go on to Naples but don't know for sure.

**26 Nov** – Arrived back off convoy today at 7 o'clock. Airgraph from Mary, Dil is bad again her mother has had word from the War Office that they are trying to get me leave. I hope and pray that they succeed.

**27 Nov** – Went to see the Major to tell him of what is happening about the posting. He said I have to see him again tomorrow.

**28 Nov** – Saw the Major he is writing to the doctor at the hospital for details of dates and the care so that he can push it from this end.

**29 Nov** – Dance tonight but I didn't go to it. It has just stopped raining after 48 hrs of steady fall.

**7 Dec** – Set off on a job tonight. Don't know what it is exactly but I think we will see some action.

**17 Dec** – The letter I wrote Wally in September was returned to me.

**18 Dec** – Back to the camp tonight, thank goodness.

### DIARY THREE

The date is the 10th of October 1944. I have now been overseas for 21 months. Things up to now have been very easy for us as we have only done the usual job of night work. Raids have been very few and far between, only about six in the time we have been in Bari (6 months). But now it looks as if we will get a bit of so called excitement and that is why I'm starting this small diary. Since 1st Feb 1943 I have served in Bougie, Phillipville and Algiers. From Algiers we came across to Bari on the 16th March we have been here for nearly 7 months and we have had an easy time. But tomorrow we move and what is in store for us we don't know. Up to now we have only been detailed for a road convoy to Anena. It is understood that from there we go to Rimini which at present is only a few miles from the front line. What we are going to do I don't know but it looks as if our easy life is finished. We set off for Anena tomorrow to get there on Saturday the 14th. We have been issued with one bivouac between 2 men and Harry and I are sharing one. As I said what is in store for us I don't know but the next few pages will tell their own story.

**11 Oct** – Reveille at 5.30 hrs. Moved off at 0800 hrs. Lunch at Foggia. Our trailers

**‘I have now been overseas for 21 months.’**

went by boat on the 9th. We stopped at Berlatta to pick up trailers belonging to 848 Coy. Lunch at Foggia.

**12 Oct** - Reveille 6.00 hrs. Move off 8.00 hrs. Passed through San Sewra again. It is the worst hole I've ever seen. Mud and filth and flies everywhere. The windscreens were black with flies. Destination reached at 16.00 hrs. On guard tonight over trucks and tents.

**13 Oct** - On guard last night from 12 until 3 with reveille at 6.00 hrs. Move off 8.00. Route now showing definite signs of war. We stopped for lunch at a camp with 1,000 paras. Damage is terrible especially, not a house left standing. Pescara is a nice place apart from the damage. All along the road are signs of mines in the area. Destination tonight is Geuliavova where we are staying in a brick building. No windows but at least it will be dry. We are right on the beach here. Every few hundred yards we have crossed a Bailey Bridge. The RE's have done a fine job.

**14 Oct** - Move off 8.00 hrs again. We arrived at Anena at 12.20 hrs. It was decided then that we had to go further. We finally ended up in a brickyard just about 3 miles from small village called Pana. Arrived here at 17.00 hrs. Beds down and dinner. The more I see of the country the more relieved I am that the war has never been to England. The people are clean but they have not very much food. In Anena the town is in ruins and hardly any civilians about. Curfew for troops at 10 o'clock. Around our billets now are minefields and we have to go steady.

**15 Oct** - Worked all day making beds and a wall around the billets to keep the draught out a little. What is going to happen to us now we don't know but it looks as if we will be here for a few days yet. Some of our lads have been back to Bari for more stuff we have left behind. At present we are invaded with youngsters asking to do our laundry and what nots. I will at least be comfortable as my bed is made of wood from the damaged part of the building. We are also invaded here and on the convoy by thousands of wasps. They get in the food and tea and are a nuisance. The biscuits we get are very hard. I haven't seen a potato for nearly a week. Just bully, biscuits, peas and tea.

**16 Oct** - Went out for an hour last night. No lights in the area. The people here are very friendly and all speak to you with a smile which is different to those in Bari. Wine is very expensive here and can't be got from the people. On a farm last night a chap told us that they couldn't gather all the grape crops in because Jerry had put mines in the fields and it was too risky to go in them. Bath and change of clothing at the mobile laundry this morning. We are busy all day repairing the bridgehead where it was bashed. A section is busy helping to repair bridges too. The rumour is that we will go on convoy work, but that remains to be seen.

**17 Oct** - Some of the trucks have gone back to Bari for the stores. The rest have gone to Anena for the Essos. It is said that the 8th Army HQ have turned us down as a smoke Coy and that our drivers will be going on convoy work from the docks to the front with new vehicles and bringing the old ones back. That has to be seen though. Harry and I had a walk round the village last night and got into a farmhouse. The people invited us in. One old man and a woman with 3 youngsters and two women and 1 young chap. Husband of one is prisoner in Germany since we British came here. Got invite to come again for a drink so we will go as it's miserable staying

in the camp all night.

**18 Oct** - Bread yesterday for the first time in 4 days. Potatoes first time for a week. The Essos have got to Anena and are coming here today. We have been told that we will be on a driving job soon. Most likely convoys from ports to the forward area. That is definite now as the Sergeant was taking drivers names this morning.

**19 Oct** - All our Essos are now here from the docks at Anena. Don't know when we will use them. Went to the farm again tonight.

**21 Oct** - Spent the last two days just cleaning the Essos. Got our first mail today.

**24 Oct** - The Major told us on parade today that we are now in the 8th Army. He said that we are the only Smoke Coy in the 8th in fact in any army. We have to prepare our Essos ready to go where and whenever the 8th Army HQ want us. But we are also a mobile column and all drivers apart from a certain number left for the Essos will be on convoy work all over Italy. So I should see a bit of the country now as I will most likely be on the convoy job. One thing I noticed while on the convoy and I forgot to enter was the fact that at intervals along the road was red houses, these are transit hostels. In peacetime for motorists. The roads as well as most of the houses round here have been mined and blown up by Jerry.

**26 Oct** - We spent yesterday morning filling up Essos ready for any emergency. Rained all day. No work. Went to the pictures in Faner. It is run by the Desert Airforce. Have been detailed for convoy which will be setting off on Saturday. Don't know where to yet though.

**28 Oct** - Reveille 5.30. Set off for convoy job at 7.20 this morning. About 65 of us in 5 x 3 ton Dodges. We are on our way to 2 vehicle parks outside Rome to pick up vehicles and bring them back to a park near our camp. Quite a good trip today. Travelled 110 miles and put up for the night in an old home on the outskirts of a small town called Falijno. Went to pictures tonight to see Ray Milland film called something about Fear. On our way here we passed through Fanir and Jesi. The route is through the mountain passes and all the traffic makes travelling slow. At times we were looking off the roads into valleys hundreds of feet below. Scenery very lovely.

**29 Oct** - Off again this morning early. Passed through Castelanarr, Castellann, Jerni and the outskirts of Rome, reach 14 VP about 2 o'clock. We got our trucks this afternoon. I have been lucky as I've got a 15cvwt Bedford but if it rains I'll get wet as it is an open air one. Nearly all the others are 3 tonners. Stayed on the VP grounds for the night sleeping in the back of the 3 tonners. About 55 vehicles all told. The Vehicle Park is stationed in what looks like a factory that was not finished.

**30 Oct** - We have 3 hours in Rome this morning. Was taken on a tour in trucks. Saw the Coliseum the King VE monument and had 15 to 20 minutes in St Peters. It is a marvellous place and can't be described properly by such as me. But I will say that I would like to spend 2 days in there alone apart from all the other places of interest. The people are very well dressed and the town itself is lovely. But they are always on the prod and every few yards you have to refrain a guide or somebody selling some sort of trash that is specially made for visitors. Back to camp for 9 o'clock and then we had to set off on our first part of the journey back. First of all came the

petrol point the other side of Rome. When I got there I had to return back to the middle of Rome with 2 petrol tins to 2 wagons who had run dry on the way. We pulled in for the night about 13 miles from Rome as the petrol point had taken up a long time and we haven't to drive by night. I got soaked through to the skin as it poured down but I had a change of clothes so I was OK. Off again this morning. Weather pretty good for which I'm thankful. My truck is a good one. Route back goes through Jemi, Narri Cantelnure to Falijno where we have to hand these wagons in and get some more for the other half of the journey. At Jemi I had to chase some wagons who had taken the wrong route but I soon got back onto the right road again which was route 3. All roads are marked with the No of the route and it's really impossible to get lost but I made good time after that and landed at Faligno at dinner time which was about 80 miles. We are given the rest of the day off and billeted in the same house again. Trucks will be ready for us tomorrow. Unlucky to be billeted orderly for the night as we have to leave someone in to look after the kit. Cards was unlucky for me as I cut the lowest out of ten men.

**1 Nov** - Something wrong as there are no trucks for us today. Have been given the day off and we will get trucks tomorrow. Visit to the pictures again and saw Bert Taylor and Susan Peters in Song of Russia, very good. Also for half an hour the Smithson Sisters were on the stage singing.

**2 Nov** - No wagons for us so we set off back at 8 o'clock in the 5 trucks we came in. Got 25 miles down route 3 and had to come all the way back again as a bridge was down. We got back onto Route 77 which took us miles out of our way and we came through Anema. Our ration wagon got through on the other route so we didn't have any rations with us. Heavy traffic on the roads. At one place about 6 miles from our camp all the fields were flooded and the road was actually submerged. We could not know if we were on the road if it wasn't for the trees lining it. Houses had water about up to the window sill. On the mountain roads we were at one time at the altitude of 2,200 ft and the scenery was lovely apart from the rain. Got back to

camp at 5 o'clock. We are hungry but had to do with makeshift meal as our rations hadn't come in. Today quite a very good trip. Bed early.

**3 Nov** - Extra pay in our books today. Pay day. Got the morning off for writing mail.

Rained hard again this morning but fared up later on.

**7 Nov** - Nothing of import has happened in the last few days. We have just been passing time away cleaning the machines and odd jobs. While I was on convoy one of the Sergeants and three men with the Captain were supposed to go round the front line companies asking them if they need a smoke cover for anything. It was held up and now it's cancelled, I hope forever. I don't fancy going up the front with the Essos as it would be suicide for us. We could be spotted by Jerry easily and he would soon have us polished off. And as I say, I hope we hear nothing more about it. It is said that we have finished with the 8th and that we are now in the Allied Forces HQ. But I don't think that is right because we are still in the 8th Army area. I don't know when we will go on another convoy but I hope it's soon.

**12 Nov** - Nothing of important has happened since my last entry. We have had

**'We are invaded by thousands of wasps'**

snow already on the mountains. It's the first for years to come at this time of the year. Storm during the week and I thought the roof was going to fly off. Hailstones as big as pears falling.

**17 Nov** – Nothing much of importance has happened in the last few days. We have had 12 AA Sergeants and Officers on a smoke course. They are demobbing most of the AA and putting them in other units. Today we had a smoke test and it was a failure. Our old man is looking for medals, as he is still looking for a front line place to smoke. The Captain and 1 Sergeant have gone for a tour of the front line units trying to sell the smoke. That is he is doing the rounds asking anybody if they need a smoke screen. I only hope nobody says yes.

**20 Nov** – Detailed for convoy today. All packed and ready when it was cancelled to give us an early start in the morning. First stop is Falijno again. After that I don't yet know but it is said that we take wagons from there to Rome and afterwards do a trip to Naples. Reveille in the morning is 05.30 hrs and we move off at 07.00 hrs.

**21 Nov** – Set off for Falijno at 07.00 hrs. Wrong route to start off with. We are in 5 trucks again with ordnance stores. MPs told our officer that route 16 was open from today but we went up and had to turn back. Arrived at Falijno at 5.20 hrs via Jesi. Went to the pictures tonight to see Peggy Ryan and Donald O'Connor in "Chip off the old Block", very good laugh. Also a film of the biggest star gazing telescope and sky camera in the world. Slept in that old house again.

**22 Nov** – Left Falijno at 07.00 hrs. Rome via route 76 and 3 through Jerni and Narni. Through the outskirts of Rome onto Route 7. Along the Appian Way. Lovely road. Saw the observatory outside Rome which we saw in the pictures last night. Through Cicterna. Not a house left standing. Some of the ruins are terrible. Whole towns and villages absolutely demolished. Arrived at Capual 20 miles from Naples at 5 o'clock. Billeted in the town. Dinner at eight and not to bad.

**23 Nov** – Car park this morning. Convoy consists of big Macs and 6 gun tractors. I got a guntract – just the job. Left the car park at 1 o'clock. Passed the ruins of a town and had to make a detour through narrow and wrecked streets. Big lorry off the bridge on the main road. Arrived at lunch point 4.30, and arrived at rest point for the night at 7 o'clock. On guard from 12.30 to 1.45 in the morning.

**24 Nov** – Left rest point at nine o'clock. Road pretty good and got along OK. Held up for half an hour on the outskirts of Rome waiting for permission to pass through. In Rome we went onto route 3 and stopped for lunch a few miles out. A big Italian convoy is on the road with us. It is a division going up the line. I have to laugh as all the trucks are decked with flowers and in all the villages and towns the people line the roads waving and clapping them as they pass and they also have flags flying all over the place. We left the lunch point at Sparenici and got tangled up with them and had a job to get past them all. We stopped for the night in a field about 50 miles from our destination in Falijno. On this convoy we have seen the Anzio beachhead and the Oontire Marches as well as a lot of other places that have been the scene of large battles. We should have come back on route 6 which would have brought us through Cassino but the road was closed so it was No 7 to Rome. Each night we have had 2 hours driving in the dark which is no picnic with the lights I had and all the traffic in the road.

