

THE PIONEER



THE QUEUE FOR TEA

84 YEARS AGO THESE PIONEERS WERE QUEUING FOR A WELCOME CUP OF TEA. TODAY PIONEERS STILL QUEUE FOR TEA AT VARIOUS BREAKFAST CLUBS!

PAGE 4



Front Cover

'The Queue for Tea'
Read more on Page

Picture: Fox Photos
Colourised: Doug Banks



Back Cover

Reunion Weekend 2024

Picture: Paul Brown

EDITORIAL

FELLOW PIONEERS, it's been a good year from my perspective. I'm encouraged by recent membership numbers which hovers around the 2800 mark. This is in no small part due to the work of Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes who has been his usual proactive self.

Thank you Billy on behalf of the whole association.

I also recognise some of the tremendous events we've had over the year. Thank you to all those who help in some way. It wouldn't happen without your efforts. I will only choose to highlight our annual reunion and AGM which was incredibly well run and incredibly well attended. It demonstrates to me just how vibrant a community we have and that the appetite is still there.

Things like our membership numbers and appetite for face to face events make my job as your President remarkably easy. Quite rightly the RLC have increased scrutiny on budgets and contributions to events. I have never had any difficulty in justifying any of ours. It is clear we are a force for good and serving our membership well.

It also allows me to maintain a line I've held since disbanding the Regiment a decade or so

ago now. That line is that I won't entertain a convergence with the RLC until the last Pioneer leaves service (and we're not there yet) and could be considerably later. Having your support and an active membership just helps reinforce that message so thank you, again it makes my job easier than it might be otherwise.

Lastly, I'm always conscious that amongst our numbers, there are likely to be those who life has dealt a few hard lessons and who perhaps aren't in the best of places. We owe it to each other to look after our membership in a way that we did when we served. You are all in places where you might spot someone who could do with a helping hand. Please don't hesitate to have those (sometimes awkward) conversations and please reach out to Billy if you think we can do anything as an organisation. We are all proud people - it's in our DNA - but asking or offering help when it's needed isn't something to be frowned upon. In fact I would encourage it. Please help me look after those who might need it.

As ever, thanks for all you do. I enjoy our conversations when we get a chance and hearing your stories via the letter when we don't. Stay safe.

Brigadier David Clouston MBE

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STOP PRESS

■ 39/93 Club continues to meet, but their numbers are low and require your support (Contact Les Rowley).

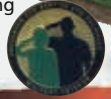
STOP PRESS

■ Remember Brian Randle? He served 518 during 55-60, George Burdet, Terry Humphreys, Rod Regus, Billy Heaps or anyone else?

STOP PRESS

■ If you can sell more raffle tickets please let us know. Your help is greatly appreciated!

■ Mr Kevin Hilton was awarded the following coin by his CEO as recognition of his military service



HOPE hope you and your Families are all well and life continues to deliver more positives than negatives. 2024 has been a very busy but remarkable year for so many different reasons.

We've had many opportunities to celebrate together by attending many of the events laid on, whether that be through the Association or more locally to you via individual Pioneer groups. They give us the opportunity to pay our respects and remember those 1000's of brave men and women who ultimately lost their lives.

It's been 10 years in September since both 23 Pioneer and 168 Pioneer were disbanded and removed from the orbat. This isn't something we 'the Pioneers' would ever remember in a positive manner; it is vitally important that we never forget our proud and successful heritage. We must, as a collective continue to celebrate with pride, both the history of the RPC and the history throughout the 21 yrs of both 23 Pioneer Regt and 168 Pioneer Regt.

We witnessed many successful functions throughout 2024, with the 75th Reunion Weekend and 75th Officers' Dinner with record numbers in attendance. We recently topped off the year with well over 100 Pioneers in attendance at the National Service of

Remembrance 2024 in Whitehall, London.

It is sad to hear the names of those who have passed during the last 12 months; we should never forget them, may they all Rest in Peace.

It is pleasing to report 496 new members to the Association since our last newsletter with numbers increasing. There's many retired or Pioneers that have transferred cap badges who are not members so spread the word, it is FREE to join and I'll work hard in contacting these individuals and encourage them to join.

Functions continue to be delivered with the WOs & SNCOs Dinner being a success and the various branches continuing to deliver functions, with get-togethers all round the Country, so please support these activities.

Finally, our biggest success this year is encouraging the younger elements of the Pioneers to join the Association; this is imperative for longevity. We should continue to be proud of all those who have served under any 1 of the 3 different cap badges throughout our history, but for me, my main focus is on the collective Pioneer trade/history. Remember, "Once a Pioneer, always a Pioneer"!

Thank you for your continued support... Merry Christmas & Happy New Year in 2025.

Lt Col Billy Dilkes MBE (Retd)



Can you spot the mouse?

The winner of "Find the Cuneo Mouse" was Tony Lunn, the second year in a row!

A prize will be on its way to Kim and Tony.

It was of course on Josh Campbell on Page 15!

We had two correct answers this time, well done to Kim and Tony Lunn and Sue Thomas for spotting him!

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. Sword Beach was the codename of one of the five main landing beaches in Operation Neptune, the initial assault phase of Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy on 6 June 1944.

Cuneo also painted himself into the painting and he can be seen with his bicycle and his easel on the beach.

Pioneers played an essential role on D-Day and suffered many casualties.

26 Pioneer Companies went

ashore on 6th June 1944. By 1st August 1944 there were over 35,500 pioneers in Normandy. D-Day + 79 there were 231 Coys and over 68,000 men.

In most of his paintings Cuneo hid a small mouse (sometimes lifelike, sometimes cartoon-like) which was his trademark and somewhere in this newsletter we have hid a Cuneo mouse and it's not the one on this page!

They can be difficult to detect, and many people enjoy scouring his paintings to find one.

Entries should be submitted (by letter, email or telephone) by 31st January 2025.

Correct entries will go into a hat and the first one pulled out will win a prize!

Good luck.

PLEASE SUPPORT THE CHRISTMAS DRAW
Tickets are enclosed with this newsletter





■ THE Career Transition Partnership (CTP) is a partnering agreement between the Ministry of Defence and Right Management Ltd, who are global career development and outplacement specialists and part of the ManpowerGroup.

CTP provides resettlement services for those leaving the Royal Navy, Army, Royal Air Force and Marines. Regardless of time served, all members of the Armed Forces can benefit from CTP support when leaving Service. In addition, they operate as an intermediary service for employers wishing to hire Service leavers.

To date, they have assisted over 235,000 Service leavers with the transition to civilian life and supported thousands of organisations looking to employ ex-Service personnel.

CTP employment fairs connect employers with skilled and experienced individuals who have un-paralleled transferable skills in planning, communication, teamwork and leadership, along with adaptability, drive and resilience.

Find out more here <https://rightmanagement.co.uk/ctp>

■ THE 2024 General Election resulted in 39 MPs in Westminster with military backgrounds, a decrease from the 50 MPs with Armed Forces backgrounds elected in 2019.

The Labour Party, currently in government, has 13 MPs who are veterans or reservists, constituting about 3% of their members.

The Conservative Party, the main opposition, includes 17 veteran MPs, making up 14% of their cohort.

The Liberal Democrats have 8 former service members, representing 11% of their MPs in Westminster.

The Democratic Unionist Party has one male veteran MP.

Overall, veterans account for 6% of all MPs, a significant overrepresentation compared to their 1.5% proportion in the working-age population of England and Wales.

Within the Conservative Party, this overrepresentation is even more pronounced, with veterans comprising 14% of their MPs.

In terms of gender, of the 39 veteran MPs, 35 are male and only 4 are female. The Conservative Party's veteran MPs are exclusively male.

