



Twiz Preaching



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Strange Antics



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War Cries



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P14

the



Pioneer



April 2014



1st TEAM

23 Pioneer Regt



1st INDIVIDUAL

LCpl Beadle - 23 Pioneer Regt



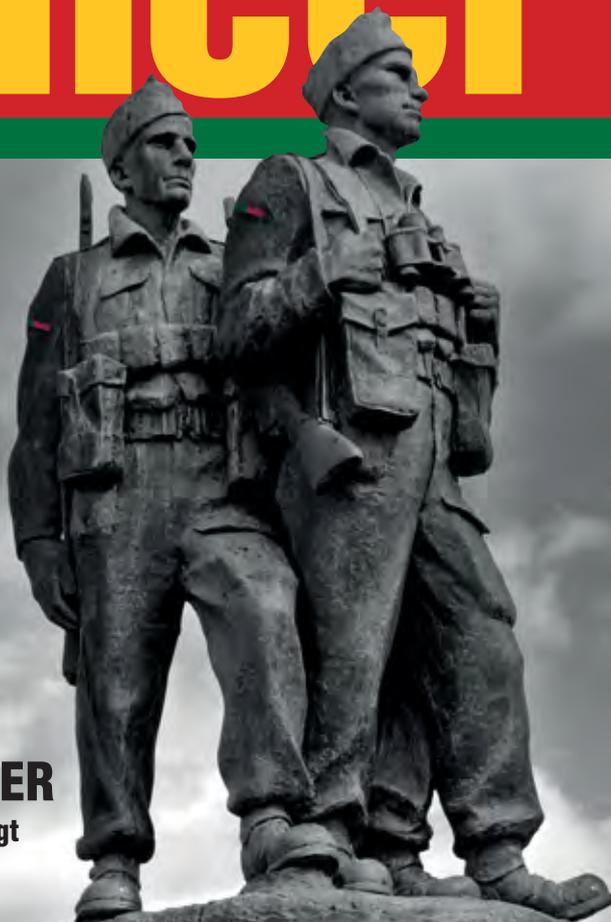
1st FEMALE

SSgt Mason - 23 Pioneer Regt



1st OVER 40 WINNER

Capt Andrews - 23 Pioneer Regt



UNITED · WE · CON

IN MEMORY OF
THE OFFICERS AND
MEN OF
THE COMMANDO
WHO DIED IN THE
SECOND WORLD WAR
1939-1945
THIS COURSE WAS
THEIR TRAINING
GROUND

Commando Speed March Winners

Page 2

**PLEASE
SUPPORT
THE DERBY
DRAW**

Full details
on Page 5

23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC not only won this years speed march they won every aspect of the march i.e. first team, first male competitor, first female competitor and first veteran. This is a great achievement and unfortunately because of disbandment maybe the last for Pioneers.

IN 1996 it was decided to reconstruct the original WW2 speed march to raise funds for the Commando Benevolent Fund and the Airborne Forces Charities as well as other charitable bodies. This has now become an established annual military event attracting over 400 entrants a year.

The initial march took place when the volunteers arrived at Spean Bridge Station. It was not unusual for them to be ordered to leave the train on the opposite side to the platform and any man injured jumping down on the track would be RTU'd. Heavy kit would be placed upon the waiting transport and the troops were then force marched to the gates of Achnacarry House carrying their fighting order.

The time allowed, to cover the 7 mile route, was 1 hour. Any recruits who failed to achieve this time were about turned and RTU'd by the next train. Prior to arriving at Spean Bridge, the recruits had undergone basic fitness training at Wrexham to ensure that they stood a good chance of completing the march.

The course consists of a 7 mile road march climbing around 400 feet out of Spean Bridge on the A82 before forking left onto the B8004 to pass the Commando Memorial at the 1.5 mile point.

The challenge for the modern day soldier is to complete the 7 miles in under 1 hour carrying 16kg. The event is also used as an Inter Unit competition with units being

allowed to enter as many individuals as possible with the first 5 from their team counting towards their final score.

It was decided that a team of Pioneers would participate in the Commando Speed March to be held on 8th March 2014. 2011 & 2012 saw 23 Pioneer Regiment winning the event and finishing 2nd in 2013 narrowly behind 7 RHA. Team members knew this would be the last chance to regain the trophy prior to disbandment.

Training started at the end of Jan14 under the watchful eye of our RAPTIC SSgt Mason. Anyone who has had the pleasure of being involved in one of SSgt Masons training programmes will tell you they are well structured and extremely testing. The old saying 'train hard, fight easy' has never been more true.

20 members of the regiment (including support staff) set off on Thursday 6 March for the long drive to Kinlochleven in Scotland. Saturday was race day with 242 competitors from 27 units: including 2 Para, Royal Marine Commando Training Centre, Infantry Battle School, 45 Commando Regt - to name but a few, lining up at Spean Bridge train station to re run this historic route.

As you would expect, 23 Pioneer Regiment team put in a fantastic display with our top 5 finishers all being in the top 24! 23 Pioneer Regt not only won this year's speed march they won every aspect of the march i.e. first team, first male

competitor, first female competitor and first veteran.

When you consider because of defence cuts the Regiment is only half the strength of other Regiments who participated this is a great achievement. The Regiment has only entered this march in the last four years and have won three times and came second on the other, unfortunately because of disbandment this will be the last time for Pioneers, however it now gives other Regiments a chance of winning!

All competitors that took part are to be congratulated on their performance on what always proves to be a testing route, in particular the individual winner LCpl Beadle (pictured on the right in the lead!) who has now won the race for three years consecutively.

After the Regiment's success some of the team took part in AT in the surrounding area. Walking in the hills and canoeing in the lochs. 23 Pioneer Regt continues the 'sprint to the finish' in the best possible manner. ■

RESULTS

Mick Beadle	47min 17secs	1	SSgt Mason	56min 05secs	64
Capt Andrews (1st veteran)	49min 27sec	5	(1st female)		
SSgt 'Hat' Clarke	51mins	9	Capt Smale	56min 47secs	71
SSgt Woods	51min 53secs	17	Lt Stanford	58mins 03secs	79
Capt Evans -Fry	52mins 46secs	24	Lt Costin	1hr 1min 08secs	117
Capt Cheetam	53min 44secs	33	SSgt Bennett	1hr 1min 31secs	125
WO1 (RSM) Lane	54min 24secs	39	Lt Col Clouston	1hr 09min 16secs	191
Cpl Thomas	55min 20secs	51	Cpl Green	1hr 09min 47secs	195
			WO2 Cheung	1hr 11min 47secs	201
			LCpl Fowler	1hr 15min 27secs	223

Pictures: Mr Graeme Taylor and 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC





COMMANDO SPEED MARCH

Spean Bridge, Scotland, 8th March 2014



Front Cover

The Commando Memorial
Picture: Stephen Meese / Paul Brown



Back Cover

Anniversaries Remembered
Picture: Paul Brown

EDITORIAL

P REPARATIONS are now underway for the disbandment of 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC and the end of the Pioneer Trade in the Army. It is the intention that all RPC Association property be disposed of either by donation to RLC Museum, Bicester Town Council, the new RLC Mess or sold to RPC Association members - the latter during the Pioneer Weekend in September. Details of auction items will be displayed on the Association Facebook page and sent to those members who we have an email address for.

If you have donated an item and wish to have it returned please contact the Association as soon as possible. Advertisements have been placed in the Telegraph, Northampton Chronicle & Echo, Bicester Advertiser, Soldier Magazine and The Sustainer.

As previously mentioned the Association will continue (as long as you, the members wish it) albeit with a revised Constitution. It is hoped that the HQ will stay in Bicester.

Once again we have, unfortunately, a long list of Obituaries to publish these include a former Colonel Commandant and a former Director as well as some well known personalities, our condolences go to their families.

Enclosed with this Newsletter is a return for both the last parade of the Regiment through Bicester on 27 July and the Disbandment Parade/Pioneer Weekend on 26/28 September.

Please note that accommodation in July is only available on Saturday 26th and in September from Thursday 25th to Sunday 28th. Please send you form in prior to 10 Jul and 13 Sep respectively. It is anticipated that this year's reunion will attract a large attendance. If you can bring your own accommodation i.e. tent, caravan, motor home etc it would be appreciated. A number of personnel will have to be accommodated in St George's Barracks and, as usual, mini buses will be provided to transport personnel to and from throughout the weekend.

Planning for the weekend has only just started but it is intended to "Go Out With a Bang", it being the last one at Bicester. It is now 22 years since we moved the Weekend from Northampton to Bicester and the Regiment has certainly looked after us well during that time.

Next year it is intended to use a hotel, probably in Coventry, this will be confirmed at the Annual General Meeting on 27th September.

If you have any topic/suggestion for the AGM

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STOP PRESS...

Planning is now well underway for the Reunion Weekend. Full itinerary will be published on the Association Facebook page shortly. Emails will be sent to those whose email addresses are known. If attending the Regiment's last march through

STOP PRESS...

Bicester on 27th July please wear a beret if in possession. A few spare berets are held at RPC Association and are available on a first come first served basis. Nothing else to report!



please send it to the Association by 10 September.

Also enclosed with the Newsletter are Derby Draw tickets, unless you have already indicated that you are unable to sell them, please support this draw as it is one of our main sources of income.

This year a record 142 personnel are attending the Army v Navy Rugby match at Twickenham. Most will be wearing 23 Regiment's Rugby Shirt (Red and Green), please look out for us on the TV - it is broadcast on Sky Sports 3.

Last year a record 42 members marched at the Cenotaph (ably led by Brig Telfer!), can we increase the number this year? If you would like to attend please let the Association know (telephone 01869 360694 or email royalpioneer corps@gmail.com)

The attendance at the Field of Remembrance however was rather disappointing, tickets are required for this but can be obtained from the Association.

Only twenty one October Newsletters were returned "Gone Away", this is less than 1% of the total sent out. If you move please let us know in good time - in advance of your move if possible and especially just prior to the posting

out of the Newsletters i.e. March and September.

Articles for the Newsletter are always welcome, it would be appreciated if they could include photographs, all photographs will be returned within 7 days.

In the next issue of the Pioneer we will be reviewing a new book on the Labour Corps "The Great War of George Weeks 1917-1919". This book was written after the war on seventy-eight sheets of cut-up wallpaper and edited by his son. It describes his service in 132 Labour Company - a very rare document and believed to be the only one in existence written by a Private soldier.

Once again I must say a big thank you to my son Paul for the preparation of this Newsletter. This takes many hours of work (and having to put up with my drafts and dis-organised layout!). You will also notice that most of the photographs were taken by him. It is recognised as one of the best Regimental Association Newsletters published. I hope to see you in either July or September (or both!) and also at the Field of Remembrance and the Cenotaph.

Norman Brown



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Can you spot the Mouse?

No one found the Cuneo mouse in the last edition of the newsletter.

The mouse was an easy one to find as well! It was on Page 30 in the side window of the vehicle.

Can you spot the Cuneo Mouse in this edition?

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 this page or page 66!

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

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 31st Aug 2014.

Good luck.

168 DISBANDMENT PARADE

Grantham, 26th October 2013



Pictures: Paul Brown

The 26 October 2013 is a date that will be pressed not only into the minds of the 500 soldiers and officers of 168 Pioneer Regiment but also the people of Grantham; who turned out in droves to watch the Regiment march through their town. Whilst being very sad, it marked the passing of the Regiment in true pioneer fashion. Labor omnia vincit.



THE 26th started with a commemoration service at St Wulframs Church, where the Bishop of Lincoln, The Right Reverend Christopher Lowson and Reverend Peter Hopkins delivered a fine service which included the blessing of the Regimental Commemorative Plaque, which it has been confirmed will be placed in St Wulframs church later in the year.

Following the service the Regiment was called to form up at Kings School, where the Regiment supported by the Band of the Parachute Regiment marched through town; quite remarkably the streets were lined three back along the entire route, with the Guildhall Square being packed to bursting point, rather poignantly 5 minutes before the Regiment stepped off the clouds parted and the sun shone down on the town illuminating the Regiment as it marched past the dais delivering an immaculate salute to the Mayor of Grantham and Major General Poffley.

Soldiers who specialise in construction work have marched through Grantham to mark their regiment being officially disbanded. The disbandment of the 168 Pioneer Regiment was announced in July as part of Army restructuring.

Formed in 1995, the regiment includes soldiers skilled in areas such as bricklaying and carpentry. Their support to regular soldiers has included building training

villages in Cyprus, and prisoner of war facilities.

The regiment, part of the Royal Logistic Corps, has also built things for communities in Lincolnshire and the North East, such as memorials, skate parks and a series of hides for bird watching.

Commanding officer Lt Col Andrew Parry said: "The Army Reserve needed to be shaped to meet future challenges.

"Our soldiers realise that and I know will serve their future units with the same commitment they have given to 168 Pioneer Regiment, a commitment that has made me proud to be their commanding officer."

Col Parry added: "Whilst this parade marks the end of an era it is also a time to celebrate the history and service of the regiment."

Following recovery to Prince William of Gloucester Barracks, the Regiment and its guests tucked into a fantastic lunch where the Regiment was also joined by the Lord Lieutenant of Lincolnshire, an hour and many sandwiches later the Regiment formed up on the Square for the formal act of disbandment. The Commanding Officers bidding word through out the Disbandment process has been honourable, with a level of turn out and bearing rarely seen and a precision in drill masking the little time many of the Regiment had to rehearse, no more honourable parade could have been

seen and so the flag of 168 Pioneer Regiment was lowered at 1546 hours marking the formal disbandment of the Regiment.

Following this rather sombre moment, the Regiment and its wider family retired to the Pioneer Hangar where over the course of the next 10 hours the Regiment and its guests were entertained by two wonderful bands, a magnificent fireworks display and the sort of evening buffet that could grace any fine hotel. One must also not forget the child's entertainer whose magic tricks even bamboozled some of the old guests.

With the dust having settled, it would only be right and proper to thanks those who have helped to make the say so special; and whilst the list would be to long to thank all individually, Councillor Mike Cook must be thanked along with the Mayor of Grantham for their hard work liaising with the wider local government, the Rev Peter Hopkins for stepping in at the last minute to provide a honourable and fitting memorial service and finally Maj Gen Tim Cross CBE, the Regiments Honorary Colonel for his tireless work over the past years.

Finally, I think all of you that have served so proudly in the Regiment throughout its history will agree that the 26th October 2013 whilst being very sad, marked the passing of the Regiment in a true pioneer fashion. Labor omnia vincit. ■

PAST EVENTS



■ THE 67th Past and Present Dinner was held on 11th October 2013 in the Sergeants Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Bicester. It was held in the Sergeants' Mess as this mess is larger.

The two guests were Col J Grinstead MBE ADC the Corps Colonel and Brig HJ Hickman CBE who recently retired as President of the RPC Association.

66 Past and Present Pioneers sat down to a very enjoyable meal.

Maj W Dilkes posted the following on Facebook:

"I have to say, that was a brilliant Past & Present Dinner Night. If I could hand pick a perfect group of men to eat and drink with then most of them were there last night... God bless you all!!"

■ ONCE AGAIN members met at the Corps Plot at Westminster Abbey for the Field of Remembrance.

Cpl Beacham stood at the front of the Plot with In-Pensioner Micky Hull where they both spoke to the Duke of Edinburgh. (It should be noted that Sgt Paul Hanson was too nervous to stand at the front). Following the service at the Field, members once again went to the Marquis of Westminster Restaurant for lunch, a beer and a chat. As is tradition we then went to Chelsea to make sure that Micky got home OK. He took us to his local pub where a few more beers were had.

■ THE Northampton Branch held what started out as a Christmas Party but turned out to be a Burns Night as it fell on 25 Jan 14.

Over 65 Association members turned up in the Eastgate Pub, Northampton, they came from as far afield as Manchester, Nottingham, London, Leeds, Bicester and, of course, Northampton. A great night was had and most enjoyed the Haggis and Neeps.

Kev Young, being of Scottish descent, was going to read out the Ode to the Haggis but at the last minute decided to read out "The Ode to the Fart" which went along the lines of:

Oh whit a sleekit horrible beastie,
It lurks in yer belly efter a feastie!
Nae maiter whit ye dae,
Awbiddies gonnae hiv tae pay.

Evn if ye try to stifle,
It's lik a bullit oot a rifle!
Haud yer bum tite tae the chair,
Tae try tae stoap the leakin air.

Shimmy yersel fae cheek tae cheek,
Pray tae God it disny reek!
Then oot it comes lik a thunder clap,
Enough tae mak yer shirt tail flap.

Richochets aroon the room,
Michty me! A sonic boom!
My o' My it fairly reeks,
Hope a huvny shit ma breeks!

If you live in Northampton or the Northampton area and do not receive the Northampton Branch newsletter please let HQ RPC Association know and you will be added to the distribution list.

It is intended to hold another Branch Function later in the year, ideas/suggestions on where to hold the event are always welcome.

We will be, once again, booking a mini-bus for the Cenotaph Parade in Whitehall in November.

Dining out Twiz and big Verne

| At the Ladies/Generation night held in the Sergeants Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment, Bicester on 18 October 2013



■ The RSM presents Rich with a badger

Picture: Paul Brown

THE WOs and SNCOs Reunion Club held a Ladies/Generation night in the Sergeants Mess, 23 Pioneer Regiment on 18 October 2013. The opportunity was also taken to dine out WO2 V Matravers and WO2 Twizzell.

The town-crier for Mablethorpe, ex WO2 Roy Palmer was going to read an ode for both the Warrant Officers but at the last moment could not attend. His Odes...

PROCLAMATION for WO2 Rich Matravers
On his Retirement from
The Royal Logistics Corps

Big Verne Matravers, stands over me, as you can see.

He is known, throughout the world and the RLC.

You get a lot of Qudos, when you're promoted to WO2.

He was posted to the West Indies, right out there in the Blue.

He joined a ship, as Warrant Officer, he couldn't even swim!

He had a 2 year paid holiday, who said, that Verne, is dim.

He has also served with the Pioneer TA sister Regiment.

Big Verne, never argued, he just went, where he was sent. .

He has served on many tours and postings, in places all around.

Some he liked, some were a bore and some they were quite sound.

He marched through Maggie's town, Grantham and on the Parade Ground too.

But he is only really happy, when he can bawl at you.

Verne, always said, "I am a Batchelor, a batchelor I will stay".

But he hadn't met the right girl, till she came along his way.

He is now engaged to marry, his girl is here tonight.

Keep a tight rein on him Janice, he's been known to party, all the night.

Verne loves his animals, tractors, also combines too.

But his return to Civvy life, will make him feel quite blue.

We have a small gift for him, to send him on his way.

A little tiny Badger, it should really make his day.

PROCLAMATION For WO2 JG TWIZZELL
On his Retirement from
The Royal Logistic Corps

Twiz, signed on the dotted line in 1991, while he was very drunk.

He thought he'd joined the Paras, but woke up in the Chunks.

During many tours and postings, our Hero, he has survived.

A challenge for most, but, Twiz, he surely thrived.

When an event organiser is needed, then please, beware.

For, how he gets the job done, he doesn't really care.

The Sgt's Mess were stupid enough, to ask him, to lend a hand.



■ Twiz exaggerates again

Pictures: Paul Brown

Stupid? I hear you ask, Twiz, covered the carpet, with 2 tons of sand.

He is a Regimental footballer, we all know, that he is good.

But if you're a Middlesborough Supporter, then football, must be in the blood.

Middlesborough Football Club, who are they, I hear you say.

While saying that, step back, for a backhand may come your way.

During your service, the Qudos, you have brought the RLC.

Is clearly there, for the Army and all of us to see.

His proud wife Claire and dear old mum, are here to wish him well.

Twiz on retirement, if your wife is aught like mine, be prepared, for hell.

Norman and myself were chunks, the Army was different then.

Our dreams have not disappeared, we still think we are military men.

But Twiz, we are in good company and it will make us proud.

When you leave this life of purgatory and join us, in the civilian crowd.

Verne sent me the following letter:

Norman, could I please thank you and the WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club for dining out myself and my fiancée and hosting my guests at the Association Ladies Dinner Night on Friday 18th October.

It was a fantastic evening and I am extremely grateful to be privileged enough to have been dined out in "our" mess as I am aware that not all Pioneers are offered

this honour. I feel honoured to have been sat at the top table, the company was excellent - if a little hazy towards the end!

If you have the space please could you place this missive in the next edition of The Pioneer and if you really have the space please include a copy of my short speech. Rich (Big Verne) Matravers.

Presiding Member, Honoured Guests, ladies and gentlemen.

22 years is a long time to do any job, let alone one as varied as mine has been. Trying to sum it all up in a brief speech is virtually impossible I feel.

It's been a number of things to me. It's been FUN - like being involved in nearly blowing up half of Otterburn Trg Area on the Sid Blinston bunker episode, or being posted to a ship - as a bloke who doesn't like water and can't swim.

It's been a challenge - various operational tours and exercises too numerous to mention, living out of a bergan, eating compo, seeing the same blokes ugly face day in day out for weeks or months on end, making hard decisions, making bad ones, making good ones, gaining good friends, and some times losing them. It's been rewarding, passing basic, getting my first stripe then losing it! Passing Brecon, teaching Infantry Recruits, seeing them around the world, gaining entry to the most exclusive club in the world THE MESS, getting a few jollies on Adventure Training in Nepal, Corsica, Chamonix etc.

Most off all it's been good, certainly good to me, 22 years of my life, life in a green suit or should that be a red and

green suit! Will I miss it, too bloody right I will, BUT, one can't do it alone so I have to thank a few people:

1. RSM, Sir, Norman and the Reunion Club, thank you for inviting me to come home and be dined out on completion of my 22 years Colour service in our mess.

2. All the Pioneers good or bad, without you the journey through my career would have been very "boring" indeed... I thank you one and all. That includes the Girls in the mess, Wendy, Annie et al...

3. Rob and Karen Hebditch, my guests, they have been my other family in civvy street for years and have backed me through good times and bad, I have become part of their family over the years, a simple thank you seems very inadequate.

4. Finally Jacqui, my fiancée, soon to be Mrs Matravers. Me the PMC of the Mess Orphans Club struck down by cupid's arrow. Jax used to make special trips to the farm to watch me "do farming".

Me being a bit slow on the uptake mentioned this to Rob one morning on leave as we were working, he replied, "she doesn't come to look at me you dick!" There was I believe some intervention by Karen ref phone numbers and the rest is history. Jax has put up with me being away a lot but not for much longer, as we will soon be together all the time, and I love her very much.

Everybody toasts absent friends and rightly so,

I would like to propose a toast to: NEW HORIZONS.

Rich (Big Verne) Matravers



We had a record number of Pioneers turn up on parade, 42 to be exact. Can we beat the record again this year?

ONCE again the UK fell silent to commemorate war dead on Sunday 10 Nov 13, and record numbers (over 10,000) marched at the Cenotaph at Whitehall this included 42 Pioneers (also a record).

The crowds in central London stood quietly as Big Ben struck 1100 hrs and the beginning and end of the silence was

marked with the firing of a round by the King's Troop Royal Horse Artillery, using a 13-pounder World War One gun.

A two-minute silence was observed before the Queen laid the first wreath, this was followed by other members of the Royal Family and then politicians, Military and emergency service chiefs and representatives from Commonwealth

countries.

The assembled marchers - who for the first time included representatives of a World War 2 unit known as "Churchill's Secret Army" which were members of the British Resistance Movement, then set off down Whitehall.

We are hoping for an even bigger turn out this year! ■



CENOTAPH MARCH

Whitehall, London, 10th November 2013

FUTURE EVENTS



■ MEMBERS OF all Regimental Associations are invited to take part in the annual Walk for Remembrance at the National Memorial Arboretum on Sunday 11 May 2014.

Full information and a booking form can be found at: <http://tinyurl.com/oyav92f>

■ 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC is to march through Bicester Town for the last time on Sunday 27 July 2014.

The day will start with a Church Service in St Edburg's Church at 1100 hours, followed by a march from the Church to Garth Park where a reception will be held.

The Regiment has asked Old Comrades to march behind the Regiment, it is hoped therefore that as many as possible attend. Accommodation will be available on Saturday 26 July and a booking form is enclosed with the Newsletter.

■ 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC is to hold a Disbandment Parade on Friday 26th September 2014.

This is to be followed by the usual Pioneer Weekend.

The Pioneer Weekend will probably follow the usual successful programme, although at the time of going to press with this Newsletter details have to be confirmed.

It is expected that the weekend, which is the last to be held in Bicester, will be the largest held. Accommodation will therefore be at a premium.

A return for the weekend is enclosed, this must be returned by 5 Sep 14. Please note that some accommodation will have to be in St George's Barracks.

To guarantee a place in St David's please bring your own accommodation (Motorhome, caravan or tent).

In addition there are a few rooms available for personnel to bring their own camp cots, air mattress etc.

Please indicate on the return if you are willing to do this.

■ THE WOs & SNCOs Pnr Reunion Club is to hold a Ladies/Generation Night on Sat 6 Sep 14 at Bicester.

Full details and a booking form will be sent to Club members in July.

■ THE NORTHERN Ireland Veterans' Association Service of Remembrance 2014 will be held at 1130 hrs Saturday 20 Sep 14 at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffs.

The service will commemorate and remember all those who lost their lives in service of the Crown as a result of the conflict in N Ireland.

The service will be followed by a parade down to the Ulster Ash Grove for the laying of wreaths.

Following the laying of the wreaths, there will be a 15 minute pause before the parade forms up for the return march to the visitor centre during which the guest of honour will take the salute.

The service is open to all and all Associations are welcome to parade their standards.

It would be appreciated if Associations arranging for groups of their members to attend could notify us of numbers and confirm if their standard will be parading.

I will always be red and green at heart

Peter Bevan decided it was time to take up charity raising and do his bit for Help the Heroes



■ Peter Bevan and the crew of the Vos Venturer

Pictures: Peter Bevan

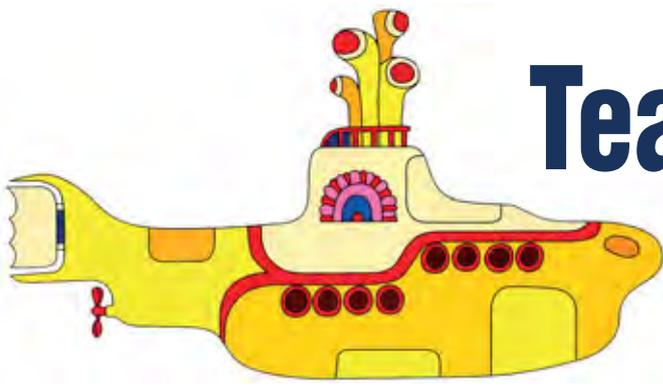
PETER BEVAN is a ex Pioneer who served from 1980 to 1984. He decided it was time to take up charity raising and do his bit for Help for Heroes but especially in memory of Lee Rigby the poor soldier who was murdered in London.

Peter now serves as a bosun for Vroon Offshore where he has had great support from the crew and his Captain John Clark.

Peter did say though that he will always be red and green at heart. He managed to raise £942.18 and would also like to say thank you to everybody that donated.

Team Charlie Wood

IN SUPPORT OF
**HELP for
HEROES**



Ex Pioneers are turning a £250 car into a yellow submarine and intend to drive their way across 5 of Europe's top 10 roads in aid of Help for Heroes

AFTER a great Christmas I was relaxing messing about with my phone when suddenly I saw a link to Help for Heroes banger run 2014 to say that I was intrigued was an understatement and I thought it was a fantastic idea.

As the days rolled on I found myself keeping going back and browsing over their website. It was then I decided I needed to be part of this, I contacted the organisers on New Year's Eve and mentioned that I was interested in joining them on this year's rally registration for newcomers opens on 12th January bloody hell twelve days to wait for registration it couldn't come quick enough I checked in with "the Boss" and got my leave pass in for the end of August if I was to be accepted.

The 2014 Banger Run will be one of the hardest yet.

Although not the longest, the bangers will be pushed to the limit as teams navigate their way across 5 of Europe's top 10 roads in £250 cars decorated as anything that's very British. The Help for Heroes Banger Run is organised by Royal Air Force personnel in between their primary duties and detachments.

It's an annual European driving event which is gaining more and more interest each year. It is open to anybody who wants to get involved. Due to the nature of the Help for Heroes charity, the majority of teams are military but a lot of the general public are entering too.

I got in contact with Heather Wood and asked if she would mind if the team did the run in memory of W02 Charlie Wood who was tragically killed on operations in

Afghanistan in December 2010 whilst serving with the Counter-improvised Explosive Device Task force on Herrick 13. Heather said that it is an amazing idea and it would be an honour to do it in Charlie's name, so Team Charlie Wood was born.

This year's H4H banger run theme is Best of British so I got my thinking cap on I need to dress up a Peugeot 406 EST to something very British, (yes I know the cars not very British but have you tried to buy a jag for £250) I went through British films and TV looking for iconic British cars to replicate and then had one of those eureka moments (ok I don't have them very often) British Pop and decided to turn a car into the yellow submarine from the best British band The Beatles, how hard could it be....

The route will include Route 500 in Germany, the Klausen Pass, Furka Pass & San Bernadino Pass as well as the Stelvio Pass all of which are in Switzerland and a small part in Italy.

The route will finish at Lake Como northern Italy. The team consists of:

Steve Miles

Ex 23 PNR Regt 1993-2000 had the privilege to know and serve with Charlie in my time at the Regt.

I am currently repairing and painting cars or submarines for Pro Smart Systems Ltd based in Chesterfield.

Thomas Keeton

Ex 23 PNR Regt 1990-2002
The Highlanders 2002-2008

Tom is now retired living in Chesterfield due to injuries sustained in a grenade attack on OP Telic 7 in Iraq 2005

Wayne Kipling

Master mechanic 24 years well he better be because he's going to be one very busy lad getting our submarine ship shape and maintaining it.

Help for Heroes is about the men and women of our Armed Forces. Since 2007, H4H has helped hundreds of men and women who have been wounded, injured or become sick in the line of duty since 9/11.

Help for Heroes strives towards 100% effectiveness – so that for every £1 donated, £1 will go directly to helping wounded Servicemen and women. So, we do exactly what we say on the tin – your donations go directly to supporting the wounded boys and girls.

To donate the this worthwhile cause and help Team Charlie Wood smash its target for sponsorship you can sponsor via justgiving at www.justgiving.com/teamcharliewood

Remember: Donating through JustGiving is simple, fast and totally secure. Your details are safe with JustGiving – they'll never share them with anyone or send you unwanted emails.

Once you donate, they'll send your money directly to the charity.

They'll make sure Gift Aid (an additional 25%) is reclaimed on every eligible donation by a UK taxpayer, too. That means more money goes to the charity, faster, with JustGiving. Textgiving texts are free.

Text – 70070.

Message-w0ii66

Enter amount ££££

Or visit www.bangerrun.com and click on the yellow submarine.



Stelvio Pass,
9045 ft



Furka Pass, 7969 ft



Klausen Pass,
6391 ft



The San Bernardino Pass,
6,778 ft

Pictures: Steve Miles

23 Pioneer Regiment, RLC held a night of boxing on 14 November 2013. The boxers were from 23, 24, 29 Regiment and 104 Log Sp Brigade. It was a night of fantastic closely fought bouts. It was pleasing to see many Association members in the audience.

BOXERS came together for a fantastic night of closely fought bouts at St David's Barracks on 14 Nov 13. The boxers from 23, 24 and 29 Regiments Royal Logistic Corps and one boxer from 104 Log Sp Brigade.

Although 23 Pioneer Regiment provided 7 of the 22 boxers unfortunately only two (Pte Lugeba and SSgt Clarke) managed to win. The others, however, were not disgraced and fought magnificently, they were Pte Taylor, Pte Petley, Cpl Lang, Pte Leach and Pte Thompson.

It was pleasing to see so many

Association members in the audience (and later in the Sergeants Mess), all agreed it was a well organised event (thanks mainly to WO2 Spencer Belcher-Marks).

The following appeared in the programme for the evening:

The Man in the Arena

(Excerpt from the speech "Citizenship in a Republic" delivered at the Sorbonne, in Paris, on 23 Apr 1910 by Theodore Roosevelt)

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs

to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat. ■



Pictures: Paul Brown



BOXING EVENING

St David's Barracks, 14th November 2013

FUTURE EVENTS



■ **THE PAST and Present Officers Dinner** is to be held in the Bicester Garrison Officers Mess, Ambrosden on 17 October 2014.

Officers wishing to attend should contact the RPC Association.

■ **THE 8 Regiment RASC/RCT/RLC ANNUAL Anniversary Reunion Dinner** is to be held on Saturday 18th October 2014.