**25 Nov** – Set off at 8 o'clock and arrived at the vehicle park in Falijno at 1030. Handed over the wagons and went to the old house where we were spending the night. Went out this afternoon for a walk round the town and went to an ENSA show at 7 o'clock to see an ENSA PIE. Only five artists but it was a very good show. Tomorrow we are taking jeeps and guntractors up near Faner and then back to camp which shouldn't be too late.

**26 Nov** – I got a jeep this morning and had one of the lads with me so he was company for me. They are fine little busses and have a good turn of speed. Along the road we had a lot of fun in and out of traffic and overtaking each other, but the traffic got a bit too thick for comfort later in the day. We had dinner about halfway on the journey but after that we had a lot of hold ups and it was 7 o'clock before we got to the park and handed over. When we set off back to the camp and arrived there at 8 o'clock.

**18 Dec** – I have to date this back a few days now as I haven't been able to write in this for 12 days. To commence I asked to be taken off a convey party that left here on 5th as I didn't want to be away from camp if my posting came through. On the morning of the 7th we received orders to fill up 6 Essos and trucks and prepare to go up the line. We finished work at nine o'clock and after packing our Kits set off for Farli. Party of 23 men including 1 Officer, 1 Sergeant, 1 Cook and 2 Staff Drivers. I am detailed as operator of C2 Esso with 1 man and 1 driver to help.

**8 Dec** – Arrived in Farli at 03.30. Billeted with some RE's. One and a half hours sleep and up again at 5 o'clock. Set off at 5.30 on the road to FAENZA and branched off the road below the town. Road is built by RE's and pretty rough. Occasional notices told us that the Jerry was shelling the road and had it under observation. We ended up on a crossroad and in one place we were only 1,000 yards from the enemy.

We commenced to make smoke straight away to screen the road little knowing how near we were. We were told later that we were in front of all troops in that position. I was in an advanced position and my machine conked out thank goodness as all the rest of the week it was under severe shell fire. We smoked for 3 hours and as we stopped Jerry let us have it and we had our first casualty. One man was hit and we learned that he died within 24 hours from blast in the chest. Returned to Farli at 4 o'clock. The town is still under shell fire. We went after dinner for oil and petrol and our truck went into the ditch and the driver and I had to stop with it all night. But we didn't mind a lot as we won't go up the line tomorrow.

**Dec 9** – A recovery wagon got us out of the ditch and got to Farli at 2 o'clock. One plane came over tonight and dropped 2 bombs and did we run. Shelling pretty heavy tonight.

**10 Dec** – Set off at 5.30 again and arrived at our positions at 8.30. No smoke today thank the Lord. Shelling very heavy and we spent most of the day in a ditch. Jerry has got the range of the road and he is giving us it now. His mortars are deadly accurate. We can see FAENZA from here and he is firing his mortars and SP guns from there. Lecture from a Chemical Warfare officer who tells us that we are doing a good job but we must await orders before smoking again.

**11 Dec** – Same procedure. Shelling getting heavier every day. The cross roads

are now called Hellfire corner and apart from us there are only a few RE's and the Manchesters' Vickers guns in a few lanes around here. By the way I'm waiting for my old Division the 46th. The 46th moves out tonight and the New Zealand Division comes in to take over.

**12 Dec** – Same procedure. 2 of the Essos have burned today but before that I had a hectic time near one of them while it was in a farm yard. I sheltered alongside a bren gun carrier for a long time while the shells were falling. 2 of our chaps have gone to hospital today with burns caused by a petrol can exploding on them. Arrived back at Farli at 4.30 hrs.

**13 Dec** – Day off from the line today. Tried to find the B15 that was bombed the other day but couldn't find it. We are short of rations this week. The lads burned for 9 hours today so I missed a bad day. It was to allow a NZ armoured division of tanks and flame throwers to go up into position for the final attack on Faemza which is to take place any time. Shelling of Farli again tonight but it didn't keep me awake.

**14 Dec** – Today it was HELL. From getting to our points this morning to leaving them we spent all the time down the cellar of a farm with a NZ Vickers gun section. Their Major couldn't allow anybody up on the surface. 4 of his men hit this morning and an Italian man and woman from the farm killed. Jerry had all his mates and SP guns concentrated on our crossroads. He was firing from inside Faenza and had the range, His wailing sisters (4 barrelled mortars) are enough to put fear into anyone. We learned later that we should have smoked this morning but all communications were down. We are thankful for that as it would have been near suicide. Tonight 2 of our men sent to hospital with shell shock so that makes 5 casualties out of 24 men, of which 3 didn't go up the line at all.

**15 Dec** – We are all given the day off to rest after the day we had yesterday. Saw some aerial photos of the screen and it was a success. Received congratulations from the NZ Div Commander who said that our smoke allowed the whole armoured Div through without one casualty. He also said that the attack on Faemza which had started had been a surprise to Jerry. 7 more men from the camp came as reinforcements and 7 went back. Our job is finished for this time though and all we have to wait for now is for things to quieten down and then go to bring the machines out. Visit to the pictures.

**16 Dec** – FAENZA fell today to the NZs. Nothing for us to do again. I saw a good few prisoners while up the line and they do look a mess. Youngsters of 17 mostly and not very clean either. One day when the Queens' were being relieved by NZ Mauri infantry they marched past us on their way back from the line. They had just passed us when a mortar shell landed among them and 8 were casualties. Fancy that after being up the line for 29 days and on their way back. Our spitfires have done a good job of work.

We watched them many a time diving with their bombs and machine guns just in front of us. Then a few of our bombers went over and just as they got overhead Jerry let fly with his ack ack and the sky was thick. I never thought I would see a German ack ack barrage as near as all that.

**17 Dec** – Nothing to do again today. Had a walk around the town.

**18 Dec** – Back to camp today with 4

**'No-one allowed on the surface, 4 men hit this morning...'**

more lads and I'm not sorry to be back either. I wonder what Dil would think if she knew what had happened these last 10 days. But glad I'd got through it and that is all that matters. Arrived back in camp at 3.30 hrs

**28 Dec** – On guard last night for the first time since coming back from Farli. The Xmas has been a quiet one and not much has happened the last 10 days. We were driving wagons for the Ordnance Corps for 3 days but they were only short trips. The trouble was they were all old trucks and on Sat I had two open ones and it snowed badly and I caught it properly. RAB & TET inoculations today. Major told us at a lecture that he didn't think that we would have any more jobs up the line as bad as the last one. We hope not anyway. Xmas day was spent by having dinner at one o'clock which was good. Tea at 5 after which Harry, Bill and I went to a house that we had been invited to. We had a nice little meal there and passed a quiet evening away playing cards with the family.

Boxing Day was quiet too. The Company held a dance but I was only in there for about 10 minutes. 3 of us had a little drink on our own but not much. The rest of the time we have spent just idling about apart from a route march up the hills to a monastery. While up there we could see for miles over the surrounding flat country. Farli was laid out like a map.

**1 Jan 1945** – Last night being New Years Eve the Company held a dance and a sing song. Harry, Bill and I went to town first and then to the sing song and a few drinks. It finished up with us having to put Harry to bed but we had a good time.

**2 Jan** – 30 men from A and B troops off on convoy today. Our troop has to stay behind as duty troop in case of a job like that at Faenza turning up again and also in case Jerry drops any paratroops round here as the big wigs suggest there is a chance of him doing it.

**6 Jan** – On guard again tonight. I am one of six men out of our troop picked for the Bren gun team and we had had a couple of hours each day training on it. It is just in case we get called out while we are duty troops but I don't think I'll ever use it especially in action.

**10 Jan** – Nothing has happened here in the last few days out of the ordinary. The convoy party got back tonight so we will be going on the next one. The weather is still bitter cold and freezing hard.

**14 Nov** – On convoy tomorrow.

**15 Jan** – Set off at 8.30 this morning on our way to Fregzie. 15 of us in our truck. Arrived at Pedars for lunch at 12.30. Got to Pescara at 4.30. Went to a cinema and saw Micky Rooney in Young Edison. Billeted for the night in big stone building with no windows.

**16 Jan** – Off again 8.00 hrs. Lunch on the road side and arrived at Foggin in pouring rain at 6.00 hrs. In transit camp for the night, still no windows and everything is thick with mud. We are supposed to take vehicles back from here but tomorrow we have to go to Bari and bring some here. Still raining hard.

**17 Jan** – Set off for Bari at 11.00 hrs. Roads very bad with the rain. In two places it was 2 ft deep in rushing water right across the road we were lucky to get through safely. All the bridges are down and we had to keep taking by-passes. Landed up at a farm for the night still about 60 miles from Bari and the journey

altogether is only 90 odd miles.

**18 Jan** – Set off again and got to Bari at 11.00 hrs. Had to go through rushing water again on the way. Billeted in the transit camp. Rest for the afternoon.

**19 Jan** – Went to the car park 18 miles from Bari and picked up trucks. I was lucky and got a jeep. Although I thought I was going to get a soaking at one point when we had to go through water again. A big Yank truck coming the other way made the water come right over my radiator and windscreen and I nearly got washed over the edge of the road. Arrived at the car park and went another 2 miles to a place called Lucia where we stayed for the night in a big barnyard.

**20 Jan** – Off to the car park again at 7.30 to pick up our wagons for the last part of the journey. I got a Chevrolet this time with a jeep loaded in the back. It was an old wagon but still a good one. Started off and rested near Jerati for the night in a field. Slept in one of the other wagons which was a

Dodge with a cover on.

**21 Jan** – Off again. Lunch and fill up with petrol outside Ortena and landed up for the night at a small place called Juliarova right on the coast. On guard tonight but lucky enough to pick the first one and I was in bed by 9.30.

**22 Jan** – Away again and landed at the car park at Mondaffer at 12.30. Handed vehicles over and back to our camp at 3 o'clock. It will be good to get into my own bed tonight for a change. I hope there is not another convoy for a good while although the rumour is that there is one very shortly. The weather isn't good enough for that job and I'll be glad when it's summer time once again.

**23 Jan** – Shaven, change of clothes and a haircut and I feel a new man again now. Told that there is another convoy tomorrow but was thankful to hear that it is put off for a couple of days. I must catch up with my mail. A bit snow tonight and heavy frost.

**24 Jan** – Russians advancing very quickly and only just over 100 miles from Berlin now, good old Joe. It can't be long now. Still bitter cold and the roads are treacherous and I hope they get cleared away before we go on convoy again.

**25 Jan** – On convoy to Naples tomorrow. No mail today.

**26 Jan** – Set off at 08.30 this morning in 3 Dodge 3 Tonners. Arrived for lunch at Pedcar on the coast. Make Pescara for the night.

**27 Jan** – Off again. Lunch on the road and stopped for the night at San Sevear. The dirtiest place I've ever been through including all the cashals. Slept in Nissen huts just outside the town.

**28 Jan** – Off through Frogzia off route 16 onto 90 and through the mountains. Onto route 78 and what a route just before getting onto that. The mountain roads were terrible and had fallen away in parts. One town we passed through was on top of a big mountain and they still had deep snow in the streets. Arrived at No 12 VP at Naples 11 o'clock. Sleeping in tents.

**29 Jan** – No trucks ready for us so we had a half day in Naples this afternoon. Had a good walk round but didn't buy anything as prices are sky high. Went into the canteen. Ours is the Royal Palace of Naples where Nelson was rescued and it's lovely. Back to camp in the truck.

**30 Jan** – Still no wagons for us. May have to do a convoy for the 5th Army yet. Afternoon in Naples again.

**31 Jan** – Have got to go to Florence with some armoured scout cars for the 5th Army. Set off this morning at 8.30. Arrived at staging point outside Rome after lunching on the road and refuelling at 9 o'clock. Naples to Rome is Route 78 and after getting in the field and finding our food and what not I got to bed at 11.45 hrs. Slept as best I could in my scout car. We had a job finding our new route in Rome. Rome to Florence is Route 1 and it took a lot of finding in the dark.

**1 Feb** – Just two years abroad today. What a life. Left Rome this morning, lunch on the road again and stopped the night 6 miles outside a town called Hintavachir. On guard tonight from 10 till 12. My bus is a good one and I've had 55 out of her a few times on a straight road. We get to Florence tomorrow all being well. Weather a lot warmer which is good as these scout cars have the engines at the back and boy is it cold for the feet.

**2 Feb** – Set off again and had lunch at Senir or Cecina I forget which of the two it was. Still on Route 73 but at Arregar we got petrol and went onto route 69. Roads very bad, wet and soft mud and winding all over the place over the mountains. At one time my ears were affected by the altitude. Arrived at 11 VP in San Girarani at 6.15. Staying the night here as we hand 12 vehicles over to them tomorrow. Mine isn't one of them. Sleeping again in the truck. Up to now we have clocked 420 miles.

**3 Feb** – Off again and this time only to Patician which is 10 miles from Florence. Half day off to go into Florence. Arrived there at 3.30 hrs. Had a good supper at Roberston House NAAFI Club. Saw a film called Dragon Seed very good. But had to walk about 3 miles in pouring rain and was very browned off of seeing nothing but blackness. Slept in truck again.

**4 Feb** – Off again. From R69 to R67 which takes us to Farbi right over the top of the highest mountain. After all the snow and ice the roads are very bad, broken away in places and at the back they are very muddy. All deep ruts and very skiddy, especially on the corners. Could see right down for 2 or 3 thousand feet. Got to Farbi and then onto R9 to Rivini. From there R16 to Reiccana where I dropped my car with 9 others. After that straight back to camp arriving there at 5.30.

**6 Feb** – Russians only 35 miles from Berlin. Roll on Joe, don't be long now.

**7 Feb** – Held anniversary dance and sing song tonight. I had a good night in the dining hall but didn't get real drunk like last year again.