The Labour Party has a slightly more diverse composition with 10 male and 3 female veteran MPs. The Liberal Democrats have 7 male and 1 female veteran MP.

This highlights a gender imbalance in the representation of veterans across some political parties, though Labour's ratio is generally reflective of the male-dominated British forces at large.

Among those losing their seats were Defence Secretary Grant Shapps and Veterans Minister Johnny Mercer.

Breakfast Clubs

Have you been to a Veterans Breakfast Club before? If the answer is no, you don't know what you are missing!



■ Northampton Veterans Club - Conservative Club

Picture: Tom Appleyard

THE Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Clubs (AFVBC) is now the single largest veterans organisation in the UK, and membership growing weekly.

With over 500 clubs nationally and 15 overseas, the AFVBC seeks to end social isolation for veterans. The clubs bring people with a connection to the UK Armed Forces together and offers a chance to reminisce, share stories and interact with a community that is missed by most when leaving the Armed Forces.

The AFVBC is also conducting five pilot programmes in HM prisons across the UK, building a Armed Forces community within HM prisons. These pilot programmes help with social interaction, rehabilitation and a support structure for veterans who are currently within the criminal justice system.

Lindsay Beadnall from the AFVBC, said: The AFVBC acts as a beacon of hope and a landmark for those who are at HMP Stocken. It gives them a community, purpose, a chance to learn new skills. And somewhere to head to when they leave HMP Stocken. Our young veterans are gaining awards and are developing their skills for employment on their release. It gives most a second chance.

According to 2017 YouGov research: 41% of UK Armed Forces Veterans experienced loneliness or isolation post-Military

34% reported being overwhelmed by negative feelings

27% admitted to suicidal thoughts after leaving the Forces

Over 31% confessed they have only one or no close friends

53% were unlikely to discuss feelings of loneliness with family or close friends, implying limited support for such Veterans

The following were the main reasons for Veterans feeling lonely and isolated:

Losing touch with Armed Forces friends (41%)

Physical or mental health issues (33%)

Battling to relate to people in civilian life (23%)

Social isolation is one of the issues fuelling Veterans' poor mental health and suicide. Many, who joined the Armed Forces directly from school, can have difficulty in adjusting when they become civilians as adults.

"You're part of a machine," said Mr Hardman of Military service. "When you hit civilian life, problems start, because you feel different, have a different set of ethics and way of thinking."

'Return to the Tribe' is the AFVBC moniker (adopted from Sebastian Junger's TED Talk) – a sense of tribal belonging is hardwired into all of us. They also state it's not simply 'returning to civilian life'. Many Military leavers leave the only life they've known to become first-time civilians, where they're now not living with their 'tribe' and its familiar support system.

"It's every man for himself in civilian life," explained Mr Hardman of the huge cultural shift that often creates the issues which prompted him to found the AFVBC.

Often, the best remedy for Veterans facing social, life and personal challenges is



■ Bicester Pioneer Veterans, meeting up on a double decker bus!

Pictures: Al Batch

regular socialising with local people who have similar experiences. It's this kind of simple yet specific and accessible support that the AFVBC and their now global network aim to provide.

The clubs often reflect an ideal society. Older Veterans are valued and respected (in fact, care homes are bringing Veterans in their charge to clubs).

"Nowhere else will you see a 95-year-old D-Day Veteran and a 20-something Afghan Veteran exchanging quips and banter while eating breakfast together – one club has a 95-year-old German U Boat submariner attending regularly!" reported Mr Hardman.

When an older Veteran from a club passes on, it's not been uncommon to see a guard of honour, standard bearers and a bugler providing a proud send-off to that serviceperson.

According to Mr Hardman, starting an Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club in a community creates a ripple effect: "There are now 'Veterans Hubs', funded by local authorities, where there were none before."

Similarly, dedicated events and parades for celebrations such as Armed Forces Day and Remembrance Day are now being organised around AFVBC, and some clubs are interacting with local authorities to address welfare issues for local Veterans.

Excitingly, the breakfast club network is growing – they're now in New Zealand, Australia, Bulgaria and Thailand, and a French Veterans network is also emerging. Every month in 2023 brought reports of new breakfast clubs opening, with the AFC Wimbledon Foundation, Huddersfield, Burgess Hill, Buckie and Bridport clubs being just a few recent examples.

For Remembrance Month 2023, the AFVBC collaborated with London-based

Poppie's Fish and Chips in offering free fish and chips to all Armed Forces Veterans for the entirety of November 2023. This generous initiative expanded on the AFVBC's network in a new way and really showed the impact they're having.

A BBC News story from 14 February 2024 focused on Tom Ripley and Peter Higgins, who got involved with running several Yorkshire Veterans' breakfast clubs after they suffered with alcoholism and isolation respectively.

"They give us a focus – to get men out of their houses and talk," said Mr Ripley. "Because men don't talk, the risks are huge: isolation, self-harm and suicide risk are all fuelled by not talking to like-minded people." For Mr Higgins, "A breakfast club is about making sure nobody is left behind."

Several clubs have reported attendance from military charity representatives, who get to meet their members regularly and encourage Veterans to accept help and support. The clubs have created additional benefits for service personnel's families, including improved outlook, better social interaction and more opportunities.

And just recently, on 24 February 2024, the first official Bradford on Avon Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club took place at the Castle Inn. According to Spokesperson Christine Giles, "We are Veterans and serving members of HM Armed Forces. Like other Veterans' Breakfast Clubs, our ethos is mutual support: we have a similar humour and outlook, and the social life we now enjoy is like our service days."

These are just some of the inspiring breakfast club stories, but there are so many more out there – and so many more

to come.

There are now four AFVBCs operating locally in the VOS Area: The Portsmouth and Southsea AFVBC, the Gosport AFVBC, the Hayling Island AFVBC and the Old Portsmouth AFVBC in Southsea.

On Easter Saturday 2024, some of the VOS team – including Wellbeing and Volunteers Manager Wendy Pearson – attended a scrumptious breakfast at the AFVBC's Gosport branch. They spoke at length of the welcoming atmosphere, supportive people and of course, the excellent breakfast.

Visit the official AFVBC website to find your local Veterans' Breakfast Club.

You can join the AFVBC official Facebook page to keep up with their stories and initiatives, and to see if new breakfast clubs have opened near to you – or someone you know who would benefit from joining.

Mr Hardman's own words make a perfect closing statement: "It would have been wonderful, when my service was at an end, if I'd had an Armed Forces & Veterans Breakfast Club to go to, so I could have remained, partially at least, part of the tribe when I needed it... hopefully, that is what we will achieve in the future."

Ed Note: Northampton Pioneer Veterans used to go to a breakfast club in Duston, however they decided not to let women attend, hence they started their own club.

This meets at the Conservative Club in Northampton. Website link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/invbclub>

The Bicester Pioneer Association also meets and has its own Pioneer Breakfast Club.

They last met up on a double decker bus, as pictured above.



■ AROUND 30,000 servicemen and women have made use of a Government scheme to help first-time buyers get onto the property ladder.

Since launching the Forces Help to Buy scheme (FHTB) 10 years ago, the Ministry of Defence says it has paid out more than £450m for military personnel to purchase their own home or make adaptations to their current property.

More than 5,000 members of the Armed Forces are expected to take advantage of the scheme this year, which would be the highest annual figure since it launched in 2014.

The FHTB scheme provides interest-free loans of up to 50% of an individual's annual salary, with a maximum limit of £25,000.

Defence Secretary at the time, Grant Shapps said: "Getting onto the housing ladder is an aspiration for so many people across the country.

"Through Forces Help to Buy we've been able to make that dream a reality for thousands of service families.

"These incredible men and women sacrifice so much in service of their country and I'm proud we've helped over 30,000 of them take the life-changing step onto the housing ladder over the past decade.