These Annual Re-Unions are open to any Ex Member of 8 Regiment, of any of the following Cap Badges: - RASC - RCT - RLC - ROYAL SIGNALS - REME - RPC - RAPC - ACC - AGC - RAPTC, who served in the Regiment between:- October 1964 - July 2012. For further information contact:- Jimmy Aspinall, by Email: jimmyasp@hotmail.com or David Southall by Email: Dcsouthall@aol.com.

■ **THE FIELD of Remembrance** will be held at Westminster Abbey on Thursday 6 November 2014.

Tickets are now required for this event, these can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.

■ **WE WILL**, once again, be holding the London Lunch on 6 November 2014.

This follows the Field of Remembrance and will be in the Marquis of Westminster Public House, Warwick Way, London (Near Victoria Station).

■ **THE CENOTAPH Parade** is to be held at Whitehall on Sunday 9 November 2014.

Tickets can be obtained from the Secretary RPC Association.

Personnel must be on Horse Guards Parade by 1010 hrs. Northampton Branch of the Association will once again be hiring a mini-bus from Northampton Town Centre, if you wish to travel on this please inform the Secretary.

NEWS IN BRIEF



■ **THANKS TO** all members who supported the Christmas Draw, this is one of the few areas in which we raise money to keep the Association running.

The draw was held in the WOs & Sgts' Mess, 23 Pnr Regt RLC on 12 Dec 13.

Cheques have been posted to lucky winners.

1st Prize £1,000 - F Cooper
Ticket No 36971
Amersham

2nd Prize £500 - P Osborne
Ticket No 47781
Bexhill on Sea

3rd Prize £200 - E Joslin
Ticket No 01329
South Benfleet

4th Prize £100 - S Blake
Ticket No 40864
Stratford Upon Avon

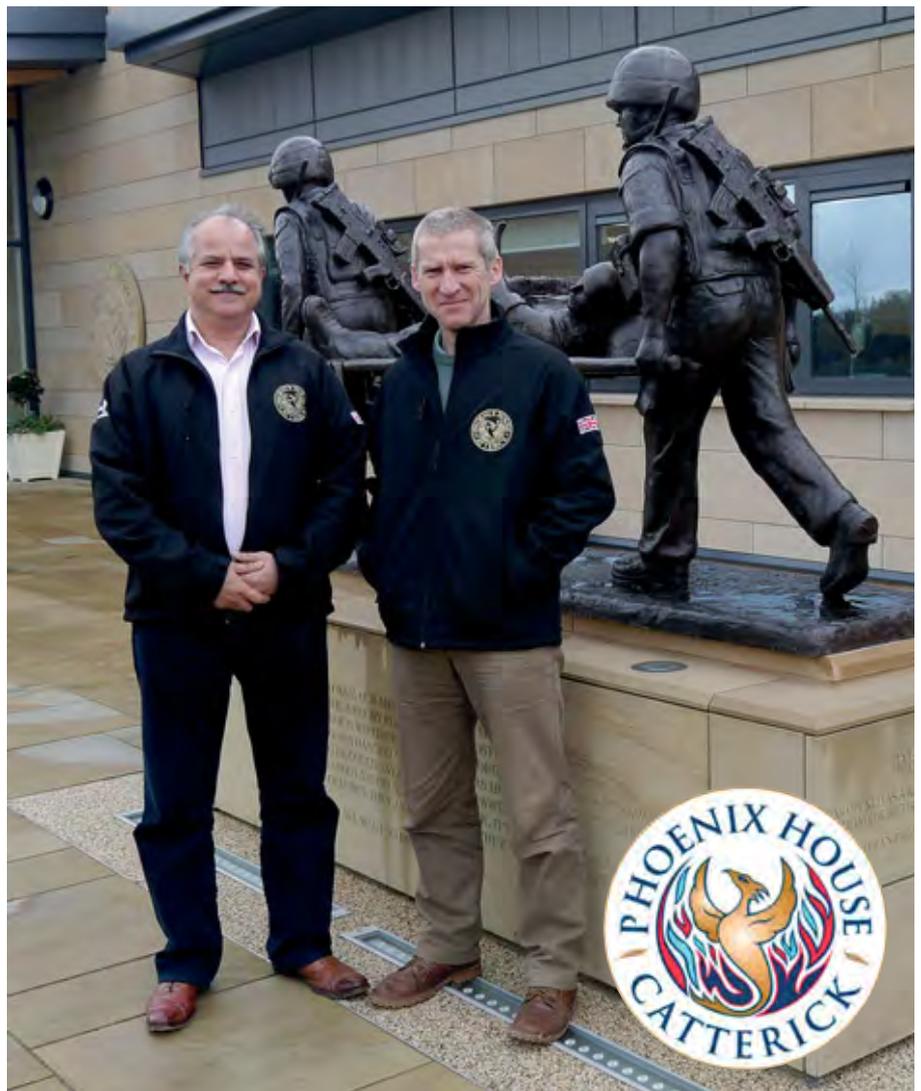
5th Prize £50 - A Marsden
Ticket No 47622
Hyde, Cheshire

■ **IN THE October 2013 newsletter** on page 41 the name Mr T Sullivan should read Bill Sears.

Hope to see you at this years reunion Bill.

Two Pioneers reunited

Two veterans who met at Sandhurst have found themselves working together again years later for Help for Heroes.



■ Mo Usman and Lawrence Mannion outside Phoenix House Recovery Centre

Pictures: Phoenix House

TWO VETERANS who met while undergoing officer training at Sandhurst have found themselves working together again years later for the charity Help for Heroes.

Mo Usman and Lawrence Mannion, both 52, joined the Royal Pioneer Corps and began their military careers in the mid-1980s. While life then took them in different directions, they remained in touch through the years.

After 24 years in the Army, Mo became the Centre Manager for the Help for Heroes Phoenix House Recovery Centre in Catterick, North Yorkshire, which provides support for wounded, injured and sick service personnel, veterans and their families.

Mo quickly realised that Lawrence, who served eight years in the Army, would be the perfect candidate for Support Programme Coordinator and he joined Phoenix House in February, 2012.

A year later, he became the Support Hub Manager, a vital role making sure that veterans and families receive all the help they need from psychological support to

housing, finances and leisure.

For Mo, working for Help for Heroes is the ideal position, following his long military career.

He said: "My greatest enjoyment is the continued realisation that you can do a lot for those who are wounded, injured and long-term sick, including veterans and their families that's perhaps just not conceivable in the general mind.

Very close to that is an absolute passion for forming highly functional and professional teams to deliver what is enormously rewarding work."

Mo, who grew up in Nottingham, joined the Army when he was 24-years-old after becoming interested in the military through the Air Cadets and then the 4 Parachute Regiment TA while at university. He credits his experience with the Army Training Corps for giving him the skills to achieve such success with the Pioneers.

He went to Sandhurst in 1986, sponsored by the Pioneers. His career saw several tours to Northern Ireland and Iraq, as well as postings to Germany as a troop commander



TO INSPIRE OUR WOUNDED, INJURED AND SICK SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN TO
ACTIVE INDEPENDENT AND FULFILLING LIVES, ENABLING THEM TO REACH THE
FULL POTENTIAL AND SUPPORTING THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES, FOR LIFE.



■ Mo Usman (whilst Adjt 23 Group and Lawrence Mannion

Pictures: Phoenix House

in 8 Transport Regiment, Malaysia and to Georgia as Chief Operating Officer for a UN Mission.

His last posting was to HQ 6 Division in York, where he was involved in training Operational Brigades deploying to Helmand Province. Before leaving the Army, he was selected into the appointment of Colonel Commandant for Cleveland Cadet Force – giving something back to the cadets. He left in June 2010 as a Lieutenant Colonel to set up a small luxury hotel, The Burgoyne in Swaledale, North Yorkshire, with his wife Julia.

At the same time, he was appointed as project officer to set up an interim Personnel Recovery Centre as part of the Defence Recovery Capability for the MOD, employed on full-time reserve service.

He was then selected by Help for Heroes to take on the project for them as Centre Manager. He worked pro bono for the charity until being officially appointed in April, 2012.

Mo said he has worked hard to build a strong team at Phoenix House and knew his former colleague Lawrence would be a huge asset to the Centre.

He said: "At Sandhurst, Lawrence and I got on a straight away. He was very supportive of me and I'm not sure if he thought I was a foreign officer and needed help, or if he was just thoughtful and approachable!

"I think it's great we are working together again. We are different in character but we have values that are very similar in nature."

For Lawrence, working with Mo again is both "strange" and "rewarding."

"It's funny how life works out," he said. "Phoenix House is very hands-on and it's a vibrant work environment.

"We are here to support all veterans who are wounded, injured or sick and it's about getting that message out there to as many organisations and veterans as possible so we can grow that role and develop that.

"The challenge of the job includes looking at how we approach different services and how all the organisations serving veterans work together or at least collaborate"

Lawrence joined the Army when he was 19 years old, beginning with the Intelligence Corps as a soldier. In 1986, he applied for his commission and went to Sandhurst for officer training, where he met Mo.

He said: "I remember he was very studious, diligent and reliable. Both of us then applied to the Royal Pioneers Corps. I was interested in logistics type corps and the Pioneers came top as it had an infantry and logistics role."

His first posting was with 518 company, where he worked with a platoon in Gibraltar as well as serving in Northern Ireland. Lawrence was then posted to the First Armoured Division and Signal Regiment in Verden as a defence platoon commander.

During his Army career, he was also a station fire officer and Regimental NBC officer. Lawrence left the Army in 1990 as a lieutenant.

Lawrence, who now lives in Reeth with his wife Hilde, trained as a teacher and became principle of Lindeth College in Windermere for pupils with moderate to severe learning difficulties and disabilities. He led visually impaired holidays for a number of years before joining the Phoenix House team.

For Mo, it's all about building a good team to support the wounded, injured and sick.

He said: "I like developing individuals, pushing people to the limits in a constructive way and giving people the freedom to try things, while making them realise they can achieve more than they personally think.

"The work here at Phoenix House spans from developing at the very base level to providing input to sophisticated ideas at a strategic level.

"I am very lucky. My time in the services was very enjoyable and my career at Help for Heroes is nothing but rewarding. The complexity of characters we see here is indefinite and that's what inspires me to help unravel those complexities in a supportive and positive way.

"Our collective role," Mo said, "is to inspire, enable and support those in need – it is not to change the world but to help and support those whose world has changed."

Anyone who served in the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Marines or Royal Air Force who needs the support of Help for Heroes Phoenix House Recovery Centre in Catterick can self-refer by calling 01748 834148.



■ THE RLC museum is going to move to a new site at Worthy Down (Project Wellesley)

The position chosen for the Museum is on the main access road and the building will incorporate the reception area and refreshment facilities for visitors. The great advantage the new site offers is that it brings the entire Museum's collection under one roof. They are currently spread over six locations at Deepcut and conditions for the collection are not always to the highest standard. In order to do this the footprint of the Museum will be twice that of the existing building and this offers the opportunity to display more of the collection to visitors than ever before. We intend to use the new exhibition space to tell the full story of the RLC and Forming Corps as part of a thematic and chronological story from today back to the fourteenth century.

The plan is for the move to the new Museum site to happen in May 2018 at the conclusion of the relocation process, but this does not mean that work has stopped at the current site.

■ THE SERVICE Personnel and Veterans Agency can be found on www.veterans.uk.info (Tel No 0808 1914 218).

This excellent website provides a large amount of information for all veterans, including Pensions, Medals, Welfare and the National Memorial Arboretum. You can also obtain your service records, for a small fee, in which you will be able to read your Confidential Reports!

The Veterans UK Helpline handles approximately 16,000 phone calls and 1,900 emails per month from veterans, their families or representatives in respect of a wide range of veterans related issues.

The advice requested through the Veterans UK Helpline is predominantly focused on pensions and compensation schemes administered by SPVA and medals concerns, however, veterans do call to seek help on a wide range of topics, some of whom are in urgent need of help.

■ THE NATIONAL Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire is looking to recruit customer service-oriented volunteers to join their visitor welcome team.

As the UK's year-round Centre of Remembrance, the Arboretum is a spiritually uplifting place which honours the fallen, recognises service and sacrifice and fosters pride in our country.

The new recruits will join an award winning team of over 180 volunteers. They are a vital part of the Arboretum, contributing both time and energy to ensuring visitors have a memorable experience, and helping the site to flourish and grow for the benefit of future generations.

Customer service volunteers get involved in all aspects of meeting and greeting visitors, leading guided tours of the arboretum and providing information to visitors. Successful applicants will receive training and advice from both senior volunteers and external bodies and the chance to work alongside an experienced volunteer mentor.

To apply contact Kim Riley, Volunteers & Training Co-ordinator (01283 792333) email: kriley@thenma.org.uk

Further news from 23

Adventure Training and a troop commanders perspective show a unique set of challenges



■ 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC, Boxing Evening

Picture: Paul Brown

FURTHER NEWS 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC. The Regiment deployed a team to Ex Ski RLC, the Corps Skiing Championships in Ruhpolding, Germany. With many brand new skiers across both Alpine and Nordic disciplines, silverware was never the objective. Instead, exposure to perilously steep icy slopes and gruelling 10 kilometre races ensured that all members of the team showed great grit, determination and courage.

Sticking with the AT theme, a team from the regiment also participated in the Combined Services and British Telemark Ski Championships. The team had varying degrees of ski experience, from ski novice to a multi-disciplined ski expert. For the uninitiated, Telemark races encompass a giant slalom run, a jump, a rap (360 degree banked turn) and a skate section. The only silverware from the competition was brought home in the development sprint race by SSgt Pete Archer who won 2nd place. Further adventure training is planned in the upcoming weeks, including a trip to Wales for a combined hill walking and mountain biking expedition. The three new Tp Comds who joined the Regt in January have also been told to 'think big' with regards to planning a L3 AT exped – so watch this space.

A Troop Commander's Perspective by 2Lt Doyle-Tanner.

I arrived at Regiment in January 2014 to a very different environment to that of my peers from Sandhurst and the RLC Troop Commanders' Course. While most were arriving to regiments with a clear forecast of

events and set targets, or the lucky few due to deploy on operations, my 2 fellow troop commanders and I faced a very different set of challenges. Instead of struggling to get to grips with the intricacies of JAMES and MJDI, inspecting vehicles or deploying on exercise, our world has become one of Outreach, the Redundancy DIN and the imminent spectre of the Tranche 4 announcement.

This has certainly presented itself with a pretty unique set of challenges, and it would be easy to become downhearted when so many of your soldiers are leaving the unit, if not the wider Army. However, the CO's insistence that the Regiment does not go quietly has been keenly implemented across the Regiment. Pioneers are certainly not ones to struggle in the face of adversity – something I've witnessed very early on with the glut of silverware amassed from various competitions and sporting events.

Invariably though, the focus across the Regiment has been on management on soldiers transferring to new trades, and ensuring Tranche 4 redundees are afforded the best chance of making a new start in civilian life. This has provided troop commanders like me with invaluable and unique experiences. However, we have not been left completely bereft of core soldiering activities; a drive towards the completion of MATTs before the end of the training year has dominated the weekly battle rhythm, and I'm planning a CT1 Level exercise for the coming months.

Overall, it has been a hectic but thoroughly enjoyable time to be part of the Regiment.



Mental health of armed forces veterans

Research recently corroborated and commissioned show that there has been a negative publicity towards mental health of armed forces veterans and that perception is unjustified

OVER the past few months there has been a general drip of negative publicity about the mental state of Armed Forces' veterans and contemporary surveys have indicated that as many as nine out of ten members of the public believe that service leavers commonly have some kind of physical, emotional or mental health problem that is a result of their military service¹.

Support Command has been looking at this issue for some time².

Our research, recently corroborated by a Study commissioned by 42 (NW) Bde jointly with the HNS NW conducted by the Universities of Salford and Chester³, shows that the negative publicity and perception is unjustified.

General Position. The majority of personnel do make a successful transition to civilian life⁴, although a small percentage struggle.

The general position is as follows:

Veterans⁵ are generally robust people who are likely to suffer the same range of health/welfare issues as the general population.

The vast majority of Service Leavers (SL) housing needs are met on transition to civilian life and the majority of SL obtain gainful employment.

A small minority of Veterans do experience difficulties post-Service, these tend to manifest themselves on average 10 years after discharge.

The adverse outcomes (common mental health problems, unemployment, social isolation, encounters with the criminal justice system) present at a rate less than that in the general population.

Adversity is more common in the untrained and Early Service Leavers (ESL) cohorts. Vulnerability is associated with pre-service adversity (childhood disadvantage, history of anti-social behaviour) rather than a consequence of Service life or combat experience.

Specific Issues

Mental Health. The mental health of Veterans is broadly similar to that of the general population, notwithstanding that their military career provides a very specific backdrop and context to some presentations.

A career in the Armed Forces is not associated with an overall increase in risk of developing a psychiatric or mental health disorder. There is, so far, no evidence to support the assertion that we are sitting on a time-bomb of PTSD among Regulars who have served in Iraq or Afghanistan. Contrary to media assertion, the overall suicide risk appears no greater for Veterans than for the general population.

Criminal Justice. The long gap⁶ between discharge from Service and custody of those⁷ who do offend makes it difficult to associate any direct causal link between service in the Forces and imprisonment.

There is limited evidence from which to identify any particular reason for Veteran offending which distinguishes Veterans from other offenders.

What is clear is that the conventional problems associated with criminal behaviour such as drug and alcohol abuse, homelessness, a poor ability to deal with emotions, low educational attainment and financial pressures, appear to be as common among ex-Servicemen in custody as it is among the general prison population. Despite the UK male Veteran population accounting for 9.1% of the population, Veterans account for only 3.5% of the prison population.

However, for the few Veterans that do come into contact with the criminal justice system violence and sexual crimes are notable occurrences with the misuse of alcohol an important recurring factor.

Vulnerable Veterans. Counter intuitively; it appears that those who serve the shortest time find the return to civilian life the hardest.

There is some evidence that ESL

experience more mental health problems than those who served for longer.

The higher prevalence of susceptibility to mental health problems amongst ESLs, in many cases, accounts for their premature departure from the Armed Forces.

For a few ESL the impacts of the various negative pre-Service vulnerability factors, placed on hold whilst in Service, reassert themselves post transition. This may account for the clustering of poor health and social outcomes in the ESL cohort.

Please feel free to publicise and use the above evidence as you see fit.

**From Major General R M B Nitsch CBE
8 January 2014**

¹ The Armed Forces & Society – The military in Britain through the eyes of Service personnel employers and the public. Published May 12 available at: <http://lordashcroftpolls.com/2012/05/the-armed-forces-society>

² 20121122-Hindering or Helping Heroes-SpComd_ColMed.pdf

³ Universities of Salford and Chester commissioned by Comd 42(NW) Bde and NHS NW.

⁴ Prof Sir Simon Wessely King's Centre for Military Health Research - KCMHR

⁵ Veterans – "those that have served in HM Armed Forces for at least one day, either as a Regular or Reservist" Armed Forces Covenant

⁶ 59% of veterans in prison are convicted and incarcerated over 10 years post discharge

⁷ The proportion of ex-servicemen who offend is very small in proportion to the total of those discharged from the Force (0.057% of the UK Veteran population).



1912 Basuto Company



A painting done during the war of the Landscape of Libya, mum said he only had four colours to draw the scene.

1912 (Basuto) Company was part of the Auxiliary African Pioneer Corps. This short story details William Newby Scott who commanded the Company.

Report: David Stott
Pictures: David Stott

MY father, William Newby STOTT, rejoined the Army on the 24th May 1940 with the rank of Lieutenant and his Army Personnel Number was 119280. He joined in the Pioneer Corps and was posted to No 1 Centre AMP Corps (21 Group) as Adjutant at Doddington.

The Pioneer Corps appears to be the follow on from the Labour Corps of the First World War. At Deepcut in Surrey there is the Royal Logistic Corps Museum which covers both the Labour Corps of the First World War and Pioneer Corps of the Second World War.

On the 17th August he was transferred to 87 Coy as 2nd in Command at Chard, Somerset and a few weeks later was ordered to proceed to War Office C2c on duty.

At the start of 1941 on the 19th January he joined 38 Group Pioneer Corps there was another three attachments and before Embarkation leave was granted on the 8th to 14th February 1941.

He departed England on the 22nd April 1941 and arrived at Durban South Africa on the 28th May, he had been appointed Officer I/C pay H.M.T.G.10 for the voyage. On arrival he was at the Chasewood Camp

Durban, Appointed Hon. Adjutant RWFAG forming Basuto, Swazi and Bechuana AAPC Coys.

On the 18th August he arrived in Maseru in Basutoland (now Lesotho) where he formed, trained and assumed Command of the 1912 Basuto Coy AAPC NT and was appointed G/Major. Records states he had knowledge of Sesuto Language.

On the 29th November 1941 he left Durban with the Company and arrived at Quassasire Egypt on 14th December 1941. Quassasire is described at that time as a sprawling Military Base between Ismalia and Zagazik.

On the 3 Jan 1942 the records shows he arrived in Damascus, Syria where he was until July.

On 2 July departs Syria En- route via Transjordan for Aqaba.

We do have two pencil sketches drawn in Aqaba which my sister holds the originals and I have copies. One is of Lawrence of Arabia Fort with the Camp of the 1912 Basuto Coy dated 15 October 1942 and the other a general view of Aqaba dated 18th October 1942. Here the dates do not quite tie up as his records show him in Palestine at Yibna on 28th September then joins the 8th Army at Quassasire on the 8th October before moving to Sidi Haneish on the 3rd November.

The Coy were with the 8th Army

Transport and utilised on road construction, bridge building, docks, aerodromes etc.in Egypt, Libya, Cinenacia, and Tripolitania & Tunisia.

On 14th June the records specifically show the Coy left Gabes in Tunisia for Azizya in Tripoli for the construction of an Aerodrome.

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia
Sidi Haneish Airfield is an abandoned World War II military airfield in Egypt, in the western desert, about 35 km east-southeast of Marsa Matruh; 410 km northeast of Cairo. It was used by the United States Army, and the Ninth Air Force during the Eastern Desert Campaign and by the British Eighth Army.

7 months later on 14th June 1943 they moved on to Al Azizia, Tripolitania to build Aerodrome and shortly after this on the 10th July embark by ship from Tripoli to Suez and back to Quassasire for the Company to be reorganised and reformed into a 'A Smoke Coy'.

However on the 16th August he is posted to H.E on Compassionate Grounds and on 19th August he embarks on H.M.T.P 35 for England where he arrives on the 10 September.

The reason for his return is sketchy, mum told she thought it was because his mother



was ill about then, she also mentioned he had some shrapnel in his ear and had glandular fever. His mother Helen died in Scarborough in 1944.

I do have a sketch of a war scene at sea which mum always told me he drew on his way home but the date of 10/12/43 does not tie up with the dates above and obviously is drawn later.

However it was shortly after his return on the 29th September 1943 that he married my Mum Barbara Grace Hutton at the Fulham Registry Office.

Looking at his medical section on his records on the 10th May 1943 in Tunisia he is rated A1 (i.e. fit) and then at a Medical Board at City General Hospital, Gloucester on 1st January 1944 his health is rated 'C' Permanently.

There is no reason stated for this. If 'C' when he applied he would have been unfit to be recruited by the army.

His health seems to deteriorate and may have some connection with his early death in 1947.

However after this he has various postings all round the Country, Prestatyn, Southampton, Southborough, Buxton, Fraisthorpe, Marsden and Richmond, all with different Companies of the Pioneer Corps.

From October 1943 until his release leave on 23rd June 1945 he had a whole series of Attachments in England at various depots. Which included;

- 18th Oct 1943 Posted with 102 Coy to No 50 Group at Restating
- 27th Nov 1943 to 32Group PC at Southborough
- 9 Jan 1944 to 8 Group at Marsden

- 28th Jan 1944 Posted to R & D Depot PC
- 20th Mar 1944 Posted to no 6 Centre PC any 563 P/W Wkg Coy
- 23 July 44 Posted to 166 Pioneer Corps Holding & Training Unit at Buxton
- 28th July 44 Posted with 605 PWW Coy to 12 Group at Richmond
- 24 June 1945 Preceded to MCU and SOS no 12 Group PC

My mother seems to think many of these attachments involved visiting Italian Prisoner of war camps. She does remember having a meal with my father at 'The Grotto' at Marsden near South Shields with two other Officers.

We were to take her there for a meal in the 1990's as she reminisced.

Courses:
C.O. Messing Course Aldershot
2 Days 1.11.43
Pay Course Marylebourne
28.3.44- 9.4.44

He was Struck off Unit strength 23.6.45
Release leave 24.6.45

Date of Official Release from Army is 16th September. 1945

Medals which we now have:-
2nd World War
1939-45 Star
Africa Star
Defence Medal
War Medal 1939-45 ■



LOWEFENCE OF ARABIA'S FORT. AQABA. T.S.
1912 BASUTO COY. CAMP.

W N STOTT
15-10-42.



Looking back at 51 Commando

Commandos and Pioneer Corps, Beach Company, unload stores at Walcheren

Picture: British Official Photo published 9th November, 1944

Not much is known about the Pioneers served during the war in special formations, such as the Commandos, Paratroops and other smaller forces and organisations.

**Report: The Pioneer, No 132, Sept 1977
by Capt C Hilliman MC MM RPC
Picture: RPCA Archive**

DON'T think that much is known about those Pioneers who served during the war in special formations, such as the Commandos, Paratroops and other smaller forces and organisations.

This time, I want to give an account of some of the fighting in East Africa in which the 51 (Middle East) Commando played a prominent part till the end of the campaign.

I must apologise to the reader for being unable to quote all the names of the officers and men mentioned in this story, as the only source of information is my own memory.

51 (ME) Commando was formed in Egypt in September 1940 and consisted almost entirely of Pioneer Corps personnel who represented nearly all nations of Europe and the Near East.

Nearly everyone of the men had a story to tell, of hatred and persecution and of adventurous escapes from Nazi dominated Europe, others, especially our Spaniards, knew some blood curling stories of savage civil war fighting, imprisonment, violence and escape, that would make some of our writers of modern fiction turn pale with envy.

The unit was raised and commanded by Lt Col Cator of the Royal Scots Greys, who must have been the most determined man in the world to have set his mind at making an efficient fighting unit of what seemed to be a not too promising body of men. When I joined this unit I was at once struck by the unusually strong esprit de corps which was evident throughout the unit despite the many languages spoken by the

men.

Intensive training began as soon as the necessary number of officers had arrived. I remember the initial training period of three months only too well. The usual PT in the morning and the after-breakfast route marches, the instruction in boatmanship on the Great Bitter Lake in the afternoons and the heartbreaking night schemes along the Suez-Cairo road will never be forgotten by anyone who took part in them.

The jokes and the curses in all languages, from Dutch to Arabic and from Spanish to Greek were as unique as the chaps.

There was Andre (he insisted on his name being pronounced with the accent on the 'e') who when asked about his country of origin, kept as silent as the Sphinx. Berndt L, a Dutchman would talk about the wonderful time he had had on his parental estate in Holland (I knew he was a sailor who had jumped his ship) and Levy, the little Russian Jewish artist, with the ballerina-like figure, who would insist on relating to his section the culinary delights of the St Petersburg restaurant where his female admirers used to take him after performances, when everybody was struggling to negotiate a sand dune at the double! Levy, despite his not-too-young age could not be troubled by sand dunes or any other obstacle. "It's all training", he used to say, "try it five times and then you'll find it's a piece of cake." Although there really was no language barrier, none too good interpretation caused at times no little chaos, to the secret delight of all ranks.

After about 3 months the men of 51 Commando were splendid warriors, who could fight with almost any modern infantry weapon in existence, with daggers

and if necessary with their bare hands. They were a fearful lot too, as a number of inhabitants of Ismailia, Suez and other places would be able to testify. Only I don't know whether this was by nature or virtue of the training. I am, however, more inclined to assume the former.

It was hoped that the unit would be employed in a Commando role during the first Western Desert Campaign. Every single man felt very disappointed when he found his first task was to escort lorry loads of dusty, defeated and dejected Italians from the forward areas to Mersa-Matruh. Everybody felt relieved when the unit returned to its base in the Canal Zone with embarkation orders to an unknown destination.

With the unit's arrival and disembarkation at Port Sudan, there was no doubt about the theatre of war in which the '51' were to fight against the Italians.

Three weeks of acclimatisation and intensive training at Gedaref in the Sudan followed. By the end of that period the whole unit which by then numbered about 350 officers, NCOs and men entrained for Kassala, the Sudanese frontier town which had been recently recaptured from the Italians who had ventured from their Eritrean colony to there and no further. Two days later, the '51' debussed in the dark of the night at a spot alongside the road leading front Agordat to Keren.

No one will ever forget that night. The horizon was lit up by gun flashes and multi-coloured flares, whilst everybody was busy trying to find a suitable place to bed down. From all ends abusive cries were heard of men who in the darkness had spread their blankets over the top of anthills and found their bedding and clothes being invaded by

the disturbed and vicious insects. A six foot python which had curled itself up on some ammunition boxes caused an alarm and left the men sleepless with a dismal fear of finding one of those weird reptiles sharing their blankets.

The following morning passed with feverish activity. Bren and Tommy gun magazines were loaded, ammunition was distributed and a large number of 36 grenades were primed. In the late afternoon the briefing of officers and NCOs began. Our task sounded spectacular and adventurous from the start. The '51' were to operate on the flank of the Italian elite formations defending the natural mountain stronghold of Keren. We were to harass the enemy by all possible means, shooting up his patrols which were protecting his right flank. This prospect of real fighting started an almost crazy enthusiasm amongst the men.

The first patrol returned to advanced base without having come into contact with the enemy. The second attempt was much more successful. About twenty-five adventurous figures sneaked through the bush, rifles and Tommy guns at the ready, straining their eyes and ears for anything that looked or sounded suspicious.

The air was filled with the noise of strange birds and hundreds of monkeys which followed the patrol with obvious curiosity, but the hot, noisy air breathes danger. Everyone has the nasty feeling of being observed by an invisible enemy and walking into an ambush from which there would be no escape. Was there not just a movement behind that rock? Was that not the click of a machine gun ready to fire? All men stop dead and remain absolutely motionless. Nobody dares to breathe lest that should give away his presence to the enemy. Sgt Schaffer bellies himself forward to investigate. His .38 in his right hand, a hand grenade in his left, he snakes cautiously towards the suspicious spot. . . and two monkeys jump up, squeaking angrily and disappear in the century old trees. The tension drops suddenly, but only for a short moment because whilst we look into each others grinning faces, a number of shots ring out about twenty-five yards from where the men have just risen from their crouched position. These shots are followed by a veritable fusillade of withering automatic fire. As if it was one man, the whole troop has thrown itself on the ground. Where exactly does that hellish fire come from? Bullets are whizzing above our heads uncomfortably close, but we have no casualties. There is a group of medium sized rocks on our right. Yes, that's where they are. The fez of an Italian native soldier can be clearly seen; behind it, two or three topees indicate the presence of European soldiers as well. A group of six men under Lt Hollingsworth has worked itself forward and amongst the din of the small arms fire, the bursting of our hand grenades can be heard. The enemy fire has decreased in intensity, there must be a number of casualties, but the machine gunners and some of the enemy riflemen are still at their post. We are only a dozen yards away from the enemy. The noise of small arms fire, the bursting of hand grenades and the terrified screams of the Italians is deafening. And then Capt Frost raises his voice "Come on, you blokes, what do you think you've got your bayonets for?" Even before he has finished the sentence, twenty odd chaps have rushed the enemy position, yelling,

shooting and bayonetting. The 'Ities' fight back magnificently; no quarter is asked and none given.

Toni Garcia who hails from Toledo rushes at an Italian officer and with a curse what makes the blood freeze in one's veins plunges his bayonet into him. This is not an ordinary fight between soldiers of opposing powers. This is a fight full of hatred, nursed for many years in exile and made worse through the feeling of being unwanted, or living without aim and homesickness.

It was a ghastly scene of dead, twisted bodies laying amongst arms and equipment. Empty cartridges and boxes of ammunition were strewn all over the place. We went through the pockets of the dead and found that they belonged to the crack Savoy Grenadiers. Fifty yards ahead were the three water-holes we were supposed to find, but which we certainly would have missed, had the enemy not put up the fight, for they were as vital to him as they were to us. As we filled our waterbottles with the deliciously fresh water, Garcia, the former Republican Captain and Corporal in the Pioneers sighed: "I have been looking forward to this meeting for three years."

The days which followed saw some sharp fighting. The enemy, embarrassed by our operations brought up reinforcements to counter the threat to his flanks. There were many clashes with Italians and native troops, mostly irregulars known as Banda and we experienced fairly heavy shelling and mortar fire, which caused some casualties.