**8 Feb** – Went to see our football game play their second game in the 8th Army PC knock out competition. Played at Aliarrevelle. Won 4-3 and the 1st game they won 13-1.

**9 Feb** – 30 of the lads on convoy to Florence yesterday.

**11 Feb** – On police from 7 to 9. Taken off because I'm on guard tonight. **15 Feb** – Had an interview with the Major last night. He said that my case was to be reconsidered again as all A&B categories are finished.

**16 Feb** – Another interview today and the Major told me that he is putting my name through for me from this end and that there is still hope that I will get back.

**20 Feb** – On a test today with the Major and the skipper. We have been testing the floating smokescreen pots in the river and comparing the results with those of the Mk III pots.

**22 Feb** – On convoy again tomorrow morning.

**23 Feb** – On our way to Capua. Set off

**'All the bridges are down and we had to keep taking by-passes'**

8.30. Stopped for the night outside Faliguo on road. Went to see a show or at least a comic play in 3 acts called "The Late Christopher Bun". Met a lad who used to live in our street. Lived in old Welburns shop at the top. She was his grandmother. Had a talk of old times.

**24 Feb** – Off again. Reached Rome at 1 o'clock. Stopped in the 14 VP. Got into Rome for the evening at 3.30. Borrowed one of the trucks to go to see Bill in 48th Gen Hospital. Back to the Alexander Club at 6.30 just in time to get a couple of pints of beer. Had supper and back to the billets at 9.

**25 Feb** – Off again on Route 6 this time past Cassino on the way. What a shambles. Not a thing standing. There is a tank knocked out right on the top of Monastery Hill and how it got up there I don't know. There is a story that a Pole got it up and was killed at the top. It seems that no one knows how he got it there. Lost our ration wagon but found it again at Capua when we landed there at 4.30. I'm on guard tonight but an easy one, only from 9 to 11.

**26 Feb** – Drew staff cars and 15 cwt Fodens from 9 VP. I've always fancied a go at a staff car but I'm unlucky as I've drawn a 15cwt. It's a nice little truck though. Left the park at 11.30. Petrol on Route 6 and then onto R7 for 90 miles and stopped for the night in a movement traffic control point.

**17 Feb** – Reveille early 4.45, breakfast 5.30 and on the road at 6.00. Well before the sun came up. Through Rome onto R3 and the petrol point before 8.30. Lunch in a field. Reached Faligno petrol point at 3.30. Washed, shaved, bed made and tea and out into the town by 6 o'clock. Saw the band of the Cheshire Regt in the cinema, very good. Got a shock when we got back to the trucks as we have to be up at 3.30 in the morning and ready to move off at 4.30 because of terrible lot of traffic on the roads. So we must go to bed right now.

**28 Feb** – Up at 3.30 and on the road at 4.30 after having packed up, checked up the truck and had breakfast. Reached Fabriano at 8 o'clock where we had to wait for an hour and a half to let a priority convoy go through. They were all tanks on transports and was I narked to think that us in fast vehicles had to crawl behind them. Had a little lunch there and then after the tanks. I passed the last one in Jesi and was I glad. The roads are crowded with traffic. I was told that the reason we were on the road so early was because there was 2,000 vehicles leaving Faligno today and we had to get out of their way. Anyway we did well and made Peasam VP before the scheduled time of 3 o'clock. Had a lunch there again and after checking in the trucks set off back to the camp. Dinner and so to bed.

**5 Mar** – A little bit of snow fell last night but soon went away this morning. Rain during the day.

**6 Mar** – That chap who is still in hospital with the burns he got up the line with us has been given the MM and the officer the MC. What for I don't know was that chap was only up with us the first 3 days and if one got a medal we all should have done. I always respected a chap with an MC but I have had my eyes opened up a little bit now.

**7 Mar** – All B Troop going away tomorrow for a big smoke test. I don't know if it will lead up to another job in the line or not. Everybody is sweating on us having to go up when they want to cross the Po river.

**10 Mar** – All D Troop is moving today. Whether they are going up the line I don't

know, but it is funny that we haven't heard anything about another convoy yet. That is two troops away now on a so called test. I wonder!

**11 Mar** – It has come. Harry and I with 6 more men to go up with our No 1 and No 2 tomorrow. Don't really know yet. Church this morning, was told about it when we got back and had to work all afternoon getting the machine ready.

**12 Mar** – Relieved last night at 10.30 as I was told that I wasn't on the job as I had been up before on the other job at Fanga. So it's definitely up the line. Harry and the others went at 08.00 hrs..

**14 Mar** – It's come again as the whole Troop is going up tomorrow morning. This morning in bed. At dinner time was kindly told to get cracking on the machines. We are going up to D Troop, who are smoking a valley only 2,000 yards from Jerry. A lot of rush getting everything ready.

**15 Mar** – Set off at 7.30. Had a drink of tea on R9 and went on through Farli and R67. Stopped for the night in Bonyer San Laneagr. On the road we caught the trailer in a bailey bridge and we may have to take it into the workshops for repair.

**16 Mar** – No hurry today as no orders have come through for movement at all. We have to go onto an up route and are only allowed to at certain times of the day. We are now attached to the 10th Italian Div in 13 Corps. Got movement orders at 10.30 and it was then decided to take the trailer to the workshops. We got into there at 12.30 and as luck would have it us two operators L Helton and myself with the truck drivers have to stay with it.

The other lads had to turn back as the route was closed and they go up tomorrow morning instead. We have got at least one days grace anyway. Our new destination is pretty near Bologna at a place called San Daniuti. Slept in the wagon tonight and had our first cooked dinner for two days. Before setting off the Captain told me that my posting had been washed out as the evidence was not sufficient to merit a posting back to the UK.

**17 Mar** – We are getting on with the job of repairing the Esso and the truck but it will take a couple of days at least. We don't mind that at all though as the two days respite from going up the line will be worth it. Saw the other lads pass on their way up this morning. The only trouble with this place is the getting up of a morning. Reveille is 6 o'clock, breakfast half past and parade at 7.15. We work right until 5.30 with a break of 1 hour for dinner.

**18 Mar** – The job is pretty well on its way now, will maybe be finished tomorrow night. Half day off with the workshop lads, had a shower in their place.

**19 Mar** – Not finished yet. The DR came here today to take us up when we are ready. He says they are getting it pretty rough up the line.

**20 Mar** – Job finished tonight at 5.30 around lunch. Won 200 fags and bar of chocolate at a whist drive in the workshops tonight.

**21 Mar** – Set off this morning at 8 o'clock. Rode the last half of the way on the back of the motor-bike as it was not so bumpy as in the back of the truck. Arrived at the place where the lads are dug in at 4 o'clock. 2,000 yards from Jerry. Slept with another of the lads in a dug-out as his mate had gone back to camp for more wagons. The lads are working 13 hours a day from dawn to dusk and it's very hard work too. The dug-outs are on the side of a hill.

**22 Mar** – Day off to dig ourselves a dug-out for night time. Shelton and I together. Worked hard all day and just got a nice dug-out finished as it was getting dark. Food pretty good. On the job in the morning at 5.45, rev at 4.45.

**23 Mar** – We woke up at 3.15 hrs by shells landing in the area. Two threw dirt and mud on our dug-out canvas. Just after the last one fell we heard one of our lads shouting for help and we got up to find that the last shell had fallen right on the top of their dug-out.

It was Starchey and he was wounded all over, his legs and face and hands, and he complained of his back. With him was Jiffy Miles and when we got to him poor devil he was dead. The MO arrived and he

wouldn't let us in to see Jiffy so he must have been bad. We got Starchey on a stretcher and away. He was talking OK but as I had expected we were told later in the morning that he had gone. They also landed 3 more

shells in the dug-out area and riddled a truck and trailer that was standing nearby. No one hurt though thank goodness. Burned our Esso for 1 and a half hours this morning. Am now out in the dug-out on the point hoping they won't call for more smoke from us.

We are in a large valley that goes two ways and we have to keep a ford covered all day as it is used by jeep trains all night taking supplies up to the very forward areas. I can see one of Jerries observation points.

We are going to evacuate our dug-outs. I'll see what the rest of the days brings before finishing this days chapter. They have got us another camp and we arrived at that at 7.30 tonight and dug ourselves into the mountainside nearly at the top. What a climb, finished at 10.00 hrs.

**24 Mar** – Buried Jiffy and Starchey in the Div cemetery Castel el Ain. Off(?) Today. Worked on dug-out and at dinner time went to relieve the others for their dinners. It is a terrible racket during the night in the valley. It feels as if every gun in the British Army is firing.

**25 Mar** – On the 5 point today. Relieved for one and a half hours. Wrote airmail 103 to Dil. Back at camp at 7.50. Gets hotter, 3 of A Troop drivers went back today, lucky chaps.

**26 Mar** – On 11 point again today. Pulled it out and put it alongside 12 at dinner time. When we collected the oil the smoke lifted and left us in full view of Jerry. Was so glad to get out.

**27 Mar** – On duty in camp today. Worked all day and relieved at dinner time as usual.

**28 Mar** – In A point which is our old camp. Spent morning building a rough shelter both from rain or shells. Rained heavy during the night and all day on and off. Shell landed 6 yards away from Les and I this morning. What with that one near us in the camp and this they are coming close enough. Although I don't care if they don't come any nearer. Back to camp as 2100 hrs. Raining tonight.

**29 Mar** – On B point today. Pretty quiet.

**30 Mar** – On again for 3rd day on G point. Bit of excitement when going into dinner. Just as we were nearing the corner for our camp a couple of Jerry shells landed just above us on the hillside to the right. On getting in the camp they told us that 2 more had cleared the hill and gone right over the camp and landed just in the valley. I don't think he can touch the camp really though now. I have got used to the

**'We woke up at 0315 hrs with shells landing in our area'**

shells going over all day and night but I'm no hero and I'm glad Dily's doesn't know where I am. One good thing is that the war is about over. Everybody but us is advancing fast and it can't last for long. As for this sector it is the most forward area in all Italy. It was strange to hear of Kesselring is in command of the Western Front Huns after all his fame out here. Someone said it was Good Friday today but I wouldn't have known.

**31 Mar** – Off today. On relief at dinner time, just as we pulled out of the camp a shell landed near where the truck had been so once again we were lucky, and it didn't harm anyone in the camp at all.

Just round the corner when we got there the shells were raining down and we stopped the truck and ran into the ditch. Only the one fell into the camp but it upset all my ideas of it being safe. Got a couple of bottles of beer today.

**1 Apr** – On F point today. Burned for 3 hours. Up at four as usual. Easter Sunday so they gave us an egg for breakfast. Too much work on my hands to write to Dil as I could have liked to have done and I can't write at night as I have no light at all. Sorry Dil.

I wonder what your thoughts will be when you read this diary, but I think that you'll really be glad I kept it quiet in the long run as it has saved you a lot of worry. If you had known I was in the front line you would have been very worried especially at this time when you are so worried about what the specialist will have to say.

**2 Apr** – On A point today. Jerry threw over a couple of air bursts at dinner time while I was moving but none of our lads hurt. Burned for 3 hours. Clock back an hour this morning which means that we don't get up until 5 o'clock but we won't get back to camp of a night until 9 o'clock which makes 16 hours duty. Not so good.

**3 Apr** – Off? Today in camp. 2 reliefs that took us four hours to let the lads have their dinners. Monty 150 miles in Germany.

**4 Apr** – On B point today. Shelling again. One of the lads gone in dock with shell shock.

**5 Apr** – On G point. Lot of work clearing up the barrels and getting straight. Hardly any smoke from us only 2 hours this morning, but plenty of hard work. The infantry got pushed back in this sector the night before last and I saw the Spitfires go in last night and help them to get the ridge back. We had a front row seat of it all. Dil knows I was at Funga how can I get out of telling her about this. Will she guess by the shortage of my letters.

**6 Apr** – Off today apart from 2 hours relief work. TEV inoculation, it's great to be able to say in bed until 7 o'clock.

**7 Apr** – On F & G point today. Always plenty of work there, what with pots and the 2 Essos.

**8 Apr** – On A point. Burned for 2 hours today. I am not very good at writing a diary so I don't make this very interesting with detailed accounts of everything. During the course of the time we have been here we have seen a good bit of shelling but I think my lucky stars that we are not getting it like Jerry is getting it from our lads. A few shells have landed pretty close and we had two or three lucky escapes but if they come no nearer I'll be OK.

**9 Apr** – All mail by air now and free for us with only 2d stamps for those at home. Had some fun today clearing leaflets our planes dropped over the Jerry lines and

which have drifted over here, I got two. Day off today. Russians are in Vienna. The bombers sent in today to soften Jerry up a bit.

**10 Apr** – Shelling near the camp last night and this morning just as we got out he threw a lot of mortars near the A point and a lot of anti grenade air bursts near us. On F point today, Heavy barrage going over now and it looks as if the push is coming off at last. 8th and 5th Army have advanced on other sectors.

**11 Apr** – On C point today, Burned 10 barrels of fog oil. Dozens of AA anti personal shells over again today. One big shell hit near us and showered the other machine with shrapnel but nobody hurt.

**12 Apr** – Off? Today. On C point for dinner reliefs again, still burning. We have advanced in this sector now and today the bren carriers and guns have been going up for hours. Whether we will finish smoking I don't know but it is assumed that we have to go on the Sarnir river after this. I hope not as we should have a rest after all this time up here, and things on the river will be sure to be hot for us. Anyway we will wait and see. The Americans are only 65 miles from Berlin. Won't be long now.