"I look forward to supporting many more in the years to come."

The scheme is open to regular or full-time personnel and the loans can be used towards the deposit, legal fees, and other costs associated with buying a property.

Staff Sergeant Sean Hanlon said: "After renting locally we wanted to put down roots to allow my partner Nicola to concentrate on her own career. Forces Help to Buy provided the financial aid and support we needed to ensure we had the home we desired.

"The best part about having our house is it's ours. Having somewhere for Nicola and our dog Reggie knowing they are settled and happy is important for a good work-life balance."

The scheme started as a pilot and was made permanent at the beginning of 2023 as a commitment in the Defence Accommodation Strategy.

Service personnel are to apply for Forces Help to Buy (FHTB) on JPA through the Self-Service Application for FHTB.

Full instructions can be found online under the tab JPA Self Service User Guide – 'Applying for Pre-Approval for FHTB'.

It will all depend on how much is borrowed. But the loan amount is divided over 10 years and you pay back that amount monthly and can choose to make overpayments.

You can opt to start making the loan repayments straight away, six months after receiving it, or in your final 10 years of service.

Great news, you will pay 0% interest on the loan. However, you will pay a small amount of insurance each month to protect the loan.

Insurance cost will work out at around £6-£7 each month depending on how much you borrow.

You can be put through to the FHTB section if you contact the JPAC enquiry centre on: 0141 224 3600 Choose option four.

For full Forces Help To Buy scheme terms and conditions, check out Joint Service Publication (JSP) 464

New Afghan War Association

150,000 people in the UK will become automatic members of a new war association when it launches in December.



■ The UK Afghanistan Veterans Community will have former CGS General Sir Patrick Sanders as its patron

Picture: Ministry of Defence

THE UK Afghanistan Veterans Community, co-founded by a current serving Lieutenant Colonel and a recently retired former Staff Sergeant, will be the largest military association in the UK.

Backed by senior officials including General Sir Patrick Sanders, the former Chief of the General Staff, the organisation is calling on Afghan veterans to contribute to a survey which they say will help shape the UK's understanding of its membership.

Combat operations in Afghanistan ended a decade ago.

Britain's most recent war in Afghanistan began in the wake of the '9/11' terrorist attacks on the United States. It continued for 13 years with the last combat troops leaving the country on 26 October 2014.

The war in Afghanistan spanned the

tenures of three prime ministers, and cost the lives of 453 British service personnel and thousands of Afghans. What was accomplished after 13 years of conflict - which included eight years of heavy fighting in Helmand - still remains open to debate.

The war in Afghanistan sucked in enormous resources. What was planned as a short-term reconstruction mission turned into a full-blown war.

At its peak, there were 137 UK bases and around 9,500 British troops in Helmand Province alone. Camp Bastion grew to the size of Reading. Its perimeter wall was more than 20 miles long. Its 2.2-mile runway was used to ferry troops and supplies in and out - along with casualties. At the height of the fighting, there were more than 600 flights a day.

The legacy of the British campaign is



■ The Association has been co-founded by Lt Col Matt Mallett and Invictus Games athlete Jonny Ball

Picture: Ministry of Defence

harder to determine. British strategy was never clear. Operations to clear the towns of Helmand of insurgents were mixed with the efforts of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams to develop Helmand's economic infrastructure.

Schools, hospitals, roads, reservoirs and power generation aimed to help the Afghans become economically invested in stability. Agricultural projects also became a priority in order to persuade farmers to grow alternatives to opium.

But the fighting remained heavy, despite large-scale operations designed to drive the insurgents out of Helmand.

Public opinion in the UK increasingly turned against the war. The British began to invest heavily in the training and mentoring of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police, so that they would take more responsibility for the security situation in Helmand and the country as a whole.

The war in Afghanistan cost the lives of 454 British servicemen and women, exceeding the death toll of the Falklands War in 1982. Total deaths of coalition forces (Britain, USA and allies) totalled 3,486. A further estimated 2,000 British military and civilian personnel were wounded in action.

In 2002, the British Army introduced an Operational Service Medal for personnel who had served in Afghanistan from 2001 onwards. It continued to be awarded after 2014 to troops advising and mentoring in Helmand and elsewhere.

The last of these soldiers - alongside others engaged in protection duties - stayed on until 2021, when all international forces left Afghanistan following the Taliban's return to power.

Now, as the 10th anniversary of that

moment approaches, two veterans of the conflict have joined forces to launch what will be the first major war association to be formed since the Gulf War.

The two men, Royal Signals Lieutenant Colonel Matthew Mallett and Invictus Games athlete Jonny Ball, have worked with charities including RBL and international marketing agency M&C Saatchi World Services to get the organisation off the ground.

Speaking to Forces News, Col Mallett said the association would "seek to establish a charitable community for the 150,000 UK Afghan veterans who served in Afghanistan over the course of the 20-year campaign".

He added: "The fact we have two Chelsea Pensioners that are Afghan veterans is signalling quite clearly that this next generation of veterans is coming through."

And Mr Ball, who was until recently a staff sergeant in the Intelligence Corps, also highlighted the demographic of the Afghan veteran population.

He pointed out that there were also 21-year-olds who served on Op Pitting – the UK evacuation of Kabul in 2021 – young adults who are already able to say they are veterans of this significant chapter of UK military history.

Mr Ball told BFBS Forces News: "There are a bit of a mix of narratives in the community. It ranges from a sense of shame in the way in which we withdrew – completely out of the control of the Afghan veterans themselves – to a sense of pride in the amazing work we did out there during our time.

"I, for one, am very proud of rebuilding a school in Afghanistan and furthering the opportunities and life chances of ordinary

Afghan children."

The association is unique in terms of its size, the demographic of its members and the fact that so many of those who qualify for membership are still serving in the Armed Forces.

That is borne out by the fact the group's co-founders consist of a serving lieutenant colonel and a former Other Ranks soldier who recently returned to civvy street.

"It might surprise people to see another rank like myself, recently discharged from the Army Reserve, and a lieutenant colonel in the regular Army that are mates," said Mr Ball.

"But we are mates. We're brothers. We have that shared experience of Afghanistan."

The group launches formally in December but has already engaged focus groups made up of Afghan veterans and created partnerships with major organisations like the RBL and the National Memorial Arboretum.

It has also attracted the backing of the Army's former boss, General Sir Patrick Sanders, who only recently retired from the military and his post as the Chief of the General Staff.

Gen Sir Patrick has accepted an invitation to become the association's patron and is joined by General Zac Stenning, Commandant of the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, who will act as the organisation's military sponsor.

The organisation called on Afghan veterans to give their views via a survey, which we published on our Association Facebook Group in October. This survey will help form the basis of a report, which the association will make public upon its launch in December.



■ AS LABOUR swept to power in a landslide victory in the General Election, a number of military veterans also took their seats in Parliament across the UK.

One of those, Labour's Louise Jones, was on the latest episode of the Sitrep podcast – which analyses the top defence stories of the week and is available wherever you get your podcasts.

Ms Jones served in the Intelligence Corps, which saw her deployed to Afghanistan and Germany before finishing her time with the Armed Forces in Cambridgeshire.

She said she stepped away from her post-military career in technology to get involved in politics because of what she saw in the communities around her.

"I just remember looking around me and seeing even still the hugely increasing rates of people accessing food banks," she said.

"I was just looking around me and thinking, you know, is this the country that I want to be a part of?" she said.

Ms Jones said something "you really get instilled in you in the military is to not just stand around, not to be Jack".

"I thought, look, I do believe Labour is the party that always puts working people first," she said.

The MP for North East Derbyshire said she initially thought she would just be a foot soldier, but that soon changed.

"What I found... was that if you've got a voice, you should use it," she said.