On the night of the 5 March 41, a sharp action was fought in the moon-lit area north west of Keren. No 3 Troop consisting of 3 officers and about 45 NCOs and men were detailed to storm an enemy OP which was known to be heavily defended. After a march of nearly six hours the party met withering fire from a hill position overlooking the moon-lit plain through which the "51" were moving cautiously. Capt Frost firing his Tommy gun from the hip led the small band up the hill and wiped out the enemy garrison.

Twenty-five dead were counted, whilst the rest of the defenders fled in panic. After trying to get some sleep in the captured position, the party was about to move off towards the object of the assault, which according to our guess - how wrong we were was found out in due course - could not have been more than an hour's march, when Cpl Said fired a long burst from his Tommy gun, shouting: "Here they are, the sons of. . ."

Suddenly, the plain below us was swarming with little dark dots. Machine guns rattled and mortar bombs crashed down on us. And still they came on, the black-shirted sons of Mussolini, Alpini and native Banda. There were still no casualties amongst the '51' but everyone, officers and men alike thought anxiously: "How is this show going to end? 45 men against hundreds of Italians, 45 men separated from the nearest British troops by miles of unfamiliar, rough and Banda infested country." Meanwhile, the Italians seemed to lose their heads and were charging blindly into the fire of the '51' who were still firing calmly at the excellent targets, as though they were at the Geneifa rifle range. A few frantic Alpini who had ventured as far as the foot of the hill were cut down by bursts of Tommy gun fire. In the meantime Capt Frost had been killed as well as Ptes Ullrich and Weinberger. Lt Randall was badly

wounded but continued to fight. With the ammunition almost exhausted the order came to break through the enemy ring which had been closed around the '51'. Down came the men from the hill and threw themselves with a yell on the demoralised enemy.

The '51' returned to their own lines with all their wounded. The three dead were later buried by the Italians with full military honours. The number of the enemy casualties could not immediately be ascertained as reports by the men were rather conflicting. It was a great fight by this band of gallant men, who were perhaps not always able to understand each other's language, but who were bound together by the strongest bond of comradeship that ever existed in any unit of the British Army.

After a brief rest the '51' moved into Abyssinia and fought many actions against the remnants of the Italian troops. One memorable action took place in the Amba Alagi area, which was the mountain stronghold from which the Duke of Aosta surrendered to the British. During that time, an Indian patrol found the diary of a dead Italian officer. The following entry was of particular interest - 5th March, 1941 - "British Troops in regimental strength attacked - (here followed the name of some location) during the previous evening and temporarily occupied hill (some other reference followed). Our own reinforced combat group threw the enemy out who withdrew after a bitter fight lasting 24 hours. A British officer, Capt Frost and two other men were found dead. Despite our casualties of 250 dead and wounded, our gallant troops have again covered themselves with glory."

A feature which later became known as "Commando Hill" was taken by No 1 and 3 troops after an ascent in pouring tropical rain.

The two troops killed the best part of a strong Italian unit and marched off the remainder into captivity. Two DCMs and several MMs were awarded to men who took part in this action, during which Sjt Khazan, a Cireassian was killed in the attempt to scale a wall of rock on an improvised ladder. During that time, a detachment commanded by a senior NCO formed the bodyguard for the British officers commanding the 15,000 odd fuzzy-wuzzy guerrilla warriors who were operating in the almost impassable region in the north and north-east of the last Italian garrison in East Africa, Gondar.

These men had some strange experiences with those Abyssinian tribesmen and will undoubtedly have a store of amusing tales to last them for the rest of their lives. But more than once they were forced to cock their guns when, for some real or imaginary grievance the dark warriors were going to use their own initiative in restoring their supposedly injured rights.

The '51' returned to Egypt in December, 1941. The unit was then disbanded and re-emerged as D Squadron Middle East Commandos.

I left the unit soon afterwards for a different job, but met some of my old friends again in September 1942, when they took part in Operation Daffodil, attempting to capture and hold Axis-occupied Tobruk, for twenty four hours, I don't know what finally happened to all those I knew. May be some of them will read "The Royal Pioneer" and remember the happy and adventurous days. ■



Saving Sarah Rigler



Ten Prisoners of War helped Sarah Rigler survive during the latter stages of WW2. Five were rewarded in 1970 by Israel. Mr Anthony Davies has traced the other five soldiers, one of whom was a Pioneer and a ceremony was held in the House of Lords.

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Hannah Sara Rigler

Ed note: 10 Prisoners of War helped Sarah Rigler survive during the latter stages of WW2, 5 of these were rewarded by the state of Israel honour of Righteous Among the Nations by Israel's Holocaust memorial authority, Yad Vashem in 1970. Since then Mr Anthony Davies has traced the other five soldiers, one of whom was a Pioneer, and on Wednesday 23 October 2013 the families of the remaining five soldiers were honoured with this prestigious award in a ceremony held in the House of Lords. John Buckley's wife, who is 92 years of age, is still alive and he has a son Robert. Sadly they did not want to take part in the ceremony so their award was posted to them.

HANNAH Sara Rigler's story of survival is a remarkable one, even by the standards of the dark times she witnessed. Now in her 80s, the still bright-eyed woman is currently in Britain, perhaps for the last time, telling schoolchildren how British prisoners of war saved her life during World War II.

She was born in 1928 as Sara Matuson - later changing her name in honour of her sister who died in the Holocaust - into a Jewish family which had recently returned home to Lithuania following an abortive attempt to emigrate to Palestine.

But her family life was destroyed following the Nazi occupation in the summer of 1941. Her father was taken away, never to be seen again.

Together with her mother and older sister, Sara was sent to the Shavli ghetto, where they survived until 1944. From here, they were taken to the Stutthof concentration camp.

With the war coming to an end the camp's women - with no food, dressed in rags and with only wooden clogs on their feet - were driven by SS guards in a death march through the snow towards the Baltic sea.

"We were about 1,000 women and within one month we were about 300," she recalls. "People died, they were killed and we didn't get any food."

"I used to say to myself - If I ever have enough bread to eat, I'll never, never want anything again in my life, just the piece of bread. Maybe, a sliced cold potato on top as a delicacy."

With no hope in sight, Sara's mother, Gita, begged her to try to escape.

Armed with a diamond ring smuggled by her mother, Hannah attempted to buy some bread from a Polish boy, only to be arrested by the police and threatened with public execution.

"I didn't mind being killed but not in front of my mother," she recalls.

Sole survivor

Finally, though, an opportunity for escape came and she took the heartbreaking decision to leave her mother and sister in a bid for freedom.

"People were watching the march... I separated [from] two people on my right and I ran behind them.

"Then I went into a barn and I lay down in a trough. And then a man came into the barn and I said to him: 'Are you Polish?'... and he said: 'No, I'm British.' And that was Stan Wells."

Sara had run into a group of British prisoners of war, which also included George Hammond, Tommy Noble, Alan Edwards and Roger Letchford, who had been captured in 1940 and were working as labourers on local German-owned farms.

"They were locked up for the night but they used to let them out in the morning to go to work and then come back. They then arranged to have me live in a hole in the straw above their camp."

She survived there for three weeks cared for by the men, who fed her, treated her frostbite and rubbed paraffin into her scalp to kill the lice in her hair.

Shortly afterwards the POWs, who were about to be evacuated to Germany, placed Sara in the care of a local woman, who looked after her until she was liberated by the Red Army.

But freedom proved to be bittersweet. Hannah discovered that she was her family's only survivor: her father, mother, sister, two uncles, four aunts and six cousins were all killed in the Holocaust.

Eventually settling in the United States, Sara changed her name in memory of her sister and spent many years trying to trace her rescuers.

She was reunited in the 1970s and five of whom have been accorded the honour of Righteous Among the Nations by Israel's Holocaust memorial authority, Yad Vashem.

On her current visit to the UK, which has been organised with the Holocaust Educational Trust, Hannah Sara Rigler once again reflected on the men who helped her

65 years ago.

"Somebody said: 'Why did you do it?' And they said: 'Well, we're British.'"

"Without them, I could never have survived."

One of the men who helped Sarah was a Pioneer. 2190073 Pte John Edward BUCKLEY (DOB 1 May 17), he enlisted into the Royal Engineers on 3 Oct 39 and was transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 1 Dec 39 when his unit 21 Works Labour Coy RE was re-titled 48 Coy AMPC.

The following is an extract from the war diary of this Coy:

- 12 Oct 39 Formed at FOLKSTONE of 6 Reservists and 224 RE Labour Recruits
Maj W Selby-Lowndes OC, Capt JS Alston 2IC and 2Lt R Campbell
- 16 Oct 39 Landed in CHERBOURG and proceeded to VIGNACOURT
- 20 Oct 39 Commenced loading and unloading and stacking petrol
- 31 Dec 39 Handling petrol during month as part of 5 Group AMPC
- 24 Jan 40 Maj GP Guyer - attached
- 12 Feb 40 Maj JS Alston - promoted vice Selby Lowndes (SOS sick)
Capt Batchelor - attached
Capt R Campbell - promoted 2IC vice Alston
- 25 Feb 40 Maj GP Guyer & Capt Batchelor - ceased attachment
- 5 Mar 40 2Lt WH Price - TOS
- 14 Mar 40 Lt CB Chancellor - TOS
- 19 Mar 40 Located VYNACOURT
Lt WH Price - on convoy duties (last time with Coy)
- 31 Jun 40 Lt WH Price - landed at DOVER (having not been in contact with the Coy
Maj JS Alston and Capt R Campbell - possible Prisoners of War
- 16 Jul 40 Lt WH Price reported to HEMSBY CAMP
Maj AD Gordon - TOS OC
Lt WH Price promoted to Capt and appointed 2IC
Lts Breeze and Brock - TOS
235 Army Class posted in to bring strength to 260 men.

It is presumed that Pte Buckley was captured at the same time as his OC and 2IC - it appears that 235 men from this Company were killed or captured. ■

Going, Going, Gone!

Once we were a Corps, A thousand men and more,
Who fought and toiled in heat, rain and soil, obeying army law.
Then cold war won, our Corps was done, amalgamation loomed,
Reducing to some regiments a whole Corps proud but doomed.

They joined us with some others, to form a great big Corps.
The loggies or really large Corps, was our name upon the door.
We soldiered on, three wars were won and did our bit with pride,
To earn great reputation, which helped to turn the tide.

Then they played the numbers game at MOD one year,
Savings, costs, all now lost, as disbandment draws near.
All we've done, jobs overcome, our freetime so cavalier,
They never will replace us..... the Royal Pioneers!

Bernard Fox
2014



Forget Us Not

Labour Omnia Vincit our cap badge proudly read,
Labour conquers all was what the Latin said,
The smallest Corps in Britain when there was not a war,
But largest in the world when Hitler knocked upon our door.

In Thirty Nine our corps was formed beneath grey skies of war
And many vets that held V.C.'s came flocking to the Corps,
To train those that feared,
had been oppressed and volunteered to serve
beneath the battered flag of freedom only England then unfurled.

We served in every Country, every theatre of war,
And stood beside our fighting arms doing work so they could roar
For they could not defeat the foe without our lads close by
To keep the wheels a turning and give them their supplies

We gained the title Royal for all the hard work done
From King George Six in Forty Six no other quicker won
And bathed in glory with war stories men would proudly stand
And raise a toast with those that boast equals with every band

Then many more disruptions of peace throughout the world
And Pioneers were sent to clear and guard against bombs hurled
Even in the Falklands with a section armed with guns
And never got a mention in the saving Regiments or sums.

Then the Gulf and Bosnia, Iraq, Afghanistan,
A change of badge and beret for all and every man
Until they changed the role again and placed the companies
Into a few more regiments now called the RLC.

The last of us must go now the orbat's changed again
And Pioneers everywhere are all just shouting SHAME
For we have all served proudly since nineteen thirty nine
And now the government and army's spenders have called Time

But we will be remembered, remembered for our craft
For there are few old soldiers that could put up with the graft
The Pioneers we shifted, we built, we guarded well
But after us they'll be no more, no Pioneers to tell.

So goodbye to an era. a Corps cut to the bone
An empty place in Bicester no more a chunkies home
Two axes on a cap badge is all that's left of us
Whilst those that once were Pioneers depart upon a bus!

So think about the days we had since nineteen thirty nine
We may not have the pedigree of Guards or right of line
For us at last the time has come, for us to call the day
And every one who was in the Corps will now gently fade away.

Bernard Fox
2014

The Labour Corps of 1917-1918



During the last two years of the war the Corps was about the same size as The Royal Engineers. The total number of men engaged on work in France and Flanders alone approximated 700,000 at the end of the war.

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Colonel John Starling
RPCA Historian

ALTHOUGH the army in France and Flanders was able to use some railways, steam engines and tracked vehicles for haulage, the immense effort of building and maintaining the huge network of roads, railways, canals, buildings, camps, stores, dumps, telegraph and telephone systems, etc, and also for moving stores, relied on horse, mule and human. In the Middle Eastern theatres, camels were also used.

In August 1914 there was no formed body of troops specifically designed for these tasks. In the infantry, manual work near the front lines was carried out by the Pioneer Battalions which were added to each Division. Some infantry regiments formed labour companies and works battalions for work on the lines of communication and at home, but the organisation of manpower was haphazard until the formation of the Labour Corps.

The labour units expanded hugely and became increasingly well-organised. However, despite adding large numbers of men from India, Egypt, China and elsewhere, there was never enough manpower to do all the labouring work required. The total number of men engaged on work in France and Flanders alone approximated 700,000 at the end of the war, and this was in the labour units alone. In many cases the men of the infantry, artillery and other arms were forced to give up time to hard effort when perhaps training or rest might have been a more effective option.

According to the Official History: "...although some labour units were raised and eventually labourers from various parts of the Empire and China were brought to France, the numbers were never at any period sufficient for the demands of a great army operating in a friendly country".

Men were sent to the Labour Corps who were not considered to be A1 Fitness, that is, able to march 5 miles in full kit and have good eyesight. Older men were also sent to

the LC. The LC was formed in April 1917 to standardise support to the Army. Prior to that date various Labour Companies and Battalions existed to support their specific areas but there was no central control and this resulted in significant wastage. If a man joined before 1917 he would have either enlisted or been conscripted into a regimental Labour Company. (For example, a Glasgow man, who was in his thirties and deaf in one ear was conscripted into the Cameron Highlanders Labour Company).

From its formation in 1917 the LC grew to over 500,000 by November 1918 of which some 300,000 served in France. The last of them didn't come home until 1921. They were employed on a wide variety of tasks including maintaining roads and railways under shell fire, digging reserve positions, moving ammunition and battlefield clearance. (The BIG task was finding rotten corpses in the trenches, identifying them, putting them into temporary graves, exhuming them when safe to do so and then organising a proper burial). Some of them were within the range of enemy guns for 6 months without a break - pretty good for older and less fit men.

The Labour Corps suffered 9,120 casualties.

Before the formation of the Labour Corps

The Army Service Corps Labour Companies

Among the earliest such units formed, the ASC Labour Companies originated to provide manpower to unload British ships and operate the docks in France. Two railway labour companies were also formed.

The Royal Engineers Labour Battalions

The RE raised 11 Battalions for labouring work.

Infantry Pioneer and Labour or Works Battalions

An early solution to the vast demand for labour was to create in each infantry Division a battalion that would be trained

and capable of fighting as infantry, but that would normally be engaged on labouring work. They were given the name of Pioneers. They differed from normal infantry in that they would be composed of a mixture of men who were experienced with picks and shovels (i.e. miners, road men, etc) and some who had skilled trades (smiths, carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, masons, tinsmiths, engine drivers and fitters).

A Pioneer battalion would also carry a range of technical stores that infantry would not. This type of battalion came into being with an Army Order in December 1914. In early 1916, a number of infantry battalions composed of men who were medically graded unfit for the fighting were formed for labouring work. They had only 2 officers per battalion. Twelve such battalions existed in June 1916.

Non Combatant Corps

After the passing of the Military Service Act in early 1916 it was decided to form a Non-Combatant Corps of conscientious objectors for work on roads, hutments, timber work, quarrying, sanitary duties and handling supplies. Eight NCC Companies existed by the middle of June 1916.

The Labour Corps is formed

Formed in January 1917, the Corps grew to some 389,900 men (more than 10% of the total size of the Army) by the Armistice. Of this total, around 175,000 were working in the United Kingdom and the rest in the theatres of war.

The Corps was manned by officers and other ranks who had been medically rated below the "A1" condition needed for front line service.

Many were returned wounded. Labour Corps units were often deployed for work within range of the enemy guns, sometimes for lengthy periods. In April 1917, a number of infantry battalions were transferred to the Corps. The Labour Corps absorbed the 28 ASC Labour Companies between February and June 1917. Labour Corps Area Employment Companies were



formed in 1917 for salvage work, absorbing the Divisional Salvage Companies. In the crises of March and April 1918 on the Western Front, Labour Corps units were used as emergency infantry. The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second class organisation: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary.

Researching men of the Corps is made extra difficult by this, as is the fact that few records remain of the daily activities and locations of Corps units.

With the shortage of manpower for labouring work continuing, Sir Douglas Haig requested an increase in the force of an additional 21,000 men.

This demand was filled by importing men from China (where the British followed a French lead and signed an agreement with the Chinese for a supply of men), India, South Africa, Egypt and other places within the British Empire. Demand continued and by the wars end a total of approximately 300,000 such workers had been engaged, of which 193,500 were in France and Flanders.

By the end of 1917 there were 50,000 Chinese workers in France, rising to 96,000 by August 1918 (with another 30,000 working for the French). 100,000 Egyptians were working in France and the Middle East, alongside 21,000 Indians and 20,000 South Africans, who were also in East Africa.

They were kept on lines of communication and other work well behind the fighting line, and as a force were rather immobile due to the decisions to segregate them - many of these workers were black - and provide special camps. Indian labourers were more often used closer to the front lines, on fortification work.

Many Indians were also used in Divisional

Ammunition Column work, as drivers as well as in the manual tasks. The South African Native Labour Corps came to France early in 1917 and established a base at Arques-la-Bataille.

Women's Auxiliary Army Corps

Formed in March 1917 after a proposal by the Army Council was welcomed by Sir Douglas Haig. Women would be used on the Lines of Communication and at GHQ, on tasks that did not require heavy labour. Initially called the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAACs), they eventually took the formal title of Queen Mary's Army Auxiliary Corps.

The women enlisted for a year or duration, whichever was longer.

They were used on a wide variety of tasks, principally in clerical, canteen, motor transport, storehouses and telephone and postal roles. Approximately 10,000 WAACs saw service, most in France and Flanders.

Entrenching Battalions

Formed from the small surplus of men left after the break-up of many infantry battalions in early 1918, and the re-allocation of their strength to bring other units up to establishment. Men were all regarded as fit and ready to replace losses in fighting units at any time. There is some evidence that some Entrenching units were also formed in 1916.

Use of enemy prisoners of war

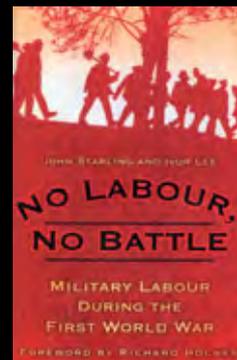
Until mid 1916, German prisoners were sent to England. From this time onward, prisoners were initially sent to Abbeville. Men with useful skills, notably forestry and engineering, were drafted into companies of about 100 men each, for use in POW Forestry Companies and ASC and RE workshops, respectively. 47 such POW labour companies were attached to the Labour Corps when it was formed.

No Labour No Battle: The Labour Corps Book

Our resident historian John Starling has co-written an invaluable book relating to the Corps. Here is a short summary by Richard Holmes.

This painstakingly researched book will appeal to far more readers than those who are tracing the war records of a great uncle, for you cannot really understand the way the British Army went about its business during the war without understanding how it used the labour upon which so much depended.

The next time you see a Labour Corps headstone in a CWGC cemetery, pause to remember that they also served who plied pick and shovel, often in conditions that we can scarcely guess at, providing service upon which so very much depended.



NO LABOUR NO BATTLE: THE LABOUR CORPS IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR

By J A Starling and Ivor Lee
ISBN 10 0752 449753

If you would like a copy of this fabulous book than let me know. The price is £30 which includes postage and for which includes a £10 donation to the RPC Association. ■



A brief history of the Mauritius overseas forces in World War II

Towards the end of 1940 it was decided the Mauritians could be usefully employed as Pioneers, Artizans, Stevedores and with motor transport companies.

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

ALTHOUGH the Mauritius authorities approached the War office shortly after the outbreak of war with a view to providing such manpower as could be used beneficially, no large-scale recruiting commenced until late 1940.

Prior to this however, a quite large number of Mauritians had volunteered for service with the RAF, RAOC, and certain other services, and many had already proceeded overseas for training.

Towards the end of 1940 it was decided the Mauritians could be usefully employed as Pioneers, Artizans, Stevedores and with Motor Transport Companies.

Accordingly, in November 1940 the military took over the Bell Village Housing Estate, near Port Louis, and officers of the local Territorial Force offered their services in connection with the training of recruits.

A Camp Staff was formed, consisting of Capt F Rountree (OC), Lt F Elliott, Lt D Sauzier (Adj) and Capt F C Lay MBE MC (QM) the latter being DO Royal Artillery who was loaned by 25th Coast Battery. Certain local gentlemen also volunteered for service with the Companies to be formed and an Officer and 6 British ORs were sent out from UK..

Recruiting proceeded very quickly and the following Companies were formed:-

1501 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

Lt G C Mayer
2Lt R Ducler des Rauches
2Lt L G P Guimbeau
337 MORs

1502 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

Lt F de Brown
2Lt G J M Leclos
2Lt J M B Baissac
345 MORs

741 Mauritius Artizan Works Coy RE

Major Duncan Taylor
Capt G E Baker-Cresswell (ex UK)
2Lt J H Wiehe, CSM Greenhill, CQMS McNaughton, Sgt Gazlewood
Cpl Haigh, Cpl Carney, Cpl Butterworth

250 MORs

The last-named Coy were trade-tested, 86 Carpenters, 34 Drivers, 6 Cooks, 32 Bricklayers, 12 Masons, 19 Electricians, 20 Fitters, 15 Painters, 23 Concreters, 3 Clerks. They proceeded overseas by HMT TALAMBA on 16 Jan 41

Further recruiting proceeded immediately after these Companies embarked and a complete Motor Transport Coy RASC together with a further Pioneer Coy were raised as follows:-

1503 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

Lt M A Mayer
2Lt A E Sauzier
343 MORs

41st M/T Res Coy RASC

Capt E J Allan (ex UK)
Lt Rolls (from RSM ex UK)
Lt M J P Chasteau de Balyon
426 MORs

Some idea of the constitution of the MT Coy can be gained by the fact that it included 378 Drivers, 27 Fitters, Electricians, Coachtrimmers, Turners and Carpenters. Both units embarked on HMT TALAMBA on 3rd April 41.

A draft of officers arrived from UK in the following June, also further British ORs. These included Majors Phillips and Cherry MC, Capts Curtis and Colsell, Lts Phillips and Fountain, CSM Hollingsdale DCM MM, CSM Kent, CQMS Hall, CQMS Appleby, Sgts Woodhouse, Charman, Reed and Warrilow.

Major Phillips now assumed command of the Camp vice Capt Rountree and the following Coys were raised:-

1505 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

344 MORs

1506 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

348 MORs

Dock Operating Coy

202 MORs

All Officers mentioned above together with two local Officers - Lts Hein and Martin proceeded overseas with these Companies by HMT ISLAMI on 27 Sep 41.

War Establishment for a permanent Training Centre being contemplated CSM Hollingdale of the British ORs posted for employment with these Coys was retained in Mauritius

En route to Mauritius, HMT ISLAMI called in at Rodrigues, a dependency of this Colony which has a population of only 9700, and embarked 350 volunteers for service with the Pioneers.

These were formed into one Company. Physically they were a good sample, but the dental standard was very low. They were used to Mosquitoes but ignorant of the dangers of Malaria as this was non-existent at Rodrigues.

The result was a very high incidence of Malaria. The mental standard of these men was not high but they proved good workers under supervision.

Much difficulty was experienced in finding the correct names of these soldiers as most of them knew only their 'nick-names.'

Meanwhile, recruiting was also continued locally and by the end of November 1941 two further Coys were ready for embarkation:-

1507 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

Capt R R Henry (ex UK)
2Lt M Cayeux
2Lt R Guimbeau
395 MORs

1508 Mauritius Pioneer Coy

Capt Curzon (ex UK)
2Lt L M Ulcoq
414 MORs

These embarked on HMT VARELA on 2nd Dec 41

Lt L Atkinson MM RNF ex Northumberland Fusiliers Training Depot (70 RNF) disembarked HMS CARTHAGE on 1st Dec 41 and the War Establishment for the Mauritius Pioneer Training Centre was approved on 11 Dec 41.

The following disembarkation from UK on 16 Dec 41:- Capt W E Allen, Lt F K Wright, 2Lts N F Soanes, E E Perry, L Y Millen, E P Scother also CSM Highfield, CQMS Metcalf, Sgts Angood, Wells, Caudwell and Robertson.

It was decided by War Office that no further Coys would be formed, but that reinforcements would be needed. Lt Wright returned to Durban as surplus to requirements Jan 42.

Recruiting again commenced and a draft of 475 MORs was raised during the next two months.

On 16th Feb 42 emergency commissions granted to 2Lts R de C Dumee and N C Glenn. 6 Mar 42 Lt Atkinson re-granted Temp rank of Capt and appointed A/Major and Camp Commandant Mauritius Pioneer Training Centre.

The draft sailed on HMT ASCANIUS on 13 May 43.

Mauritius Pioneer Training Centre was now re-organised, the following being on permanent staff:-

Major Atkinson	Camp Comdt
2Lt Dumee	Camp QM
2Lt Saeuer	Camp Adjnt
2Lt Scotcher	Oi/c Trg
CSM Hollingdale	Camp RSM
Sgt Robertson	Drill Instr

And 48 MORs of low medical Category

Sgt Angood proceeded to UK on compassionate grounds and was later granted a commission

Owing to a heavy RE Defence Works programme, personnel awaiting embarkation had been loaned to the RE for

The work included the clearance of dense undergrowth and construction of roads. This very arduous work was vigorously tackled as was the man-handling of guns into barges and their later installation in concrete gun emplacements.

works. This proved so successful that some 50 tradesmen were held back from the last draft, and permission to raise a local Company sought. This was granted by ARMINDIA in Sept 42 and 370 men were recruited into the Pioneer Coy Mauritius Territorial Force.

In October 42 2Lt O M Adam was commissioned and 2Lt M E Barclay disembarked ex India together with Sgts McCarney, Cardwell, Cairns, Vincent, Dowler, Williams, Eves and Brabaeon. These had been demanded as drill instructors.

All were of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers with the exception of Mr Barclay (Ghurkas).

The War Establishment of the local Coy was approved conditionally that Major Atkinson filled the vacancy of OC Coy in addition to that of OC MPTC, but vacancy 2IC (Capt) was filled by promotion of Lt Dumee in December 42.

The work of this Coy included the clearance of dense undergrowth and construction of roads on Isle Aux Aigrettes and Isle de la Passe, also similar work at Points aux Fenilles and Points du Diable.

This very arduous work was vigorously tackled as was later the man-handling and

loading of guns into barges, and their later installation, the construction of concrete gun emplacements, of buildings and other essentials to hotted camp.

This Company, whilst being concerned for over 12 months with construction of buildings and other units, had no other accommodation apart from canvas for themselves, but no complaint was ever heard.

Early in 1943 Royal Signals commenced work on an ambitious programme that of linking up the whole of the military installations and units which had previously depended upon the civil telephone department.

ARMINDIA was asked to approve the formation of a second Coy but in the interim period Mauritius was placed under East Africa Command who, whilst approving the formation, laid down a W/E for the two Coys which in effect provided for only 40 additional personnel.

Recruiting however had proceeded in anticipation of a duplication of the original W/E so that each of the two Coys were 300 strong instead of 200 as provided in the W/E.

Pioneer mobile detachments were attached to Sigs and erected poles and telephone wires from Mahebourg and coastal batteries, over the mountains to Vacos, and were responsible for the erection of a complete net-work of

communications, carpenters making and erecting crosspieces and other tradesmen doing suitable other work, so that OC Sigs commented that these detachments were able to work for long periods without his supervision.

Also in early part of 1943 CSO visited Phoenix camp and discussed the question of enlistment of Mauritians for Sigs.

This was eventually decided upon and 200 Mauritians were placed in the Pioneer Camp Phoenix for their initial Infantry Training, which was undertaken by MPTC.

NCOs were also loaned to Mauritius Coast Regt on formation for recruit training.

In June 1943, 1st Bn Mauritius Regt was unable to cope with intake of recruits for that Bn, and an arrangement was arrived at whereby recruits were first posted to Pioneer Camp for 6 weeks training until such time as they could be absorbed.

On completion of recruiting to W/E it was decided to form a reserve '2nd Bn MR', and some 40 volunteers were transferred to form the nucleus of that Bn.

At about this time, Mid East called for a reinforcement of 35 MORs and these were immediately forthcoming, the men being discharged from their Home engagement and being re-enlisted in Pioneer Coys a few days prior to the date of embarkation.

East Africa also requested a number of Clerks, and 25 men were sent to this HQ by NSO. Only 14 of these were able to stand up to elementary training and these were embarked, the remainder being discharged as physically unfit with the exception of Pte Nadia, who was embarked on a later ship and unfortunately went down with this ship.

Also in July it was decided to form a Coast Security Section and these men were

all volunteers from the Pioneers.

Other personnel were later recruited to bring to full W/E. CSM Saydraouten was transferred to this Section - a procedure which did not please Maj-Gen Smallwood, who thought that Saydraouten would be more usefully employed with Infantry, Saydraouten declined to re-transfer.

A new War Establishment for Mauritius Recruiting and Training Centre was approved for the purpose of recruiting Clerks, Tailors, Shoemakers and other tradesmen for service in East Africa. HQ was a Bell Village, which had been vacated by Pioneer Trg Centre in July 42.

Towards the end of Nov 43 the accommodation at Phoenix was proving insufficient for the needs of both Pioneers and Signals, and it was decided that Pioneers should return to Bell Village, and also absorb the aforementioned unit.

The move took place immediately and on 1st Dec 43 the distribution of Pioneers was:- HQ Bell Village, No 1 Coy PGME - Bell Village, No 2 Coy PMGR - Mahebourg, Defacements - Vacoas, Quartier Militaire, Point aux Feuilles, Point du Diable, Isles aux Aigrettes and Fort George.

The detachment at Fort George was composed of a special camouflage squad which carried out a good deal of work for RE at various parts of the Island.

Lt E F Bishop (Kumaon Rifles) also arrived in early 1943 and was placed in command on No 2 Coy. He later however was appointed OC Trg to Pioneer Units and was both efficient and popular.

During December 1943, 17th (Ugandan) KAR disembarked at Port Louis, and were accommodated in Bell Village for several days pending embarkation of 1st Battalion, Mauritius Regt.

Shortly before 1st Bn MR embarked a new W/E was received which made a demand for 50 trained soldiers. 50 volunteers were immediately forthcoming from Pioneers, and after being interviewed by CO, all were accepted.

Also towards the end of 1943 this HQ was provided with a Lt (QM), ex RSM G J Christie being posted in to fill the vacancy.

A rather quiet period was experienced at the beginning of 1944 but the position regarding Officers was very acute, and in March Lt W Taylor and Lt I Richardson were posted to the Group from East Africa, both having served during the Madagascar Campaign.

It should here be mentioned that in order to regulate the command of various units in Mauritius, the Pioneer Training Centre, 2 Pioneers Coys of the Mauritius Regt, and the Mauritius Recruiting and Trg Centre were all abolished in Jan 44 and a new W/E approved for A Pioneer Group, Mauritius Regt.

This provided for HQ and 1 Recruit Coy and 2 Works Coys. Lt Taylor was appointed OC of the Recruit Coy with the rank of A/Capt, the full list of officers on reorganisation being as follows:-

HQ	
CO	Maj L Atkinson MM
Adjnt	
QM	Lt (QM) G J Christie

No 1 Coy	
OC	Capt P R de C Dumee
2i/c	Capt O M Adam
	Lt E P Scotcher

No 2 Coy	
OC	Capt W G Bishop (Ind Army)

2i/c Capt M E Barclay (Ind Army)
Lt I Richardson

Recruit Coy
OC Capt W Taylor

Capt H Avice (on loan from HQ MR) Mid East called for a reinforcement of 800 in March 1944 and recruiting proceeded immediately.

Some 100 men from MTF Pioneer Coys immediately volunteered and were discharged from engagement and re-enlisted in the Pioneer Corps.

The remainder of the recruits were enlisted within 3 weeks. It was impossible to spare an Officer for Draft Conducting and Lt Gough together with Sgts Winters and Sellars were posed from East Africa for that purpose.