**13 Apr** – Last night I was got out of bed at 10 o'clock to go for a load of pots ready for this morning and got back to bed at 12. Left at 3.30 this morning in a hurry and we had to go up with the pots and stand by at a point about a mile past where we were before. It seems that Jerry has pulled out of his positions and we have to be on the job just in case. The wood we are in is heavily mined and we have to be careful.

A jeep went up just near us, and later the road was suspect too. Dozens of wounded coming down. Stayed their till about 3 o'clock and then went for oil for the haslars. Got back to camp at 6.30. They have found Jerry again and we have got 3 Essos out at the other side of the valley where he can see the road from a hill. It will only need six men to man them though so we may have a bit more time off.

**14 Apr** – Off this morning. Wait on the Essos after dinner until 8.30. Got back to camp at 9. Lot of heavy shelling round the point as that is the only place he can see. Will be glad when they get him out altogether. The Essos are in a farmyard. The farm has only a couple of walls left standing and everything is booby trapped. Our lads buried a British soldier they found there this morning. Picked up a lot of propaganda leaflets which Jerry had left lying around.

**15 Apr** – Complete day off. Had a bath in the stream at the bottom of the hill. As I have already stated my description of things hasn't been very good. I could tell of a lot of things that I have missed out such as the AP shelling of a nighttime over our camp and all the aircraft I saw go over the sector on our right to drop thousands of small bombs on Jerries lines previous to the push. On our left there is a continuous rumble and it looks as if something is coming off there two.

The stench in the valley is terrible from dead mules and I fear from dead human beings too, but the sights of these are not for the pages of this diary.

**16 Apr** – Up at 4.15 and on the point at 5. On the left hand side of the valley. Finished our shift at 1.30. We are finishing smoke tonight though thank goodness. Italians have just about taken over from the

10th Indian Div. Ration of rum tonight.

**17 Apr** – All Essos are now back in the camp which just leaves a little clearing up of barrels on the points for tomorrow. Will most likely be on our way back on Thursday morning. Have been told the Company have moved to Servia.

**18 Apr** – Worked all day clearing the oil off the points. We have just to wait for the movement order now and back we go. The sooner the better. Airbursts right over the camp last night so they are getting near. The Yanks have lost a ridge on our left and Jerry is having a pasting from our guns in the sector.

**19 Apr** – Slept very badly last night. The guns were terrible and nobody slept very much. Some 25 pounders under us were especially noisy and kept rattling the dug-out. Everything is finished now and we just wait the orders to go back now.

**21 Apr** – Nothing to report about yesterday only that the guns stopped firing at dinner time and it was very quiet except for some in the far distance. D Troop went back yesterday and we set off at 12.30 and arrived at Caria at 5.30. Billeted in private houses for a change.

**22 Apr** – A & B Troops went off yesterday morning on another job with all floating pots so it looks as if they are going on a river. Good luck to them they have my best wishes. Cleaned all equipment today. Our billet is right on the Adriatic beach and it will be grand in the hot weather. Right now there is a sandstorm on. We passed through Imala yesterday which was only four days after it fell, then we heard that Boligna had fallen last night.

**23 Apr** – A & B have gone up to stand by for a screen on the River Po so I hope they don't have a rotten job. Worked all day on the Essos. The Russians have reached the outskirts of Berlin and over here we have advanced well past Bologna.

**24 Apr** – All day on Essos again, just getting us to look a little ship shape now. Made myself a bed tonight with some canvas I brought back and some wood I scrounged.

**25 Apr** – They have reached and crossed the Po so I hope the lads won't be up there for days.

**26 Apr** – Went to Forli this morning 35 miles for a bath and change of clothes. Got back at 12.30 and had lunch and then went to Cuccavar for a visit. About 20 of us went and it was 50 miles from here. Harry and I had a quiet time but a lot of the lads got merry. The village turned out to see us. The SM warned us that we were all still standing by in case we were needed for another job.

**27 Apr** – Saw G Raft in Road to Frica this afternoon and tonight saw the DAF variety show. Some of A Troop lads got back today. 4 of them had been among the first to cross the Po in the first amphibious tank. But they weren't needed to smoke so they had it easy which was a good thing. If Jerry had made a stand they would not have come back at all as it was about a suicide job.

**28 Apr** – On guard tonight. Some of B Troop back they were also lucky. J Lillgan is still away with some of A Troop and we think he is following the advance and trying to get us another job. I hope he doesn't get one anyway. Heavy rain last night and today.

**29 Apr** – Maj back. We will be moving soon as we belong to 5 Corps and we have to move up with them. Mussolini has been caught and shot by the partisans. Genora, Milan and Venice have fallen and fighting is fierce in Turin. The Yanks have reached the Swiss border and it is all over bar the shouting now.

## **‘One big shell hit near us and showered the other machine with shrapnel’**

**30 Apr** – Some of the lads told me that when they had crossed the Po river they were stood about and heard an officer give an order that 6 tanks had to go up to a village as 200 German prisoners on their way back without an escort had stopped at this village and started to rape the women and doing other damage. The tanks soon got them on the move again to the PW cage. I think I would have shot the lot. Hundreds of prisoners made their own way back to our PoW cages as the advance was so fast that our lads didn't have time to bother with them all. Three quarters of Berlin is now captured and it is completely surrounded so it will fall any hour now.

**2 May** – Nothing happened yesterday apart from the fact that it was reported that Hitler had died. I hope its true as it will save a lot of bother arguing what to do with him. All Germans in Italy and S Austria we reported on the wireless tonight to have declared an unconditional surrender last Sunday in Naples. Rumoured today that we are going to Yugoslavia so I hope there was no truth in it.

**5 May** – The Allies are celebrating with flares tonight and the bells are ringing. They say that the war is over in Europe. I don't know if it's true but I certainly hope so and are impatiently waiting for the news.

**6 May** – They were wrong last night as the war is still on but NW Germany with the Netherland have surrendered which brings the total of prisoners up to over 2,000,000 with the Italian campaign. It can't be long now only a matter of days. Went to Farla today for a bath didn't get back until 2.15 from 10 o'clock. What an army. Needed another one when we got back after all the dusty roads.

**7 May** – Checked all Esso tools this afternoon as they are going in the Ordnance with the Esso trailers. Had parade to check up our age group for de-kitting and also got electoral paper to send off to our home towns.

**8 May** – Today is the day we have been waiting for for such a long time. Germany has surrounded unconditionally and the cease fire will take effect from midnight tonight. Missed Churchill and the King speech while out on the roads. Harry went away on a job this morning and they took some of the cars with them. Nearly all the trucks have gone and it is said that they are taking troops up to Venice.

**9 May** – The first day of peace in Europe. Day off for me.

**12 May** – The last three days have been spent easily with just a few fatigues and a dip in the sea in the afternoons. Last night the trucks arrived back and today the advance party left for Venice. We go at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning. On guard tonight.

**13 May** – Set off this morning at 8.30. Stopped for lunch alongside the River Po. Passed through FARRARA, ARWENTA GAP AND PADEVA. Landed up in a field just outside a small place called MESTRE about 5 miles from VENICE. Arrived here about 4.30. All 2 man bivouacs and Harry and I obtained one.

Harry on guard. At nine o'clock I had just settled down to a game of solo whist the orderly sergeant detailed me for a job. I had to get my kit ready to move off in 5 minutes. 6 of our trucks with 6 of 848 Coy who were in another field had to go in convoy right down to Fanga to pick up a group there. I was to be a co driver in the wagon. We set off and stopped for the night in the same place as we had lunch at about 12.30.

The Italians are still celebrating VE Day as there are thousands of vary lights going

up. And down in that district they are very jovial and constantly waving and smiling to the troops.

**14 May** – Set off at 8 o'clock. I drove all the morning and we got to Farli at 12.30. Had dinner in the canteen and went on to Fanga. Picked up a load of stores from the Italian section of the group. We are supposed to go to TRIESTE. Set off at 5.30 with 6 Italians on top of the kit. J Dodds driving. Just about 4 miles out a Dodge in front of us packed up and we went into the back of him and smashed our radiator in. One of the trucks towed us to a workshop and we stay here for a few days. They are sending a wagon back for the kit on ours. No one hurt thank goodness. Slept alongside the truck tonight.

**18 May** – Still at the workshops and the truck hasn't yet come for the kit from us. It is a deadly game as we have done nothing since we got here and the sun is very hot. Went into Farli yesterday and had a bath and got a change of clothes. Truck came at 12.30.

**22 May** – Still at the workshops. The truck that bought the kit of us had to take the message back to the company to get a radiator as otherwise the job couldn't be done. We haven't heard from them since.

**24 May** – Europa day and Dils birthday too.

**31 May** – Set off back to camp yesterday, stopped for night outskirts Rarigo. Passed through Bolagona, Farrara and Padon on the way. Arrived in camp, a school 8 miles from Astre or 8 miles from Venice, at 12 o'clock. Just in time to see them draw my name out of hat for rest camp at Rome tomorrow morning. 8 of us going. Harry also. Rev at 4 o'clock. Truck to Farliu and train to Rome. Signed 2 statements for the accident with the wagon, there is no witness.

**1 Jun** – Left camp 5.00 hrs and arrived at Farli at 1230. Got on train at 14.00 hrs. Journey via Rimini, Riccini, Faro, Jasi and Falejnor.

**2 Jun** – Arrived Rome at 07.00 taken out to 56 rest camp in trucks about 2 miles out of town. They run ferry trucks all day to town.

**6 Jun** – Up to now have had good time. Went to the Vatican city today. Saw the Pope and also bought Mary a present.

**8 Jun** – Our last day. Had a night in the camp last night and had a few glasses of beer. Went into Rome to see King Henry V – terrible! Tonight went back to camp after getting a present for Dil. Had 8 pints of beer in the Red Lion.

**9 Jun** – Left rest camp to catch train at 3 o'clock. When we got there the train wasn't going till tomorrow and they took off to 159 transit camp about 8 miles out of Rome. That spoilt our leave as these camps are rotten.

**10 Jun** – Set off in the train for Farli at 4.30. Had to sleep as best I could while sat up on my kit as the train was so crowded. I didn't get much sleep.

**11 Jun** – Reached Farli at 8.30 this morning. Our truck was waiting and we set off straight away for our camp. We got there at 4.15 in the afternoon.

**15 Jun** – Sent off presents by registered post to Dil for her and Mary.

**22 Jun** – Today is a day I'll remember. 40 of us went down to Venice docks and had to unload and had to take up 2 flights of stairs and stack in a warehouse boxes of MONEY. Altogether there was 4,000 boxes each containing £30,000 with a total of £120,000,000.

We worked like horses and had half of them up by one o'clock. Then we were relieved by Italians. There was Tommy guns all over the place. It was Austrian and Italian cash and I'll never handle so much again. We got thanked by the officer IC who said he had never seen men work so hard which was proved by the fact the 60 Italians had to be relieved at 6 o'clock and had not done half of it.

**23 Jun** – Went to theatre. Got back at 10 o'clock to be told to pack up as we are moving in the morning.

**24 Jun** – Reveille 5.00 hrs. Set off 12.00 hrs and arrived at Trieste at 5 o'clock. Our billets are right on beach.

**25 Jun** – On the trucks working at the DID working from 7 in the morning until 7.30 at night. Moved into billets in a hospital. Have to climb 140 steps to the room. The Yugoslavs have been in here before us.

**26 Jun** – Docks again today until 8.30 tonight. There is a raid of bugs over from the beds the Yugoslavs have left. We had to cleanse everything with 192.63.

**27 Jun** – In camp today. Bugs still bad and we moved into another room today.

**28 Jun** – Worked until 5 o'clock

**29 Jun** – Worked from 7.30 to 5 o'clock

**30 Jun** – Worked until five o'clock again.

**2 Jul** – Off yesterday. Start night work tonight at four o'clock. Had a couple of beers this morning in Italian cafe.

**3 Jul** – Worked till 10 o'clock last night. Tonight worked from 4 till 12.30.

**4 Jul** – B Troop moved today to Udine.

**5 Jul** – Moved to a place in the country two and a half miles from Udine. In bivouacs for 2 men in a field. Joe Carver with me.

**6 Jul** – Had a walk round a little village tonight.

**7 Jul** – Went to Udine to see a play called White Congo.

**8 Jul** – Moved again about 5 miles away further into the country, not too bad but nothing to write home about. Finished work at 8.30.

**9 Jul** – Nothing out of the ordinary today. Set off at 5.30 to pick up 11 Coy PC band at Willach in trucks and bring them back to Rear Army HQ, arrived at Villach at 9.30 slept in trucks.

**10 Jul** – Left Villach at 10 o'clock back at camp at 4 o'clock after dropping the band at HQ.

**11 Jul** – Also learn that 3 men go on blighty leave on Saturday.

**13 Jul** – On guard tonight. The first three blighty men have left on their way home.

**22 Jul** – Day of days. 2 allocations for leave and I was one of the two out of the hat.

**23 Jul** – Documentation at 18 Group.

**24 Jul** – Company moves up tonight. Set off at 12 o'clock and reached our camp (bivouacs again) about 8 miles north of Klayafart at 6.

**25 Jul** – Bath and Ffa. OK. Wrote Dil telling her the good news.

**26 Jul** – Set off for transit camp at Villach. Got tickets and everything for the trip.

**27 Jul** – Left transit camp and went down into Italy and up through the Nremnar Pass to Epidaville camp at Innsbruck. Arrived 6 p.m.