Ms Jones is not alone, with 35 elected MPs having military experience.

Jonny Ball, the host of the Veterans in Politics podcast and the founder of Campaign Force, which encourages veterans to stand up and serve again, also joined Sitrep.

"I'm not saying that we're golden people within the Armed Forces community, but you know what? We got a good start, right?" he said.

"I think politics is crying out for a bit of a refresh on those behaviours too."

He said there are a multitude of reasons why military veterans stepping into politics is a good idea.

The first one Mr Ball listed was inspiration, outlining that if veterans being elected inspires others to serve on a local government level, that can only be a good thing.

"Local government is a mess," he said. "I've worked extensively in local government and the talent is pretty variable in terms of local councillors."

He also said it is important to have people who have been involved in tackling threats when it comes to making decisions about the global dangers the UK faces.

"I think it matters... in terms of our global threats, having people, that'd actually been there, they've been on the ground in places like Iraq, Afghanistan, the Balkans, Northern Ireland, is really important because these people ultimately are going to vote on key decisions of national security," he said.

Lastly, Mr Ball said military veterans bring skills and values from their time in the forces that some may argue British politics has been lacking.

"It's really important that they bring those skills, hard skills from service and the experiences and the values because we've all been really sick of some of the behaviours in our politics," he said.

As with any MP you can email them. Contact Louise Jones MP by emailing her at louise.jones.mp@parliament.uk

Army vs Navy in Northampton

Members of the Northampton Branch of the Association watched a thrilling game on the big projector screen at Norman's Cricket Club, with refreshments laid on



■ The Winning Try

Picture: BFBS

IF YOU are a Northampton member of the Pioneer Association and did not attend, you missed out on a great afternoon and also missed out on some lovely grub which was laid on.

Norman Brown organised the Rugby to be shown on the big projector screen at his Cricket Club and got the room booked, together with Norman's son, Paul setting up the streaming service for the Rugby and also helping his son James in the kitchen, whom was busy preparing half time Pie and Chips and all sorts of other goodies.

The Pies and refreshments were awesome and so was the Rugby!

From being 22-0 down after a quarter and 29-5 behind at half-time, and then 42-31 with four minutes to play, the Army scored a double-blow of tries to keep their hopes alive of regaining the Inter Service Championship.

Fifteen minutes into the second half and that error was long forgotten, because what the Navy could do in the first half so could the Red Shirts after the resumption of play.

The way the game was going the one-off moments were going to matter even more, and between 65 and 70 minutes there were three which were pivotal.

First was a break from Solodrau Radianirova that carved the Navy's defence to shreds. Half-backs Johnson and Alexander Gliksten were in support, but the blue shirts had scrambled, winning a

turnover which immediately became prime attacking position thanks to Duncan's 50-22.

But the Navy made a hash of the lineout, the ball was kicked downfield, with the chasers forcing Duncan to concede a lineout.

Johnson's conversion brought things back to 31-39, which while positive for the Army was still a two-score deficit.

Gott seemingly made the game safe with a penalty four minutes from time, and when the fly half intercepted to defuse a dangerous Army attack with 77 minutes on the clock there seemed too much still to do.

Jay Toogood was in support, but when the replacement scrum-half held on in a tackle Johnson and Nayalo showed quick thinking by tapping quickly and combining to put Radianirova over between the sticks.

The conversion made it 38-42, and – crucially – there were still 90 seconds on the clock. Plenty of time for the most dramatic of finishes.

Job 1 – secure the kick off.

Job 2 – head downfield with a penalty.

Job 3 – win the lineout.

Job 4 – create an opportunity.

All were achieved, and when Gliksten spotted an overlap, Nayalo and Frank Kelly combined intelligently to send Qorowale away down the left touchline and the red shirts into ecstasy. Final score 43-42 to the Army Reds! Best A v N game ever!



■ Commonwealth War Graves Commission Cemetery Cassino, Italy. Pioneer John Tancred, buried at Minturno Cemetery

Picture: Ministry of Defence

Cassino Anniversary

On 19th May, a British ceremony to mark the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Monte Cassino has taken place in the Italian town.

THE event was held in the Commonwealth War Cemetery in the town, located in between Naples and the Italian capital of Rome. More than 100 British service personnel took part in the commemoration service to mark the battle, with Sophie Duchess of Edinburgh and Chief of the General Staff General Sir Patrick Sanders also in attendance.

The battle was a significant moment in the Second World War Italian campaign, as capturing the mountain was essential for the Allies to breach the Gustav Line and advance towards Rome.

It turned into one of the bloodiest engagements of the war.

Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Patrick Sanders said:

"Anniversaries are opportunities to pause and reflect. On 19 May we mark eighty years since the end of the four-month long struggle at Monte Cassino.

"Standing in the tranquil shadow of the great Monastery today, it is difficult to imagine the savagery of the fighting that echoed around the Liri Valley in the late winter and early spring of 1944.

"As we remember the courage of those who paid the ultimate price to secure Allied victory, I am reminded of the truly multinational nature of the forces involved:

British, Canadian, New Zealand, Indian, Polish, French, Italian and American troops all served alongside each other, united by a common cause.

"We are fortunate that allies of the past remain allies today. In Europe, we stand shoulder-to-shoulder with our NATO partners, resolute in our continued commitment to European security and the freedom won by those who fought and died at Monte Cassino."

All Commonwealth countries who fought in the WW2 were acknowledged through the reading of national citations, by tri-service personnel based in Italy, primarily from the NATO Joint Force Command HQ in Naples.

The four battles took place between January and May 1944, fought between the Allies and the Axis powers, with the Allies seeking to break through the heavily fortified German defensive known as the Winter Line.

Monte Cassino was a 1,400-year-old Benedictine Abbey located on a rocky hill, the Germans using its surrounding hills as a key strategic position.

The victory was a significant achievement for the Allies, allowing them to continue their advance towards Rome and eventually liberate Italy from German occupation, it is remembered as one of the most challenging and costly battles of the Second World War.

The capture of Monte Cassino on 18 May 1944 came at a high price, with the Allies suffering around 55,000 casualties in the battles. British forces alone lost around 8,000 personnel, killed, or missing and presumed dead. German casualties were estimated at around 20,000 killed and wounded.

At the foot of monastery hill, stand the rows and rows of gleaming white headstones, the final resting place of thousands who fell in some of the fiercest fighting of the Italian campaign, a sombre reminder of their bravery.

Capt H Tristram, a forward observation officer in the 46th Division, recorded in his records, "The Pioneers provided bearers for positions well forward in the Cassino Monastery Hill area. During the fiercest battles, they worked for 72 hours without sleep or rest until towards the end they appeared to walk and work like robots as their limbs seemed to be moving from an unbreakable spirit of duty and discipline and the maxim of not wanting to let the other men down. This was camaraderie at the highest point".

The fall of Rome, on 4 June, 1944, ended almost two years of fighting. It occurred two days before the D-Day landings and by drawing the German troops to the Mediterranean it contributed to the success of campaigns elsewhere in Europe.



■ THE MINISTRY of Defence has accepted responsibility for the hearing loss suffered by military personnel, offering hope to others who have been affected.

Until now the MOD had opposed many hearing loss claims made by veterans, variously arguing that other sources of noise were to blame, individuals should have worn protection, or their claims had been made too late.

But in a major breakthrough for thousands of military veterans seeking compensation for hearing loss suffered during their service, the MOD, in agreement with Hugh James Solicitors, has accepted responsibility.

It comes after a case last year saw a former Royal Marine awarded almost £714,000 in compensation after hearing loss ended his military career.

James Barry's case saw the High Court reject claims from the MOD that the former marine was partially responsible as he had failed to use hearing protection.

An MOD spokesperson said: "We take the health and wellbeing of our personnel seriously and always look at how we can reduce noise levels in their working environment.