Also in the early days of 1944 some 100 volunteers for transfer to Pioneers from 1st Bn MR were also sent to Mid East from Madagascar, the Bn being disbanded at that time and re-formed into Independent Guard Coys and an Artizan Works Coy.

The new War Establishment was approved w.e.f. 1 Jun 44 and the Group established with HQ, A, B & C Coys.

On 18th July 44 A/Capt Gough, 2 BORs and 796 MORs embarked on HMT SALVEEN for Mid East.

There was no further recruitment during 1944, but in October some 120 MORs were repatriated for leave and home service. Also disembarked from the same ship were 150 ORs ex 1st Bn MR who were to be discharged as "surplus to requirements". The discharges were carried out by this HQ on the same date.

A quiet period ensued, meanwhile the strength of the Group hovered round 700 - 800, all being fully employed on local works for RE, Sigs, Ord, whilst many Clerks, Drivers and miscellaneous tradesmen were attached to various units.

The beginning of 1945 was marked by

The beginning of 1945 was marked by the worst cyclone on record for over 50 years which resulted in the demolition of practically the whole of the temporary military establishments and camps on the island, except Group Headquarters!

the worst cyclone on record for over 50 years which resulted in the demolition of practically the whole of the temporary Military establishments and camps on the Island.

These included the four Mauritius Coast Battery encampments, new buildings erected for the RASC detachment in Vacoas and for the Signals at Phoenix.

The greatest disaster, however, was the complete razing of Bell Village estate with the one exception of Group HQ building. Nothing but the bare walls remained of some 100 cottages built in brick and concrete, and even many of these walls had been blown down, whilst more than a further 100 stoutly built and composition houses which had withstood many near-

cyclones for many years completely disappeared.

The loss of stores appeared likely to be colossal but by virtue of the splendid efforts of all ranks, the final write off was a mere £300, stores to the value of over £10,000 having been recovered some of these being collected from a distance up to a mile from the camp.

On surveying the devastated area, the local government decided to wash their hands of the camp (which was a pre-war housing estate), but the OC Troops decided that a certain amount of reconstruction could be undertaken, especially with a view of the desperate position regarding accommodation for the troops.

Accordingly, a small party of RE set to work on salvage and reconstruction, the troops meanwhile being given permission to sleep at their own homes.

In March 45 Lt N C Glenn who had left Mauritius in May 42, returned to Mauritius with a draft of 321 MORs of low medical category. By the same ship was embarked a draft of 272 reinforcements.

Lt Glenn was appointed OIC Works, and buildings were repaired and made habitable at such a rate that within 6 months of the catastrophe it was possible to provide accommodation for between 400 and 500 men in the camp.

In April 1945 there disembarked Lts A Clark, D Ball and H Lambert and recruiting commenced immediately for two new Companies which had been demanded by Mid East.

These were completed by the end of May and ready for embarkation. Again more than half of these men were volunteers from Pioneer Coys MR. Lt Darnell disembarked on 9 June 1945 and was TOS. A further small number of medical cases also disembarked for home service.

Shipping was not available until early August, but on the 10th of that month the two Companies embarked on HMT FRANCONIA.

The draft was in charge of Capt Avice, whilst Capt Bishop, Lt Darrell, Lt Lambert, Lt Scotcher and Lt M Christie also proceeded by the same ship.

Also during the early part of August 45 there disembarked 1064 Docks Operating Coy with Maj Brown in command and Capt Ulcoq 2IC, the strength of the Coy was approximately 400.

Disembarked from the same ship were

204 MORs of 741 Art Wks Coy under Lt Cateaux and a further 333 who had been repatriated for various reasons, the Group now had a strength of 1600.

Large scale releases were now ordered by East Africa Command, the first being the disbandment of 1064 Coy on 1st Oct 45. Authority was also given for the release of all men of low medical category, and with the first 11 Age and Service Groups being affected, releases commenced at a rate of approx 100 per week and continued at that rate until the end of the year.

Reorganisation was effected, 'A' Coy being converted into a Divisional Centre and 'B' Coy carrying all other personnel (less 'C' Works Coy) and acting as Depot. Strength of this Coy rose to well over 1400

at one period.

During the last two months of the year further drafts of 837, 160, 360 and 50 disembarked from Mid East.

Some very large amounts were paid to soldiers on release and a Branch of the Government Savings Bank was established in Bell Village.

The venture was so successful that almost a million rupees paid out to the end of the year, practically a half of this amount was invested in newly opened accounts, quite apart from the amount invested by those who already had deposit accounts in the bank.

Average payments amounted to over £100 including plain clothes allowances.

During the year Major L Atkinson received the MBE whilst the Officer Commanding Troops - Col R E S Yeldham (Sherwood Foresters) was awarded the CBE for outstanding service.

One of the most creditable achievements during the past 4 years had been the fight against Malaria, especially in Bell Village which had enjoyed a terrible reputation, it having been said that no man ever escaped the dread disease who entered the Camp. From an average of 12% of the total strength in hospital from all causes in 1941/42 a steady decline had been effected and resulted in figures of 8% in 1943, 5% in 1944, and less than 3% for the whole of 1945.

During 1945 there was an epidemic of Infantile Paralysis followed by a cyclone but none of the personnel of this unit were affected.

The shortage of food in the Island and the deterioration of conditions generally had the effect of inducing the majority of the men who had been struck off strength as Deserters to surrender themselves. Pioneer Camp at Bell Village was also used as a Transit Camp by various units of MR on disembarkation and those units were accommodated in some cases for several weeks pending the establishments of their own HQ.

A Victory Parade was held on 16th Aug 45 and a detachment of Pioneers under Lt Glenn took part in this. 'VJ' Day celebrations were held on 6 Sep 45 and both 1064 Docks Operating Coy and an ex 741 Art Wks Coy men took part in this parade.

Pioneers were also used for lining the route of procession and for controlling crowds at various railway stations.

His Excellency the Governor, Sir Donald Mackenzie-Kennedy arrived back in the Colony on 3rd Jan 46. The Guard of Honour was composed of 100 men ex 741 Art Works Coy RE, who put up a splendid show. A further 100 men of this unit, also ex-overseas, formed the cordon from the quay-side.

The work of excavating and laying cables connected with RADAR from the top of Signal Mountain to Fort George was undertaken by this unit.

Towards the end of January 1946, proposals for the re-deployment of Ex-Service men were discussed, and the possibility of further service in the Mid East was muted.

In this connection Maj Atkinson proceeded to HQ East Africa Command by air on 23 Jan 46, Capt A Clark assuming temporary command of the Group.

A cyclone warning was received on 29 Jan 46 and the cyclone eventually passed near the West Coast of Mauritius during the night 31 Jan - 1 Feb 46.

Several roofs were stripped off buildings, the cook-house demolished and considerable other damage was noted.

On 7 Feb 46 232 Mauritians and Rodriguais disembarked ex Mid East. The former were sent home on leave and the latter accommodated in Fort George pending onwards movement to Rodrigues. Major Atkinson returned by air on 11 Feb 46, having made satisfactory proposals which had been approved by the Governors of both Mauritius and Seychelles, details to be settled by HQ MEF, HQ EAC, both Governors and OCT.

C in C Lt Gen Sir Keith Atkinson KCB, MC visited this HQ 12 Feb 46.

On 14 Feb 46, 161 Rodriguais left by SS HUNAN for Rodrigues. Lt Rochecouste, Lt Pontre and 2 Sgts accompanied the draft for the purpose of completing the release of these men on disembarkation at Rodrigues.

As a result of the visit of the C in C, it was decided that disbandment of 101 Ind Gd Coy MR, 102 Ind Gd Coy MR, 131 Art Wks Coy MR, and the Depot MR, should be effected, and this HQ would be responsible for release procedures. First batch of 40 MORs from 101 Coy passed through the Dispersal Centre on 25th Feb 46 and the disbandment was completed by 20th Mar 46.

It was also decided that Agr and Service Groups 30 to 36 all Mauritian personnel stationed in Mauritius should be released by end April 46. Some 640 men of this unit were affected and releases started at the rate of approx 30 each day w.e.f. 22nd Mar 46.

News was also received that a further 400 MORs were in Transit Camp in Mombasa, and these would be released immediately on disembarkation in Mauritius. Expected that these would arrive by HUNAN in early April.

Now confirmed that recruiting would shortly commence in order to raise at least 10 new companies for Mid East. It is planned to return all personnel at present serving in Mid East as soon as possible.

New War Establishment to include HQ, Dispersal Centre, Depot Coy, Works Coy, and 2 Holding Coys, the unit meanwhile having been organised on these lines as a compulsory measure.

An unofficial O2E(?) has also been set up as the number of casualties to be published have risen to an average of well over 100 daily during the past 4 months.

This Depot housed in splendid new buildings erected by own personnel from salvaged material.

On 4 May 46 a further 416 MORs disembarked from HMT HUNAN. These were mostly ex Mid East but approx 50 were Mauritians who had been serving with units in East Africa. All were sent on Release Leave w.e.f. the date of disembarkation.

The DCO (Draft Conducting Officer) in charge of this party was Capt Leclos. During the month a further 300 (approx) men were also released from units stationed in Mauritius, being in Age and Service Groups 37 to 46.

Recruiting commenced for a 3 years term of service with Pioneers in Mid East on 13th May 46 and by the end of the month attestations had reached 1222. This meant that the following Coys had been formed:-

1st (Mauritius) Pioneer Coy Strength 360
2nd (Mauritius) Pioneer Coy Strength 360
4th (Rodrigues) Pioneer Coy Strength 360

NCOs Pool and surplus ORs Strength 202

These figures include 380 volunteers from Rodrigues, HMT HUNAN making a special trip to collect these during the a/m period.

A further 5000 volunteers had been registered up to the end of the month, all having been selected from much greater numbers as likely to pass the approved medical standard.

These will be called forward as quickly as accommodation can be found.

Up to the end of May 46 approx 5000 MORs had been released via the Dispersal Centre of this unit and well over Rs5,000,000 (five million) paid in release benefits, some Rs3,000,000 of this total has been paid into the Government Savings Bank Branch which was established as a branch of 'Welfare' in HQ Camp at Bell Village.

Of the 900 recruits accepted in Mauritius (excluding Rod) some 250 are ex-servicemen whose release leave had been completed.

Major Atkinson, having completed 4 years service overseas in Sep 45 was called forward for repatriation under 'Python'.

He agreed to defer until the Dispersal Scheme had become efficient and again on his visit to East Africa in Jan 46 agreed to remain in Mauritius until the new recruiting scheme was successfully launched.

On completion of the first 3 Companies, and sufficient volunteers being registered to ensure that the scheme would go ahead, Major Atkinson elected 'Python' at end May, and Major H P Rowbotham was nominated to proceed from East Africa to Mauritius to take over command of the Pioneer Group approx Mid June 46. ■

Egypt, on the threshold of Revolution 1945 - 1952

| from the Library of Congress

A Major from the Royal Engineers, Deputy Commander of Royal Engineers in the Suez Area was travelling in an Army Car accompanied by one warrant Officer and a Private soldier, and followed by a three-ton Lorry driven by a British Corporal and carrying eight Mauritian Soldiers, (Pioneers) and was returning by the coast road from a visit on duty to Port Twefik.

As they turned the corner by the Eastern end of the refinery area, they ran into an ambush which concentrated heavy fire on both vehicles.

Fire came from a building in the refinery

and from a grove of palm trees on the other side of the road.

Both vehicles were forced into the ditch by the intense fire.

The occupants of the car were thrown clear, but although unhurt, were weaponless and could not defend themselves.

The post mortem reported that the eight Mauritian soldiers and the British soldier were killed by gunshot, but there is evidence also that their bodies were "mutilated" after death by being struck all over by a "blunt" instrument.

The driver of the lorry dismounted with his weapon and lying on the ground, returned the fire of the attackers. The only two men he actually saw firing at them were auxiliary policemen.

After a few minutes a civilian car approached from the East and the Warrant Officer, commandeering it was able to escape with the Corporal to fetch help. They returned with a party of Bren-gun carriers, which on approaching the scene of the ambush came under heavy fire from both sides of the road.

This party also observed Police Auxilliaries amongst the attackers. Under fire they were able to rescue the bodies of five Mauritian Soldiers from the lorry.

The following day early in the morning, a party of troops was sent again to the scene of the ambush and on making a thorough search of the area, found the bodies of the remaining three Mauritian soldiers and of the British soldier who had been in the car. The body of the British Major was delivered to the British hospital by an Egyptian Police officer.

It appears from the Post Mortem report that the eight Mauritian soldiers and the British soldier were killed by gunshot, but there is evidence also that their bodies were "mutilated" after death by being struck all over by a "blunt" instrument and by stabbing.

It is clear from the evidence of the Post Mortem Report on this Officer, that he was brutally murdered, probably near the scene of the ambush.

The Actual Post Mortem/ Autopsy report #61/. (FO.../96...) was performed by Lt Col R. V... (RAMC) Specialist in pathology.

This report is far too brutal to be fully reported here but suffice it to say this is as far as this Newsletter will go when it comes to reporting such brutality.

The only serviceman who was taken prisoner by these Auxilliaries and lived to tell the tale of his harrowing experience was LAC Tony Rigden who after a long time in captivity ended up being thrown out of a taxi onto the streets of Paris, and from there made his own way home.

He recounted his experience on the recent Television special on the Canal Zone by International Jazz Musician (and SCZ Veteran) Acker Bilk. ■



■ RPC Plot at Field of Remembrance and RLC Plot at Field of Remembrance (Top Left)

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Members form up at Field of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Norman Brown talks to 2 of Sgt Scully's daughters

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Cpl Beacham and Micky talk to the Duke of Edinburgh

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Members form up at Field of Remembrance

Picture: Paul Brown



■ A scene from Micky's local

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Norman meets friends from Northampton

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Kelvin smiling - someone bought him a pint

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Two smiling faces at the Burns Night

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Kev Young prepares to read the "Ode

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Bob Fox looking serious

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Some of the attenders at the Burns night

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The haggis tastes good

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Tony & Liz Bloor at the Burns Nigh

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dusty centre of attention again

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Bob Hyslop shows off his hat

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Brummie Whitson and Kelvin Smith pose

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dusty in camouflage

Picture: Paul Brown



■ More happy faces at the Burns Night

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Tom Appleyard doing a "Selfie"

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Vi Butler is happy as the rest are glum

Picture: Paul Brown



■ WO2 Geordie Holmes, laying a wreath of at the memorial to WO2 Charlie Wood, Albert Park, Middlesbrough. Picture: Supplied



■ Cpl Chilli Wardmen, 104 Pnr Sqn, at the grave of Cpl Ginge Roberts on behalf of 23 Pnr Regt at Acklam Cemetery Middlesbrough. Picture: Supplied



■ Two Corps "Heroes" Pat Morley (ex TA) and Bob Fox (ex Reg) Picture: Paul Brown



■ Geordie T and Pat Morley Picture: Paul Brown



■ Norman Brown prepares for Chelsea Hospital Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pat Morley sneaks in again Picture: Paul Brown



■ Two Bobs make two shillings Picture: Paul Brown



■ Two smart Pioneers at the National Memorial

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Past & Present Officers Dinner

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Annie poses with with Patters

Picture: Paul Brown



■ The RSM agrees with the saying on the mug

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Two Norman's with little wisdom between them!

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Dusty again?

Picture: Paul Brown

16577 Brigadier Harold Gordon Lusby Prynne CBE MC 1899-1976



Brigadier Prynne

The RPC Association historian, Lt Col J Starling, recently purchased the medals for Brig HGL Prynne, the medals are: CBE military, MC (GV), 1914/15 Star (2Lt 13 London.Regt), BWM, Victory Medals (Capt), 1939/45 Star, Africa Star, Italy Star, Defence Medal, War Medals, MID, Efficiency Decoration, (GVI) dated 1944.

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archive

BRIGADIER H. G. L. Prynne, CBE MC TD, was probably one of the best known figures in the Royal Pioneer Corps, and certainly one of the most popular. To go with the recent acquisition of his medals by our resident historian John Starling we thought it only fitting to give you some background on this character.

His medal citations read:

OBE

As Officer Commanding the Pioneer Corps Base Depot, this officer has, since October 1941 mobilised and equipped 130 units of the Pioneer Corps and a total of some 50,000 troops have passed through his hands.

The organisation and administration of his Depot have been of the very highest order and have enabled sudden expansions to take place smoothly and efficiently. He has administered as many as 15,000 troops in his Depot at one time. His never failing energy, initiative and enterprise have been an inspiration to his Staff which has resulted in perfect team work and many Pioneer Units have thus been equipped and despatched to the theatre of operations far earlier than could otherwise be expected. This officer's services have been of outstanding merit.

CBE

This officer, by the very high standard of administration and organisation of military and civil labour in the Command, has played an outstanding part in the development and performance of the administration services. He has under his control two military Pioneers Bns and twenty-six Companies and an average of 100,000 (60,000 in Iraq, 40,000 in Persia) civil labour.

He has given the AIOC considerable assistance in their labour problems and by personal initiative and efforts in securing

agreed terms for civil labour with the American Command – AIOC and the civil government has been largely instrumental in the successful solution of the civil labour problems of all the large scale employers in Persia and Iraq.

Obituary

He died in 1976 at the age of 77 and the following appeared in The Royal Pioneer Issue Number 127:

Brig HH Blanchard writes:

After distinguished service in the First World War, for which he was awarded the Military Cross. Brig Harold Prynne kept a very active interest in the Army by commanding the Queen's Westminsters; Under his leadership this Territorial Battalion was always up to strength and was outstanding.

When war came in 1939 he joined the Pioneer Corps but did not succeed in getting to France with the BEF. Instead his genius for organisation, allied to his effective but unorthodox methods, resulted in many units from his Depot at Clacton being better equipped and trained than most.

He became Commandant of the Pioneer Corps Depot at Quassassin in Egypt. His remarkable handling of Pioneers of many races is a familiar story to readers of "The Royal Pioneer" to which he contributed articles after the war. He later went, in 1942-43, as Director of Pioneers and Labour Persia and Iraq (Paiforce) where again he made his mark.

I first met him – he was by then a legendary figure – in Italy in 1944 when he was Director of Labour Central Mediterranean Force. "The war is won!" said the late Maj Leslie Vedrenne to me when he knew that he was coming.

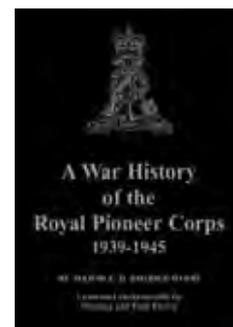
A fascinating drive together across Italy was the start of our long friendship. I shall always remember his pungent wit, crystal clear and sharp mind, and the laughter we enjoyed together.

After the war he was a regular supporter

of the Corps. Old friends gathered round him at Corps meetings and Liza, his wife, who died a short time before him, added gaiety to the proceedings.

It is good to have known Harold and the Corps owes him a lasting debt of gratitude.

War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1946 by Maj HR Rhodes-Wood



(This book has been converted to electronic format by myself and my son Paul and is available from the RPC Association on CD Rom at a cost of £10 + £1 pp).

The following are extracts from the book:



Leading Old Comrades at Wrexham

Pages 119 - 129

Since the many thousands of Colonial Pioneers to be produced from this vast campaign of recruitment were to be despatched as speedily as possible to Egypt it became obvious that a depot would be required there to receive, equip and train the men, and in due course to disperse them in companies to the operational areas in which they were needed. A site was selected for this purpose in the Sweet Water Canal area of the Canal Zone and here on 1st June, 1941, the Pioneer Corps Base Depot, Middle East, was opened. So states the official record, but seldom was a statement more misleading. Most remote of all the military camps in the Canal Zone, set deeper in the desert than any other, nothing in all the bleak landscape was already more "open" than the three square miles of desert at Quassasin now designated as a "Base Depot." Open to the burning sun of day and the bitter winds of night, open to the full force of gritty sandstorms and stinging dustwhirls; bleak, barren, desolate. Here and there an occasional, newly erected, empty cookhouse broke the monotony of the landscape; a rusted length of piping projecting nakedly from the sand showed

where water had been laid on; and huddled together in a few rows of tents 800 disconsolate Palestinian and Cypriot Pioneers, survivors of the campaigns in Greece and Crete; as forlorn as the prospect which surrounded them. Such was Quassasin on the first day of June in 1941.

The selection of Lieutenant-Colonel H. G. L. Prynne, MC, TD, to fill the appointment of Commandant at the Depot was a fortunate one. Deceptively mild in appearance, Colonel Prynne was the rare combination of an astute and successful business man with an international knowledge of men and affairs, and a soldier with staff training and experience in early days—a mixture which seldom blends happily for the keen commercial mind is apt to be intolerant of the slow and rigid processes of departmental orthodoxy. Of boundless energy and consumed with a determination to carry out any task assigned to him speedily and effectively, he had already given evidence of the subtlety with which he used his wide knowledge of military procedure to overcome the obstacles of established custom when on the staff of the Pioneer Corps Training Centre at Clacton. All his resolution and guile was to be called upon in the task

which now lay before him.

Despite the fact that the recruitment campaign aimed at the enlistment of 100,000 to 150,000 Colonial Pioneers, and the project was already in train and gaining momentum, Colonel Prynne's original instructions were to prepare for the reception of 1,600 men. Audaciously, and with a clearer perception of the reality of future events, he laid out a Depot for ten times that number, with additional spare accommodation near by should it be required, a course of action which more than justified itself, when under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel G. Richmond, MC, the Pioneer Corps Base Depot at Quassasin reached an all-rank strength of 23,000 men and became in all probability the largest Army unit on record.

With the meagre staff allowed him by the Establishments Committee—one captain was authorised for the combined duties of adjutant and quartermaster—and his nucleus of Palestinians and Cypriots, the newly appointed Commandant prepared the desert site for its occupants and planned in anticipation of their arrival. The purely military problems of quartering, clothing and feeding were, apart from the unprecedented size of the operation, fairly

simple of solution. From the outset, he realised that the normal system whereby units mobilising at the Depot would individually indent on Ordnance, S. and T., etc., for their daily requirements of rations and clothing, and their mobilisation needs of stores, equipment and transport, would be too cumbersome and laborious and arrangements were made for an enormous floating stock to be held at Depot Headquarters of everything individuals or units would require. Provision was made for the reception and issue at the Depot Ration Store of from 10,000 to 16,000 rations daily during the first few months, whilst the Depot Quartermaster's Store, which became more like an Ordnance Depot than a unit store, normally held of the most important items, 30,000 shirts, socks, sets of underclothing, suits of battle dress, etc. 15,000 items of gas equipment, respirators, gas capes, etc, 50,000 blankets, 100 tons of G.1098 stores and tentage, 24 trucks and a similar number of bicycles, 50 typewriters.

Similarly, sufficient stationery,

increased from two hours a day to begin with to a full day's work after ten days. The wisdom of this course of action was proved later when, by the time the first 50,000 Colonial Pioneers had passed through the Depot, the cemetery there contained less than two dozen graves, and these casualties were caused by normal disease and accidents.

Hospital arrangements, too, had to be made. British military hospitals in Egypt could not accept Colonial troops because the medical staffs did not know the many languages of the men and so could not diagnose or treat ailments with certainty, nor were many of them conversant with tropical diseases and General Headquarters, Egypt, refused to provide a special hospital. In desperation Colonel Prynne turned to the Director of Medical Services of the Union Defence Force (South African Army) who was internationally famous for his knowledge of native problems and who agreed that it was essential to have special hospital arrangements at the Depot to guard against and deal with any epidemic

ruling which laid down that they did not serve native troops. Once again he turned to his South African friends and no words can express the gratitude which the Corps owes to the Union Defence Force and other South Africans for the valuable, and often "unofficial" help they gave our Depot in the Middle East and the men of many nations who passed through it. Largely due to Colonel Prynne's initiative in the first place the South African Parliament voted a sum of money to be devoted to the welfare of British Colonial Pioneers and the Union Forces carried out the task on a scale that was far ahead of anything that was done for British troops at that time. They stocked, supplied the personnel for, and ran canteens and welfare generally and also sent up from South Africa two excellent mobile cinemas.

Throughout the Quassasin Base Area an Egyptian cinema organisation was erecting cinemas on sites where other depots were to be created. These cinemas were not for the use of Colonial troops, nor was the Pioneer Corps Base Depot to have its own. Once again Colonel Prynne's ingenuity was brought into play and no one was more surprised at a later date than the Egyptian company when they discovered that they had been talked into building and equipping a cinema in the centre of the Colonial Pioneer area. But since they were business men and the cinema had been completed they operated it, to the mutual benefit of the Pioneers and themselves. Similar tactics were followed by the wily Depot Commander with the NAAFI authorities who were erecting large brick canteens and institutes all over the Middle East, and although they raised a bit of a fuss when they found they had unwittingly built four Institutes in what they discovered was to be a Colonial depot they finally agreed to operate them rather than have them stand idle and unprofitable.

In spite of almost insuperable difficulties Colonel Prynne had now, within two weeks of the arrival of the first batch of recruits, obtained amenities for the Pioneer Corps Depot as good as any in the Middle East and, indeed, far better than most-specialised medical care and hospitalisation, NAAFI institutes, welfare huts and canteens, a permanent cinema, two mobile cinemas, and even an assured income to finance anything else he was likely to require. And this latter was an important essential for the pay of Colonial soldiers was not high, and they were inclined to save rather than spend, so the canteen profits would not be so big as in a comparable British unit, and if the Commandant's plans for the future, which included a bus service to take his men to and from the nearest large populated centre and educational tours whilst on leave in Egypt, were to be developed it was imperative that he have an income for the purpose.

But bright though the outlook appeared there was a large black cloud on the horizon. The construction of things which even General Headquarters considered to be essential for natives-latrines, wash-houses, etc., was not progressing. An interview with the CRE provided the solution. He was, it appeared, a religious fanatic who was deliberately going slow on the work because "the natives were all pagans"! It took all Colonel Prynne's persuasiveness to convince the man that ninety per cent of them were Catholics before he would agree to speed up the



Sir Winston Churchill greets Mrs V Rhodes-Wood and Major EH Rhodes-Wood author of "A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1946".

publications, medical panniers and stores, and in fact everything that a man or unit could possibly require-fully to equip ten companies, each of 350 men-was always in stock with the result that everyone was clothed, equipped and administered without going outside the Depot.

Sixteen camps, each to contain 1,000 men, were laid out. But the biggest problem of all, the human problem, had yet to be solved and already in Africa, India, and the islands of the Indian Ocean the recruits were preparing for their long journey to Egypt. acclimatisation, particularly for the Africans with no experience of low temperatures and their susceptibility to pneumonia and other respiratory diseases, was of paramount importance. Like the majority of the recruits they would reach the port of disembarkation clad only in the shirts and shorts in which they had left their native land, and many would be reaching Egypt in the winter. Since the journey from the ship to the Depot might well prove fatal to a number of them plans were made for them to be issued with warm clothing on the quay immediately on disembarkation, and a schedule of duties, exercises and parades drawn up to ensure that the amount of work they did after arrival was gradually

which might break out. He, too, tried to persuade the British medical authorities to make adequate arrangements for the Colonial Pioneers, but having achieved no success decided on his own initiative to bring up from South Africa a general hospital specially staffed and equipped to deal with them and place it at the disposal of the Depot, acquiescing to Colonel Prynne's plea that no mention of the proposal be made to British General Headquarters until the hospital was already on its way to the Middle East.

The arrival of this South African hospital caused something of a furor in Cairo. General Headquarters insisted that they could not accommodate it, nor would they approve of Colonel Prynne's offer to erect a complete 1,000-bedded hospital from spare tentage which he held in store. Since, however, the South African medical staff was on the spot and a compromise had to be reached they finally agreed to the Depot Commander erecting the hospital temporarily until proper accommodation could be provided-which was done just before the first big draft of Pioneers arrived.

Welfare for his men presented Colonel Prynne with a considerable problem. The Army Welfare organisation was unable to help and NAAFI authorities produced a

work. Fortunately he never later visited the Depot to check up on the men's religious beliefs!

By October 1941 the first 6,000 Colonial Pioneers were expected in Egypt daily. The nights, and frequently the days, were very cold, with a keen wind blowing and with occasional days and nights of driving rain. The Army in Egypt had discarded tropical kit and donned battle dress, to which were added pullovers and greatcoats to combat the cold. For three months Colonel Prynne and his staff had prepared for every contingency and now all that remained was to draw the blankets and warm clothing to protect the men from climatic conditions to which exposure in their shorts and open-necked shirts, even for a few hours, would for many of them mean pneumonia and death. Only on arrival at the Ordnance Depot did Colonel Prynne learn that there was no authority for him to draw clothing since the original instructions had said that the men would be clothed before leaving their own country and there were no blankets, for all in stock had been issued to other units. In the turmoil that ensued someone at General Headquarters conceived the brilliant idea of immediately shipping masses of warm clothing to South Africa for the men, only to have to order that it be shipped back again when it was pointed out that the men were not in South Africa but at sea and daily expected at Suez. Once again Colonel Prynne resorted to unorthodox methods which would have appaled a more conventional man in order to meet the emergency. By guile he conjured the warm clothing from Ordnance and by guile acquired his 50,000 blankets from other camps in the neighbourhood-but only the night before the men disembarked and just in time to send them by truck for issue to the men as they came ashore from the transports.

And so the first Colonial Pioneers came to Quassasin, men of a dozen different nationalities and religions, men speaking a score of languages and habituated to a host of national and tribal customs. Feeding them involved a variety of ration scales and called for many forms of cooking and cooking utensils. Clothing them was complicated by an assortment of different clothing scales. Paying them meant juggling with numerous varying rates of pay. And with the men came the "expert advisers" on native customs and affairs, experienced in the ways of the tribesmen on their own tribal ground and genuinely convinced that age-old customs could not and should not be altered or disturbed. With all the patience he could muster, and patience was not one of his greatest virtues, Colonel Prynne listened to the advice they offered him. This race, he was told, should not be allowed to mix with that race or riots and bloodshed would ensue; this tribe must not meet women, whom they would rape on sight; these people must be kept away from strong drink or they would go berserk; some fed squatting in the open, some only in the privacy of their tents; some would sit up to table, most had never seen a table; some would use a knife, fork and spoon, others only handled food with their fingers. It soon became apparent to him with his wide knowledge of the world and its people that sincere though the experts undoubtedly were in their convictions they were nearly all presenting old ideas which had been found to work in other surroundings but few could advise him on the practicability of new ideas, because

they had rarely seen new ideas tried out. Added to this, the advisers were not entirely disinterested but were frequently more concerned with post-war problems in the territory for which they spoke than with immediate military requirements.

In any event it would have been out of the question to operate and administer a large military depot with a confusion of regulations and exceptions. Without hesitation Colonel Prynne made up his own mind as to the course he would follow. The men had become Pioneers and irrespective of what they had been accustomed to in the past only one standard would be accepted in the future, that of the British Army, and that standard would be applied to all details of Depot life. Regardless of race, caste, nationality or custom every man would march to his meals, have them in a proper dining tent, sitting on a form and eating properly at table; the kit lay-out for all would be identical, as would individual turn-out, smartness and behaviour.

The right of all to share equally in the Depot's communal life would be respected, the freedom of all to mingle with the civilian world outside would, subject to the restrictions of personal freedom enforced on all soldiers, remain unimpaired. The rightness of the Commandant's judgment soon became evident. In canteens and cinemas available to Colonial troops the men of India, Africa, Palestine, Cyprus, Mauritius, Syria and Lebanon rubbed shoulders and formed a brotherhood linked together by one intangible thread, their common membership in the British Army and the Pioneer Corps. This is not to imply, however, that Colonel Prynne rejected all advice offered to him. Such action would have been foolish and he was a man of much wisdom and had, in addition, a sincere sympathy and understanding for the soldiers under his care and appreciated many if not all the problems of reorientation which their simple minds could not immediately grasp. To such men as Colonel DW How, CBE, of the High Commission Territories, who was free from accumulated prejudices and approached native issues from the practical angle, he turned gladly when in doubt, as also he did to the chaplains who had accompanied the men from their homes and who frequently had already reached the conclusion that given the opportunity the men would respond favourably to any chance to improve their status.

Visibly the Pioneer Depot grew in size. Rows of tentage to accommodate 16,000 men covered the desert in orderly lines; there were 101 cookhouses; 60 unit quartermaster's stores; 60 unit orderly rooms; 20 unit officers' messes and a similar number of unit sergeants' messes; the Depot Stores holding 1,000 tons of materials; the Depot Ration Store containing 30,000 rations; the messes and offices of the Permanent Staff and similar accommodation for the stream of reinforcements constantly coming and

going. By the end of December 1941 troops were passing in and out of the Depot at an average rate of 10,000 a month, and regularly each day, six days a week, one fully equipped and mobilised company of 350 men, every man having fired a course on the Depot rifle range and been instructed in gas precautions, was sent out to the operational theatre in the Western Desert, Syria or Palestine for which it was destined. The administrative work involved was immense.