**28 Jul** – Still at Epidaville. A stoppage on the route from Calais because of the rough crossing of the channel.

**29 Jul** – Off again through Augstay to Tunis camp (6A Dov) at Uhre, arrived 5 p.m. ■

**‘Today is the day we have been waiting for – Germany’**

# AGM Minutes

## 63rd Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association

**Acting Chairman: Lt Col JA Starling**  
**Secretary: Mr N Brown**  
**Members Present: 68**

**A**FTER welcoming members present and receiving apologies from Colonels Barnes, Broome and Baker, Messrs W Huntington, C Willetts B Greatrix, R Burnage, J Hay, P Blessing, M Bennett, P Brookes, J Booth, M Shearer, D Gorringe, P Parkinson, P Baggaley, S Herridge, G Howe, J Rooney, R Paul, D Priddle, P Burnett, C Belgum, B Sherry, G Mitchell, G Kirk, C Bunn, R Jones, M Torn, A Jones, K Paterson, A Batchellor, A Barratt, D Luker, B Joyce and G Pringle the Chairman opened the meeting at 1200 hours and requested 1 minutes silence in memory of those members who had sadly died during the last year after their names had been read by the Secretary. They were Ex LCpl H Stanley, Ex Pte DW Henry, Ex Pte EG Neame, Ex Pte FPM Hayward, Ex Pte AW Brown, Ex Maj G Lineham, Ex Pte LA Duffin, Ex Cpl L Clarke, Ex Lt Col G E Piper, Ex Pte FD Griffiths, Ex Pte M Garadi, Ex Pte JE Cunningham, Ex Pte WL Perry, Ex Pte JB Tuff, Ex LCpl C Johnson, Ex Sgt GC Bridger, Ex Lt Col R Wither and WO2 C Wood.

### ITEM 1. MINUTES OF 62nd ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The minutes of the 62nd Annual General Meeting were unanimously agreed. There were no points arising.

### ITEM 2. REPORT ON PIONEER ACTIVITIES

2. Lt Col D Fletcher CO 23 Pnr Regt RLC gave the following report:

During the last 12 months 23 Pnr Regt has been fully employed on supporting Operations, these commitments are enduring every 6 months. This demands high levels of personal training and training with new equipment which is being brought into use. Pre Deployment Training starts between 9 and 12 months prior to deployment and the Regiment has 180 personnel committed to Operations.

Tasks include Force Protection to the Logistic Support Regiments, Advanced Search Teams (4 teams of 7 personnel), Mortuary Affairs at Hospital Bastion (2 personnel every 3 months), this team carry out mortuary affairs for all coalition forces, apart from USA, and include Afghan civilians and insurgents.

The Regiment has had to pay a heavy price in the last year with the loss of WO2 Charles Wood and Pte Stringer who was seriously injured and required triple amputations.

The Regiment has had many visitors during the past year but the main one being the visit of the Princess Royal, Colonel in Chief RLC, who visited in November and awarded both Campaign Medals and LS&GC Medals to members of the Regiment. The Director RLC visited in March where he renamed the dining facility the "Scully Club", two of Sgt Scully's daughters were in attendance.

The Regiment has also excelled on the

sporting front. They are the RLC Athletics Champions 2010 and 2011. They won the Silver Medal in the Cambrian Patrol. In the RLC Gore Trophy the Veterans Team (over 35's) came first. In the Commando March the Regiment came first, the first RLC unit to do so.

Training continues to be varied, the JNCO Cadre trained at Hereford, numerous Study Days have been held and also Logistic Study Days. All in all a full and busy period for the Regiment.

3. Lt Col A Perry CO 168 Pnr Regt RLC(V) gave the following report.

It is a delight to command and am proud to come back as a Pioneer. The current climate for all Pioneers is an uncertain one, redundancies, both civilian and military, restructuring and for us a Review of Reserves. We at 168 have much that is positive to focus on.

The Regiment continues to grow in both numbers and quality. The Regiment is now manned at 80% in terms of TA soldiers. A rise of almost 10% on last year. Whilst financial constraints mean that I am not allowed to rise above 80% I do not feel inhibited. Recruiting continues and I am being more proactive in discharging long term non attendees and managing outflow.

Officer recruiting has improved: all national troop commanders slots are now filled with numerous Pos on the books and a new and fruitful link with Northumbrian UOTC. In the North East I have a regular officer commanding 100 Pnr Sqn – this gives me a permanent foothold in NE England and will continue. We still have considerable gaps at Capt level both within Regional and National elements.

The main focus this year has been to deploy 60+ soldiers and officers with 23 Regt on Op TOSCA in Cyprus from October 2011. It has been the regimental main effort for the last year and sees the regiment put individuals into every department of the UN operational structure. Our training is complete at the end of next weekend; mobilisation will take place in August when to all intents and purposes CO23 Regt will then have the lead. Whilst I will always maintain a degree of over-watch I am totally confident that my soldiers will be well led and well cared for by Lt Col Dom Fletcher and his team.

Annual camp this year took place in June and was, unsurprisingly focused on TOSCA training. It also afforded a good opportunity to work with the Mobile Force Reserve from 23 and conduct some realistic public order training – think petrol bombs and pioneers rioting. Some things we do so well.

Once the boys deploy the challenge will be to continue with demanding, interesting and rewarding training for the younger and newer members of the Regiment and those left behind. Sport and Adventure training will play a part and there will be some positive restructuring and refocusing for the medium term future.

It is not however all work and no play. During the year the Regiment participated

in Northumberland Triangle a 168mile cycle ride, they came second the the RLC Country Championships, participated in skiing "Chunks on the piste", participate in 11 a side Football, sailing (Caribbean Adventure, Transatlantic Adventure RLC Sailing Regatta, the Lam and Gore Trophies, the Altar Challenge and even Ice Hockey.

It is also intended to reinstate other TA Association activities such as the October reunion dinner.

Whilst the future might not be orange, 168 remain thoroughly red and green!

### ITEM 3. REPORT ON BENEVOLENCE

4. Maj R Corbey Controller Benevolence The RLC was unable to attend and had sent the following report which was read by the Chairman:

Shown below for comparison is a tabular summary of RPC benevolence cases handled in the years 2008-2010 and an extrapolation from 30 June 11 stats to give a forecast for the current year:

Cost	Cases in		Grants Made	
	Average	Grant		
2008	238	178	£54,024	£304
2009	223	169	£52,993	£313
2010	192	150	£51,446	£343
2011 (f/cast)	182	126	£47,595	£377

Having got over the surge caused by the economic slump in terms of caseload, we returned to the 2006 levels last year and are fairly confident that the fall in the number of applications will continue, as forecast prior to convergence. In line with current policy (and inflation) we have continued to increase the level of grant.

ABR The Soldiers' Charity continue to be rather generous in their support, contributing £58,653 over and above the RLC grants in 2010 and forecast to contribute a further £49,848 this year. That of course is in addition to contributions from the Royal British Legion and any other occupational or regional charities approached.

There were no 'funny' or indeed amusing cases during the past 12 months. Sadly, around 30% of grants made were for disability related matters, 26% on household goods, 15% on property maintenance and repairs, 7% on finding accommodation or moving into something more suitable. The remainder encompassed pure debt related matters, holidays, funerals and general needs. But of course, all of the applications stem from a lack of funds in general and of late this has been caused by our ageing dependency seeing their savings and pensions being rapidly eroded at a time when prices are soaring. It is little wonder that they cannot manage.

### ITEM 4. COUNCIL CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

5. Lt Col JS Starling gave the following report on behalf of the Chairman:

I must thank Lt Col D Fletcher and Lt Col Andy Parry for a very comprehensive report on their unit's activities over the past year, as usual both Regiments have had a very

busy time. I must also thank Col Fletcher for allowing the Association to hold its Annual General Meeting and Reunion Weekend in his barracks and for allowing over 285 Association members to stay over the weekend. I must also thank the RSM, WO1 Wayne Fuller, for allowing us to hold our AGM within his luxurious mess. It is obvious from the surroundings that this is the "Home" of the Pioneers.

Col Barnes Chairman of the RPC Association sends his apologies but his TA commitments must take priority, he hopes that the weekend goes well and everyone has a wonderful time.

The marriage with the RLC continues to be happy, harmonious and successful and the RPC Association continues to be well represented on various RLC committees.

It is pleasing to have Major Bob Corby here today and to hear the marvellous work the RLC Benevolence Team are carrying out on behalf of ex Pioneers who have fallen on hard times.

Finally my thanks to the remainder of the Committee for their work during the past year especially Norman Brown and his son Paul for their fabulous Newsletters which are appreciated by all members.

A few years ago it was asked at the AGM why we did not have a Pioneer Museum on the camp, a Museum Paper is currently being circulated regarding Service Museums.

The RAF and Navy had two museums each whereas the Army have 69 museums employing 120 civil servants, this number is likely to decrease to 36 Army museums in the future. There are certainly no monies available for a Pioneer Museum.

It is pleasing to see so many attending this year's Reunion some travelling great distances Frank Lyle from Dublin, Mr Johnson from Germany and Mr Simm from Denmark and many from Scotland, the North-East and the South-West. It is exceptionally pleasing to see our one In-Pensioner Micky here for the weekend. I hope all have a wonderful afternoon and evening on the Sports Field and the hangovers are not too bad tomorrow!

## ITEM 5. GENERAL SECRETARY'S REPORT

6. Mr N Brown gave the following report: The booking form for the Reunion Weekend is distributed with the April copy of the Newsletter, in future this will be the only means of booking in. This year we had people sending messages on Facebook and expected accommodation.

I must thank 23 Regiment not only for the help and assistance that they have given in preparing this weekend but also the help they give me over the year.

I would also like to thank 206 Sqn for their excellent organisation of this years events especially WO2 (SSM) K Cheung who has been pulling his hair out, SSgt (SQMS) K Foster and his team for the layout of the field. I would also like to thank, once again, my son Paul who prepares the Newsletter and also manages our website.

In the next issue of the Newsletter we are publishing an article on the Pioneer involvement in the Suez Campaign in 1955, we would like to have personal memories of this time. If you were there please send us details.

Once again I must request that you

inform the Association when you move, following the distribution of the last Newsletter thirty five were returned "Gone Away".

The Derby Draw was won this year by 93 year old Mr H Stanley, a World War 2 veteran who served from 1940 – 1946 and who only joined the Association in February this year. Sadly it is my duty to inform you that since his win he has sadly passed away.

The 39/93 Club still meet twice yearly at The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham. They next meet on 23 September, if you would like to attend please contact the Club Secretary, Mr Les Rowley (Tel 07955 237932)

## ITEM 6. ELECTION OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

7. In accordance with the Constitution one third of the Council must stand for re-election every year. The following members all were willing to serve for another term and were unanimously elected: Colonel M Baker, Maj GF Crook, Mr I Easingwood and Mr N Brown. The meeting also elected Mr PN Thomas who had been nominated by the Council for the vacancy on the Council.

## ITEM 7. ARRANGEMENTS FOR NEXT REUNION/AGM

8. The date of the next reunion/Annual General Meeting would be 6-8 July 2012.

## ITEM 8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

9. There being no further business the meeting closed at 1245 hours

**N BROWN**  
Secretary

# Coco the Clown

Article from Northampton's Chronicle & Echo newspaper dated 18 July 2011

Report: Chronicle & Echo  
18 July 2011

THE following article appeared in Northampton's Chronicle & Echo dated 18 July 2011 and has been reproduced by kind permission of the Editor. Coco the Clown was in fact 13081825 LCpl POLAKOUS Nikolai who enlisted into the Pioneer Corps on 19 March 1940 and joined 3 Centre Pioneer Corps for training, he served until 7 August 1941 when he was medically discharged. Coco the Clown, our adopted hero – by David Saint

I love to write about Northampton's heroes. Usually these are men or women who were born in the county, but occasionally I like to focus on our "adopted" heroes too. A great favourite of mine has always been Coco the Clown. Like so many of my age, he was the epitome of what a circus clown should be.

It was only when I was well into my 50s that I discovered that this great hero of mine had lived, and was buried in Woodnewton, right here in Northampton. And if ever I am in that part of the county, around Oundle, I always make a pilgrimage to his final resting place.

Well, I never met Coco, Nicolai Polakovs, but I knew his daughter, Helen, whom I first met when I was a judge for the Village Ventures Competition organised by Northamptonshire ACRE. The residents of Woodnewton were working hard to build a

Village Hall and back in 1990 they organised a major fundraising event called Clownfest. The clue is in the title and, of course, Helen was behind it all!

She invited dozens of her father's clown friends to Woodnewton for a special service in the church followed by a village celebration. It was a triumph. They now have a wonderful village hall and that was opened in 1992 by the vice-president of Clowns International, the late Norman Wisdom. Many years ago, Coco had identified a piece of wasteland in the village that he turned into a playground for the children. He paid for the swings and slides himself with the money he had eared through the famous Road Safety Campaign that many of us will recall!

In that park now is a very modern wooden statue of Coco, jolly and brightly painted. Nicolai Polakovs was a Jewish Latvian, his father used to work in the circus during the summer and in the winter he worked as a props man in theatres.

When Nicolai was about four years old, a theatre company was performing a play called "The Simkin Bells" and they needed a small girl. The girl they found was useless, so Nicolai's father offered him for the part. They put him in a nightdress and an over-sized blonde wig. As he was carried across the stage on the first night, the wig fell off! During the next scene of Russian high drama, young Nicolai wandered back on stage to retrieve it.

This turned the tragedy into a comedy and for the first time, he heard the audience laughing at him. Coco the Clown was born. He kept audiences laughing for the rest of his wonderful life.

Then he became apprenticed to the celebrated Russian clown Lazernko and went on to manage his own circus.

Escaping the hardships of the Russian Revolution to join Circus Busch in Berlin where he was spotted by Bertram Mills and in the 1930s Coco came to England.

Later in life he worked with Roberts Brothers' Circus which always had its winter quarters at Polebrook, near Oundle. Indeed, he was with them when he was taken ill. He subsequently died in Peterborough Hospital in 1974.