The agreement with the law firm sees the MOD no longer disputing that it owes a duty of care to personnel who suffered hearing loss while serving.

Clients of the firm will now only have to prove that any hearing loss was sustained during their time in the military.

Simon Ellis from Hugh James said: "This is a groundbreaking development for servicemen and women seeking justice for their hearing loss.

"Many military personnel suffered hearing loss that was entirely preventable had they been provided with the correct equipment and training.

"As a result, individuals have had their careers prematurely ended, other employment opportunities denied to them and their personal lives irrevocably changed.

"The MOD has both acknowledged the duty of care that it owes military personnel to protect their hearing and agreed that all individuals discharged after 1987 can secure the compensation they are entitled to for any hearing loss resulting from their military service."

Robert Barnett was medically discharged from the military in 2014 after an 18-year career, which saw him serve 3 tours in Afghanistan and 2 in Iraq.

He is now one of the thousands hoping to receive compensation for noise-induced hearing loss, having launched legal action against the MOD.

He has never been able to afford the hearing aids he needed after suffering around a 20% loss of hearing in each ear, describing the legal process as "slow" and "frustrating".

"The reason I am doing this is to spread the message far and wide.

"We found in the veteran community and the services, sometimes things are kept need-to-know, so the hope of doing this is that the message is spread far and wide, and there is hope.

"If you don't ask, you don't get, so it is worth at least ringing, texting, or sending an email just to make an initial inquiry."

Several cases will shortly go on trial to determine next year to determine the level of compensation veterans should receive.

Special tribunal for nuclear test veterans

Veterans who took part in nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s and 60s have offered to settle their legal claims with the Ministry of Defence through a "special tribunal"



■ Nuclear Test Medal

Picture: Ministry of Defence

VETERAN'S who took part in nuclear weapons tests in the 1950s and 60s have offered to settle their legal claims with the MOD through a "special tribunal".

Those who were involved in the trials and some of their next-of-kin served a "letter before action" on the MOD on Tuesday – setting out the details of their claims.

Armed Forces veterans who took part in Britain's nuclear weapons tests claim their medical records have been illegally withheld by the MOD.

Some of the claimants said they have had cancer, blood disorders and lost children – and descendants have spoken of being born with obvious disabilities.

According to the MOD, more than 20,000 military personnel were present at the UK nuclear weapon tests between 1952 and 1967 in Australia and the South Pacific.

Veterans handed in a petition at Downing Street on Tuesday, and made an offer to resolve their claim through the creation of a

"special tribunal" in order to settle the matter "efficiently, and quickly".

The claimants believe a special tribunal would be a fast-track method of investigating, compensating and commemorating alleged victims.

The MOD previously said "it remains the case that no information is withheld from veterans" but could not comment on ongoing litigation or claims.

As part of the legal claim, veterans have said blood and urine samples taken at the Cold War weapons trials have been reclassified as "scientific data" and placed at the Atomic Weapons Establishment – an agency of the MOD – which means they cannot be accessed.

Sources at the MOD said the archives at the Atomic Weapons Establishment have been searched on numerous occasions and do not contain the medical records of service personnel.

Brian Unthank, of Erith, Kent, said he had 92 skin cancers removed, lost 13 children to



■ Nuclear Memorial, National Arboretum, Staffordshire

Picture: National Arboretum

miscarriage and 20 years of his annual medical records are missing.

He said: "I am one of the lucky ones. I am 86, still here and still fighting.

"I was proud to serve my country, and it saddens me that I am now forced to serve it again with a legal action.

"The Prime Minister refused to talk to us, and the Veterans' Minister told us to sue.

"We only want the bloody truth."

Nuclear veteran descendant Alan Owen, and founder of campaign group LABRATS, said: "The youngest survivors are now in their mid-80s, and they've seen other injustices – like Hillsborough, infected blood, and the Post Office – grind on for decades, at huge cost to everyone.

"That's why our legal team has made an offer to the MOD to settle this efficiently, and quickly. No-one can afford to wait any longer."

Veterans have campaigned for years over illnesses they say were caused by radiation exposure, in a fight which reached the Supreme Court in 2012, where 1,011 test cases lost their bid to be allowed to seek compensation.

The claimants say they can prove the nuclear testing was repeatedly ordered over a 10-year period and up to 100% of personnel at some operations were affected.

Veterans also claim ministers have repeatedly misled Parliament and that they blocked information being given to next-of-kin in 2022.

It is also claimed military medical files have been edited to remove all records from their time at the tests, making it difficult to claim war pensions on the basis of radiation-related injury.

Jason McCue, senior partner at McCue Jury & Partners, which is representing the

veterans and their families, said: "Be it Hillsborough, infected blood or the Post Office, time and again we have seen injustices left to fester.

"This stops now. The veterans' case is strong, fair and simple.

"It is sad that the MOD cannot see what is as plain as a pike staff to everyone else and that it requires court action to force it to take responsibility."

A spokeswoman for the MOD said: "We are grateful to all service personnel who participated in the British nuclear testing programme and contributed to keeping our nation secure and are pleased that they have received a medal in recognition.

"Nuclear test veterans who believe they have suffered ill health due to service have the right to apply for no-fault compensation under the War Pensions Scheme.

"It remains the case that no information is withheld from veterans and any medical records taken either before, during or after participation in the UK nuclear weapon tests are held in individual military medical records in the government's archives, which can be accessed on request."

A crowdfunding page has been launched to support the veterans' legal claim at crowdfunder.com/case/nuclear-veterans-case.

Only last year, nuclear test veterans received a medal to recognise their service after a more than 70-year wait.

The Nuclear Test Medal has begun being issued to veterans, starting with the oldest, who participated in the UK's Nuclear Test Programme between 1952 and 1967.

The first veterans to receive the medal wore it for the first time in public at a service at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire to mark National Atomic Veterans Awareness Day.

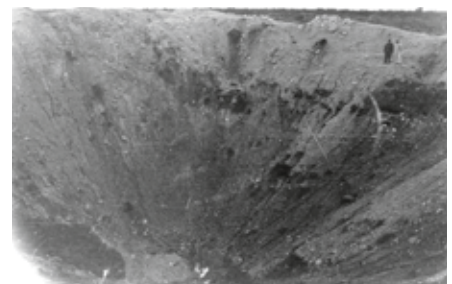
Ed Note: We have published a few articles on Pioneers working with nuclear, the last I believe was called Maralinga in the December 2021 newsletter, which told the story of the cleanup operation by Pioneers in 1967 to get the area cleaned up to a level that was acceptable to the Australian government.

The work went on six days a week, with the men mustering at 0645 hrs for the 30-mile drive to the edge of the main range area, and returning at 1800 hrs. At the end of each day's work, each member of the Force, stripped, showered, was monitored and if declared "safe", donned fresh clothing, while his soiled clothes were taken away for laundering.

Although the task was scheduled to take 12 months, the operation was completed in a little over three months.

The Platoon returned to the UK during late August, leaving behind a concrete plinth with a statue of a Brumby (wild horse) on top, a lasting reminder of "Operation Brumby" at the edge of that desolate part of Australia, the size of the whole of Ireland, that formed the Maralinga Nuclear Test Area.

Pictured below is the crater, notice the 2 individuals standing near the top right of the photograph!





■ A CAMPAIGN has been launched to help improve veterans' access to healthcare services and funding for mobility equipment.

The campaign is also encouraging more GP surgeries to sign up to the veteran-friendly accreditation scheme, so the NHS is better able to identify and signpost veterans to receive specialist care.

It is believed there are more than 1.85 million veterans living in the UK, and those injured while in service may be entitled to grants from the Veteran Mobility Fund (VMF), which will remain open for five years.