During the first six months of its existence the Pioneer Corps Base Depot at Quassasin was approximately at divisional strength-it developed later-and throughout this period the only accommodation available for Headquarter offices was one wooden hut divided into two rooms, each about thirty feet by twelve, and the total authorised staff was the Commandant, his Second-in-Command (a Major), his Adjutant/ Quartermaster, one spare subaltern, one Orderly Room Sergeant, one

Rows of tentage to accommodate 16,000 men covered the desert in orderly lines, there were 101 cookhouses, 60 unit quartermaster's stores, 60 unit orderly rooms, 20 unit officers' messes and a similar number of unit sergeants' messes. The Depot Stores held 1,000 tons of materials, the Depot Ration Store held 30,000 rations. By the end of December 1941 troops were passing in and out at a rate of 10,000 per month!

corporal and three clerks. The Depot Orderly Room had to issue routine administration orders for the 16,000 men in the Depot, the operation orders for the rifle range and gas chambers, and returns of daily arrivals and departures; to prepare time-tables for the drawing of food, clothing and stores; detail transport arrangements; compile Part II Orders; organise Courts Martial, Courts of Inquiry and the running of the Depot Detention Camp; and to cope with the hundred and one other problems that inevitably arise with a large mass of men. During the same six-month period the Depot Quartermaster's Store issued daily over six thousand items of personal clothing and equipment in addition to transport, tentage and accommodation stores. A similar quantity of stores had, of course, to be drawn daily from Ordnance and S and T. in order to maintain the stock at its operational level. In the Training Wing of the Depot 300 men fired a course each day on the rifle range, whilst a similar number were instructed in the use of the gas mask and passed through the gas chamber. The task of the

Depot Gas Officer, who also doubled up on other duties, was not an enviable one for the men had never heard of poison gas, had never previously seen a respirator, and hardly any of them could speak or understand English. Courses of instruction had also to be given in driving and vehicle maintenance, for each unit on leaving had to drive its own transport away, and to the unit cooks and clerks. In this Wing, also, elementary classes were held to teach the British officers and NCOs the native languages according to which race was eventually to come under their command.

From the beginning the Depot was also the Reception Centre for all Pioneer drafts

Once the African soldier had been issued his kit and equipment he would wear everything at once for the sheer joy of possession.

arriving in the Middle East. Many of the officers and NCOs viewed the place with mixed feelings; it was for them the beginning of a new life, a new way of life. They had to learn to speak African dialects, to understand the ancient laws and traditions of the Basuto, or distinguish between the solid boy from Kenya and the wild tribesman from Uganda; they had to learn to hold a balance between Jew and Arab, or between Hausa and Ebo, and they had to accustom themselves to the vagaries of Swazi cooking.

In forming, operating and administering the Pioneer Corps Base Depot at Quassasin all Colonel Prynne's terrific energy and enthusiasm would have been unavailing without the loyalty of the war-time accomplishments of the Corps brought more the endless hours of work they put in to make the unit a success and particular mention must be made of the Second-in-Command, Major G Richmond, MC, a tower of strength to his Commandant; to the original Quartermaster, a London tram conductor in civil life, who worked himself into hospital; to his successor, Captain HH Rose, who was sent to the Depot because he was unfit and left again after months of toil because by then he was even more unfit; and to 2Lt HR Johnson who, although without experience, volunteered to act as Adjutant-but without the rank and pay of the appointment because there was no provision on the establishment for an adjutant. When on a tour of inspection of the Middle East the Adjutant-General described the Pioneer Corps Depot as "the eighth wonder of the world" and few if any of the war-time accomplishments of the Corps brought more distinction to "The Pioneers" than this creation in the barren desert of a city of multi-racial and multi-lingual men who, newly arrived from their primitive ways of life, were to sally forth in soldierly pride to serve the Allied cause in many corners of the earth.

To the majority of the men it was indeed a matter of pride that they were allowed the privilege of wearing the uniform of the British Army. These were no conscripts, these men of India and Africa, but free men who had volunteered to serve in the forces of the Crown. No enemy threatened their homes or their future freedom. Of Hitler and Mussolini they knew nothing and cared

less. The King-Emperor had need of them and that was enough. To the sophisticated eyes of men of a more developed civilisation there was something humourous in the attitude of these men towards their uniform and drill, but the British officers and NCOs responsible for their training found their eagerness and earnestness rather devastating and overwhelming.

Admittedly it was funny to see an African become so lyrical over a steel helmet or a battle-dress suit that after drawing his new kit and equipment he would wear everything at once for the sheer joy of possession, battle dress over khaki drill, greatcoat over everything, and steel helmet over his bush hat regardless of the temperature. But no trained soldier of any nation, however long his service, could fail to appreciate the smart turn-out of the same African a few weeks later when the first rush of childlike excitement had died down and he paraded ceremoniously in his spotless, jealously cared for uniform

with blanccoed webbing and shining boots. And few Army rifles received such loving care and attention as they gave to theirs. So keen were they that they drilled each other between parades imitating as best they could the, to them, strange foreign words of command used by their drill instructors. They could not be punished by the award of extra guard or picquet duty, for this they looked upon as a reward of honour and punishment had to be given by the denial of permission to attend parades. For all of them the greater part of their service was to consist of hard, unspectacular toil but to the end they never lost their pride in being a soldier. Only those who served with Colonial Pioneers will understand the extent of their devotion to the Corps and the Corps's respect for them.

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It fell to the lot of Brigadier HGL Prynne, MC, TD, who it will be recalled had formed the Pioneer Corps Base Depot at Quassasin, to be appointed Director of Pioneers and Labour to Paiforce and to create order out of chaos. It was apparent that a comprehensive labour organisation would have to be set up for the Command and a large number of additional officers would be required, for civilian labour control particularly, and that it called for the introduction of Pioneer Corps Groups to organise and administer things. A considerable number of Pioneer Corps NCOs would also be needed. But since drafts from the U.K. had to come by sea convoys via the Cape and the Persian Gulf the build-up was a slow process and throughout the winter of 1942 a very heavy burden was thrown on the comparatively small number of officers and NCOs already in Paiforce.

Authority was obtained from India to disband the Auxiliary Pioneer battalions which were too cumbersome and form in their place Indian Pioneer companies. A civilian labour control formation was set up throughout the Command on accepted British Pioneer lines. Two ADPLs were appointed, Lieutenant-Colonel G Lowe, OBE, for Persia, and Lieutenant-Colonel A I Macpherson for Iraq; Labour Staff Officers were attached to the various areas, sub-areas and formation headquarters, and on the completion of the organisation Paiforce

had been provided with a Labour Directorate and a Labour Service in accordance with modern practice.

Prior to Brigadier Prynne's arrival no estimate of labour requirements and the available supply had been made, nor was it known where labour would be required, what proportion would have to be skilled or semi-skilled, or what trades were needed. One of his earliest tasks was to get out an appreciation of the supply and demand situation from which it appeared that whereas numerically sufficient unskilled labour was available (although there would be seasonal shortages at harvest time, Ramadan, etc.) there was an immediate shortage of around 20,000 skilled and semi-skilled men, with a cumulative future shortage very much larger as the lines of communication installations and aid to Russia programme got into their stride.

An additional problem was that most of the big base installations had been located in the desert many miles from any centre of habitation, and the majority of them in a part of Iraq that is intensely hot and dry in the summer and wet and cold in the winter. In order, therefore, to induce labour to work in these installations it was necessary to create camps with feeding arrangements for the men, to issue rations and water to the workers, and to provide hospital facilities. In the end some 40,000 civilian workers were accommodated in camps and some 120,000 fed by Pioneer officers and NCOs as part of their normal duties.

The shortage of skilled and semi-skilled men was serious, particularly in Iraq, an agricultural country with only a very small industrial population, and a training scheme was instituted, intelligent young Iraqis' from the schools receiving instruction at military installations and workshops. In Persia the situation was not so acute as many Persians take naturally to skilled and semi-skilled work and are usually very useful with their hands. Since, however, the local population could not supply sufficient men for the work Indian Pioneers were attached to military workshops for training and achieved a quite remarkable standard of proficiency. They proved particularly apt in the metal trades and eventually the main base workshops were largely staffed by Pioneers who had been trained in a few months by REME staffs. A Vehicle Assembly Unit in Southern Iraq, staffed by Indian Pioneers trained on the spot, was by the autumn of 1943 turning out a larger number of trucks per day with a smaller labour force than were units run by General Motors Inc. of America a few miles away with a large, highly-skilled and highly-equipped staff.

Application was made to General Headquarters India for Indian Pioneers who were employed on these tasks to receive trade pay if they were able to pass the tests. After considerable negotiation this was authorised and several hundred men qualified for and drew trade rates.

As had been the case in Palestine, a problem requiring early attention was the co-ordinating of labour of the various interests contributing to the war effort in Persia and Iraq which had been competing with each other for labour, and in some instances offering inducements to workers to leave one employer for another. These interests were:

1. The British Army, Navy and Air Force-each of which was offering different conditions of service to civilians.
2. The United States Forces.

3. The Russian Forces.
4. The Anglo-Iranian and Iraqi Oil Companies, for whom 80,000 civilians were working in oilfields and refineries.
5. The United Kingdom Commercial Corporation, which operated some thousands of trucks on aid to Russia, vehicle assembly plants, workshops, etc.
6. General Motors Inc. of America.
7. The State Railways.
8. The State Public Works Department.
9. The Persian Road Transport organisation.

The co-ordination of the labour requirements of all these interests had to be effected and maintained by the Pioneer Corps Labour Directorate and competition between the various interests abolished. To achieve this it was necessary to get the competing parties to arrive at a common basis for wages and conditions of service, no easy task in view of the varying rates and conditions in existence and the number of workers 400,000 affected.

In Iraq, where the British formed the predominant interest, the normal conditions of Army employment were accepted without demur, but in Persia the situation was so complicated that a new basis acceptable to all had to be arrived at and it is worthy of note, because probably unique in such matters, that only one meeting under Brigadier Prynne's chairmanship was needed to arrive at and agree on a basis and to work out a complete directive embodying details regarding rates of pay for all grades, conditions of service, rationing, machinery for complaints and enforcing compliance as between the various interests, for assessing skill of tradesmen, for preventing poaching by one interest from another, and in fact a complete labour directive in all its aspects. This meeting which was held in Persia on neutral ground (outside any military area, that is) and lasted three days, transformed the usual Army directive on civilian employment from a very complicated to an extremely simple and brief document. For all skilled and semi-skilled workers there were only six different rates of pay, and for unskilled two rates. A man was either a good tradesman or a bad tradesman and was accordingly paid one of two rates.

Rations were the same for everyone and were considered a part of the wage, i.e. no deductions were made on pay rolls thus simplifying accountancy.

The basis of the new wage scales was the cost of living in Persia and Iraq respectively. This modern method of assessing a fair wage had never been introduced into these countries, and in fact cost-of-living statistics had not been maintained by the government of either country. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company undertook the responsibility of producing these statistics monthly, in accordance with an agreed formula, so that in cases of need wages could be adjusted accordingly. The negotiation of these agreements in the two countries, coordinating all labour engaged in the war effort, was a personal triumph for Brigadier Prynne and an example of the high standard in all aspects of labour organisation and administration which the Pioneer Corps had achieved in its brief existence.

Indian Pioneers (none from other countries were engaged in Paiforce with the exception of the British officers and NCOs) were never required for normal labour tasks and to a large extent became specialists. When the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company was unable to carry out the programme

required of it to step up oil deliveries the drum and tin plants were taken over by 1249, 1300, 1301 and 1303 Companies and within two weeks increased production by sixty per cent., which enabled the British Government to fulfil in full their deliveries of aviation spirit to Russia which, prior to the Pioneers taking over, had been getting considerably in arrears. 1261 Company specialised in vehicle assembly and other Pioneers were engaged in artisan work of all kinds in REME workshops.

Special mention must be made of the excellent work of Pioneer Corps officers engaged in recruitment. During the early months neither Iraq nor Persia were belligerent and in general neither was particularly well disposed towards the Allies so there was no question of obtaining labour by patriotic appeal. Most of the people knew little about either side in the world conflict and the majority of the more intellectual had a rather higher opinion of the efficiency of the Germans than of the Allies. The natives worked for us simply because they liked the way they were treated by the British officers and NCOs they came in contact with. There were certain definite difficulties which conspired against consistently maintaining a large labour force in these countries. The people are essentially agricultural and whenever anything was doing in the fields (ploughing, sowing or harvesting) a large proportion of them went back to the land. They are naturally lazy people and only a proportion would drift back to us after the land work was over and we had constantly to send recruiting officers into the agricultural regions, often hundreds of miles away, to get the tens of thousands of men back again. In addition, the natives have a natural roving disposition and after working at one place for a few weeks they would wander off somewhere else, and as they had been behaving like this for thousands of years there was little we could do about it. A further complication was that both countries were essentially feudal in their domestic structure and the ordinary native, having only the vaguest idea what "the Government" was or meant consequently paid little attention to what it said and listened to and obeyed only his local chief or sheik. It followed that the Pioneer Corps recruiting officers had to win and retain the friendship of local leaders if they were to obtain the workers they needed. In this delicate task they received every assistance from the British political advisers stationed throughout both countries, men who had lived for many years in the countries and were well known to and liked by the majority of the local sheiks. This close liaison was of constant value. Cases occurred where native tribes decided to have a local war in an area where a Pioneer Corps officer was recruiting labour. The local sheiks would request the officer to move out of the area temporarily and when the fighting was over sent word to him to return and then directed their people to his recruiting office. When the Kurds decided to fight the neighbouring Arabs they informed us they regretted they would have to withdraw some of our labour, but that it would come back to us after the fighting

was over. There were countless instances where this personal touch between the Pioneer officer and local chiefs enabled us to get labour that would otherwise have been unobtainable.

As time went on the volume of "Aid to Russia" materials to be transported along the many hundred miles of mountain roads and passes of the lines of communication became very great, several hundred trucks starting each day on the five- or six-day journey to the Russian border where the Russians took them over and as many as eight Pioneer companies were at one period employed in keeping the vehicle assembly line up to schedule.

Throughout all this period of activity the general bearing and appearance of the Indian Pioneers was soldierly and their discipline excellent. Their work sometimes entailed risk to and loss of life and when faced with such a situation they showed themselves worthy of the best Army traditions. Men died through fumes inhaled when handling 100-octane spirit in the high temperatures of southern Persia; they knew the risk but they also knew that the petrol was essential to the conduct of the war and the units concerned made it clear that they would feel insulted if they were replaced by others who would only have to face the same danger. In the mountainous country of northern Persia were gangs of bandits who from time to time attacked Pioneers at work so that men of each detachment had to man defensive posts whilst the others carried out the job on which they were engaged.

Brigadier Prynne made frequent representations to General Headquarters India for Indian Pioneers serving in the

When the local Oil Company were unable to increase deliveries four Pioneer Companies took over the drum and tin plants and within two weeks increased production by 60%.

Middle East and Paiforce to be given combatant status since they were taking part in military operations and suffering casualties, whilst yet being under a social disadvantage at home and a financial disadvantage in the Army, and in 1943 he paid a visit to Delhi to plead their cause. Largely due to his efforts the concession was eventually granted to companies that might be committed to operational roles and these fine soldiers became equal in status to all other Pioneers.

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When towards the end of 1942 Brigadier HGL Prynne, MC, TD, had been appointed Director of Pioneers and Labour to Paiforce he had reorganised the Indian Pioneer Corps units in that theatre on the lines of the British Army model, a course of action which was to have a profound effect on the future of Pioneers and Labour in the Far East in the years ahead, an early reaction being a similar reorganisation in India by Brigadier SW Bower, newly appointed its Director of Labour by General

Headquarters, India, who as DAQMG with Tenth Army in Persia had studied the revised system in Paiforce at close quarters.

In December 1943 Brigadier Prynne had paid a brief visit to India to find to his surprise that South-East Asia Command (SEAC) had no military labour organisation of its own but was relying on the services of General Headquarters, India. General Sir Henry Pownall, then Chief of General Staff at SEAC, who whilst Commander-in-Chief, Paiforce, had noted with approval the



Brigadier Blanchard



Brigadier Eyde

Pioneer and Labour reorganisation there, informed Brigadier Prynne that he would welcome a similar set-up in SEAC but, since this was outside his province, suggested that Brigadier Prynne might try to "sell" the idea to SEAC's administrative staff. To this end Brigadier Prynne turned his energies and persuasive powers, funnelling his approach through the Brigadier "Q" at SEAC (Brigadier WE Cole) in a letter dated 10th

January, 1944, at the same time advising Major-General Friend, the Director of Labour at War Office, of the action he was taking. Since Brigadier Cole had also served in Paiforce where he had had the opportunity of seeing its Pioneer and Labour organisation in action he needed little persuasion and in turn carried the suggestion on to the American General who was Principal Administrative Officer at SEAC and who was favourably impressed. The outcome of these devious negotiations was that in June 1944 the Supreme Allied Command South-East Asia (SACSEA) asked War Office to appoint a Director of Pioneers and Labour to plan the provision of labour, coordinate demands and allocate priorities for overall requirements in the theatre, including those of Eastern Fleet Air Command, Civil Affairs and the U.S. Forces, and the following month Brigadier GR Prendergast was sent out from England to fill the appointment-subsequently designated "Inspector of Pioneers and Labour."

Later, War Office was asked to appoint two Deputy Directors, one as DDPL to ALFSEA (Allied Land Forces, South-East Asia), the other as Adviser to Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, appointments which went to Colonel HH Blanchard and Colonel JHM Eyde, DSO, OBE, MC. It is of interest to note that both these officers were eventually to become Directors of Labour at War Office.

In April 1945, ALFSEA asked that their Deputy Director be upgraded as the organised labour was then approximately 660 officers and 250,000 men and the responsibilities included the administration of local civilian labour in Burma and beyond. This was done and Colonel Blanchard was promoted to the rank of Brigadier.

Brig Prynne also wrote four articles for

The Royal Pioneer during 1949-1950 that are considered worthy of a re-print. These are:

"SELECTED CONFESSIONS OF A PIONEER" PART I

Those confessions are described as selected because they are confined to more respectable- incidents which I think may be of interest to readers of "The Royal Pioneer." There are others which even "Jimmie" Adamson (Ed note: Lt Col Adamson was the editor of The royal Pioneer), kindred spirit though he is, would not publish in case it might be thought that I am somewhat light-hearted about these incidents. I think I may mention that it was once intended that soldiering should be my career and anyway it has always been my very serious interest in life. But, though an orthodox soldier at heart, during the War it seemed to me that once it had been decided that a certain objective must be attained then, as far as I was concerned, "the end justified the means" and if it could not be attained the orthodox way then other means had to be resorted to.

With hundreds of ex-officers I was "called-up" in October, 1939 and was posted to the Pioneer Centre at Clacton. This had been Butlin's Holiday Camp, at the outbreak of War, had been surrounded with barbed wire and turned into an Internment Camp and was subsequently, the internees having been removed, taken over by the Pioneers. The accommodation was comfortable, provided one did not mind sleeping in damp blankets in sweating huts, or falling over barbed wire when one went out to pay a call at night.

All the officers had "previous service," but it soon became apparent that in some cases the scope and distinction of that "previous service" were largely the product of the imagination of the officers concerned. Others seemed to be under the impression that they had been called to the Bar, not to the Colours. Most of the former spent the entire War doing little but explaining how wonderful they were - and a few got away with it - most of the latter were Court Martialed and flung out. For those who belonged to neither of these categories there was plenty of work to be done, under the shrewd and experienced eye of Lt Col KW Macdonald, CIE, DSO, the Commanding Officer, who, after commanding a battalion in the Indian Army, had been Chief of Police in, I think, Burma. I always thought that the latter experience must have stood him in good stead at Clacton.

The liberal accommodation provided by Mr Butlin for his holiday-makers enabled us to feed, clothe, equip, house and train some two thousand troops and the Centre was dealing with the problem of forming, and despatching overseas, Pioneer Companies with, it seemed to me great efficiency and very little fuss. I was a kind of "odd job" officer - one of many - and so was able to get a fairly good impression of what was going on.

At the end of the year we were told that we were to be loaned to the Royal Engineers as a Mobilisation Centre for forming RE Construction Companies, for which recruiting was to be opened and which were urgently required in France as soon as possible. It was anticipated that about 300-500 men a week would enlist and the target was for us to form and send overseas two companies a fortnight.

The weather was appalling and at the

commencement of this new role the CO, Second in Command and Adjutant were all sick in quarters with some kind of fever, so action devolved on me (I was then OC HQ Company) and the QM, who was a quite amazing chap of incredible executive ability. Recruiting started, but instead of the rate being 300-500 a week more than a thousand arrived the first day. I telephoned the War Office and asked if they were going to do anything about it and they said that we must do the best we could - and we did.

The rate recruits were coming in - 1000 a day - was 7000 a week, so obviously something had to be done about details like food, clothing, equipment and accommodation. We tried "the normal channels", but it was hopeless. Every train brought a few more hundreds to the camp and the Supply Services wanted three days' notice in the case of rations, a fortnight or so in the case of clothes and longer for equipment or vehicles - and even then they only had provision for an additional 300-500 men a week. Action was obviously essential, and here comes my first confession. I telephoned the two Central Ordnance Depots - Didcot and Branston - said that I was their branch at the War Office, that recruiting for the new RE Coys was a far greater success than had been anticipated, that hundreds of men were pouring into the Pioneer Centre at Clacton and that they would be receiving instructions to supply clothing, stores, vehicles and equipment on telephone requests from that Centre and that formalities, such as indents and so on, would be dealt with later. I then rang off and a few minutes later phoned them again and said I understood they were being instructed by the War Office to issue stores, etc. to us on telephone requests. They said that they had just heard from the War Office and I asked them to send along immediately clothing and equipment for five thousand men and vehicles and technical equipment for fifteen RE Construction Companies. We increased our ration indent by 1000 a day progressively, so as to be on the right side, saw the Bank Manager and told him we should be wanting about £10,000 extra per week and phoned RE Records and asked them for a "block" of 5000 regimental numbers so that we could allot numbers to recruits right away and not await allotment by Records in the usual way. We then waited to see what would happen. All responded beautifully except Records, who would not give us the block of numbers. As a result of my telephone efforts, Ordnance sent special trains from Didcot and Branston with clothing, stores and equipment and over a hundred vehicles turned up. The extra rations arrived and the Bank Manager produced the cash.

One hundred and fifty RE officers arrived, 145 of whom were newly-commissioned 2Lts who had never before had on a suit or uniform of any kind. As each Company had to have one Major and one Captain we had to pick out the most likely looking and make them Majors or Captains - and they were so entirely ignorant on army matters that we had in most cases to explain that that meant wearing a crown or three stars instead of the one star they had. Much to our relief, a regular RE Major arrived to superintend the technical make-up of the Companies.

So the RE Construction Company Mobilisation Centre got going. The place

was an inferno of activity and the results were really quite staggering. The CO seemed to be of the general opinion that anything that would "help to get this bloody war over" was justified and our justification was, I think, that we actually formed and sent to France twenty-two RE Coys within one month of recruiting starting. (The target we had been set was two companies a fortnight). We had been told that these Companies were urgently required in France. Well, they got them, and all that remained was to "take the can back" for the methods we employed.

It took ADOS (the Ordnance officer) at District HQs about three weeks to realise that something unusual was going on at Clacton and by the time he came to see us it was all over. We suggested that all he could do was to send some Ordnance personnel to take stock of what we had left in our QM Stores and find out from Didcot and Bransfon what they had sent us, because, of course, we had received far more than my original telephone request for ordnance supplies for 5000 men and 15 Companies. So they checked up our stores and found we had left in store items like 12,000 shirts and 7,000 suits of battledress - these figures I remember, but of course there were corresponding quantities of other items of clothing and equipment, technical stores, a few trucks, etc. In fact we had left what was really a sizeable Ordnance Dump.

We seem to have obtained about £250,000 worth of Ordnance stores without any indents and without our ADOS knowing about it, which caused quite a stir. But what caused even more excitement was the fact that we had expended about £35,000 in paying these troops and as nearly all of them had gone overseas without Army numbers there was virtually no way of knowing who actually had had the money - there being hundreds of cases of two or more men with the same names.

But as the Pioneers had, as was to be so often the case, done an important job in record time a general "write-off" was authorised and it was decided that all should be "forgiven and forgotten," and the Centre returned to its normal Pioneer activities.

But not for long.

With the Spring things began to go badly with our Forces in France and the coast had to be prepared to withstand a possible invasion. We were told what defensive works were to be carried out in our area and we had hundreds of troops who could have got on with the job, but no tools or materials. Eventually the Commanding Officer persuaded the Corps Commander, who had come to see us, to say that he agreed with us obtaining some tools, etc., locally. Doubtless the Corps Commander thought we just wanted to make a few modest purchases of picks and shovels, but he did not say so and we had other ideas. We just went out and bought all the tools in the shops in Clacton and the nearby places, requisitioned all the lorries we could find, tore up all the iron railings in Clacton, commenced removing the planks from the Pier, bought cement, sand and gravel and concrete-mixers and went in for the construction of defence works in a big way. Then in due course written authority arrived from Brigade HQs in confirmation of the verbal permission we had got from the Corps Commander, the only drawback being that it limited our purchases to the total value of £50. Then also came

complaints from the CRE that we were doing a job that was really his and should be done by the Royal Engineers. I don't know how the CO. "got away with that one," but he did - and again an essential job was done in record time by the Pioneers. Things began to hot up. The invasion scare increased and true to the traditions of the British Army the Pioneers of Clacton prepared themselves "to hold the line to the last man and the last gun." The line they were told to hold extended from Mersea to South of Harwich - about twelve miles of coastline - the available men consisted of about two hundred Reservists (our Pioneer recruits were untrained), the guns consisted of two machine guns, one on Clacton Pier and one on Walton Pier. But out on the North Sea was the British Navy, which sounded all right until we found that that portion of the Navy consisted of totally unarmed fishing vessels supplied with Very pistols in order to give us warning of the invasion. So we "lent" the Navy a Lewis gun - which they put on one of the fishing vessels and with which they subsequently destroyed an enemy aircraft which tried to bomb them. Thus even the Navy had to rely on the Pioneers on occasion.

Soon Pioneers from Boulogne, Dunkirk and elsewhere were arriving in this country in large numbers. We were asked for the maximum number we could take and the War Office telephoned to say that two thousand more than that number were on the way to us and that we just had to take them in somehow. The arrangements were largely my responsibility as OC HQs Coy. The normal machinery for getting billets would have taken about a fortnight and we had only a few hours. So we simplified matters by me going out with the QM and a pick-helve. We just went to hotels, institutes, etc., and I broke in with the pick-helve. Then to the local Gas Company and requisitioned all the gas stoves they had and personnel to fix them in the buildings we had broken into, and on to the Electricity Coy to order them, with some vague Authority we said we had, to connect up those buildings. All the troops who arrived were accommodated and our system of obtaining accommodation had the merit of being simplicity itself - although it certainly did not comply with Army regulations on the subject and was probably illegal. But no doubt it was all sorted out eventually.

Shortly after I left to be Second in Command of a Group, where I led a life of extreme respectability until at the end of the year I was given Command of a Group proceeding to Middle East.

PART 2

During the war the professional soldier was generally very generous in making allowances for the amateur. It was usually assumed - and rightly so - that he knew little or nothing about military procedure, military law or Staff work, except what he was picking up as he went along. If one started the war with any such knowledge, it was customary to rush about and advertise the fact on every possible occasion in the hope that by so doing one would "wangle a good job." It seemed to me that more could be achieved by reversing that

procedure, i.e. by using one's knowledge of these subjects without broadcasting the fact that one possessed it.

I was accepted as an amateur soldier, ignorant of procedure, etc., and I was allowed a lot of latitude and lots of things were "forgiven and forgotten" because of that. But in fact, in a previous military incarnation let us say, I had qualified at a Staff Course, had held "G," "Q" and "A" Staff appointments and had served attachments to most of the Services. In fact I suppose I "knew the form" better than the majority of the Officers with whom I had to deal at the various Headquarters which I served under or with, which put the odds in my favour in any unorthodox action I was taking at the time.

In addition, I had an unusually varied civilian experience in different walks of life and in dealing with various nationalities, and finally I was always prepared to "take a chance."

Therefore if, in reading these notes of mine, you might be inclined to think that I was "lucky to get away with it," you would be wrong. The odds were in my favour all the time and actually I would have been darned unlucky not to have got away with it.

But there is one essential to success in such enterprises and that is having the right chaps round one and absolute loyalty from them. This I never seemed to lack. Many of them doubtless often thought that I was

We had obtained about £250,000 worth of Ordnance stores without any indents and without the Ordnance knowing about it.

behaving like an "absolute so-and so," but that did not alter their attitude to the job in hand.

Shortly after our arrival in Middle East we were informed that my Second in Command (Major, afterwards, Col Graham Richmond) and I were to leave the Group and start a Pioneer Corps Depot. So off we set with our baggage, in a 15 cwt truck with me driving, to report to the Area Commander Quassassin.

There we took over a thousand Palestinian Pioneers and a thousand Cypriot Pioneers. The latter had just mutinied and marched to the Area Headquarters and threatened to shoot the Area Commander, so they had had their rifles taken away. I had never seen a Cypriot before, except in a Police Court charged with being objectionable to women. But I had these on parade and came to the conclusion that they might be offensive to women, but they certainly did not have the guts to shoot us - so we gave them back their rifles. Actually a few weeks later they did mutiny again and got a pretty rough handling for so doing - but stone and knives - preferably in the dark and in the back - are more in their line than rifles.

I was then told we had to form, at Quassassin, a Pioneer Corps Depot to take up to sixteen hundred Native Pioneers (we had no English Pioneer Coys in the Middle East during the War) at a time and to receive, clothe, equip and arm the Native Pioneer Companies that were being

recruited in Africa, India and other parts of the Empire.

A study of this recruiting programme showed that we were more likely to have sixteen thousand at a time in the Depot than sixteen hundred. In actual fact, the strength of the Depot, when my successor Graham Richmond was Commandant, reached twenty-six thousand at one time – I should think an all-time record strength for an Army Unit, and five to six times the size of Depots at home.

So we went ahead to lay out a Depot for sixteen thousand men, with further spare accommodation nearby if required,

The Depot was to be a Mobilisation Centre for Pioneer Units and a Reinforcement and Training Centre. The Companies, Groups or Drafts would arrive mostly with the minimum of clothing, possibly just shirts and shorts, and with no Unit Stores. On arrival they would have to be completely armed (all Native Pioneers were fully armed, combatant troops; except the Indians in the early stages and they later became armed combatant troops) clothed and equipped and issued with Units stores, transport and equipment including tentage. Also all ranks had to fire a course at the Depot Range. During this period they were “acclimatised” so as to get than used to the Egyptian climate and they could do little work while this was being done. The Reinforcement part of the Depot received all drafts, casualties, etc, re-clothed and re-equipped them as necessary and posted them to Units as required. The Training part ran Courses as required.

The target was to raise between 100,000 and 150,000 of these Native Pioneers and they would all come to this Depot where it was thought that they would spend about a month. It seemed pretty obvious that the War Establishment they gave us for the Depot of 1,600 was hopelessly inadequate. Actually as far as officers were concerned it consisted of a Commandant (Lt Colonel), Second in Command (Major) and a combined Adjutant and Quartermaster, a Messing Officer and four Captains each to command a “Wing.” One would have thought that a Unit to deal with the

from Kenya, Uganda and Tanganyika; West Africans from various parts; Mauritians and Seychellois from the Islands; Arabs and Jews from Palestine; Syrians and Cypriots; Pathans, Mahrattas, Madrasis and various different kinds of Indians, men from the hills from the plains, from the North and from the South.

Incidentally, one of my officers worked out that at one time we had twenty-seven different languages being spoken in the Depot, and he was probably right. Personally, I found that the language I employed on occasions formed a kind of common denominator for them all. And I imagine there were many of the tens of thousands that stayed at the Depot in my time returned home after the War with a limited but curiously adequate English vocabulary learnt from me.

I was sent a number of “Expert Advisers” to tell me how to handle the various kinds of Natives. Have you ever seen an old hen with her chicks? These chaps were incredibly like old hens, which are admirable in farmyards but a darned nuisance elsewhere. Each of the twenty or thirty different kinds of natives I was to have was, according to the “experts” to be treated differently, usually on no account to come in contact with other kinds of natives, and so on. Whether or not such treatment was desirable or necessary, which I doubted, the real point was that it was obviously quite impracticable.