Coco had lived in Woodnewton for many years with his daughter Tamara and then his other daughter Helen soon joined them. Helen's daughter, Vasentina, kept the village pub, the White Swan.

The family still lives in and around the village and, as great-grandson Antar told me, they are all proud of their famous forebear and are thrilled to keep the name of Coco alive. And another thing... Do make a trip to Woodnewton to see Coco's grave in the churchyard at the east end of the church close to the wall.

If you take youngsters, tell them Coco's story, especially how he once had a serious road accident, so he devoted his life to promoting road safety for children. ■

# Blast from the Past

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



■ Sgt N Beattie, Cpl D Bryant in Cyprus (others not known) Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Cpl Wall receiving trophy from Brig DR Higginbotham Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Visit of Colonel in Chief to Officers Mess (Date unknown) Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Freedom of Northampton Parade, 29 Mar 84 Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Known names, Bloor, Gascoigne, Crawford, Robinson, Buck, Wroot, Eccle Picture: RPCA Archive



■ 9 Sig Regt, Date Unknown Picture: RPCA Archive



■ WSU soldiers ready to go to Bulford Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Unknown, maybe 522 Company Picture: RPCA Archive

# An update

Thanks for your message regarding 'diary dates'. Here in Bulgaria - all is well!

How are things with you all? You may know that I have been the 'Honorary' or as our Ambassador calls it 'My Surrogate' Defence Attache, for a couple of years or so since the regrettable and unfortunate demise of the Defence Section in HM Embassy in Sofia, Bulgaria. Since then it has been officially covered from the Embassy in Roumania in Bucharest, incidentally the current DA in Bucharest is Giles Orpen-Smellie, whose father, 'Larry' taught me much of what I know about shooting at Bisley! Anyway, I hold the end up here! The duties are not onerous, but I have to organise the annual Remembrance Ceremonies at the two major Commonwealth War Graves Cemeteries here in Bulgaria, and liaise with the Bulgarian MoD and all other Defence Attaches from Commonwealth and Allied Nations.

The main ceremony will be on Sunday 13th November at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery in Sofia, preceded on the 11th at the other major War Graves Cemetery in Plovdiv, some 100 miles to the east of the capital. The cemeteries are immaculate, and are like well-tended gardens, it makes one very proud to visit and to be there and reflect on the young buried there. The graves are mainly from the 'Great War' - with remains of servicemen from the 'Labour Corps', 'Maltese Labour Corps', 'Macedonian Labour Corps' together with the 'Army Cyclist Corps', the 'Army Interpreter Corps', RASC and very many old and illustrious Regiments.

A couple of weeks ago I represented our Ambassador at the 'unveiling' of a memorial to 2 South African bomber crews who died over Bulgaria in 1944, returning from a bombing mission over the oilfields in Roumania - it was interesting that the son of one of the pilots was there, and I was able to read the original 'log-book' from the final flight. In other northern parts of Bulgaria, there are many hundreds of British Soldiers buried in the aftermath to the Crimean War, most of whom died of Cholera, Typhoid or Malaria in the duration and aftermath of the campaign.

Anyway, just an update from me. Very Best Wishes

**John Allen**

# Well worth the long drive back

NORMAN, first let me thank you and 206 Sqn, for your time, devotion and such a memorable reunion.

I had a fantastic time catching up with a few friends; Simon Fairholme, Tony Simm, Dave Done and Graham Jordan too name but a few which I have not seen for years.

I also want to congratulate you and our hosts 23 Pnr Regt, for all hard work put into this weekend and creating a fantastic event, well worth the long drive back to Edinburgh.

Also for the financial contributions made for Stevie B's Hospice and the RPC A. Once again thank you.

**Taff Teague**

# Passed out in wellies!

**T**HIS IS a slightly unusual request. Do bear with me while I explain! I'm a writer, currently researching a book on the kidnap and disappearance of Mrs Muriel McKay in 1969.

Many thanks for the Pioneer Newsletter. I was sad to read about the death of Sgt Bridger, I met him at Northampton during the fireman's strike, he was my watch Commander and a very nice chap.

My training at Northampton was interrupted due to the fireman's strike and I recall my passing our parade was done

in overalls, combat jacket and wellingtons!

There are not many Pioneers who passed out with a Band Parade and wellies, it still makes me smile to remember this day.

I cannot attend this year's reunion, I have already booked holidays which coincide but I'll be definitely there next year. Many thanks

**Thomas Cherry**

*Ed note: Thomas has only recently joined the Association - he must have slipped through the net at Northampton)*

# One day my time will come

JUST A quick note to say thank you for the Pioneer Mag which I always like to see how the Regt is doing and how much its changed over the years.

I have also seen the paper work for the Pioneer Reunion but I am unable to come with living so far away, but never mind one day my time will come.

I will be thinking of the guys of old that I served with on that weekend, also on the back cover there is a photo of the Pioneers at work I would like to know if it's for sale as a photo, if so please can you let me

know how much they are.

Well Norman over here in New Zealand it's all good, I have teamed up with Daz Frost this year he's from 187 (5 Plt) and I am going to hook up with Dave Moore, it's 20 years since I last saw him but we will see what happens.

Well take care, you are a valid asset to the Association keep up the good work.

**Andy Barratt Ex (187 3plt)**

*Ed Note: The Pioneers at work are available in the PRI Shop, 23 Pioneer Regiment.*

# Served under Uncle Tom

I WOULD like to thank you and your team for all the hard work in arranging the reunion. This was my first reunion it has taken me 10 years to attend. I found the whole experience fantastic and emotional all rolled into one.

Meeting up with old comrades some I had not seen since day one of my army career and talking to the new ones who showed us old chunks the utmost respect.

The sense of pride I had at the parade of being a part of the Royal Pioneers history

left me in no doubt that this was the right time to attend.

I have always felt it a privilege to have served under RSM Tom Appleyard (uncle Tom) so to meet up with the guy after 20 years was a great moment and we chatted about old times at Simpson Barracks.

I now know what the reunion is all about and I certainly will attend again, once again Norman a big thank you, all the best big...

**Andy Anderson**

# No labour, no battle

IT WAS good to see you and of course many others that I knew and renew friendships and make more.

You and your son should be very proud of the support that you get from not only Association members, but also 23 Regt RLC and this year 206 Squadron.

Many thanks for forwarding 'No Labour, No Battle by John Starling and Ivor Lee' to me, I have found it very useful in finding out facts which I have been able to put to good use whilst researching the family,

especially my wife's relations many of whom were to join midland regiments and either through wounds, or because of their suitability were transferred to those Regiments Labour Units or transferred directly to the Labour Corps.

There are some that I found who were placed on call up later in the War, directly into the Labour Corps.

Well done, keep up the good work and I hope to see you next year.

**Frank Berry.**

# Pioneer badge on the wall



■ The Black Horse Inn, Derbyshire

Picture: Supplied

**H**I NORMAN, I walked into an isolated pub in the Derby countryside (The Black Horse, Hulland Ward).

I saw a Pioneer Badge on the wall with a Corps magazine on a table below.

When I asked the lovely barmaid who put them there I was told it was your sister's pub and that you had put them there.

What a small world and what a great pub, the food is lovely and I was allowed to park my tractor unit in the car park.

I will definitely be going there again and I might see you there sometime.

I hope all is well with you and yours and if I don't see you there I'll see you at the reunion 2012.

**Rob Porteus**

*Ed note:* Yes, it is my sisters Inn! I thoroughly recommend the Black Horse Inn! It dates from the 1690's and is set in the Derbyshire Dales on the edge of the Peak District and is an ideal centre for visiting the many attractions in the area. The ale is good and the food is gorgeous! You can even stay the night in one of the lovely rooms. If anyone is interested in booking than ring 01335 370206.

# Our past

ALTHOUGH I have read and enjoyed The Pioneer for many years, I found the most recent edition to be extremely thought provoking.

Two contrasting pieces brought to life the important role the magazine has to play in overcoming the frailty of the human memory and helping us connect with our past.

The first article written by Lieutenant Bruce Melia was a largely factual account of the 1977 fireman's strike. Although I played a small part in this industrial dispute, his description of the whole operation gave me insight and knowledge beyond that provided from a second lieutenant's limited 'window on the world'. I am most grateful to Bruce, who if my recall is correct, hailed from the Midlands and was ever a personable and calm individual. He also possesses the widest smile of any officer I have ever met.

The second piece, a letter contributed by Lieutenant Colonel Joe Sievier, takes issue with an earlier article (Oct 10) written by Lieutenant Colonel Colin Davey. Lieutenant Colonel Davey's reflections on his military service were drawn, in part, from events of which I had some knowledge. However, in contrast to Lieutenant Melia, Lieutenant Colonel Davey drew both on fact and his impressions of others as his source material. Therein lies a danger, which provoked Lieutenant Colonel Sievier's letter challenging Lieutenant Colonel Davey's analysis of someone who had, in the past, been Lieutenant Colonel Sievier's Commanding Officer. If my memory serves me right Lieutenant Colonel Joe Sievier was known amongst junior RPC officers of my generation as 'Big Joe'. Forthright and direct, his drive and energy were enhanced by his sense of humour and a 'larger-than-life' presence in the mess. I will not describe Lieutenant Colonel Davey. He made no impression on me during his service and doubtless this view is reciprocated as I am, in truth, an uninspiring individual. However, I am most grateful that his article reminded me of a remark I once overheard during a conversation between a curate's wife and her son. She rebuked the child with the comment, 'If you can't say anything good about anyone don't say anything at all'.

I of course apologise for any offense that my description of Bruce or Joe may have caused - my memory is not as robust as I would wish.

**Lieutenant Colonel (Retd) David Rainey**  
Court Officer, Bulford Military Crt Centre

# Donation

AS PROMISED, a little donation in appreciation for sending the Association Newsletter all the way to West Africa each issue.

I thoroughly enjoy keeping up to date and seeing old familiar faces. I have been quite fortunate ending up where I have after leaving school with no qualifications, my education came from the RPC and I will always be thankful.

**Phil O'Connor (Ex WO1)**

*Ed note: the substantial donation is well appreciated*

# Little horror

ONCE AGAIN well done on another good mag that's gets better with a lot of very good stories in them...

I hope that I'm right this time as i got it wrong last time, the mouse i think is on P16.

The mouse, I hope, is on the 1st house to the left of the 4 chimneys.

**Tony & Kim Lunn**

*Ed note: Wrong!*

ONE MORE go, my wife thinks it's on page 13 in the shield in the flames hope we are right.

Once again what a good mag look forward to the next issue.

**Tony & Kim Lunn**

*Ed note: Wrong again - try buying a magnifying glass*

WELL WE hope we're third time lucky, we've spent the last four days looking for this little horror two of which have been with a magnifying glass, and we now think Mr cuneo mouse is on page 6 under the leg of the front soldier in the mud and to the left of the small picture on the right.

**Tony & Kim Lunn**

*Ed note: Correct - your name now goes in the hat*

JUST RECEIVED your email and to tell you the truth we didn't buy the magnifying glass we borrowed it from a friend of ours, but that's not how we finally found him my wife decided to enlarge the magazine on the website. So until the next time we wait in anticipation.

**Tony & Kim Lunn**

# Reunited after 30 years at reunion



■ Dave Ravenscroft and Banjo Malcolm

Picture: Supplied

**H**OPE ALL is ok with you and yours have just about got over the organised chaos of yet another very successful Reunion Weekend.

Once again the weather was awesome and more importantly the beer was cold and again bumping into yet more 'old faces'!

Thanks very much. I'm not sure if the photo attached is good enough to make the Corps Mag.

It is of course me with Banjo Malcolm

meeting up after a 30 year gap (we lived in each other's pockets back in 1979/80, and I'm glad he remembered everything I taught him on the football field?!), if that bit was put in the mag he would be livid (lol).

Take good care Norman, all the best for now.

**Dave Ravenscroft**

*Ed note:* I expect to see you both on the football field next year!

## Real gratitude

WHAT AN exceptionally fantastic Reunion Weekend. With our thanks to you will you please convey our thanks to the Commanding Officer, his Staff and in particular RSM Fuller. Just like the old days "tuck me in my little wooden bed".

The group and those with us felt that this time there was that underlying feeling of really being wanted. The camp had that feeling of smartness and pride about it but at the same time having a very relaxed atmosphere and hospitality in all areas we came into contact with.

We all had a most enjoyable Saturday afternoon with a bunch of young serving lads that had turned into a brotherhood of well mannered respectful soldiers.

Maybe a little drunk as the afternoon went by but we suspect this was trying to convince us how much they could drink because every time they bought a round we had to be included. Saying "NO!" was not an option.

We listened to stories with some off loading many personal events and fears

before enlisting. We laughed and told jokes, one lad in trying to convince one of the group of his prowess at unarmed combat was chased caught and showed the error of his ways much to the amusement of his mates while showing his now limp hand and saying "He's broken my five fingers", the blood did return in about 10 minutes with him insisting he buy his assailant yet another drink.

The medical profession could learn a thing or two from these lads, laughter really is the best medicine some of us veterans even forgot to take our tablets and left little the worse for it.

Last but not least our thanks would not be complete without mentioning the catering staff both serving and civilian. The food was excellent in the canteen and beyond belief at the BBQ.

In some small way we hope this letter will explain our real gratitude for a very enjoyable reunion.