The funding is being made available to support veterans with physical disabilities through grants that can be used to purchase mobility equipment not usually available to the NHS.

It is hoped that raising awareness will mean more veterans being referred to veteran mental and physical healthcare programmes, such as Op RESTORE and Op COURAGE: The Veterans Mental Health and Wellbeing Service.

The £2.52m Veteran Mobility Fund is being administered by military charities Help for Heroes and Blesma, through the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA) and the Armed Forces Covenant Trust Fund.

Veterans in receipt of a War Pension or an award from the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme may also be eligible for a grant.

Kate Davies, National Director for Armed Forces Health, NHS England, said: "It's really important that veterans who need treatment and support get the help they need and the best way to do this is to register with a GP practice and tell them you've served."

"Along with helping to ensure that veterans get the support that's right for them, this means that GPs and other healthcare professionals can better understand any health problems, particularly those related to a person's time in the Armed Forces."

She went on to say, "My message to veterans is that it's never too late to tell your GP practice you've served; it doesn't matter how long you served for or when you left the Armed Forces, sharing this information may be relevant to your health and care, now or in the future, and the NHS is here for you."

Eligible veterans can apply for grants or equipment to help with their mobility needs, from 12 March 2024.

More information on the Veterans Mobility Fund can be found at helpforheroes.org.uk/veteransmobilityfund.

■ THE FORCES Employment Charity stands by ex-Forces personnel through a range of programmes and practical support. Supporting anyone who has served at least one day in His Majesty's Regular Armed Forces, or Merchant Mariners who have seen duty on legally defined military operations.

Support is delivered by experienced advisors, many of whom also served. The Forces Employment Charity advisors are committed to helping veterans succeed through their working lives.

The Forces Employment Charity programmes provide a range of practical tools and advice to help veterans use their military skills to stand out from the crowd.

For more info visit www.forcesemployment.org.uk

Opening of Soane Stable Yard

The Soane Stable Yard now houses the Chelsea Pensioners Museum, a Café by Heidi Bakery, a Shop and Post Office, an Activity Room and the Veterans Outreach Centre.



■ Soane Stable Yard, Royal Hospital, Chelsea

Picture: Royal Hospital, Chelsea

THE Soane Stable Yard at Royal Hospital, Chelsea, provides a new starting point for visitors to the Royal Hospital and the opportunity to explore the past and enjoy a taste of all the Royal Hospital has to offer today.

Eminent architect Sir John Soane, whose legacy includes the Bank of England and Dulwich Picture Gallery, also in London, was the Royal Hospital's Clerk of Works for 30 years. He designed and built the Grade II listed Stable Yard between 1814 and 1817, re-purposing many materials from Wren's original structure.

The stable block provided stalls for 25 working horses, housing for nine carriages and two flats for stable boys and coachmen.

The buildings have been the subject of an extensive renovation project thanks to a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund with support from other benefactors and charitable trusts. Overseen by architect, Laura Morgante, of Peregrine Bryant, the restoration has conserved the historic fabric from both Wren and Soane's buildings and reinstated architectural features – like the beautiful chimneys damaged during the

Second World War – using innovative conservation techniques. Throughout the project we have adopted a sustainable and accessible approach while endeavouring to conserve the spirit and beauty of Soane's design.

On another note, should you like to visit some of the most beautiful buildings in London, hear about their history from a Chelsea Pensioner and get a glimpse into what life is like as a resident behind the scenes? Book here, <https://chelsea-pensioners.co.uk/tours>

Also open in the Soane Stable Yard is the Heidi Bakery Café where you can choose from a delicious range of handmade pastries, cakes, savouries and salads, speciality coffee, artisan teas and more at the Heidi Bakery Café in the Soane Stable Yard.

The café is open between 8am and 5pm Monday to Saturday and from 9am to 5pm on Sunday.

In addition the shop in the Soane Stable Yard is open for a range of high quality gifts and souvenirs. Opening hours are 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week and proceeds from all sales help to support the Royal Hospital Chelsea and the Chelsea Pensioners.



“They got in touch and from there I felt it was all about me, an individual thing.”

Denis, one of nearly 30,000 veterans helped by Op COURAGE

■ Operation Courage Re-Designed

Pictures: NHS

Op Courage Redesigned

Mental health support for military veterans is to be expanded following a survey that found most former personnel struggle to speak about their problems.

As a result, the NHS has redesigned Op Courage, a specialist service that supports serving personnel who are due to leave the military, reservists, Armed Forces veterans, and their families.

Op COURAGE can help you and your family with a range of support and treatment, including:

- helping you transition from military to civilian life by providing mental health care with Defence Medical Services (DMS)
- helping you recognise and treat early signs of mental health problems, as well as more advanced mental health conditions and psychological trauma
- providing support and treatment for substance misuse and addictions
- helping you to access other NHS mental health services if you need them, such as finding an NHS talking therapies service and eating disorder services
- liaising with charities and local organisations to support your wider health and wellbeing needs, such as help with housing, relationships, finances and employment
- supporting armed forces families affected by mental health problems, including helping them to access local services

It will focus on boosting self-referrals, as

well as enhancing addiction support and a new awareness campaign will also shine a spotlight on Op Courage.

“This sets them up to provide a non-judgmental service and build trust with those seeking help,” said Dr Jonathan Leach, NHS England’s associate medical director for armed forces and veterans’ health.

A survey carried out between April and May 2022 received 3,095 responses from veterans, serving personnel, reservists, their family members, and carers.

Its purpose was to collect views on veterans’ mental and physical health services.

Of those who responded, 52% said they had a current or previous mental health problem and 60% said they found it difficult to ask for help.

There are an estimated 2.4 million veterans living in the UK.

Responding to NHS England’s announcement Royal British Legion Campaigns, Policy and Research Director Angela Kitching said: “The Royal British Legion welcomes NHS England’s commitment to do more to support veterans.

“Any steps that ease the anguish that some veterans and their families experience will make a difference.

“However, no new resources have been offered to address the twin challenges faced

by many veterans of mental health concerns and substance dependency issues.

“The inconsistent patchwork of care across the country, where location determines the availability and quality of treatments, must be addressed.

“Driving down the wait for support that veterans and their families face must be a key part of this new approach.

“The Royal British Legion will continue to work with the NHS and partners across government to ensure that veterans and their families receive the mental health and substance support they vitally need”.

Former Royal Marine, Invictus Games medallist and TV presenter JJ Chalmers, said: “Recognising when you need to reach out is the first hurdle and fellow veterans can help so much with this, as they’ve been through it too.

“The wonderful thing about Op Courage is that it has been developed by veterans, for veterans – the trained NHS professionals you’ll speak to are from the Armed Forces or have experience of working with the community. They really get where you’ve come from.

“I remember how hard it was adjusting to life after the military, getting to grips with civvy street after everything I went through in Afghanistan. Having a service like the Op Courage to support you is invaluable.”



■ A NEW study into the suicides of military veterans has found much more mental health support is needed for those in the armed services.

The report called One Is Too Many found a range of issues that lead to avoidable deaths.

Dr Paul Watson was involved in the study and told the BBC that they had spoken to hundreds of mental health staff and bereaved relatives and found similar stories of missed opportunities over more than a decade.

"If we want to save lives, families need to be involved," Dr Watson said. "The biggest message the families have articulated to us, there were times where there could have been an intervention or they've spotted something but no-one would listen.

"To keep reading that over and over again, it is, as a research team, a significant finding."

Veteran Ben Riches took his own life in 2019 – it followed numerous conversations with mental health professionals.

Ben's parents are among 20 families who have told their story to researchers at Northumbria University to contribute to the One Is Too Many study, a research project carried out by The Northern Hub for Veterans and Military Families Research.