“For Heaven’s sake don’t let the Ugandans get near any of the Indians. They have awful tempers and will be trouble.” “You must keep the Hoochers away from the Wochers, they are sworn enemies and have only stopped being cannibals.” “Don’t let the Marutas get near a village or they will get drunk and beat up the place.” “The Gazekas must never be allowed near any women, they are bound to rape them.” So said the “Experts.” And this rather depressed me until I realised while they might be expert on advising how the various natives had been handled and had behaved in the past when living normal lives in their own countries it was anyone’s guess as to how they would behave in the

British Army in strange surroundings and thousands of miles from their homes and native influences. And I thought that my guess was more likely to be right than theirs because my experience in the world was wider. But I did want some adviser to turn to in case of need who really understood the native mentality, so I decided to rely on Colonel Douglas How, of the High

Commissioner’s Territories, who always approached problems from a practicable angle and free from accumulated prejudice and for whose wise council I often had cause to be grateful. It was a great loss to me when he died tragically the following year, and an even greater loss to our Colonial Administration. The other experts I disregarded.

Obviously we had to approach our problem from a practical angle. Our job was to create a single Native Pioneer Corps, not to pander to individual traditions and habits. It was a problem that no one had been faced with before so there could be no such thing as an “expert adviser” on how to deal with it. The only possible practical way of running this Depot was to,

as far as possible, disregard the fact that we had lots of different kinds of natives from different parts of the world and to run the Depot as one administrative unit, only providing separate accommodation for British Officers and ORs. Why should natives from different parts of the Empire fight each other if they met in the same canteen, as the experts said would happen? It just didn’t make sense and anyway the only practical solution was that they should meet and see what happened. And, of course, nothing happened.

Well, we were to have a Depot consisting of about three square miles of desert and it was decided that it should be divided into sixteen camps, each to accommodate a thousand men or four Companies of 330 each. Water was laid on to the centre of each camp and a cookhouse built there.

And that was that – but that was what?

What about administrative arrangement? All we had was a chunk of desert with water laid on and some cookhouses. Leaving aside such matters as clothing, equipping, feeding and training, what about the hospitalisation of these tens of thousands of various kinds of natives? What about recreation, NAAFI, Welfare Huts, Entertainments?

The Official answer to these questions was simple. It was that as ours were to be native troops there was ‘nothing doing.’ Believe it or not, it is an absolute fact that neither NAAFI nor the Welfare Services would have anything to do with us – their orders were quite explicit on the matter – they were only to cater for British White Troops and they were not to cater for British Native Troops. This applied also to cinemas, entertainments, and everything in the way of welfare amenities. As regards hospitalisation, the Medical Services did not say that our natives could be treated in the ordinary British hospitals, but they refused to make any special arrangements for dealing with them.

As regards NAAFI and Welfare, not only did they refuse to do anything in the Depot, but they said that orders would be issued that our natives were not to be admitted to any NAAFI or welfare huts, Cinemas or entertainments anywhere. I approached “A” Branch to try and get this decision altered, but they merely held up their hands in horror and said that far from letting the native troops into the NAAFI or Welfare huts, I must understand that they were not to be allowed even to go to any village or town, but must keep strictly to the limits of military camps.

So the official view was that we were to have tens of thousands of native troops who would be confined to the limits of military camps and denied any form of Welfare or entertainment while they were well and not provided with proper medical attention if they were sick. Having learned this at GHQ I withdrew.

But not defeated – deflected. Deflected from normal to abnormal methods.

These were the unorthodox methods to which I was deflected by the official refusal to do anything:-

Hospitalisation. I knew that the UDF (South African Army) had a Director of Medical Services who was internationally famous for his knowledge of native problems. I saw him and he told me that it was quite essential that we should have special hospital arrangements for the depot, if it were to contain upwards of 16,000 natives newly arrived in Egypt. Apart from normal sickness, which would anyway

The Medical Services refused to make any special arrangements for dealing with Native troops. This called for some unorthodox methods.

administration and equipping of 150,000 men, for instance, deserve a full-time Quartermaster and a full-time Adjutant. I did make a request for a more adequate Establishment, but met with no success. But time was short, it was no good arguing – I knew how much time one could waste dealing with War Establishment Committees. And there were other far more pressing problems, of which the following are some of the more interesting.

The job we faced was first of all to see that adequate administrative arrangements were made for this Depot, which was to accommodate up to 16,000 non-Europeans from various parts. Basutos, Bechuanas and Swazis from the High Commission Territories of South Africa; East Africans

require special medical attention, if special precautions were not taken to guard against an epidemic, and special treatments were not instantly available if an epidemic did break out, then we might literally lose thousands of these chaps. Also special "acclimatisation" treatment was required for the first three weeks after arrival. None of this could be done by the British hospitals, because firstly the medical staff did not have the necessary knowledge of native ailments and secondly they did not know the language and so could not diagnose or treat ailments with certainty.

This South African DMS came to the Depot and advised us on layout and native administration in general and, at my request, he tried to persuade the Medical authorities of GHQ to make adequate arrangements for our natives, but they refused to do so.

I was getting desperate, because it was only a matter of a month before large numbers of natives were due to begin arriving. Eventually the DMS of the South Africans said that on his initiative he would bring up from South Africa, a General Hospital specially staffed and equipped to deal with natives and place it at the disposal of the Depot, with a Section of the Hospital in the Depot itself and an outlying Section at the port of disembarkation (Suez). He arranged to say nothing about it to the British until the hospital was embarked in South Africa and on the way to Middle East. When the hospital was on the way we had a meeting with the Medical Authorities from GHQ, who were very agitated about it and said they could not accommodate it! I said that I would erect a complete 1000 bedded hospital for them from tentage I had spare, but they said that the whole thing was irregular and they would not accept my offer. But that could not prevent the hospital arriving. And when it did we had to "put it up temporarily" until proper accommodation could be erected – which was in due course done just before the first really big arrival of natives.

This hospital was, of course, a God-send and I shudder to think what the situation would have been with these tens of thousands of natives and no proper medical arrangements for them. As a friendly gesture from the South Africans it was just terrific and typical of help I was constantly to receive from them throughout the War, on a kind of friendly, unofficial basis.

Welfare. Obviously I was not going to accept the GHQ decision that our Native Pioneers were to have no welfare arrangements. As the British Army had failed I naturally thought of my South African friends and suggested to a member of the South African Parliament that they should vote a sum of money to be devoted to the welfare of the British Native Pioneers. Politically it was a well-timed request and it went through. So the South African Forces undertook the welfare of our natives. And they did it on a scale far ahead of anything that was done for the British troops at that time. They stocked, supplied the personnel for and ran canteens and welfare generally and also sent up from South Africa two excellent mobile cinemas. The latter I lent to the British Welfare authorities when we did not want them - because they had none in Middle East then.

NAAFI Large brick NAAIF canteens and institutes were being built all over the Base Area in Middle East - but, of course, not for native units. But by means that shall not be

set down here I "arranged" for four of these to be built in our Depot, and when NAAFI found that unknown to them, they had built four institutes in what was to be a Native Depot they raised a bit of a fuss, but of course had to agree for us to run them rather than for them to remain empty.

Cinema. Here again, whereas at intervals throughout the Base Area cinemas were being built and run by the Egyptian chain cinema people, and the large depots were to have their own, we were neither to have one nor were our natives to be allowed into any of them. So, posing as a Headquarter Staff Officer, I saw the Managing Director of the Cinema Company and bluffed him that one of the cinemas he had agreed to build should be built where our Depot was to be located, carefully omitting to tell him that our Depot was to be there. So he built the cinema and no one was more surprised than the Egyptian Cinema Company when they found that they had built and equipped a cinema in the native Pioneer Depot. But having done it they had no alternative but to run it, which they did.

Funds. The Depot was now well furnished with welfare and other extra-military requirements. But we had very ambitious plans and must have an income. I don't want anyone to think that in any of our unorthodox practices we at any time bribed anyone to get anything done. Other methods are more intelligent. But I wanted to do a variety of things - starting a bus service from the Depot, for instance - that would require money, and we had to have an income somehow. The pay of the natives was not high and they were inclined to save instead of spend. So the canteen profits would not be as big as in a comparable British Unit.

The opportunity for getting a good income presented itself as follows: Every Unit in Middle East had a contract with an Egyptian contractor for various domestic matters, including doing the unit laundry. When making a deal with such contractors, Units had to conform to a standard British Army form of contract. I reckoned that this standard contract was so drawn in favour of the contractor that in our case it meant he would make about £20,000 a year profit out of our Depot, and accordingly asked GHQ for authority to enter into an amended form of contract which would only give him a more reasonable margin of profit. But I was curtly ordered to enter into the standard approved form of contract.

So I did as I was ordered and entered into the standard form of contract, but I was darned if I was going to let the Egyptian contractor get away with £20,000 a year on it. So I told him that he would have to contribute £500 a month to Depot PRI Funds - which gave us an income of £6,000 a year apart from profits from regimental institutes and "put us in the money" right away.

Thus by the unorthodox methods into which GHQ deflected me by their refusal to do anything for us because "we were to have native troops" we got amenities for the Pioneer Depot as good as any in the Middle East, and far better than most. Specialised medical care and hospitalisation, NAAFI Institutes, Welfare Huts and Canteens, a permanent Cinema, Mobile Cinemas. Also the necessary income to finance anything else we were likely to require.

Then I kind of wondered why what even GHQ regarded as essential for natives was not progressing - the building of latrines,

wash-houses, etc. for my 16,000 who were due to start arriving in less than a fortnight. I went and saw the CRE responsible and found that he was a religious lunatic - he was not getting on with work at the Depot because, in his own words, "they are all pagans." This sounds incredible, but it is true. However, I assured him that about ninety per cent, of them were Catholics and he immediately agreed to get on with the job - and did. I hope he never came round to check up on their religious beliefs.

All very unorthodox – but when it came to clothing and equipping the natives and running the Depot generally even more unorthodox methods had to be resorted to.

PART 3

Having settled the general administrative arrangements for the Middle East Pioneer Depot there were detailed arrangements to be made before we would be ready to start receiving the native Pioneers. Amongst these were the following.

Tentage

All the Depot so far consisted of was approximately three square miles of desert, divided into sixteen camp sites with water laid on and cookhouses, wash-houses and latrines built. NAAFI's, Welfare Huts, a Cinema, etc., were in course of construction, obtained as described earlier in these "Confessions." We had to get tentage for the following:

Living tents to accommodate 16.000 (sixteen thousand) men.

60 (sixty) Unit Q.M. Stores.

60 (sixty) Unit Officers.

20 (twenty) Officers' Messes.

20 (twenty) Sergeants' Messes.

Depot Q.M. Stores to accommodate about a thousand tons of stores.

Depot Ration Stores to carry about 30,000 (thirty thousand) rations.

Depot Officers' Mess to hold up to 150 staff and reinforcement officers.

Depot Sergeants' Mess to hold up to 200 staff and reinforcement sergeants

A study of the items will show the magnitude of the problem. A call at the Base Ordnance Depot resulted in the news that the total number of marquee type tents (suitable for offices, stores, messes, etc.), in the Middle East was about one hundred. All the other tentage was of the bell or bivouac type, only really not suitable for living accommodation. A certain amount of persuasion resulted in them giving us all the marquee-type tents they had. Thus we drew about one hundred in all – and made a central dump of them on the Depot site. I told the Adjutant to put a Guard over them, because the Arabs were very keen to steal the canvas marquee sides in order to use the canvas to repair the sails of their boats. But he thought he knew better than I and did not mount the guard on them. That night the Arabs came and stole every one of the marquee walls, even including one which we had pitched and in which the Orderly Room clerks were sleeping. So all we now had was marquee tops with no sides - and no more marquees or sides in any Ordnance Depot in the Middle East. The Adjutant was sacked. He was not a Pioneer, he had been loaned to us by GHQ as a "special favour."

But if there were no more marquee sides to be got from Ordnance there were lots of standing camps in the Base Area which had marquees with sides. And if any camp was to go without sides to its marquees I was determined that it should not be the

Pioneer Depot. There was no time to waste either.

The first draft of officers arrived, consisting of chaps who had been on the Greece and Crete show and had had a very sticky time. I watched them get out of the truck they had arrived in. Graham Richmond pointed out to me a likely-looking lad - HR Johnson by name. So I asked him whether he would like to help me steal four hundred marquee walls from camps in the Base Area, because my late Adjutant had been fool enough to let the Arabs steal ours. He seemed to think it was a grand idea. So he and I went out together during the next day or two, with ten-ton trucks I got from Area HQ and some native troops who did not know what was going on anyhow. And we acquired sufficient sides to re-equip all our marquees.

In the course of the above operation I told HR Johnson that what we were forming was a Pioneer Mobilisation, Training and Reinforcement Depot about 16,000 strong and I asked him whether he would like to try his hand at being Adjutant. He said that he had not been commissioned long and really did not know the first thing about the job, but that he was prepared to "have a go" if I wanted him to. And he certainly did "have a go." He was Adjutant of the Depot for the next

The thousands of Pioneers who met him during the War will be interested to know that he got his real start in the Army by helping me to steal four hundred marquee walls.

two years, during which time he saw it grow from nothing to a strength, at one time, of 26,000. Afterwards he commanded a Basuto Company that was on board a small craft that was sunk by air attack on the way to Tobruk and later commanded a smoke Company at the crossing of the Rhine. "Johnny" was a first-class adjutant, a first-class officer and a first-class friend to whom I owe a considerable debt of gratitude. The thousands of Pioneers who met him during the War will be interested to know that he got his real start in the Army by helping me to steal four hundred marquee walls.

One way or another we got all the tentage we wanted for the Depot and we got it erected as troops were due to arrive. We also got enough, by devious ways, to eventually erect a complete 1000-bedded General Hospital for the South African Unit I had got the Union Defence Force to send up from South Africa for us.

While all this was going on the Cypriot Pioneers, of whom I had about a thousand in the Depot, staged another mutiny and set on their British Officers and Sergeants, doing quite a bit of damage to some of them. These choice citizens of the British Empire had prepared for this outbreak by burying hundreds of weapons - mostly knives but also a few revolvers and grenades - in the sand of the desert around their tents. However, we were not going to stand any nonsense from such scum; they

got more than they gave and were literally having the hell of a time for the next few days until a British Colonial official, who was singularly ill-informed as to the character of these chaps although he was an important member of the Administration in Cyprus, got GHQ to intervene and send me a direct order to call off my retaliatory methods, which were in fact turning these Cypriots into soldiers. They were then moved to a camp on their own under the direct eye of the Colonial Official, himself, where they rapidly degenerated into an undisciplined rabble, the majority of whom deserted when they were ordered to the Western Desert.

Clothing and Blankets.

By now it was October and always the nights, frequently the days also, were very cold, with a keen wind blowing and occasional days and nights of heavy driving rain. We had discarded the "shirts and shorts" of the summer for battledress and, when necessary, greatcoats, pullovers and all the extra clothing one wears at home in the winter. The native troops were to come up to me in shirts and shorts. Even a few hours in those clothes in the climatic conditions we were then experiencing would almost certainly have meant the death of thousands from pneumonia. So off I went to Ordnance to draw blankets

and clothing before they arrived.

To find that there was no authority for me to draw any clothing and that the Ordnance Depot had already issued all the blankets to other units. So there was no authority for clothing and no blankets anyway.

I rushed round GHQ in a kind of panic but achieved nothing. The original instructions for the raising of these thousands of native Pioneers said that they

would be clothed before leaving their own country. So there was no authority for issues to be made in the Middle East. Then someone at GHQ suddenly got a brainwave and sent masses of clothing, etc, from Middle East to South Africa for them, in order to help the situation. But the chaps had already left there, so orders were sent for the clothing to be sent back to Middle East when it arrived in South Africa. And I was then told that apart from nothing having been authorised for my native Pioneers this clothing, etc, that was wandering around between Middle East and Africa was kind of debited against them anyway. And that officially "there was nothing doing."

By this time the first few thousands were due to arrive at Suez any day - and unless they were warmly clad in some way immediately they disembarked a good proportion would probably die.

Now, long ago I had discovered two things about indents for stores. The first was known to everyone, the second to few. The first was that you cannot get anything on an indent without quoting on the indent an official "authority" for the issue. The second that provided the indent is sufficiently large and the "authority" looks alright it is not checked. So I just found out what kind of "authorities" GHQ was using for issues of stores (so many letters, so many figures, and so on) and invented one myself, complying with that formula, for

the issue of clothing and stores for native Pioneer Units. Then I went to Ordnance with indents signed by me, and bearing this fake "authority" that I had invented for clothing, arms and equipment for sixteen Pioneer Companies and also for G1098 stores, tentage and accommodation stores for sixteen Companies.

And it worked. I got the clothing, equipment and stores on the "authority" I had invented - and so far as I know we never used any other.

But there were no blankets at the Ordnance Stores, and I must have fifty thousand before the troops arrived.

So, armed with the "authority" I had invented, the officer who was acting as quartermaster and I scoured the Base Area trying to find blankets and making up a variety of stories for getting them. And eventually a few thousand from this camp a few thousand from that Depot sometimes by making friends, sometimes by telling the tale, we got the 50,000 - quite a lot of blankets.

Other Supplies

Once one embarks on a wangle or a racket one finds that inevitably one gets more and more involved. As I was drawing enormous quantities of stores on a fake "authority" that I had invented myself it seemed to me that I must at all costs keep the individual units from direct contact with the Service Depots - Ordnance, Rations and so on. Otherwise the myth of my supposed "authority" would be immediately exposed. And the only way to prevent units contacting Services direct would be to have everything they might want available for them at the Depot. They would then have no need to go outside and I alone would be dealing with the Services. Therefore I must draw every kind of store, ration and supply in bulk and issue in detail to units in the Depot.

So I had to extend the "arrangement" I had now with Ordnance and Rations to everything else a Company would want. For instance, I found that there were only one hundred typewriters in store in the whole of Middle East and I did a deal with a Major by name of "Joe," who ran the typewriter department at GHQ, to give me fifty of them, so I could issue a typewriter apiece to the first fifty units we formed at the Depot. Then "Joe" promised to give me more as they became available, keeping my stock as near fifty as possible. A similar "arrangement" was made for bulk supplies of stationery, military textbooks, and everything down to a censor stamp for each Company. Every item of clothing, stores, equipment and vehicles was drawn in bulk by us and issued to Companies and they left the Depot completely equipped in every respect without ever having had dealings with anyone outside the Depot. Which was how we "got away with it" without having any proper "authority."

The reader may ask why we should have gone about things in this unorthodox way - obtaining probably four or five million pounds worth of stores on a fake "authority." For that is what it amounted to.

They may contend that as the formation of these native Pioneer Companies was authorised therefore in due course a proper authority for clothing and equipping them would have been forthcoming. And I have no doubt it would. But it would have been too late.

We did not resort to the means we

employed until we were forced to and until all normal methods had proved useless. In the end the position was that the first batch of natives, some 6,000, was actually due, at Suez and we could get nothing for them. And even after making out the fake indents we only finished drawing their clothing and blankets during the night before they disembarked and only just in time to send the blankets on trucks to meet them as they disembarked and entrained for the Depot. Normal methods had failed before we resorted to our unorthodox ones.

By taking the action we did we certainly saved the lives of several thousands of those African Pioneers by issuing them with blankets or clothing as they stepped off the boat. In that bitter weather a high proportion of them were sure to catch a lung affection they were liable to if exposed to a long journey by train or truck without such protection. This I was assured would happen by the South African Director of Medical Services - the acknowledged authority on the subject of native health.

Also the probability is that had we waited for a proper "authority" it would have been for an issue on a scale far inferior to what we were drawing on our fake "authority" - which was normal British Scale. Because the attitude at GHQ towards native troops was more or less that "anything would do for them." And our native Pioneers would have started off with an inferiority complex and it would not have been so easy to turn them into the first-class soldiers they were.

Finally, I was not just behaving in an irresponsible way and denuding the Supply Depots of stores that might be required for some other purpose. I had a friend who was very highly placed at GHQ and was conversant with all administrative planning there and he assured me, privately, that the quantity of stores we would draw would not embarrass the "provision" programme in Middle East. So although we drew an immense quantity of stores on my fake indents - say four or five million pounds worth - I knew that the actual withdrawal of these stores would not interfere with other plans.

Administration at the Depot

The amount of administration work was terrific. This will be realised from the fact that during the first six months from the time the native Pioneers began to arrive we turned out an average of one Company per day.

The Depot QM Stores.

The average daily issues for the whole of those six months were as follows:

Rifles and bayonets	265 per day
	40,000 in six months
Battledress suits	400 per day
	60,000 in six months
Pairs of boots	400 per day
	60,000 in six months
Shirts	600 per day
	90,000 in six months
Vests	600 per day
	90,000 in six months
Pants	600 per day
	90,000 in six months
Pairs of socks	600 per day
	90,000 in six months
Shorts	300 per day
	45,000 in six months
Greatcoats	200 per day
	30,000 in six months
Pullovers	200 per day
	30,000 in six months

Steel helmets	300 per day
	45,000 in six months
Gas respirators	300 per day
	45,000 in six months
Gas capes	300 per day
	45,000 in six months
Ground sheets	300 per day
	45,000 in six months
Blankets	600 per day
	90,000 in six months
Sets of equipment	300 per day
	45,000 in six months

The above items alone give the colossal total of over six thousand items of personal clothing and equipment issued every day or over one million of such items during the six months.

But, in addition to the above, an average of one Company every day was issued with tentage, G1098 and accommodation stores, amounting to several tons in all, and transport vehicles. In other words, a Company a day was fully equipped.

There were also a vast number of smaller items of clothing and equipment issued daily, not to mention exchanges, replacements, and so on.

One also has to remember that a similar quantity of stores had to be drawn daily, in order to maintain the stock in the QM Stores.

Messing

Throughout this six months we drew an average of twelve thousand rations per day. The ration scale and the actual rations varied for each type of native at the Depot and they were drawn in bulk to the Depot Ration Store and issued in detail from there accordingly. As a matter of interest it is worth mentioning that there were 101 (one hundred and one) cook-houses in the Depot.

The Depot Orderly Room.

No one who has only served in an ordinary Unit or Depot - in fact no one who was not actually on my HQs staff at the time - can realise the immense amount of work there was to do in the Depot Office.

Orders for the routine administration of the sixteen thousand men in the Depot, for the rifle range and gas chamber (three hundred men a day each), for the dispatch of reinforcements to all Pioneer Units in Middle East, for the detrainment and move into the Depot of an average of a Company a day and for the move out of the Depot and entrainment of similar numbers, timetables for the drawing of clothing and stores and for the issue of 16,000 rations a day, the arrangement of transport to draw about sixty tons of stores a day from Ordnance and sixteen thousand rations from the Supply Depot, the compiling of Part Two Orders for about 350 men a day on an average joining the Depot, the routine, direct discipline of the about three thousand men of depot staff and reinforcement "wings" of the Depot, all of whom were dealt with as a separate Unit with me as CO organising Court Martials, Courts of Enquiry and running the Depot Detention Camp (with sixteen thousand one would expect to have about the same amount of crime as a Division and this had to be catered for) and a hundred and one other things I cannot think of here.

Now this is the astounding fact in connection with this mass of work. The only accommodation we had for Depot HQs offices during the six months under review consisted of one wooden hut

divided into two rooms, each about 30 feet by 12 feet, and one small marquee tent. And the total staff was my second in command, my adjutant, a spare subaltern and myself, with one orderly-room sergeant (who had been batman to my first adjutant), one corporal and three clerks (when we could get them, they were frequently borrowed from Units in the Depot). I sat in one of the two rooms with my second in command and adjutant and the spare subaltern kind of hovered about in the same room, the orderly room sergeant, corporal and three clerks spread themselves over the other room and the small marquee.

And with that accommodation and that staff was carried out the amount of work I have indicated above - having experienced both, I should say about twenty times what was done at the average Group Headquarters. This is not boasting but appreciation, because Graham Richmond, my Second in Command, and his successors, "Johnny," the Adjutant, and the rest of the staff did the work - I was "out and about" most of the time and the amazing fact is that Graham and Johnny seemed to find plenty of time to help me outside also.

Personnel

A remarkable thing was the ridiculous inadequacy of the War Establishment for the Depot. Our Directorate at GHQ had tried to improve it and I attended before the War Establishment Committee at GHQ. But I realised that they were quite incapable of grasping what was going on at the Depot because it was so far removed from anything that had happened in their experience. So we gave it up meantime. And for instance, I was still officially only allowed a "combined adjutant and quartermaster" - one officer to combine both jobs.

But a visit to Second Echelon when I was starting the Depot had resulted in some very interesting discoveries. The officers I met there did not seem to "have a clue" about anything connected with their job there, the RSM was so incredibly ignorant of even elementary military matters that I do not know how he could have served many years in a Regular Unit (as he had) and learnt so little. Records were in a completely chaotic state - so chaotic that I lent Second Echelon some clerks I had awaiting posting at the Depot, and found through them exactly what was going on. It was frankly admitted by the Officer in Charge that they were in such a mess with the ORs records that they were making no attempt to keep Officers' records up to date.

So our Directorate at GHQ turned a blind eye to what was going on and I knew that Records did not know. Thus I was able to get officers that were essential for the Depot even though they were not allowed on my War Establishment; but I still had to keep this to a minimum because we were short of officers generally in the Middle East.

Training

With the exception of the men in the Reinforcement Wings (one wing for each nationality) this was carried out by the Group and Company Commanders in the Depot according to a graded programme which allowed for the gradual "acclimatisation" of the native troops. But certain things had to be arranged, or run,

by the Depot Staff.

As instances, every man had to fire a course on the open range, had to be taught to use his gas mask and pass through the Depot Gas chamber, men had to be taught to drive trucks and instruction given to cooks, clerks, and so on.

We had, of course, to construct and run a Depot Range. And it had to be quite a considerable range, because an average of three hundred men a day had to fire their course on it. It was not elaborate to start with, in fact instruction was of the crudest and the range was just a patch of desert, with biscuit tins filled with sand as targets. But fire they all did and as time went on we had quite a high-class range. Anyway it was no mean achievement to start from absolutely nothing - we had even to get the rifles and ammunition by a "wangle" - and for six whole months to pass through on the range an average of three hundred native Pioneers a day.

Teaching in the use of the gas mask and passing through the gas chamber an average of three hundred men a day was again quite a job. These natives had never heard of gas, never seen a gas mask and hardly any of them could speak English. The Depot Gas Officer had the hell of a job to first of all explain what gas was, then what a gas mask was, then to get them to put it on and finally to get them to go into the gas chamber and not take the gas mask off while they were in there. And he had other jobs as well as being Depot Gas Officer.

Many - or most - of the Units had no men who could drive motor transport and they had to drive their trucks away when they left the Depot. So we had to arrange for a school of instruction to help units train selected men. It was a somewhat hazardous activity - teaching totally inexperienced natives - who probably could not speak English - to drive an Army truck capable of going at about fifty miles an hour.

In the early days training of cooks, clerks, etc., and of English to natives and other languages to British Officers and NCOs was a sketchy affair, but in the end we had a

very efficient School of Instruction going in both this and other subjects - NCOs Courses of Instruction, Drill Courses, Weapon Training and so on.

It will be realised that the three square miles that comprised the Depot were pretty well seething with activity all the time.

Welfare

Though NAAFI and Army Welfare would have nothing to do with us, there was quite a lot going on.

The Depot were running the five brick NAAFI's themselves and the Cinema was going strong (all obtained by various "wangles" as explained previously) and two "Institutes" and mobile cinemas were all being ran by the South African authorities, as I had arranged privately.

Then we ran our own regular bus services to Cairo, Ismalia and Palestine and conducted trips to the Pyramids, etc, these buses having been obtained out of the £500 a month I got "on the side" from the Egyptian contractor who did our laundry.

The Staff of the Depot.

This Depot must have been unique. It organised and administered a strength of eventually up to 26,000 on kind of "mass-production" lines, receiving unequipped reinforcement units or drafts at the average rate of about 350 men per day, month after month, and turning out fully equipped Companies ready for operational duties if need be, at the average rate of one a day and also despatching regular drafts of reinforcements to units all over the Middle East.

The work my Officers and NCOs put in was unbelievable and for the first eighteen months as we only had the War Establishment for a Depot of sixteen hundred, instead of sixteen thousand, none of them could be given rank proportionate to the work they were doing or the responsibilities they had.

The first officer who acted as Quartermaster was a London tram conductor. Just think of the size of the Stores he was responsible for, the hundreds of tons of stuff he drew and issued weekly

the microscopic staff he had to help him. After he had worked himself into hospital came Hughie Rose, an experienced soldier who came to me because he was unfit (what a place for a quartermaster to have a rest in!), and after months of terrific toil left because he was, of course, a darned sight more unfit.

Then the Adjutant - "Johnny" - who originally said he did not know anything about it but was prepared to "have a go." He set up and ran this immense administrative machine, in addition to his personal work as Adjutant, with a staff of one junior officer, constantly changing, and a maximum of five clerks, mostly fairly unskilled.

And my original second-in-command, Graham Richmond, who worked as I have never seen anyone work till we had got the thing on an even keel, much of the time with a leg he had damaged driving a motor cycle over the desert, then went off to command a Group, came back to command the Depot while I was sick and eventually took over from me as Commandant when I left.

One could go on for hours describing that amazing team. They were all wonderful - they had to be, otherwise they did not stop on the Depot staff.

It was tremendously hard work and also I found it great fun.

Some of the fun we had I will describe in the continuation of these "confessions" - if 'Jimmie' Adamson makes me write any more.

PART 4

Before starting this set of Notes there are two things I want to refer to regarding previous articles of this series.

I have been told that objection is taken to my reference to "stealing" tent walls in my Notes which appeared in the December issue of The Royal Pioneer. In the Army whereas stealing is not permissible "scrounging" or "acquiring" is looked on as a fairly legitimate occupation, even if it is not officially countenanced. In these Notes all I want to do is to set on record something of the enthusiasm, hard work



Brigadier Pryne (Left) at the Ceremony of the naming of The British Railways Locomotive "The Royal Pioneer Corps"

and enterprise of the little band who had the privilege of helping to create the Royal Pioneers in Middle East and elsewhere, where I saw it, and of the difficulties they encountered. But I am obviously not an experienced writer and I very much regret if my clumsy choice of words has caused offence. Perhaps I might mention here that I subsequently went to see the Camp Commandants of the camps from which we acquired" the marquee walls referred to, told them what had taken place and made due restitution. Possibly therefore, "borrowed" is really the most exact description of the operation.

The second thing is that I have been told that "rumours are going round" that I have received considerable correspondence from the War Office or elsewhere regarding incidents related in these "confessions." This is not so. And I want to explain why. In order to bring home to them the neglect the Pioneers overseas suffered from and to avoid it happening again on any future occasion, I had already told the "Authorities" what I had done. And that is also one of the reasons for me publicising the facts in these Notes.

And now to get on with my story, I find that at the end of my last Notes I said that I would give some instances of the fun we had while running the Pioneer Depot in Middle East in 1941-2. And I find it hard to do. It was fun because it is always fun to work with a bunch of good fellows, fun to command keen and loyal subordinates, fun to be achieving something worth-while in such circumstances the problems, the crises, the narrowly averted catastrophes are all fun, anyway in retrospect if not perhaps quite so funny at the time. But it is darned hard to think up any that will amuse, or even interest, anyone who was not there at the time. But possibly the following may.

GHQ were very afraid that our African Pioneers might cause trouble in the Egyptian villages and towns, not necessarily intentionally but because they were different races with different habits, but the same natural instincts, and speaking different languages. So it was decreed that villages and towns should be "out of bounds" to them. This virtually confined them to camps, or the desert, perpetually. GHQ admitted that this was really an impossible prospect and were anxious for a solution of the problem but could suggest none. And it came about this way. The nearby villages were too filthy to attract the early African arrivals (some wavered later on) so the problem of the villages solved itself. As regards the towns we adopted the following plan. Without telling the Authorities we sent a number of Africans each day to the nearest town. After a fortnight we again asked for the ban on Africans entering that particular town to be waived. And we were again told that they were quite certain that if the Africans went into the town there "would be trouble." I then told them that Africans had been going into the town every day for the past fortnight and so far from causing trouble they had been so well behaved that the Military Police had not even noticed their presence. GHQ then had, of course to capitulate and allow the Africans into towns, and they told me privately that they were darned glad I took the action I did because they realised that the "confined to camp" order was impracticable but that a variety of considerations prevented them making any experiments themselves. At GHQ one has to be a politician as well as a

soldier, I guess. But if one is a soldier one must know the quality of the troops one commands.