**GW Goode**  
Chairman 39/93 Club

the  
**Pioneer**



■ **JUST** found your great website devoted to all things RPC! I saw a posting by Jim Gregson on his father's photo in Aden. My father John ("Paddy") Gibbons was a Corporal with 518 company and was involved in that large arms find that Jim said. I'm in Canada these days but if I can get hold of some of Dad's old photos, I'll scan them in and send them to you.  
**Bill Gibbons**

■ **I THINK** I think I have found the Cuneo Mouse - it's on P52 (Fire Fighting) with 206 Coy, on the right-hand side of the Green Goddess on the side of the windscreen. Thank you for the Newsletter which was most welcome.  
**RW Stone**

*Ed note:* Sorry, wrong!

■ **I'M WRITING** to you as my wife met a member of the Association at the Army v Navy game. Thank you for sending me a copy of The Pioneer... I've passed it around the Pioneers in Afghan. Myself and Pte Buci are serving with the Royal Navy at Bastion Hospital carrying out mortuary affairs.  
**Cpl A (Swede) Stephen**

■ **THANKS** to everyone for this weekend it was great to see old mates again and it was my first year and hopefully not my last, so see you all next year and Norman you did a great job thanks mate.  
**Mick Gentile**

■ **JUST** to say that as a National Serviceman, I joined up at Hermitage Camp in March and after training was posted to Hutswell Camp, Corsham (405 Coy). When the camp closed we moved to Basilhill Barracks. As I was only 5 feet tall I became the camp messenger or camp runner. I always remember the RSM's looking at me and saying you are a cross between a misfit and a dwarf, we will have to get you a fairy cycle!

**Patrick Northover**

■ **THANKYOU** and your son for the Newsletter, I read it then I pass it to my mate an ex Para who then sends it to England to another ex para to read then he sends it back. They can't believe I get such good Newsletters.  
**R Newey (New Zealand)**



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:  
royalpioneer corps@gmail.com

# Contact with old Cloggy!

THANKS FOR your letter received today, glad you got the stubs and the money - here's hoping.

I keep in contact with Cloggy by telephone as I live in Victoria and he in WA, which is approx 3415 kms by road and four hours by air, if you want to drive its 3/4 days.

We had a good conversation tonight and I told him about your letter and its contents I also told him I would copy it to send to him.

We also spoke about Mr Plummer whom he remembers, Cloggy has a mate

with a computer so he will discuss things when he gets a copy of your letter, we also spoke about a photograph to send to you and he says he will have one taken.

He sounded quite pleased that people remember him and it brought back good memories.

Again thank you for your letter and I will keep in touch with you of the progress.

With Best Regards to you and all Pioneers everywhere.

**Keith Moore**  
Australia

## Like to wish WO2 Bell all the best

I HAD a lovely time at the Reunion Weekend, met lots of old friends and made some new ones.

I would like to thank the CO and RSM (and the men of course) for giving me a good time. I would like to wish WO2 Bell all the best on his retirement from the Army, I hope he returns to future Reunions. I even spoke to the CO of 23 Pnr Regt which I found unusual to me as I was only a Private, that was very nice of him to do that. There was only one down fall, there was no shooting ranges this time.

**David Armstrong**

## A real hero

MY DAUGHTER Emily and I had a great time at the reunion.

Fantastic to see Graham Jorden, Gordie B, Cudgie, Neil Butterworth, Dusty, Alex Cardow, Jed B, Stevie H, Graham E and so many more to mention even though seeing Mrs Wendy Kirkham the wife of the late Cpl Les Kirkham a real hero, made our weekend much more richer. I would like to thank you all for still recognising me and making Emily so welcome she had a great time. Well done to Norman and 23 Regt for all their hard work, cheers

**Taff Shaw**

## First weekend

THIS WAS the first weekend I have attended for nearly 10 years, so was really apprehensive as to how it was going to turn out, there was no need to worry what a fantastic Corps Weekend, you should feel very pleased with yourself the day was a total success, which I know will be down to hard work over the last few months by yourself and the Regiment.

If you get a chance can you pass on to whoever was spammed from the Regiment for the sports field side it was like our old weekends used to be back in the 70s, the food was first class and the side shows brilliant.

**Tom Appleyard**

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

## Across the Mersey

THERE ARE not enough words in the Oxford dictionary to describe the latest edition of The Pioneer.

The contents which cover a multitude of events and happenings are very interesting but unfortunately at my age of 93 years I am unable to participate.

The days of travelling to London and participating in the Remembrance Service at Whitehall are long gone.

It has been a long time since I was astride

a cycle and the account the the Ex Pioneer Triangel was magnificent and in my dreams last night I was with them all the way.

The picturesque account of the heroic act carried out by Corporal Scully during WW2 was memorable especially as it happened just across the River Mersey from where I live.

Once again Norman and your "Staff" have performed wonders. Bye for now

**George Pringle**

## Saddened to read

I WAS saddened to read of the deaths of Lt Col Robin Wither and Maj George Lineham in the last issue of the Newsletter.

Lt Col Wither was my OIC when I was with 3 HQ & Sig Regt, Bulford in 1966 when he was a 23 year old Lieutenant who was a good all-round sportsman and a very good footballer.

I first met George Lineham when he was a Cpl and he escorted us to our first unit

from Simpson Barracks to CAD Kineton, Nr Banbury in 1963. I served with him again when I was posted from Germany to 206 Coy at Long Marston where he was CSM.

He went on to be commissioned and finished his service as QM Northampton.

Unfortunately I am unable to attend the Reunion Weekend but will be at the London Lunch.

**Glyn Cooke**

## Long Lost Trails

### SUEZ CANAL ZONE

522 Coy (Suez 1956/1957). Mr Fred Cooper wishes to contact ex members of 522 Coy who went to the Suez Canal Zone. Contact Mr F Cooper c/o RPC Association.

### 243 COMPANY

243 Company. Mr Harry Ratner would like to get in touch with any former members

of 243 Coy who remember him or Joe Bernstein (author of "From The City From The Plough") or Joe's family he believes his widow is still alive.

### NIGEL DEAN

Nigel Dean appeared in many national papers whilst he was serving because of the size of his feet - SIZE 18!

Has anyone got a cutting

from this.

He was known as Big Foot. Contact RPC Association.

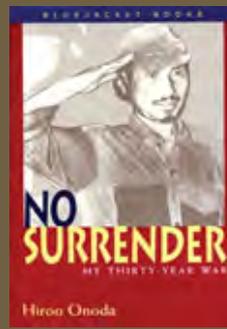
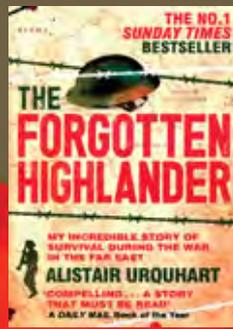
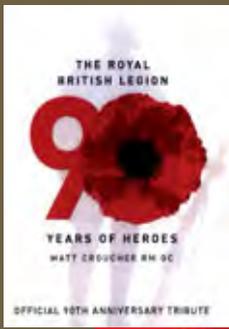
### 187 COMPANY

Hi, I am sorting out pictures taken during my career with 187 (Tancred) Coy RPC. If anyone who served with me in the Gulf 91, Ireland, UK and Batus wants any see my email address.

I may or may not have them on picture, its a lucky dip, but who knows.

imlooneytoon@googlemail.com

Ian McMullen served Jan 1987-Dec 1992 - pictures of Andy Rowley, Kevin Horwood, Kevin Neary, Taff Bennett, Scouse Hughes, Lt Reid, Paul Lorking, Group pics in the Gulf, Sammy samson (Christchurch Fuelling Depot) to name a few.



# 90 years of heroes

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**T**HIS SUPERBLY illustrated book has the full support of the Royal British Legion and will tell the complete story of its history through exclusive access to its archives, thus providing a celebratory, as well as informative, tribute to their work over the past 90 years.

It will be the definitive history of this much-loved organisation, charting its work with soldiers and ex-servicemen through the stories of its heroes, famous as well as unknown, during the highest-profile military campaigns of the past 90 years. The book will be divided into nine chapters, each representing one decade

in the RBL's existence. Each chapter will celebrate one hero per year; 1921, 1922, 1923, etc. giving an account of that particular person, and what they achieved. Within each chapter will be special spreads that emphasise also the social history of the evolution of the RBL as a charity, supported with iconic imagery and text. Each one of the heroes, from 1921 right through to 2011, has been personally chosen by decorated royal marine, and RBL ambassador, Lance Corporal Matt Croucher GC. Men such as Major Robert Henry Cain VC (1909-1974), who destroyed six tanks during Operation 'Market Garden' at Arnhem in 1944 and was one of the only officers from his

battalion to escape the German encirclement of the British 1st Airborne Division.

The book will be published in late autumn to coincide with the 2011 Poppy Appeal, which will be the biggest in the Legion's history. Royalties will be going to the RBL. Review by Amazon.co.uk

90 years of Heroes is published in hardback by Collins at £25.00, but if bought via Amazon the RBL's affinity fundraising site <http://buy.at/legion> it will cost just £11.80 at the time of writing.

**THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION: 90 YEARS OF HEROES**  
By Matt Croucher  
ISBN 0-00-744153-3

# No surrender

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**I**N THE spring of 1974, Second Lieutenant Hiroo Onoda of the Japanese army made world headlines when he emerged from the Philippine jungle after a thirty-year ordeal.

He had been officially declared dead in December 1959.

At the time it was thought that he and his comrade had died of wounds sustained five years earlier in a skirmish with Philippine troops.

A six-month search organised by the Japanese Government

had uncovered no trace of the two men.

In 1972 Onoda and his comrade Kozuka surfaced, and Kozuka was killed in an encounter with the Philippine police.

For nearly 30 years he had been hunted in turn by American troops, the Philippine police, hostile islanders, and successive Japanese search parties.

However he skillfully outmaneuvered all his pursuers. He was convinced that World War 2 was still being fought and that one day his fellow soldiers would return

victorious.

This account of those years is an epic tale of the will to survive that offers a rare glimpse of man's invincible spirit, resourcefulness, and ingenuity.

A hero to his people, Onoda wrote down his experiences soon after his return to civilization.

This book was translated into English the following year and has enjoyed an approving audience ever since.

**NO SURRENDER - MY THIRTY YEAR WAR**  
By Hiroo Onoda  
ISBN 978-1-557-50663-4

## Amazing story of survival

Review: Norman Brown  
Picture: Supplied

**A**LISTAIR URQUHART was barely twenty when he was shipped to Singapore with the Gordon Highlanders.

In 1942 the Japanese invaded, and he was taken prisoner and sent to work on the notorious bridge over the River Kwai.

He worked on the 'Death Railway' for over 750 days and survived starvation, cholera and the torture and brutality of the Japanese Imperial Army, only to be packed in the hold of a rusting hell-ship bound for Japan. Torpedoed by an American submarine in the shark-infested waters of the South China Sea, he drifted for days, close to death. When he was eventually recaptured, Urquhart was transported to a prison camp only eleven miles from a fateful city called Nagasaki, where he bore witness to one of the most momentous and terrible events of human history.

Alistair Urquhart was born in 1919, and is one of the very last surviving members of the Scottish regiment the Gordon Highlanders who were captured in Singapore. He lives in Scotland, where he teaches computer skills to OAPs.

For over sixty years he remained silent about his sufferings at the hands of the Japanese. Many of former prisoners of war did, and all for the same reasons.

They did not wish to upset their wives and families, and themselves, with unsettling tales of unimaginable torments.

On their liberation all prisoners signed an undertaking to the British Government that they would not talk about the war crimes they witnessed or reveal what they saw in the atomic wasteland of Nagasaki.

**THE FORGOTTEN HIGHLANDER**  
By Alistair Urquhart  
ISBN 978-0-349-12257-1

# Last Post

It is with sadness to report the following deaths

**SWEETMAN PHILIP CB (198664)**  
**Lt Col, (Aged 95), Guildford, Feb 11**

He was born in London in 1916. His family moved to Exeter in 1928 and he attended Exeter School for seven years.

After a year at Exeter University he joined Customs and Excise as an unattached officer in 1936 and served with them until he was called up in 1940. During 1940 and 1941 he served respectively as a private soldier and then as an NCO in the 9th Devon Regiment; the East Surrey Regiment; the Pay Corps and the Royal Artillery before being accepted for a commission with the Pioneer Corps in June 1941. After he was commissioned he was hospitalised for three months with a bad back suffered during OCTU training.

In 1942 he became an assistant adjutant in the Pioneer Corps. He was billeted in Hoylake and was in charge of upto 300 men on fire watching duty at night in Preston, and then Liverpool guarding warehouses and spreading sand on the roofs to minimise the damage from fire bombs. He was then selected by Major General Friend as his ADC, and drove the General around the UK for many months as he inspected Pioneers.

On 1 January 1944, he followed Major General Friend when the general was transferred to the Labour Directorate in the War Office in London. He served in that role until November 1946 when as a newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel he was demobbed as Assistant Director of Labour.

He subsequently joined the Inland Revenue, under a transfer scheme with Customs and Excise. He rose to be the Senior Principal Inspector of Taxes responsible for Capital Gains Tax and finally Regional Controller for the South East of England.

He was appointed CBE in 1974 for services to the Inland Revenue. He retired in 1979, and after his wife passed away in 1985, he pursued a wide range of interests over the last 25 years including gardening, supporting Surrey Cricket Club, bird watching, rambles, acting as a town guide in Guildford and enjoying his growing family and grandchildren.

**STANLEY HAROLD (13030386)**  
**21 Jun 11, (Aged 93), Gotham, Notts**

Served 6 Jun 40 to 25 Apr 46 in 147 and 150 Coys Serving in North Africa, Italy and Austria.

**BROWN ARTHUR WILLIAM (6915898)**  
**27 Oct 10, Hythe, Kent**

Enlisted into the Rifle Bde on 18 Jan 40, transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 5 Mar 42 and served in 45, 42 and 47 Coys).