His mother told the BBC that forces personnel need specialist help, saying: "Ben could be and could come across as aggressive, but he wasn't being aggressive, he was trying to mask his vulnerability.

She added: "Our caregivers don't recognise that, because they're not trained or educated in dealing with the veterans."

Professor Matt Kiernan, who led the research, says issues around confidentiality are often to blame for poor care.

He said: "We actually need to be able to help, not only the health services but it's social services, it's the military charities, to work with families better."

"We need to start looking at that and how is that. Unless we can get over the confidentiality, the GDPR, the barriers... there are barriers in the way all of the time.

The researchers have said that the aim of the study was not to assign blame but to find out why veterans were being missed.

The Government says it will review the university's research and "continue to work to ensure veterans can access the right support".

A spokesperson said: "We also published a new five-year Suicide Prevention Strategy for England in 2023 which sets out over 130 actions, including for veterans, that will be taken to reduce the suicide rate in England."

■ THE NORTHAMPTON Branch of the Association meet on a regular basis and organise many trips and events, such as Veteran Breakfasts and trips to Duxford and much more!

If you are interested in joining us for any of the functions and activities please give Bob McGinley an email at bobmcginley8@gmail.com and he will sort you out.

Members are growing and we look forward to welcome you!

Annual 168 Reg Camping Trip

Members of 168 Regiments RLC set up camp on Ardentinnny Beach for their weekend camping trip



■ Where was our invite?

Pictures: John Taylor

JOHN Taylor reports: after our annual camping trip in April was a complete wash out due to very poor weather we decided to organise another date, so on Friday 6th of September we set off with an early start to catch the ferry to Dunoon, then a 30min drive to Ardentinnny beach to our camping location where we set up for the weekend.

With the sun out we sat around having a good old catch up and of course we had a few beers then when the sun went down we had the obligatory fire and a few more

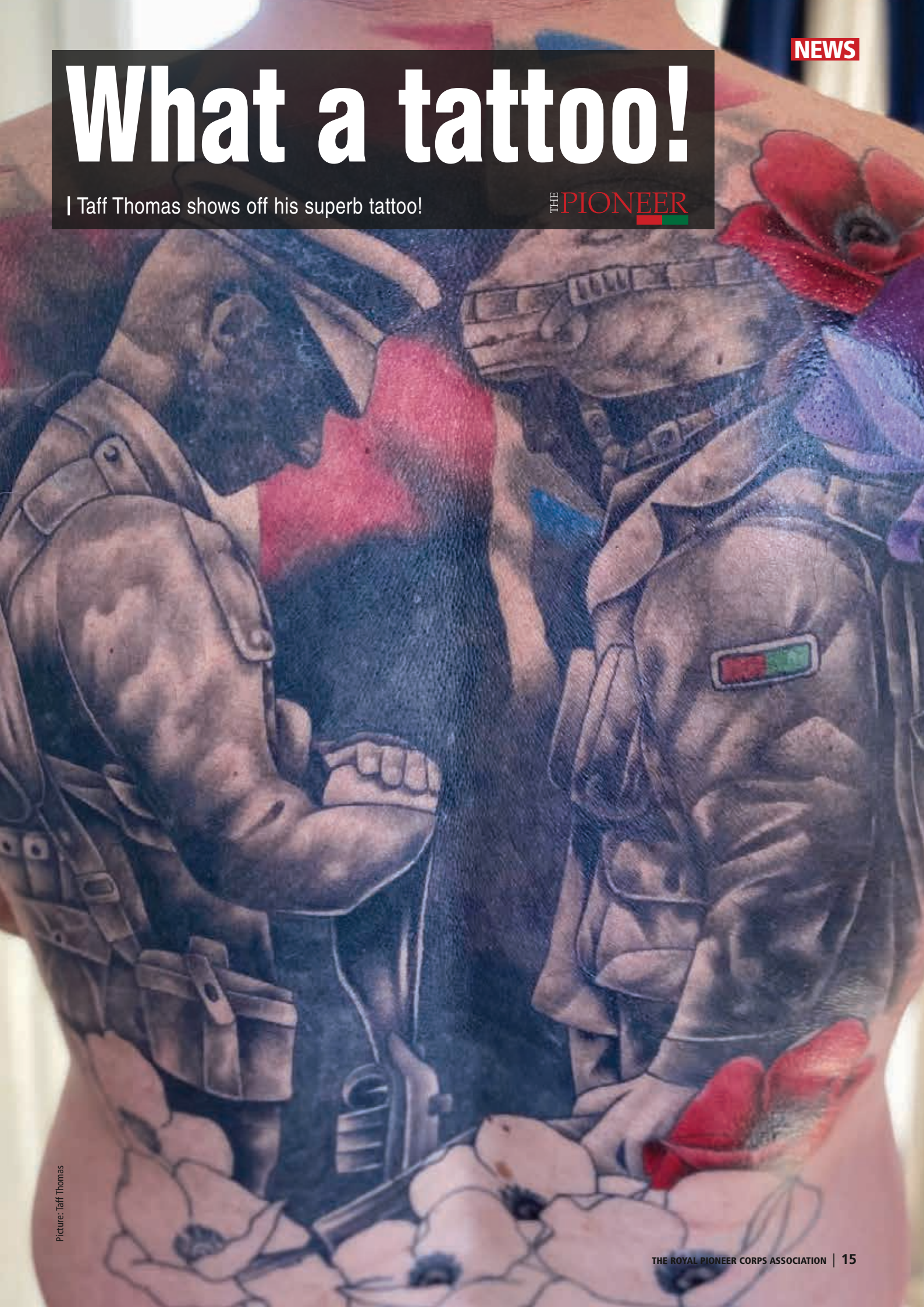
night caps.

The following attended J Taylor (not in any of the photos) Tam Stewart, Wullie Anderson, Brian McGeoch, Andy Burns, David McGeoch, Guy Gillan, Jimmy Robb, Rab watson, Brian Milton (drove all the way from Portsmouth) Stewy Forrester and Bob Shiels. We look forward to next May when we hope to go camping once again. We have more lads who could not make it but they will all be with us for the Remembrance Parade and also on our Christmas Dance night.

What a tattoo!

| Taff Thomas shows off his superb tattoo!

THE PIONEER



Picture: Taff Thomas



■ A FORMER paratrooper who suffered a life-changing spinal injury on a parachute jump has had his journey to recovery featured in a new film.

Ben Halms, 33, features in *The Mountain Within Me*, a film shining a spotlight on the work of charity Millimetres 2 Mountains, which helps those dealing with intense physical injuries take on epic challenges across the world.

Mr Halms served in the Paras for 13 years before his life was altered forever following what should have been a routine jump that ended in disaster when he fell 1,000 ft in just 12 seconds.

Speaking with BFBS Forces Radio, he said: "When I looked at the ground, I was no higher than probably a house height away from the floor, so I hit the ground pretty hard and fast.

"I suffered an L2 burst fracture, so the lower part of my spine, one of the vertebrae, compressed and just burst."

Mr Halms severed some of his nerves, immediately leaving the soldier with no sensation or movement from the waist down.

Thanks to rehab and physiotherapy the veteran eventually regained movement, but still has no feeling.

However, after a couple of years on civvy street, the veteran lost the vital motivation which had been essential to his recovery.

That's when the charity Millimetres 2 Mountains helped turn his life around.

He said: "When I left, I felt like I'd lost my identity and I had no purpose so when this opportunity came along, I felt like I had another purpose.

"I had something to aim for and I had a goal so it got me back into the mindset of training."

The main focus of film *The Mountain Within Me* is the charity's founder, former Rugby Union player and Paralympics presenter Ed Jackson and his team as they look to bring hope to those looking for a new purpose in life – much like Mr Jackson did after his own injury.