The Official fear as to "what the Africans might do" seemed sometimes to translate itself into a kind of belief that they might do anything dreadful - the cannibal stories of their youth seeming to form the basis of their opinion of the African character and habit. One day, shortly after the first Africans arrived, I received a phone call from Area HQ to the effect that a nearby camp Cinema had been raided by a couple of soldiers, the Greek cashier knocked out and the till stolen. They said it appeared to be a carefully planned raid and they thought it was done by two of my African soldiers. I said "Oh no, I don't think so." To which they replied "You and your Africans, you never will believe anything against them, why don't you think they could have done it." To which I replied "Because they have not been living with the highly civilised British Army long enough yet - in six months time I will be prepared to believe they may do it." The raid was eventually traced to two British soldiers who had taken an Army truck some time before and kind of "turned bandit."

The first two African Groups to arrive in the Depot were a Basuto Group closely followed by a Bechuana Group. These were commanded respectively by Lt Col Basil Hamborough (Welsh Guards) and Lt.Col John Edge (Yorks and Lancaster Regt.) I have always thought that it was a very fortunate thing that these first two African Groups were commanded by them because their standard and example was that of the Regular Army and they were able to, and did, start these Africans off "on the right foot."

Equipping these chaps was great fun from many angles. They were so delighted with everything. One cannot imagine the British recruit becoming lyrical over a steel helmet or a battle-dress suit. But these men were. It was rather like Father Christmas giving out presents from a Christmas tree. And they wanted to wear everything they received - all at once, if possible. It was no unusual sight to see members of a Company that had just been issued with their kit wearing, regardless of the temperature, battledress over their shirts and shorts together with greatcoat surmounted by a steel helmet perched on top of their ordinary hat.

Then there was their unusual attitude to routine duties, which was devastating until one "knew the form." They caused quite a stir by objecting to act as Mess Orderlies - regarded as a nice easy job in my days in the ranks. But we found that their idea was that the mess orderly job was one that could and should be done by "light duty" men, who otherwise loafed about, so that the fit men could do a real job of work. Again, they considered extra guards, piquets and so on a privilege, not a punishment - so if you gave a man an extra

guard you were rewarding him not punishing him. And in view of this enthusiasm, I blush to remember the number of times I paid chaps to do my guards for me when I was a private soldier. At a very much later date we found that many of them regarded it as a disgrace to be "sent home on leave" until the war was over - a disgrace many of us could very easily have got over.

The Africans quickly wore down the prejudice against them by and large they were smart, soldierly and well-behaved and the general feeling began to swing the other way - people being rather out to help than the reverse. This also led to embarrassment at times. A concert Party touring the Middle East decided that they would like to "give a show to the Africans." Now this was a project we viewed with some misgiving. But to ask them not to come would at once have set in motion again anti-African rumours. We tried to side-track the Party diplomatically, but failed. But the result was rather dismal. The Africans, of course, understood little or

GHQ were afraid that our African Pioneers might cause trouble in the Egyptian villages and towns and it was decreed that these towns and villages should be "Out of Bounds" to them, thus confining them to camps or the desert. Without telling the authorities we sent a number of Africans each day to the nearest town. After two weeks we asked for that particular town to be waived. This was initially refused until they were told that they had been entering the town for the last two weeks and the MPs had not even noticed.

nothing of what was going on, which did not make them an ideal audience. But another consideration was far more embarrassing. One had the alternative of either letting them applaud and so on, like an ordinary audience, or of telling them they must remain silent. The former had the result of them making an infernal din all the time, the latter of turning them into rows of impassive, silent, faces. Either was, of course, devastating for the members of the Concert Party. Added to which in order to preserve the prestige of the British and in view of the fact that a small number of the Africans understood English we had to warn the Concert Party to very carefully censor the performance, which robbed it of most of the turns which would have entertained the British members of the audience - an entirely purified programme is not ideal for a soldiers concert. However,

we got through it somehow – and we had quite a good party in the Mess afterwards.

We found that these Africans were very good at guard duties, which they took very seriously, but were a bit literal in carrying out their orders. All over the Depot were sentries and their job was important because the Arabs were experts at stealing - particularly tents, rifles and so on. It was difficult to see these chaps in the dark and they were inclined to wait till you were more or less on top of them before they challenged you. And if they were in doubt as to what to do next they were as likely as not to decide that they had better just keep you there - with a bayonet unpleasantly near your chest - until your or their shouts brought the NCO of the Guard along. An amusing true story is told of one of the first guards they mounted outside the Depot which was at an important Naval Base. The Admiral did not have much of an opinion of the Africans and was rather annoyed at his British guard being replaced by them. So after dinner one night he thought he would take a walk and try them out. He arrived and the Basuto guard let him pass and wander all over the place. The Admiral got more and more furious with the "useless African guard" and eventually decided to go back and report them and ask for his British guard back. But he found that he couldn't. When he turned round to go out he found that he was confronted by a little party of Basutos all standing with fixed bayonets pointing at him and unpleasantly close to him. And that was all

I was told that this Depot was the eighth Wonder of the World and it seems to me a pretty good description.

they did, or would do. When he moved they did not and he either had to walk into a bayonet or stand still. As long as he had walked into the Base they had just followed him, reckoning that the further in he got the more difficult it would be for him to get out. But they were not going to let him start going out again. And his uniform meant just nothing to them. So there he stayed for quite a long time till someone came along and dealt with the situation. The Admiral said he thought it was a darned good guard.

The Commander of the Sub-Area in which the Depot was located was a very large man with a reputation in that part of the world and a liver. He was very friendly to us because he realised that we of the Pioneer Depot were trying to do our best towards the War effort, which was, I reckon, his yardstick. He never worried us with inspections, but very occasionally dropped in to see how we were getting on and invariably helped us when we asked him to get anything done for us. He realised I was usually very busy all day and so most evenings he used to ask me to go round to his HQ and have a pink gin (usually several) with him before dinner. Then I used to tell him all the news about the Depot and he used to tell me anything he wanted us to do - or to stop doing. And he was the kind of chap who knew when he asked one to do anything or to stop doing anything that we would do it or stop

doing it – irrespective of the fact that he might say it casually over a pink gin. In him we had a staunch and valuable friend. One evening he said that the GOC Canal Area wanted to come and inspect the Depot. This was Major-General Arthur Selby, a giant of a man whom everyone more or less went in fear of. We fixed a date for him to come and inspect us. And I promptly forgot all about it.

A few days later I was sitting in my office, which I shared with the Second in Command, Adjutant and spare officer, when a number of Staff Cars drove up and the Brigadier and a whole flock of Staff officers came in, followed by the General towering over them all. We all stood up and there was a kind of awful silence and someone said "The General has come to inspect you." Well there was no good in beating about the bush so I said "I am sorry, Sir, but we have been awfully busy and I forgot all about your inspection." The general result was rather like a Bateman drawing – everyone more or less fell over backwards. Except the General, that is. He said "You have got the Hell of a big job here, Prynne, and I won't trouble you now. Just let the Brigadier know when you are ready for me to come and see your show. In the meantime if there is anything I can do to help you, let me know." and the cavalcade departed. A few days later he arrived with his entourage again, but this time we were ready for him. Now, perhaps I have an unusual approach to the subject of inspecting officers. May be it is the result of

my business training. But when I am told someone is going to inspect my Unit I immediately get out a list of what I want him to do for me. In this way the maximum advantage results from the inspection. The inspecting officer sees the Unit and also finds out what assistance they want to increase their efficiency. It

always seemed to me that in order to achieve this it is as much the duty of the Unit Commander to know what he wants to get out of the inspection as it was the duty of the inspecting officer to see what he wants during the inspection. So when General Selby arrived I told him that it seemed fairly useless touring the whole three square miles of the Depot with the three or four Staff cars and his leading with the flag flying. And I suggested that he should leave them behind and that we should just take my car, with me driving and him sitting alongside, and that he could then see what he wanted to see and I could show him what I wanted him to see and what improvements I wanted. So off we went, with the Brigadier and a Staff officer in the back seat who took notes of what the General said he wanted done for us. General Selby subsequently went to GHQ, Middle East, and eventually MGA, and Commander in Chief, Paiforce and up to the time he left that part of the world in 1944 was a tremendous friend of, and fighter for, the Pioneers.

Another "occasion" was when we were told that the Adjutant General, who was making a tour of all the Theatres of Operations, was in Middle East and was coming to see us. We were warned that he did not want any fuss or parade, or to interrupt our usual routine, but just wanted to come and see us. Having done so he said "I was told that this Depot was the eighth

Wonder of the World and it seems to me a pretty good description." A good testimonial to the home base of the Middle East Pioneers, and I record it because they were a marvellous team.

And that is a good note, I think on which to leave these jottings on my time at the Depot. I eventually handed over command to Graham Richmond, my original Second in Command, who was then commanding a Group, and during his time as Commandant the strength in the Depot at one time exceeded 26,000 (twenty-six thousand). This must surely have been the record strength for an Army Unit.

Rommel was prancing about the Western Desert and forcing the Eighth Army to withdraw, eventually to the El Alamein line. The Canal Area was being organised for defence and I was appointed OC Troops of an area from Tel El Kebir to Moascar. This included a number of units of all branches of the Service and additionally one or two RAF Units, notably the big peacetime RAF Station at Abu Swer, outside Moascar. All troops were to be organised as "Commandoes," particularly to deal with landing from the air. And from my private stock of machine guns I was able to arm not only my own troops but some in other areas also. Then I found that the RAF Units had no arms and armed the chaps at the RAF Station at Abu Swer and the others that came under me with rifles from my stock.

The next thing that happened was the arrival of a RAF Staff Officer from their HQ in Cairo, who told me that most of the British RAF in Middle East were unarmed and they could neither defend themselves nor their airfields and that they could not get arms from anyone - lots of promises but no rifles. So I gave them 5,000 rifles from my reserve stock. It is a matter of interest that the RAF were armed by the Pioneers at that somewhat critical time.

This made me kind of "RAF minded." They were being forced to evacuate their forward operational airfields and to set up temporary operational airfields in the desert around us.

But the only personnel they had to do this with was their own RAF ground staff, who were more than fully occupied with the terrific maintenance work entailed by more or less continuous operational flying. I had a lot of Companies at the Depot, many forced back by the withdrawal in the Western Desert. So as the RAF Units arrived in our vicinity I gave them each a Pioneer Company, who just loved working amongst the operational planes and for whose services the RAF Units were terribly grateful.

I suppose these are unrecorded incidents of the campaign. And to my mind the great pleasure, and privilege, of serving with the Royal Pioneers was that we were so often able to give a helping hand where it was vitally needed to get on with the War.

Then "out of the blue" I was ordered to report to GHQ and was told that I was leaving the Pioneers, was being promoted and appointed Area Commander south of the Gulf of Suez, where they had prepared a relief military port because they thought that Suez and the Canal might become untenable. This I liked because it sounded an interesting, responsible and useful job. But I did not like leaving the Pioneers. Anyway it is stupid to talk about, or even think of, likes and dislikes during a War. As there were certain points to be cleared up I sent my Staff on to Safraga, where my HQ was to be, and established myself in

Shepherd's Hotel, Cairo, intending to follow when everything was straightened out. But I never did. After about three weeks I was told that I was to hand over to someone else and that I was to be appointed Director of Pioneers and Labour, Paiforce.

This was a new command which was being formed in Iraq and Persia, with General Maitland Wilson as Commander in Chief, and I was just terribly proud of, and grateful for, being selected for the job. And after that brief interlude as an Area Commander I was back with the Pioneers again.

The following article appeared in the same edition of The Royal Pioneer as Part 4:

Just as final page proofs go to press word has been received that Brigadier Prynne has made another confession – i.e. has become engaged to be married. All his friends, Pioneers and otherwise will wish him and his Bride-to-be all the happiness that life can bring.

And in the next edition:

Brigadier H. G. L. Prynne, CBE MC TD, probably one of the best known figures in the Royal Pioneer Corps, and certainly one of the most popular, delighted his many friends by announcing in May his engagement to Miss DE Gully of Reading Street, near Broadstairs, Kent. Invitations for the wedding at St. Peter's-in-Thanet, near Broadstairs, on 24th June were sent out. Unfortunately it is not possible to get a report of the ceremony in time for this issue. Royal Pioneers in many parts of the Empire will wish Brigadier and Mrs Prynne every happiness, and hope that they will be present at many of our Corps gatherings.

(Unfortunately his wife Doris Elizabeth – died 18 Feb 76 and Brig Prynne died shortly afterwards on 13 May 76).

Other entries in The Royal Pioneer are:

Presentation of a Copy of the War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps to Her Majesty the Queen

In September, 1960, at the request of the Chairman of the RPC Historical Committee (Brigadier H H Prynne, CBE, MC), the Director of Pioneers and Labour wrote a letter on behalf of the Colonel Commandant to the Private Secretary to Her Majesty The Queen enquiring whether Her Majesty would graciously consent to accept a copy of the War History. The Private Secretary replied that Her Majesty would be very pleased to receive a copy and indicated that it should be sent to the Palace by post during the week before general publication.

Messrs Gale and Polden were then instructed to prepare the presentation copy and to inscribe the fly leaf as follows :

"Presented with their humble duty to Her Majesty The Queen by the Colonel Commandant and All Ranks, Past and Present, of the Royal Pioneer Corps. OCTOBER, 1960."

The presentation copy reached the War Office on 10th October and was kept on view there for two days before being posted to Buckingham Palace. It is a fine piece of work : bound in blue leather, bearing the Corps Badge in silver on the front and with the page edges gilded.

The inscription had been beautifully done by an expert penman. On 18th October a letter arrived from the Palace for the Colonel Commandant.

The Corps War Memorial

The following letter of appeal was sent to all Branches, Units and individual members of HQ Branch in July, 1964. It is republished through the medium of The Royal Pioneer for the information of those who did not see the original letter and as a reminder to those who did, but have not sent in their subscription, in the hope that they will do so before the closing date :

"Dear Member,

You will recall that quietly and without a

great deal of fuss, the Pioneer Corps, later and deservedly to be granted the accolade of "Royal" performed its duties in what is to be hoped was the last totally absorbing "National Emergency" and has lived up to that magnificent reputation ever since.

In the early days it seemed that merely "Labouring" was to be our lot, but the test of time and the requirements of later moments quickly converted this so called "Source of Labour" into a practical, realistic thinking Force, which created not only its own abilities to deal with physical situations, but added, also, an imaginative combatism which became a source of great strength to those for whom reliability, in its widest meaning, was of the utmost value.

Inevitably, this cost a lot of lives and although we may mourn them no longer, they nevertheless, must be correlated, in terms of the Corps, with its traditions and its pride.

So, there grew up a modest desire to commemorate our heroic dead and your Corps has, to its best abilities, matched their sacrifice by erecting in their honour a Memorial of natural British stone at the heart of our affairs in the Corps Depot at Northampton.

It is a worthy Memorial, designed and built with loving care and all members, past and present, are invited to give a little of themselves not only to meet the material cost of £400 but, truly, to honour those of us who have, indeed, paid the highest price.

Subscriptions, please, to the General Secretary of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association at 51 St George's Drive, London, SW1.

You will appreciate that this is a matter which should be resolved at an early date, but it is proposed that the subscription list should remain open until 21st December, 1964.

With my kind and warm regards,
(Sgd) H G L PRYNNE, Brigadier. ■



Unveiling of the Corps War Memorial 16 April 1964



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



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Picture: RPCA Archive



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Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



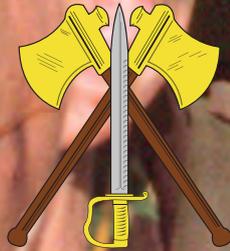
■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



Blast from the Past

Here are a selection of photographs from our archives. If anyone has any Pioneer related photographs than send them in.



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive



■ Do you recognise any of these faces?

Picture: RPCA Archive

Background Picture: Do you recognise him?

Press Cuttings for 1943

The following have been taken from our archives. These cuttings are all from the year 1943. It is the intention in future Newsletters to print details from other years.

Report: Norman Brown
RPCA Archive

THE following have been taken from our archives which detail Pioneer related events from various publications. These cuttings are all from the year 1943.

The Times 4 Jan 43 ALIENS IN THE ARMY TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

SIR – I am about to marry a German alien in the Pioneer Corps of the British Army. I have recently seen with appreciation the Ministry of Information's sympathetic account of the life of the men in the alien companies in that corps, "Lift your head, Comrade!" You may imagine my feelings when I heard the bland though perfectly correct statement by the narrator that these men who fight for our King and country, if taken prisoner, would automatically be shot as traitors. It seems to me strange that our Government cannot afford to these men who risk everything for us the legal protection of naturalisation, such as is given to German and Austrian aliens immediately on enlistment in similar corps of the American Army.

Hansard 19 Jan 43 PIONEER CORPS

Colonel Arthur Evans asked the Secretary of State for War whether in view of their war record, especially as the Pioneer Corps now play their part in combined operations and were among the first troops to land in North Africa and that so many officers and men have been transferred from Royal regiments and corps, he will now recommend that the title and honour of Royal be granted to the Pioneer Corps?

The Secretary of State for War (Sir James Grigg) I think that it will be best to follow the normal practice and postpone consideration of such matters as this till the end of the war.

The Times 12 Feb 43 WAR LEVY ON BASUTOS - DECISION OF PARAMOUNT CHIEFTAINNESS FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT BLOEMFONTEIN, FEB 11

The Paramount Chieftainess of Basutoland, Mantsebo, has decided, after consultation with the Basutoland National Council and with the approval of the Basutoland Government, to impose a war levy. The money derived from the levy will be used to provide comforts for Basuto soldiers in the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps and make an interest-free loan to the British Government. This loan, when redeemed, will be used to finance development works in Basutoland.

The levy ranges from £5 for the principal to 10s for the ordinary native taxpayer. Men serving in the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps or native military corps in the Union of South Africa are exempted.

Hansard 16 Feb 43 LOSS OF KIT (CHARGES)

Sir Smedley Crooke asked the Secretary of State for War whether his attention has been drawn to recent police court proceedings before the Melksham magistrates who, on conviction of a soldier in the Pioneer Corps for a minor offence and ordering a fine to be paid within 14 days, were told by defendant that he could not pay the fine as he had been charged £17 10s. for his kit which was thrown away, by order, at Dunkirk, and that it was being stopped out of his pay; and whether this treatment had the sanction of the War Office?

Sir J. Grigg This case has been looked into. The soldier's account was in credit on 25th December, 1942, but on 29th January, 1943, it was £1 0s. 6d. in debt due to forfeiture of 16 days' pay because he had been absent without leave. At no time was he charged £17 10s. or any other amount for loss of kit at Dunkirk. Such charges are not made when kit is lost as a result of enemy action and in circumstances like the evacuation from Dunkirk and I am glad to have this opportunity to kill this slander.

Hansard 23 Feb 43 PIONEER CORPS (ALIENS)

Mr. Vernon Bartlett asked the Secretary of State for War whether all men in the Alien Pioneer Corps who are sent overseas are now given identity papers and pay-books which make them indistinguishable from soldiers of British birth?

Sir J. Grigg My hon. Friend's suggestions are now under consideration.

Hansard 25 Feb 43 SIR JAMES GRIGG'S STATEMENT (THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WAR)

"I have already referred to one of the natural difficulties which confronted our troops on their arrival in North Africa, namely, mud. But this was really only a super-imposition on the other natural difficulties, and these had all to be taken in the day's work by the Royal Engineers works and transportation units, the Royal Army Service Corps, the Royal Army Ordnance Corps and the Royal Electrical Mechanical Engineers. It would be invidious to pick out any of these for praise above the others, and so I select for special mention a different Corps altogether, namely, the Pioneers, those men-of-all-work of the Army. The Pioneers have done and are doing quite excellent work in North Africa, and I am glad to be able to remedy to some slight degree the lack of appreciation which I know their Colonel Commandant, Lord Milne, has sometimes felt that they have endured."

Hansard 13 Apr 43 PIONEER CORPS (SPANIARDS ENLISTMENTS)

Mr. Pritt asked the Secretary of State for War why the voluntary enlistment of

Spaniards in North Africa into the Pioneer Corps has been suspended; and whether he will give orders for its resumption?

Sir J. Grigg I have no information that this is the case but I will make inquiry.

The Times 15 Apr 43 FUTURE OF REFUGEES TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir, - The letter of Wing Commander James is not quite accurate in its facts and not very generous in its outlook. The number of refugees admitted from Germany and Austria was authoritatively stated by the Prime Minister in the House last week as 55,000 adults and 13,000 children, and the number from Czechoslovakia as 10,000. The figure of hundreds of thousands is imaginative. The fact that 6,000 of these refugees have during the war volunteered for service in the Pioneer Corps, and that thousands more have been engaged in other forms of war work, so that today almost all are usefully employed, must surely affect the conditions on which they were admitted to the country. As to the larger Jewish problem, Wing Commander James is mistaken in thinking that south-eastern Europe had been the age-long centre of the majority of the Jewish people. For 2,000 years after the first captivity the majority of the Jews lived in the Middle East and the Mediterranean lands. It was only after their expulsion from Spain and Western Europe that the larger numbers were driven to Poland. The national home of the Jews can be only in the Bible lands. A Jewish State cannot be conceived in any other country.
NORMAN BENTWICH

Hansard 22 Apr 43 ALIENS (ENLISTMENT)

Captain Nicholson asked the Secretary of State for War whether he has now been able to issue instructions modifying the method of enlistment of nationals of those countries with which we are at war?

Sir J. Grigg As the House is aware, nationals of countries with which we are at war have hitherto been required to enlist in the Pioneer Corps in the first place. As I informed the hon. Member for Rugby (Mr. W. Brown) on 2nd March facilities for transfer to other arms of the Service have recently been extended, and I am now able to announce a further step in this direction. As from 1st May aliens of enemy origin may be considered for direct enlistment into any corps other than the Royal Corps of Signals. I should add that in order that aliens who have not previously enlisted in the Pioneer Corps may not be at an advantage over those who are already serving, candidates for direct enlistment into arms other than the Pioneer Corps will be required to show good cause for not having enlisted before.

Hansard 4 May 43 ALIENS

Mr. W. Brown asked the Secretary of

State for War how many transfers from the Alien Pioneer Corps to combatant and other units have taken place since 2nd March?

Sir J. Grigg Since 2nd March 175 transfers of aliens to technical corps have so far been authorised provided that the individuals concerned pass the requisite trade tests. In addition, officers commanding alien companies of the Pioneer Corps have been instructed to forward applications for transfer to the infantry, Royal Armoured Corps and other combatant arms and these applications are now awaited.

Hansard 12 May 43 NORTH AFRICA (INTERNEES)

Mr. John Dugdale asked the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs how many political prisoners are still interned in North Africa?

Mr. Eden No exact figures are available, but my latest information indicates that between 3,000 and 4,000 have been released during the past two months. I understand that there remain two to three hundred Frenchmen and probably rather less than 2,000 internees of all other nationalities. The majority of these are Spaniards, and a large number of these Spaniards are waiting until transport can be provided to take them to Mexico. Others are waiting for definite jobs and accommodation to be made available to them. There are likely to be a hundred or two who are medically unfit or incapable of employment for one reason or another. The medically unfit are to be admitted into a special rest centre organised with the assistance of the Red Cross. Up to 1st May, 794 internees had joined the British Pioneer Corps and a further 106 have been accepted for enrolment. The French authorities in Algiers have stated officially that all internment camps, except those for enemy nationals, are to be dissolved. I understand that this will be done as soon as employment and accommodation have been found for the remaining internees and as soon as transport has been provided for those of them that are willing and able to

leave North Africa.

Hansard 5 Aug 43 PIONEER CORPS

Captain Gammans asked the Secretary of State for War what qualifications are required for commissions in the Pioneer Corps; and whether ex-officers of the last war of suitable age and physical standard are eligible for commissions although they may not possess technical qualifications?

Mr. A. Henderson In general any candidate for a commission in the Pioneer Corps, including ex-officers, must have the following qualifications:

For Labour Duties: experience in the handling of labour, particularly in the building and allied trades, or of dealing with goods in bulk quantities; For Fire Fighting Wing fire fighting experience in the N.F.S. or a commercial firm; For Accountants in Prisoner of War Camps: accounting experience.

Hansard 2 Dec 43 DOMINION AFFAIRS

Sir Alfred Beit. "Many famous feats of arms have been performed by Dominion troops in critical theatres of war, and many great sacrifices have been made and grievous losses sustained by them. Let me give a few examples. Let us call to mind the South African triumph in Abyssinia, as well as the tragedy of Tobruk; the gallant performance of the Australians in New Guinea under conditions of appalling hardship; the remarkable exploits of the New Zealand Division in Greece and Crete and in breaking through the Mareth Line in Tunisia. There is, too, Canada's invaluable contribution to the maintenance of the North Atlantic sea routes and to the Allied Air Forces in man-power, training and aircraft, as well as her gallant action at Dieppe, where she suffered such heavy losses.

The House will also remember that Rhodesians suffered the first casualties in the first action in the Western Desert at Fort Capuzzo on 12th June, 1940. Last, but by no means least, we desire to pay tribute

to the 32,000 natives of the South African Protectorates, volunteers who have played such an important part in the Middle East campaigns from Syria to Tunis in the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps"

Hansard 14 Dec 43 MILITARY PERSONNEL (USE IN DOCK STRIKE)

Sir Henry Morris-Jones asked the Secretary of State for War whether members of the Pioneer Corps and the R.E.'s, who were called to certain docks in the week ended 6th November last, in the course of a dockers' strike, to unload certain cargoes, received any extra pay for the work; whether any of the men were injured; and whether any special recognition was given to the non-commissioned officers who volunteered to operate the cranes?

Sir J. Grigg I much regret that five men were injured while doing this vital work. They were on military duty, and the answer to the first and third parts of my hon. Friend's Question is "No, Sir."

Sir H. Morris-Jones Is it not a fact that some of these non-commissioned officers volunteered for the work, although they had no previous experience of it, and that some of them were injured?

Does my right hon. Friend think it is right that they should be treated less favourably than the highly-trained section of the population who understand those working conditions?

Sir J. Grigg I think it is the business of the Army to do anything they are asked to do which is essential to the war effort, and particularly the military part of it. The unloading of those stores was an integral part of the military effort.

Sir H. Morris-Jones Will not my right hon. Friend reconsider his attitude in this particular instance, in view of the very useful service that was rendered?

Sir J. Grigg I am very well aware that the Army renders extremely useful service in this direction and in a great many others. That does not alter the fact that the men were detailed to do it as a military duty. ■

Sarajevo - a very short story

A short story about a lads time in Sarajevo under 170 support squadron with temperatures outside at -23 and a frozen moustache.

Report: Cpl Martin Thomas

ARRIVED in Sarajevo on 12 December 1995 as a member of IFOR, my unit was 170 Support Sqn ARRC. My platoon and the remainder of my unit were stationed at Kiseljak north of Sarajevo.

I had arrived four days later than my platoon, accompanied by six other members of 170 Sqn and two four tonners.

We were met at the airport by the senior pay officer whose name I cannot remember and driven to the HQ which was stationed in Zetra stadium.

After undergoing a flash tour of this shithole I was put on duty in the makeshift guardroom, i.e. reception room with Cpl

Geordie Forster. I thought it a little odd really to have two full screws on a guard shift.

As a spare bod, so to speak, I took it upon myself to make sure the lads had copious amount of fags and hot brews, as I recall it was -23 that night.

Walking back from the main check point after having a fag and a brew with Pte "Brown Bottle" Searle my moustache was frozen solid by the time I got back to the guardroom/reception.

Just inside the door was a large blackboard saying guardroom/reception with a pointing arrow, I just remembered the movie Ice Station Zebra and underneath I wrote welcome to Ice Station Zetra, hence the name stuck.

The following evening while doing my usual fag and brew patrol myself and Pte Searle came upon sniper fire at the main barrier, lucky for both of us it was as foggy as hell.

If anyone remembers Zetra that's the reason the checkpoint was relocated to the tunnel.

We had various cap badges on duty every night, on one night this young signals lad was telling jokes the whole night, and when we all got to our pits that morning this young lad shot himself dead.

I can't remember his name but I will never forget his face as long as I live, rest in peace son.

Nine days later I was reunited with my platoon. ■

Will not boast about it

MYSELF AND my family are amazed as to how you and Paul manage to compose such a brilliant and exciting and interesting Pioneer Newsletter every year.

However, this October 2013 issue was magnificent and we think it has surpassed all others. I have all previous copies in 2 binders from the original by Major Crook, earlier copies of yours with 19 pages and all the others of sixty odd pages.

I only have to mention that the postman has delivered the Newsletter and there is an uproar as to who gets it first after I have read it.

The picture on page 41 was a surprise but honestly Norman Bill Sears and I did not blackmail you in printing it as we were hoping to attend the reunion in 2014 in due course.

Bill Sears wants me to mention that he has not changed his name to Mr T Sullivan so he hopes you will rectify this in the next issue.

My family have counted the number of times my name and photograph appeared but I am a modest person so will not boast about it.

I was about to end this but my family informed me I should include the following phases which formed part of the wording printed on page 15 when Pte A Taylor received his Friend Memorial Trophy, but are relative to you, "You are an excellent communicator, you ooze confidence, reliability and acumen and your administration is excellent.

You strive to ensure that maximum effort is applied to any given task and ensure they are completed in a timely manner and to the highest possible standard."

Incidentally they think you should be awarded an OBE in the New Year's Honour list.

I finally close with the following "May you always have a smile on your face."

Yours in comradeship
George D Pringle

Jimmy Collins and Steve Kember ?

HOW SAD to hear of Joe Smillie's death, I was stationed at Bicester between 1976/79 and Joe was, I believe, the goalkeeper in a fine Pioneer Team consisting of Jimmy Collins (like myself a Spurs supporter) and good enough to have been a professional footballer (always doing detention!), what a waste of football talent, Steve Kember who I believe Chelsea were willing to PVR him from the Army and sign him. Kevin Chisett another good player.

Do you know if Steve or Jimmy are still alive? They as a football team were outstanding to watch. Yours

Robert Moore

Ed note: neither Steve or Jimmy are on my distribution list - does any member have contact with them?

I Shall be there in spirit

GREAT to hear from you, and very interesting to hear what is happening to 23 Regiment.

I am somewhat disabled and unable to attend any of these functions unless a miracle happens. The mind is still just working at present! I would wish my personal greetings to be passed on to all concerned especially the Regiment or Group as it was in my day!

I served in two companies of the Group and was 2 i/c. I remember especially the first parade we held for the Duke of Gloucester and all that went with it.

So sorry that I cannot attend personally but I shall be there in spirit. All the very best
Mike Grinnell-Moore



Only British soldier to go on both the Bruneval and St Nazaire raids and he joined as a Pioneer

I FOUND this letter someone photo copied it to me. It is from one of our Pioneer Mags of the past:

The Bruneval Raid

This was the daring and successful raid 27 February 1942 on the German occupied French coast when a small force composed of all three services physically seized vital components of a German secret radar device, at the same time providing of much need morale boost to the whole country and empire.

This raid is very adequately described in the PAN paper-back of the title George Miller and there is one very interesting facet affecting our Corps.

A German born member of the British Army accompanied the raiding party to act as interpreter and this man, to be known only as Private Newman, was dressed in the uniform of a Private in the Pioneer Corps.

The book does not state he was a Pioneer but surely the most likely explanation is that he was a member of one of the so-called 'Alien' Company's. These, with the exception of officers and senior NCOs were composed of non-British nationals either northern European or south European.

There is no mention in the War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps of this episode and would be interesting if anyone can provide further confirmation that the Pioneers were involved.

CC Gower
(Capt. Retd)

I found him.

13081753 Pte Peter Nagel PC
Peter enlisted in the army at Richborough on 8 March 1940 as a private in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps (AMPC), number 13081753 and was sent to No. 3 Centre, 93rd Company at Codford near Salisbury.

His address at the time was given as 35 Lowndes Street London SW1.

His religion was given as Church of England, which was very typical as European Jews in British Forces were encouraged to hide their Jewish background in case of capture by the Nazis. Peter's justified claim to fame is that he was the only British soldier to go on both the Bruneval and St. Nazaire Paratroop/Commando raids in World War II.

Peter retired in September 1979 but sadly fell ill with an aggressive form of skin cancer in the early 1980s and died of a brain tumor on September 25, 1983, aged only 67. Peter was cremated on September 30, 1983 and his ashes scattered in the Glade woodland area at Gilroes cemetery.

He had remained a member of the 2nd Paratroop Association (67) and several veterans attended his funeral where they placed a Union Jack flag on his coffin.

His obituary (69) appeared in the Leicester Mercury on September 28, 1983, page 5 – describing him as a local war hero and showing a partially blurred photo.

Taff Teague

Ed Note: Found a photo, Peter is pictured on the right.