**HAYWARD FREDERICK PATRICK MICHAEL**  
**7 Jan 11, (Aged 72), Margate, Kent**

Served 1957-1959.

**NEAME EDWARD GOERGE (13073719)**  
**7 Dec 10, Herne Bay, Kent**

Served 31 Oct 40 to 30 Aug 47, was driver for Col Dean from 25 Aug 41 until 17 May 43.

**HENRY DAVID WILLIAM (23486740)**  
**20 Apr 11, (Aged 73),**

**South Gosforth, Newcastle Upon Tyne**  
Served 27 Aug 56 - 26 Aug 59 in 251 Coy

**BUNTING DEREK**  
**18 Aug 11, Clifton, Nottingham**  
(aged 35)

**PARKER RG (23996217)**  
**10 Jul 11, Huntingdon**

Served 17 Feb 64 - 21 Jul 68 (Was a dog handler at CAD Kineton).

**MULLAN DANIEL (23682979)**  
**11 Aug 11, Northampton**

Served Dec 58 - Dec 61 (A member of the RPC Association from 16 Dec 59, a regular attender at Reunion Weekends and Northampton Branch functions).

**WATKINS HENRY (HARRY) (23996010)**  
**28 Aug 11, (Aged 67), St Austell**

Ex LCpl served 1964 - 1973 - member of Corps of Drums.

**BLENMAN STEVE (24704586)**  
**25 AUG 11, BANBURY.**

Served 1984 to 2007. Major Billy Dilkes writes: on Wednesday 7 September 2011 at 1100 hrs Ex SSgt Stevie Blenman was laid to rest at 44 years of age after his long battle with an aggressive brain tumour.

SSgt Stevie Blenman originally from London joined the Royal Pioneer Corps in 1984. He served in most Pioneer sub-units, including 187 Company at Northampton, 1 (BR) Corps in Germany and all 5 Pioneer Squadrons at Bicester. He went to Deepcut as the Provost Sergeant before returning to 187 as a Troop Sergeant in order to deploy on Op TELIC 1 in Iraq in 2003.

He served on many operations including Bosnia, Kosovo, Sierra Leone and Iraq. In his early days he was infamous as a PTI at Northampton within the Pioneer Continuation Training Wing. He became qualified in many Military Skills including Skill at Arms and First Aid but Stevie will always be remembered for his big heart and being a ladies man. He was truly one of the nicest people you could ever wish to meet. His family was the Army, and he was so proud to be a Pioneer and such a good ambassador. He will be sadly missed by all whom ever met him/

"God Bless You Soldier" and may you now "Rest in Peace"

His final resting place is at Hardwick Hill Cemetery at Banbury.

Sgt Nickie Walsh who cared for Steve throughout his illness and spent hours at his bedside and voluntarily became his personal carer has given me permission to publish the eulogy she made at Steve's funeral: Stephen Blenman. AKA Stevie B - Mr Unique.

Steve was born in London on the 5th May 1967 to parents Sandra & Terrance Blenman. At a young age and after the break up of his parent's marriage, Steve and his father then moved to Stone Bridge, London NW10.

At the age of 13 due to unforeseen circumstances Steve made the decision to move in with his best friend Danny and his parents where he instantly became a loving member of the Richards family.

He continues to be a son and a brother to them all and he was particularly proud of Danny and especially fond of his mum Marlene who looks upon him as her own son.

As a child/teenager Steve was always a



Lt Col Sweetman



Pte H Stanley, Vienna 1945

caring, affectionate, warm, wonderful, thoughtful, considerate selfless human being who had a big heart that he generously wore on his sleeve for everyone to see. He was always special and unique and these are just some of the endearing qualities that he had as a child. So it comes as no surprise that he turned into such a fantastic man, always putting others before himself. We are thankful that he was here even though for a short while because he has touched so many hearts and he lived his life to the full.

We had an angel in or mist, but we did not notice because we look for a halo and wings but he was here with us.

At the age of 16 he decided to join the Army and on the 23rd May 1984 he enlisted into the Royal Pioneer Corps. Steve passed his basic training in Northampton and then went onto to serve in:

- Tidworth with 187 Squadron,
- Northampton with 187 Squadron,
- Germany with 1 BR Corps,
- Northampton and then Bicester as a PTI,
- Deepcut as the Provost Sergeant,
- Bicester as a platoon Sergeant and then Provost Sergeant
- Family's welfare Staff Sergeant Bicester.

Steve also completed operational tours of Kosovo, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Iraq and a UN tour of Sierra Leone as well as serving twice in the Falklands.

Steve was known as the beast master, using his PTI skills to the best of his ability whenever he could and enjoyed each session. Steve went on to achieve many great things in his career.



■ Major Billy Dilkes and Sgt Leeroy Brown, two of his closest friends before the Service where approx 400 people showed their respects.



■ Rest in peace Stevie B

Pictures: Supplied

He was well known for his NOT so good time keeping, but no matter how late he was, his infectious Laughter, smile and sense of humour would always win you over. He was great with his charming skills.

Steve reached the very respectable rank of Staff Sergeant, and you could not have met a man who was more proud of his Regiment and the great things he achieved whilst serving with the Royal Pioneer Corps.

He always said the army had made him the person he was today and it has taught him one valuable lesson "BE NICE TO OTHERS AND THEY WILL BE NICE BACK" (This became more apparent to Steve when he had so many visitors and his room was always filled with love and he would always say I am such a lucky man).

In May 2007 and after completing 2 yrs service for the Queen and then 22 yrs for his Regiment he left the army and started a new civilian life in Banbury. Steve decided that he was going to start a chauffeuring company with a close friend, but doing things like picking up a client in London and then half way into his journey getting a phone call from the intended client asking were the hell are you, did not stand him in good stead but Steve being Steve blagged his way out of it and calmly turned the car round. After realising that chauffeuring was not for him he decided to join Ell security using his CP qualification, working on different power stations throughout the country and this was to be Steve's last employment.

Although Steve never settled down to family life he was never short of female company and we all know he was very much a tart with a heart and as Steve would put it "I LOVE THE LADIES" and even through Steve's illness he still had an eye for the pretty nurses.

No matter how tough life got or what hurdles were put in his path he always had that big bloomer smile on his face and he never let it get him down.

We all know and love Steve to be the kind of man that had no appreciation for the value of money and would phone a very close friend and say "mate I am in a bit of money trouble, any chance you can lend me some money?"

His friend replies "Yes Stevie would £300 be ok?" "Yes please," Stevie replied

The next day his friend rang him and said "Steve were are you?"

Steve calmly replied "Mate I am in

Harrods getting a cut throat shave and a hair cut"

(Just classic Mr Blenman - only you)

Beyond the fun loving quirky Steve Blenman who lived life to the max in his smartly dressed clothes and always drenched in aftershave, was a very deep and meaningful man. He always had time for anybody no matter how long or short the conversation or how big or small the problem was he always had time to listen. It didn't matter to him who you were.

Steve changed so many lives and touched so many people with his infectious personality and could light up a room in seconds with his laughter (as Danny often said you laugh like Sid James).

In Dec 2010 Steve suddenly fell ill and had a seizure whilst out shopping. In Jan 2011 and after a number of tests Steve was diagnosed with a Grade four brain tumour (which Steve nick named the crazy fool) this was a very aggressive type of tumour. In the coming months Steve continued to battle his illness with so much determination and was always so positive that he would beat it, he still remained up beat and cheerful throughout his intense treatment regime.

In April 2011 it was discovered that the treatment had not worked and that he only had months left to live, this still did not get him down in fact he pulled me to one side and said, "Nicky I have accepted my fate I embrace it and I am excited about going to another place please don't be sad." Steve ended his days in the comfort of Katharine House Hospice.

After a long conversation with Steve he asked me to stand up and thank everybody from the bottom of his heart who has ever touched him, and more importantly the family and friends that have been there for him throughout his illness showing him all the love he had never expected.

On behalf of all the family and friends we would like to take the opportunity to thank all the doctors and nurses from both Katharine House and the Churchill hospital, for the way they loved and cared for Steve, it ment so much to him.

Steve ask me to be strong, look up at everybody in the church and say in the words of Steve "I will always love and miss each and every one of you and please remember me with laughter and not tears"

Quotes from the DVD, filmed by Billy Dilkes, which was played at the Reunion...

**"Come in Mr Grimsdale! Do you know how long I have waited to say that! (laughing)... all right Gents, thanks for taking the time for having a drink at the bar for me, I wish I could be with you there now... big hi, big thanks to each and every one of you, great big hugs and love to you as well.."**

**"I would like to say and wish I could be with you for the Corps Weekend... but I can't because obviously... but I tell you what you got me their in spirit, you got my mind, body and soul so don't worry about that... I love each and every single one of my Pioneer brothers, I love each and every one of my 23 Pioneer brothers... you're all there now, get yourself laaaaggrered up! (hand gesture with a pint. I don't want to hear of no one sort of like sitting there like this, it's boring this, because I know that would be me! (laughing))"**

**"All I want to say is big kisses to you all, big hugs and everything... I can't use my left hand anymore... (laughing and customary hand gesture)..."**

**"Take care, all bye" (thumbs up)**





# And finally...

## Confidential Reports, General Reinwald, a train journey and the hardest provo Sgt in 23 Pioneer...

Report: Norman Brown  
Picture: RPCA Archive

**I**F YOU have any humorous stories to tell, send them in at the usual address... Here are some examples of various officer's confidential reports.

- His men would follow him anywhere, but only out of curiosity.

- I would not breed from this Officer.

- This Officer is really not so much of a has-been, but more of a definitely won't-be.

- When she opens her mouth, it seems that this is only to change whichever foot was previously in there.

- He has carried out each and every one of his duties to his entire satisfaction.

- He would be out of his depth in a car park puddle.

- Technically sound, but socially impossible.

- This Officer reminds me very much of a gyroscope - always spinning around at a frantic pace, but not really going anywhere.

- This young lady has delusions of adequacy.

- When he joined my unit, this Officer was something of a granny; since then he has aged considerably.

- Since my last report he has reached rock bottom, and has started to dig.

- She sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.

- He has the wisdom of youth, and the energy of old age.

- This Officer should go far - and the sooner he starts, the better.

- Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap

- This man is depriving a village somewhere of an idiot.

- A gross ignoramus - 144 times worse than an ordinary ignoramus.

- A photographic memory but with the lens cover glued on.

- Fell out of the family tree

- Has two brains: one is lost and the other is out looking for it

- If brains were taxed, he'd get a rebate.

- If he were any more stupid, he'd have to be watered twice a week.

- If you give him a penny for his thoughts, you'd get change.

**T**HIS IS an exact replication of National Public Radio (NPR) interview between a female broadcaster and US Army General Reinwald who was about to sponsor a Scout Troop visiting his base.

Female Interviewer: "So, General Reinwald, what things are you going to teach these young boys when they visit your base?"

General: "We're going to teach them climbing, canoeing, archery and shooting."

Female Interviewer: "Shooting! That's a bit irresponsible, isn't it?"

General: "I don't see why, they'll be properly supervised on the rifle range."

Female Interviewer: "Don't you admit that this is a terribly dangerous activity to be teaching children?"

General: "I don't see how. We will be teaching them proper rifle discipline before they even touch a firearm."

Female Interviewer: "But you're equipping them to become violent killers."

General: "Well, you're equipped to be a prostitute, but you're not one, are you?"

This is fiction. According to NPR no such interview ever took place. But it's a good story anyway...

**A**ND FINALLY... Four strangers travelled together in the same compartment of a European train. Two men and two women faced each other. One woman was a very wealthy and sophisticated 70 year old lady. Next to her sat a beautiful young woman, 19 years old who looked like something right off the cover of a fashion magazine.

Across from the older lady was a very mature looking man in his mid-forties who was a highly decorated Sgt Major in the Army. Next to the Sgt Major sat a young private.

As these four strangers travelled, they talked and chatted until they entered an unlighted tunnel and there they sat in complete darkness and total silence, until the sound of a distinct kiss broke the silence; following the kiss a loud slap could be heard throughout the cabin.

In the ensuing period of silence the four strangers sat quietly with their own thoughts. The older lady was thinking, "Isn't it wonderful that even in this permissive day and age there are still young women who have a little self-respect and dignity?"

The young woman, shaking her head and greatly puzzled, asked herself, "Why in the world would any man in his right mind want to kiss an old fossil like that when I'm sitting here?" The Sgt Major, rubbing his sore face, was outraged that any woman could ever think that a man in his position would try to sneak a kiss in the dark.

The private, grinning from ear to ear, was thinking, "What a wonderful world this is when a private can kiss the back of his hand and then smack a Sergeant Major in the face and get away with it!"



**"You'd never think Jock Leslie had the reputation of being the hardest Provost Sergeant in 23 Pioneer Regiment..."**

## Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Your Letters
- Photo Gallery
- News from 23 and 168 Pioneer Regiments
- Report from Cenotaph Parade
- Pioneer involvement in Suez
- Reviews
- And much more!



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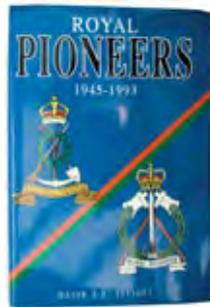
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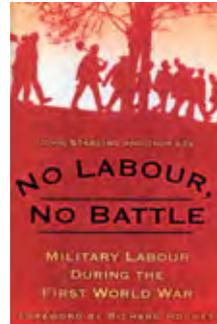


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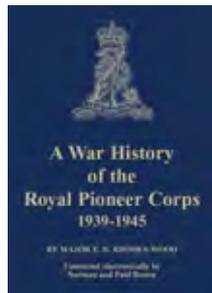


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