See you at the reunion Derek



■ Photo of Derek, Remembrance Day 2013

Pictures: Derek Luker

COULD I once again thank you for our latest Journal, it seems to get better every time I receive it, I also take two other Regimental Journals (no names no pat drills) and ours is second to none.

I would also like to thank the photographer, I believe it's your son, I really enjoy looking through the photos to see who I can recognise, though there are very few of the lads I did recognise this time, but I did see one of my old

Musketeers friends, Mr George Pringle.

I was so sorry to have missed this year's Reunion again, I think it must be four years I've booked and paid for but have been unable to attend. Let's hope I have better luck next year, I am hoping my daughter will bring me.

Many thanks for your company and help over more years that I wish to remember old comrade and best wishes to your family.

Derek (Taffy) Luker

the Pioneer

■ HI Norman, just thought I would drop you a line and see if I have found the mouse, I think it is on page 66 the pic there are what looks like 2 barrels its hiding behind the 1st one I hope. **Tony Lunn**

Ed note: wrong - keep looking

■ SORRY we did not get to Grantham this weekend but we are moving home on Thursday 31 Oct, so things are a bit hectic at the moment. The first thing we do when the latest magazine arrives is to get the bad news out of the way and it is so sad to hear of the passing of so many old friends. Alan Evans, Joe Smillie, George Pugh and Tony McCormick we spent hours walking around Kineton when were on Dog Section. That's all for now will be touch soon.

Terry Burden

■ DEAR Norman, Very much enjoyed the last magazine, thank you. You and your son are doing an amazing job - as always! **Col (ret'd) GR Cooper**

■ MANY members are ex National Servicemen - articles about Pioneer Corps in the UK during the 1950s and 1960s required, less World War 2 articles please.

Ex Cpl AJ Allen
(71 and 260 Coys)

Ed note: I can only publish what is supplied to me or what I can find, how about you submitting an article, with photos if possible.

■ SIR, many thanks for sending the Pioneer, I really enjoy reading and keeping up with what's going in the corps. I would love to be able to attend your functions but unfortunately due to poor health am not in that position to do so, however. my thoughts are with you all good luck in all you do

R Worthington
ex Sgt RPC

■ THANK YOU for your speedy reply on my grandad, I now feel close to him with the information you gave. **Sarah Lyons.**



Write in or email us...

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



If World War One was a bar fight



Germany, Austria and Italy are standing together in the middle of a pub when Serbia bumps into Austria and spills Austria's pint.

Austria demands Serbia buy it a whole new suit because of the new beer stains on its trouser leg.

Germany expresses its support for Austria's point of view.

Britain recommends that everyone calm down a bit.

Serbia points out that it can't afford a whole suit, but offers to pay for the cleaning of Austria's trousers.

Russia and Serbia look at Austria.

Austria asks Serbia who it's looking at.

Russia suggests that Austria should leave its little brother alone.

Austria inquires as to whose army will assist Russia in doing so.

Germany appeals to Britain that France has been looking at it, and that its sufficiently out of order that Britain not intervene.

Britain replies that France can look at who it wants to, that Britain is looking at Germany too, and what is Germany going to do about it?

Germany tells Russia to stop looking at Austria, or Germany will render Russia incapable of such action anymore.

Britain and France ask Germany whether it's looking at anyone.

Germany rolls up its sleeves, looks at France, and punches Belgium.

France and Britain punch Germany. Austria punches Russia. Germany punches Britain and France with one hand and Russia with the other.

Russia throws a punch at Germany, but misses and nearly falls over. Japan calls over from the other side of the room that it's on Britain's side, but stays there. Italy surprises everyone by punching Austria.

Austria punches Turkey, and gets punched back. There are no hard feelings because Britain made Austria do it.

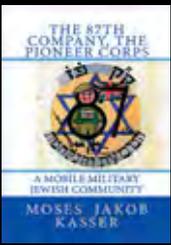
France gets thrown through a plate glass window, but gets back up and carries on fighting. Russia gets thrown through another one, gets knocked out, suffers brain damage, and wakes up with a complete personality change.

Italy throws a punch at Austria and misses, but Austria falls over anyway. Italy raises both fists in the air and runs round the room chanting.

America waits till Germany is about to fall over from sustained punching from Britain and France, then walks over and smashes it with a barstool, then pretends it won the fight all by itself.

By now all the chairs are broken and the big mirror over the bar is shattered. Britain, France and America agree that Germany threw the first punch, so the whole thing is Germany's fault.

While Germany is still unconscious, they go through its pockets, steal its wallet, and buy drinks for all their friends.



87 Company

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

HISTORY books tend to describe what happened, but the thoughts, feelings and the day-to-day details are missing. This book fills a little of the gap at least as far as the German Jews who served in the Pioneer Corps in the Second World War are concerned.

Moses Jakob Kasser arrived in England in March 1939 as a refugee from Nazi Germany. When the war broke out, he volunteered to serve in the British army and was placed in the 87th Company of the Alien Pioneer Corps together with a number of other Jewish volunteers with a German background. He was ultra-orthodox and his lifetime of service to Anglo Jewry began in a very small way when he became the unofficial Jewish chaplain to his unit. A number of his wartime sermons and some of the artwork they used for services and other commemorations have survived

and what he had to say then is as valid today as it was then. This book also contains copies of some of his correspondence in their original English, German, Hebrew and Yiddish providing a treasure trove of material for further research. I did this after long deliberation because in this form the book is an educational resource for many different types of projects. I have only translated some of the letters and draft letters where they clarify some of the situations in the writings.

This book also describes a number of incidents including what happened after the official Jewish Chaplain had the audacity to repeat his previous year's Yom Kippur sermon on the following Rosh Hashanah and accidentally omitted a page without noticing, while his audience did and that led to some 'fighting in Britain'.

**THE 87TH COMPANY, THE PIONEER CORPS
A MOBILE MILITARY JEWISH COMMUNITY**
by Pte Moses Jakob Kasser
Editor-in-Chief Dr Joseph Kasser
ISBN 1493777564

Europe goes to war

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

IN 1914, Europe plunged into the twentieth century's first terrible act of self-immolation – what was then called 'The Great War'. On the eve of its centenary, Max Hastings seeks to explain both how the conflict came about and what befell millions of men and women during the first months of strife.

He finds the evidence overwhelming that Austria and Germany must accept principal blame for the outbreak. While what followed was a vast tragedy, he argues passionately against the 'poets view', that the war was not worth winning. It was vital to the freedom of Europe, he says, that the Kaiser's Germany

should be defeated.

His narrative of the early battles will astonish those whose images of the war are simply of mud, wire, trenches and steel helmets. Hastings describes how the French army marched into action amid virgin rural landscapes, in uniforms of red and blue, led by mounted officers, with flags flying and bands playing.

The bloodiest day of the entire Western war fell on 22 August 1914, when the French lost 27,000 dead.

Four days later, at Le Cateau, the British fought an extraordinary action against the oncoming Germans, one of the last of its kind in history. In October, at terrible cost they held the allied line against massive German assaults in the first battle of Ypres.

Throwing empty beer bottles at the enemy

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: Supplied

BEYOND the Legend is the authorised biography of William (Bill) Speakman, who was awarded one of only four Victoria Crosses for action in the Korean War.

It covers his sometimes controversial life, from his childhood in Altrincham, Cheshire, to his later life in South Africa – about which little has been known previously.

Authors Derek Hunt and John Mullholland also explore the myth of the 'beer bottle VC' (in which Speakman was said to have fended off the Chinese Communist Army by throwing empty beer bottles at them after they ran out of grenades), bring to light what really happened on United Hill in November 1951.

Speakman held the attacking Chinese army at bay for over four hours and led a final charge that allowed his company to withdraw from the hill.

After Korea, he saw active service in Malaya, Borneo and Aden before retiring from the army, with the rank of Sergeant, in 1968.

Bill Speakman, despite his physical size, is a shy and modest man and does not seek attention and rarely talks about himself.

Although he has been mentioned in several books about the VC and the Korean War, he has never contributed to a biography or written his memoirs.

The authors have disproved all the myths surrounding his life and how he won his Victoria Cross, as well as giving an account of the Victoria Cross action in his own words.

BEYOND THE LEGEND
by Derek Hunt & John Mullholland
ISBN 978-0-7524-9430-2



The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

DUNBAR JJ (JIMMY) 23247064 2 OCT 13

(Aged 76) SSgt. Northampton

Jimmy served from Feb 61 until Feb 83 and will be remembered for his time at Northampton as a recruit instructor.

PARKER NORMAN 22965130 7 OCT 13

(Aged 78) Cpl. Bicester

Norman served from 1953 until 1982.

ROSSNEY HAROLD HERBERT

13800791 AND 13046536

(Aged 93) 13 OCT 13

Harold served from 3 Jan 40 until 1946 in 137 and 93 Coys PC before transferring to 32 Graves Registration Team.

Helen Fry wrote on Facebook: We remember ex- 'alien' Pioneer from WW2 Harry Rossney who passed away on Sunday 13 Oct 13 at the age of 93.

Harry was assigned after D-Day from the Pioneer Corps to the Graves Registration Unit, and as a signwriter, wrote the names on the crosses of our fallen soldiers in the cemetery in Bayeaux.

A fine man and remembered with fondness by all who knew him - he was passionate that the stories of veterans should be told.

WHIPPS THOMAS EDWARD 15 OCT 13

(Aged 76)

Pte Orpington. Tom served in 251 Coy in Bicester from 1956 - 1958.

RATNER HENRY ALBERT JOSEPH

13090867 23 OCT 13

(Aged 93) Pte. Ilkeston, Derby

Served in the Pioneer Corps from 10 Jul 41 to 11 Apr 45 before transferring to the Green Howards. Landed on D Day in Sicily, Italy and Normandy with 243 Coy PC. In Normandy this Coy were working with Rhinos, an exert from the War Diary shows the following:

"Landed in NORMANDY. Disembarkation hindered by the state of the sea and being dependant on availability of shore room, and safety for landing vehicles which took place at various times.

A number of RHINOS were put out of action by standing beach obstacles and mines.

Pte Cheavins killed following a mine explosion under a RHINO loaded with ammunition and petrol.

Ptes Hunt, Gascoigne, Palmer & Bradford - injured and evacuated.

RHINOs proceeded from LSTs to shore fully laden and commenced ferry service between shore and LSTs."

SYMONDS RONALD BERTRAM 22193876 27 OCT 13 (Aged 82)

Pte. Caister on Sea.

Served 3 No 49 - 25 Oct 51 in 71 Coy RPC.

MARTIN LC 23531674 8 AUG 13

(Aged 78) Pte. Crewe.

Served 1960 - 1969

PETHERAM REX (7937364) 21 AUG 13

(Aged 93) Pte. Llantarnam, Cwmbran.

Served in RAC from Feb 41 and Pioneer Corps from 9 Jun 42 to 11 Sep 46 with 44 Coy PC/

ROBERTS JOHN ELWYN (13113941) 10 MAY 13

(Aged 86) Pte. Rotherham

Served 9 Apr 42 to 8 Jun 46.

STEBBEDS STANLEY JOHN (14546894)

27 NOV 13

(Aged 89) Pte Stow-cum-Quy, Cambs

Served from 18 Feb 43 - 11 Jan 46

LANAWAY WILLIAM THOMAS (271623) 29

DEC 13

(aged 101) Lt Col. Redhill, Surrey.

Served from 1943 until 1946 (recalled for short period in 1956) Landed with 170 Coy PC on D Day - first landings on NAN Sector White Beach.

We published details of his 100th birthday in the April 2012 Newsletter.

His granddaughter Lesley wrote: "The family are taking comfort in the fact that he did not suffer & that he led a very fulfilling & active life right up until the very end.

After finding out more about his time with the Royal Pioneer Corps & then talking to him recently about it.

I know that he was very proud to have served in the Royal Pioneer Corps & spoke very highly of the brave men that he fought alongside in WW2."

TURNBULL GEORGE ROBERT 24116999 26 DEC

13

(Aged 67) Capt Coalville, Leics.

Served from 1968 - 1993, was commissioned in 1988.

BELGUM DON 487810 8 FEB 14

(Aged 76) Capt, Wasaga Beach, Canada.

He joined the Corps in late 1969 from the Royal Military Police and his first posting was to 522 Coy at Kineton.

He was then posted to 908 PCLU and was one of the last to leave the Arabian Gulf as he and Capt Bill Elliott (assisted by Sgt Dennis McKeown) remained to carry out the final paying of civilian staff.

He returned to 522 Coy before being posted to A Det 5 PCLU in Hannover, where he worked extremely hard with the young (he was a scoutmaster).

His final tour was as an instructor in the Pioneer School at Northampton.

GODDARD ROBERT 22600746 5 FEB 14

(Aged 80) Sgt Eastleigh, Hants.

Joined the Association in 1957.

MORAN SJ 24031648 25 FEB 14

(Aged 66) LCpl Bolton, Lancs.

Ex Dog Section Kineton.

FARRAR JAMES 23424789 8 MAR 14

(Aged 75) Leeds.

Former Dog Handler 522 Coy.



RYALL JOHN BLEADEN CBE

Brigadier John Ryall died at Bournemouth on 27 October 2013 at the age of 92.

In February 1939 he joined the Territorial Army – the 9th Battalion The Middlesex Regiment, which was later re-badged to the Royal Artillery - he and served with this unit in the UK and Egypt.

He was originally commissioned as a Quartermaster in June 1946 but later this was converted to a Combatant Commission

In 1947 he returned to the UK and after a short spell with HQ 71 Group, Royal Pioneer Corps, was posted in August 1948 as Staff Captain, Labour Directorate, HQ BAOR. A tour as Adjutant 13 Group followed.

In March 1953 he returned to Egypt where he served with Mauritian and East African Companies until 1956. This was followed by service with RPC Companies serving in the UK.

He returned to Germany in 1958 to serve with a Mobile Civilian Labour Group and a Pioneer Civil Labour Unit.

In March 1962 he was posted to Cyprus to Command 518 Company and he moved with that unit to Aden.

He left Aden in 1963 to attend the Diploma Course in Personnel Management at Strathclyde University. Fresh from Strathclyde he was again posted to BAOR to Command 4 Pioneer Civil Labour Unit, where he remained until 1967 when he was appointed Second-in-Command at 13 Group.

In 1969 he was appointed Assistant Director Army Pioneers and Labour where he remained until being promoted Colonel and posted to HQ BAOR as Director. Throughout his service he was a devout church-goer and an active supporter of Garrison Churches wherever he served. He had an abiding interest in Corps 'family' matters.

He was promoted Brigadier and appointed Director Army Pioneers and Labour in March 1975.

In 1978 he retired from the Army and for a short time took up an appointment with a Building Society until being appointed Bursar of a school in Berkshire. In retirement he campaigned actively on the subject of Forces' Pensions writing tirelessly to MPs on the subject.

His son John read the following at his Church Service:

As a family we have been very touched by the genuine affection and esteem in which Dad was held, and this has been of great comfort to us at this time.

Dad was born in 1922 in Hendon and was the youngest of three brothers. He was blessed with a golden voice and regularly sang with the choir at his local church of St Albans and St Michael in Golders Green. He left school at 14 and followed his eldest brother into Estate Agency and quickly learned the art of selling and bartering, something that stayed with him all his days. He was a savvy and frugal man who would always head straight for the reduced counter at Waitrose, and used to enjoy shopping at the value shops such as Lidl, G&T's, and the 99p shop. Dad always loved the challenge of getting a real bargain.

First and foremost Dad was a family man who enjoyed nothing more than being surrounded by his children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. He married Joyce in 1942 and was a good husband to her for 62 years until her death in 2005. For the



■ John Bleaden Ryall CBE, 3rd from left

Picture: RPCA Archive

last 5 years of her life Mum had developed Alzheimer's. Dad became her full time carer and was absolutely devoted to her despite her illness becoming more and more debilitating. They loved to go on cruises and Dad and Mum made a good many lifelong friends on board ship and made the most of their retirement together. After Mum had passed away Dad carried on cruising with the longer round the world cruises being the order of the day. On one such cruise he was joined at Brisbane by Sue's Mum Sylv who was introduced as "a friend that had just been released from prison". Some passengers may have thought he was being serious instead of being the practical joker that he was. He became hugely popular on board ship and spent hours strolling round the deck, as seemingly everybody wanted to stop and talk to him.

Dad led a very distinguished career in the British Army, rising from the rank of Private to Brigadier. In 1977 he was awarded the CBE for services to the military, and considered himself highly honoured. As young children growing up we were lucky enough to go to places that Dad would be stationed at, including Aden, Cyprus and Germany. On one of their tours Dad was tasked with looking after us children when Mum went into hospital for a short while. We have very fond memories of the fireman's breakfast he used to cook for us, and wondered if the name had something to do with the burnt offering that would be served up. Mum and Dad were well suited to Army life as Dad in particular was a very gregarious character, and Mum the perfect hostess.

In August 2011 we were devastated to learn that Dad had been diagnosed with Pancreatic Cancer and given just 6 months to live. Dad being Dad had other ideas of course and the family were never convinced that Dad ever really thought that he had cancer at all. Perhaps this was in part due to an almost negligible understanding of medical matters, and his belief that soldiers are made of strong stuff. Thinking that he only had a few months to live Tom and Helen made Dad very welcome at their home in Derbyshire where in the end he stayed for 21 months, with Tom and Helen doing the most fantastic job in looking after him. In May of this year Dad decided that the time was right to move back to his flat in Bournemouth, whereupon he proceeded to renew acquaintances at all his favourite

shops and Banks in Winton, getting there by mobility scooter.

Dad turned 90 in 2012 and a large family get together was held for him in Bournemouth in his honour. Despite his failing health Dad regaled us with his risqué jokes and limericks and I'm sure his booming voice could be heard three streets away. He was always in his element at these dos, and his naturally flirtatious leanings were always evident with any lady that he came across. This also applied to his various stays in hospital up and down the country. He was fond of saying that he was going to live to be a 100 and be a miserable old b, and although he never quite made it Dad had a wonderful life and was loved by all that came across him. He was always made to feel especially welcome by the Church and congregation of St Augustan's, and it is very fitting that his memorial service is being held here today.

Dad was a larger than life character who will be sorely missed. But we are thankful that he is no longer in pain, and able to re-join the loved ones that went before him. As someone who for years had expressed a wish for his body to be donated to Medical Science, Dad would have thought it highly amusing as well as being highly privileged to learn that his remains have been accepted by the Royal College of Surgeons in London.



■ John Bleaden Ryall CBE

Picture: RPCA Archive

The family received the following letter from Lt Col (Retd) John Rayner:

Although I knew your father was gravely ill I was very saddened to hear of his passing.

I remember very vividly his 'phoning me in November 1969, introducing himself and inviting me to consider a regular commission in the Royal Pioneers.

I had just come to the end of my Short Service Commission in the Gunners and was exploring a number of career options, most of them rather fanciful, I'm afraid to say.

Your father invited me to join the Director's Study Period in early December and stay for the annual formal dinner.

I have to say that your father's direct influence upon me was profound: I saw a man; a Lieutenant Colonel then and me a subaltern, who was the most considerate officer I had ever met.

I later learned that he would take to heart everyone else's problems at a personal level and offer good advice or better still, do something about it if he could.

I liked him enormously and 'signed-up', as they say.

Apparently I was the first of a 'new breed' as he called us, whatever that meant but I can say that several of my contemporaries joined from other regiments as a result of his initiatives and we were a body of souls that later directed the Corps down a different but successful path in later years that culminated in it becoming part of the RLC.

The result was that 23 Pioneer Regiment was and still is held in huge esteem throughout the Army (sadly for not much longer). But it was your father who set that ball rolling and the Pioneers of today have a great deal to thank him for.

I only worked for John once and that was in Rheindahlen in 1972/73 as a Staff Captain.

He was a great director because we all worked well together and achieved a great deal under his light touch.

I must say that he seemed to overlook my many misdemeanours and was always kind to me.

I regret that I will be unable to attend your father's memorial service as I am about to depart on holiday abroad with my family until the end of the month.

My best wishes to all the family at this difficult time.

With kindest regards
John Rayner

**General Sir John Stibbon KCB OBE
Colonel Commandant
Royal Pioneer Corps 1986 - 1991**

General Stibbon died on 9th February at the age of 79. He was educated at Portsmouth Southern Grammar School, the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst and the Royal Military College of Science.

He became one of the Corps' most distinguished officers.

He was commissioned into the Royal Engineers in August 1954 and subsequently graduated from RMCS as BSC(Eng).

He served widely in RE Field and training units, in UK and Germany, including with the RE Wing at RAC Centre, Bovington.

He commanded 28 Amphibious Engineer Regt at Hameln; was later appointed Assistant Military Secretary, and then to Command 20 Armd Bde.

After studying at RCDS, he was

appointed Commandant at RMCS Shrivenham.

During this tour he was responsible for privatisation of the College to become a wing of Cranfield Institute of Technology.

He brought RAF degree students into the college and initiated recognition of Army Staff courses to second degree level.

During this time student numbers increased from 1200 to over 5000 from 37 different countries.

He became Colonel Commandant and President, RPC Association during this period.

He was then appointed Master General of Ordnance where he oversaw the entry into service of the Main Battle Tank (Challenger), replacements for 155mm self-propelled artillery, (AS90), Multi Launched Rocket Systems, (MLRS), new helicopter family and B Vehicle fleets and A/Tk weaponry.

During this period he was a member of the Army Board which approved the continuation of the RPC manning of the Weapon support Group companies within 8 Regt RCT. During his many visits to the Corps Gen Stibbon was always keen to be among soldiers and to talk with them, invariably in an amusing, animated and detailed style, about their sporting and training activities.

He had an eye for detail in matters concerning the Association and was deeply interested in ex-service affairs.

He was Chairman of the Governors of the Royal Star and Garter Home, becoming its Vice President in 1996.

He was Chairman of the Gordon School Foundation between 1982 and 1998.

He was Commissioner of the Duke of York's Royal Military School 1993 - 1998, and became a Freeman of the City of London in 1992.

He had a lifetime interest in sport, received colours at Sandhurst and RMCS and played soccer until the age of 46.



■ Gen Sir John Stibbon KCB OBE Picture: RPCA Archive

He was Chairman of RE Corps Soccer, President and Past Chairman of Army and Combined Services Soccer.

He was Hon Vice President of the Football Association between 1988 and 1992.

In 1993 he was appointed Chief Royal Engineer, a post he held until 1999.

He was a collector of fossils from his service days and other visits all over the world. He had half a ton of them!

He was an accomplished water colourist and exhibited regularly with the Armed Forces Art Society.

He remarked that he achieved what he did in spite of never having attended Staff College!

He is survived by his wife Jean, and daughters Jane and Emma.

**GOODE GW (BILL) 23926722 30 DEC 13.
(Aged 76) Cpl Worcester**

Served as a National Serviceman from 15 Mar 56 to 15 Mar 58 including service in Suez crisis.

He was a regular attender at Pioneer Reunion Weekends and was Chairman of the 39/93 Club.

His niece, Caroline Beale, posted the poem below on Facebook.



■ Bill Goode at the Reunion Weekend

A dear man we loved so much,
Was taken from our lives,
The Lord he opened up his
arms and asked you to go back
home, We never had the
chance for proper Cheerios,
Heaven has gained an angel,
While we have lost a friend,
You did a lot for everyone and
we never will forget,
The pain we felt the day you
left was of sadness not regret,
We know The Lord ment well
as he only takes the best,
He knew you was very tired
and needed a well earned rest,
One day we will meet again
which will take away the pain,
Until that day my dear friend,
We'll continue to miss you so

R.I.P my sweet uncle Bill

Picture: Paul Brown



Long Lost Trails

The following are trying to re-establish contact... can you help? If so please get in touch.

NUENEN 1944

As a member of the local history association of Nuenen, the Netherlands.

I am interested to get in contact with any relatives of the following RPC members that were quartered in Nuenen in 1944.

- 1. Lt J Cobb, 95 Maudsley Street, Blackburn
- 2. Lt W Ingham, 20 Joshua Street, Todmorden
- 3. Capt KF Lewis, Midland Bank Chicester
- 4. EO Duggan, The Moorlands, Rothbury, Northumberland

They all belonged to the 265 Company and the addresses given are the last know addresses, given to us by those people in whose houses they stayed.

In that year 1944 the southern part of the Netherlands was already liberated, but the northern part was still was under German occupation.

The reason these men stayed here had either to do with helping to repair war damage in this area or was prior to any pioneer work to be done at the frontline, that was located from mid 1944 upto mid 1945 some tenths of kilometer north of here at the big rivers.

Contact: j.kamp@onsnet.nu
(Ed note: EO Duggan was OC until 10 Jun 45 and KF Lewis was 2IC until then when he was promoted Maj and appointed OC, Cobb and Ingham were Lts).

521 COY RPC

I was stationed at Bicester in 1970-72 before being posted to Aldershot and then Kineton.

I would like to make contact with anyone who remembers me from then. Contact David Elson on davidelson54@yahoo.co.uk

24470414 CPL DAVID DOUGLAS CHAMBER

His son Frankie Franklin is trying to make contact with his father. Contact Frankie Franklin via Facebook or RPC Association.

PUTTING NAMES TO PHOTOGRAPHS

Mr Ian Gibson is trying to put names to photographs taken during his service. Out of the three photos at the top of the page he can name Pte Duncan in the front centre of the top left photo - can you help?





And Finally...

Show your appreciation and support at the Disbandment Parade, a former Commanding Officer and some Sergeants...

Report: Norman Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archive

IN THE past 22 years 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC have looked after the Association and its members very well, so let us show our appreciation and support them in this their final year.

Let us march proudly with them as they march through Bicester on 27 July and spectate at the Disbandment Parade on 26 September.

It would look good if we all wear our berets, I do have some spare used berets (and old type cap badges), if you would like one please let me know approx size - first come first served. I will, however, expect you to pay the postage.

Let us make the final year with the Regiment one to remember.

DAVID a former CO of 23 Pioneer Regiment was in his early 50's, retired and started a second career. However, he just couldn't seem to get to work on time.

Every day he was 5, 10, 15 and sometimes 30 minutes late. But he was a good worker, real sharp, so the Boss was in a quandary about how to deal with it. Finally, one day he called him into the office for a talk.

"David, I have to tell you, I like your work ethic, you do a bang-up job, but you're being late so often is quite bothersome and other workers are complaining."

"Yes, I know Boss, and I am working on it."

"Well good, you are a team player. That's what I like to hear. It's odd though, you're coming in late. I know you're retired from the Army. What did they say if you came in late there?"

"They said, "Good morning, Colonel."

ASERGEANT was addressing a squad of 20 and said: "I have a nice easy job for the laziest man here. Put up your hand if you are the laziest." 19 men raised their hands, and the sergeant asked the other man "why didn't you raise your hand?" The man replied: "Too much trouble, sarge." (Note: that man was Rob Aspinall in training!).

THE PROVOST Sergeant walks into a bar. Sitting himself down, he tells the bartender, "Quick, pour me a drink, before the trouble starts. The bartender pours a drink and watches as the man quickly downs it.

Putting the glass on the bar, the Provost says, "Give me another drink before the trouble starts."

The bartender pours another glass and the Provost drinks it as quickly as he had the first, before asking for another, again adding, "... before the trouble starts."

After several rounds of this the bartender says, "Look Provost, you've been in here ten minutes and you keep talking about trouble starting. Just when is this "trouble" going to start?"

The Provost looks at the bartender and says, "The trouble starts just as soon as you find out that I ain't got any money."

AGROUP of Sergeants and a group of Army Officers take a train to a conference. Each Officer holds a ticket. But the entire group of Sergeants has bought only one ticket for a single passenger.

The Officers are just shaking their heads and are secretly pleased that the arrogant Sergeants will finally get what they deserve.

Suddenly one of the Sergeants calls out: "The conductor is coming!". At once, all the Sergeants jump up and squeeze into one of the toilets, they had used this trick many times.

The conductor checks the tickets of the Officers. When he notices that the toilet is occupied he knocks on the door and says: "Ticket, please!"

One of the Sergeants slides the single ticket under the doors and the conductor continues merrily on his round.

For the return trip the Officers decide to use the same trick.

They buy only one ticket for the entire group but they are baffled as they realise that the Sergeants didn't buy any tickets at all.

After a while one of the Sergeants announces again:

"The conductor is coming!" Immediately all the Officers race to a toilet and lock themselves in.

All the Sergeants leisurely walk to the other toilet. Before the last Sergeant enters the toilet, he knocks on the toilet occupied by the Officers and says:

"Ticket, please!"

And the moral of the story? Officers like to use the methods of the Sergeants, but they don't really understand them.

SSGT Paul Monaghan was surrounded by a large enemy force. He was running low on ammo, he was getting very nervous and sweating profusely. Just then, his SSM (Daz Moore) kicked in the door to his room. He screamed "Hey Crazy!! Get off the damn playstation and get down to the MT!!"



WITH THE CHINESE LABOUR CORPS
NCO "Don't yer know yer own bloomin number yet Chinaman (proudly) "One-Seven-Six"

Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- Forthcoming events
- Your stories
- Your Letters
- Press Cuttings
- News
- Report on Disbandment Parade and Reunion Weekend
- Photo Gallery of this year's events
- Reviews
- And much more!



Association Shop



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£2.50



▲ **Tie Pin**
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£2.00



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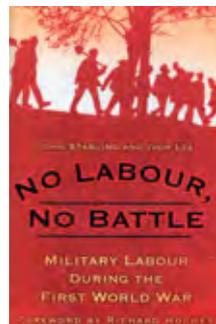


◀ **Blazer Badge**
silk & wire
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◀ **"Royal Pioneers 1945-1993"**
by Major Bill Elliott

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

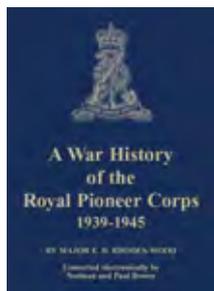


◀ **"No Labour, No Battle"**
Military Labour during the first World War
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◀ **Blazer Badge**
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◀ **"A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-45"**
by Major E H Rhodes Wood

This book, long out of print, is now available on CD-Rom at a cost of
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◀ **Pioneer Active Polo Shirt**
Top quality. Available in Black, Red, Green and a women's cut Electric Pink!
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£145





6 June 2014

70th anniversary of the start of D-Day

Very little has been said about the **Royal Pioneer Corps** units that landed on D Day. Yet the Pioneers played an essential role in that and other campaigns and suffered many casualties.

The only full account of the corps is **A War History of the Royal Pioneer Corps 1939-1945** by Maj E H Rhodes-Wood.

The following is an excerpt from it... "With each group that landed on the beaches of Normandy on D-Day was a **Pioneer Corps Group**. Their task was to clear mines and underwater obstacles, unload landing craft, build ammunition and other dumps, construct beach tracks to carry the guns, Armour and miscellaneous vehicles to the firm land beyond, act as stretcher bearers, collect and evacuate the wounded, guard prisoners and, if necessary, join the assault forces in the battle."

There were **6,700 Pioneers in Normandy on D Day**, some 6% of the total. They laid the first 500 miles of the PLUTO fuel line to Germany, produced smoke over strategic targets, buried the dead, guarded prisoners, moved stores, and made roads and airfields.

4 August 2014

100th anniversary of UK joining World War I

Described as the "War to End all Wars" it took only 21 years for World War Two to start.

The UK lost nearly 1 million servicemen in WW1 and over 2 million injured (German figures are nearly 2 million killed and over 4 million injured).

The Germans expected a quick victory using the the Schlieffen Plan this envisaged a rapid German mobilisation, disregard for the neutrality of Luxembourg, Belgium and the Netherlands and an overwhelming sweep of the powerful German right wing southwest through Belgium and Northern France.

However, this ended with four years of Trench Warfare.

The Labour Corps was formed in 1917 to stop the wastage of labour and became the largest Corps in the Army (approx 10% of the total size of the Army).

The Corps always suffered from its treatment as something of a second class organisation: for example, the men who died are commemorated under their original Regiment, with Labour Corps being secondary.

17 October 2014

75th anniversary of the formation of the Pioneer Corps

In WWII the **Labour Corps** was reformed but due to the association with Labour it was named **Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps**.

Direct enlistment into the Corps began that day. In December 1939 a Director of Auxiliary Pioneer Services was appointed who worked under the Director of Recruiting and Organisation.

Enemy Aliens were recruited into the **Pioneer Corps** and over 10,000 Germans, Austrians and Italians were recruited. Some fought in BEF in 1939 and 1940.

One in six soldiers was a Pioneer at the end of the Second World War, during which 14,444 Pioneers died.

Unfortunately in July 2012 it was decided under the Army 2020 review that the Pioneer CEG would be deleted and 23 Pioneer Regiment RLC would be disbanded (168 Pioneer Regiment RLC(V) has already been disbanded).