After an almost fatal diving accident in 2017 that left him being told by doctors he would never walk again, Mr Jackson was diagnosed as having Brown-Sequard Syndrome – a rare neurological condition that leaves people with weakness or paralysis on one side of the body.

In the film, Mr Jackson reveals what keeps him motivated to take on extreme challenges. He said: "I wanted to rewrite the rule book of what is possible in life. 'I'm not scared of dying, I'm scared of not really living.'"

It was this fear that encouraged him to take on the mental and physical heights of Snowdonia, the Alps and Himalayas with other people also facing mental health struggles because of adversity, such as Army veteran Mr Halms.

Mr Jackson said: "I was trying to break a height record for someone with a spinal cord injury, but I actually saw a lot of similarities with our journeys.

"I played professional rugby my whole life and my injury took that loss of identity, loss of purpose.

"But on the trip itself, like I saw that determination, that drive.

"The psychological journey of it and learning to accept the new version of yourself and try and let go of the old version yourself is a tough one."

The documentary is now available to watch on some digital platforms.

Memorial walk

Royal Pioneer Corps veteran walked nearly 60 miles between 61 Memorial sites ahead of Remembrance Sunday



■ Well done Phil!

Pictures: Phil Speddy

AN ARMY Cadet sergeant instructor is walking nearly 60 miles between memorial sites across Rossendale ahead of Remembrance Sunday.

With the sun out we sat around having a good old catch up and of course we had a few beers then when the sun went down we had the obligatory fire and a few more night caps.

On the sixth day, Phil Speddy will then take part in three Remembrance services, in Accrington, Haslingden and Rawtenstall.

The Royal Pioneer Corps veteran, 51, from Rawtenstall, said: "This will be a local community act of Remembrance and I am doing it to raise the profile of Veterans in Communities.

"Operations Manager Bob Elliott will be supporting me with back up in the minibus to make sure I have water and provisions and help if needed and I am asking veterans in the area to come along and join in for part of the walk.

"I will be camping out during the week and some veterans have also said they may join me.

"I set off on November 5 and start from what is reputed to be England's highest war memorial at Deerplay Moor above Weir and that first day will be the longest and hardest of all as I go down to Bacup then on to

Whitworth and back to Stacksteads.

"I will visit 61 memorials, graveyards with Commonwealth Graves and churches with Rolls of Honour."

At each location the Last Post will be observed and a memorial cross with poppy will be placed. These have been made by members of 38th Rossendale Open Scout Group.

On day two he will travel from Stacksteads to Edgeside and then on to Dunnockshaw and then Day three will be from Dunnockshaw to Cloughfold and then to Rawtenstall.

Leaving Rawtenstall on Day four, he will visit Holden, and then on the fifth day he will visit Haslingden before making his way to Oak Hill Park in Accrington.

His final walk will take in Accrington, Haslingden and Rawtenstall, attending Remembrance services along the way.

Phil was one of 13 members of VIC to go on the Battlefields Tour in the summer and he paraded the Veterans in Communities Standard at Menin Gate in Belgium.

Members of VIC will also be present at many other services and parades around Rossendale, Greater Manchester and East Lancashire in areas where they provide services.

Ed Note: Phil (25001297) joined the RPC in 1991 and served in 187 Coy



■ Pioneer Scott Wall, on Everest Base Camp. An awesome achievement - Nice one Scott!

Pictures: Scott Wall

Everest base camp trek

Registered Blind Pioneer Scott Wall who served in 187 Squadron, completes a gruelling eleven day trek to Everest base camp

SCOTT WALL, affectionately known as Fluff, is a registered blind ex-pioneer who served in 187 Squadron from 1999 to 2005. He was deployed on two operational tours to Iraq and Afghanistan during his army career.

More recently, Fluff has embarked on a trek to Everest Base Camp with eighteen other injured, sick, and wounded veterans and service personnel. The mission was to raise money for the Armed Forces Para Snowsports Team (AFPST), an organisation dedicated to rebuilding the lives of sick, injured, and wounded veterans; and serving personnel through the power of snow sports.

The trek was a gruelling eleven-day journey, which consisted of seven days ascent to Everest base camp, travelling through various villages along the way, and four days of descent, ending in Lukla, Nepal. The team reached a maximum altitude of 5364 meters and covered over ninety-two miles, averaging more than eight miles daily. They endured nine hours of hiking per day and a total ascent of 11,650m over the eleven days. In addition to this, the team were also battling altitude sickness, exhaustion due to lack of sleep and harsh weather conditions as well as everyone's individual disability.

Fluff and his companions faced immense challenges along the way. They burnt up to

5000 kcal daily and on average lost 6kg each during the trek. However, the team forged lifelong bonds and raised approx. £60,000 for the AFPST before and during the trip.

Despite being registered blind, Fluff navigated the treacherous terrain with the help of his fellow team members, particularly WO R.J Page RAF, who acted as his guide and support during the final push to Base Camp.

WO R.J Page, who had overcome challenges of his own including a broken back, selflessly guided Fluff through the rough and rugged terrain, providing vital assistance and a sense of security, so kudos to that man, he managed to do it and I will be forever thankful to him."

After seven days of arduous climbing, all eighteen members of the team finally reached Base camp. Fluff reflected that it was a moment of triumph and relief as they stood together, bodies exhausted but spirits high. They had faced countless challenges and obstacles but had pushed through with determination and teamwork. On reaching Basecamp Fluff proudly flew the pioneer flag and felt a sense of accomplishment and a connection with his fallen comrade Cpl Andrew Roberts (Ginge).

As the team made their way back down the mountain, the sense of accomplishment was palpable. Each step was a reminder of their

endurance and resilience, a testament to their unwavering commitment to each other and to the goal they had set out to achieve. They had done it, all eighteen of them had made it back safely to their families. In the end, it was not just the summit that mattered, but the journey itself and the bonds they had forged along the way.

Throughout the expedition, Fluff experienced a significant loss of appetite, weight loss, and illness; and even tested positive for Covid upon returning to the UK. However, he considered the journey a once-in-a-lifetime experience and was grateful for the opportunity to contribute to such a cause.

Fluff would like to express his deep gratitude to his fellow pioneers who sponsored and supported him, as well as pay tribute to his friend Ginge, who is dearly missed every day and remembered fondly by all who knew him.

As he looks towards the future, Fluff carries with him the memories and lessons learned from the journey, knowing that he has made a difference in the lives of others and honoured the legacy of those who had gone before him. And so, with red and green forever in his heart, Fluff continues on his path, guided by the spirit of camaraderie and service that defined his journey to Everest Base Camp.



■ SINCE launching phase two for the wider veterans community 9 months ago, the Office for Veterans' Affairs says it has received thousands of applications for veteran ID cards.

A new digital application service was launched at the end of January and, as of 22 February 2024, the department said it had received 72,606 applications, which includes 69,698 digital and 2,908 paper requests.

And as of 8 February 2024, a total of 28,882 cards had been sent out to applicants in the post.

The MOD says it is delivering the service, together with the Office for Veterans' Affairs, as part of ongoing improvements to veteran support.

Veterans who served prior to 2018 and have not received a card can apply by visiting the GOV.UK website.

Until the veteran ID card was created, there was no way for former personnel to easily prove they had been in the Armed Forces.

■ VETERANS Minister Alistair Carns has said he wants to offer a more formal type of support to personnel who leave the forces, rather than relying on goodwill.

Mr Carns said he aims to achieve "institutional resilience" in support networks for service leavers.

The former Colonel in the Royal Marines spoke to BFBS Forces News during a visit to Jaguar Land Rover in Warwick, where some veterans have transitioned into civilian work.

The employment rate of personnel six months after leaving the Armed Forces reached a record high of 89%, according to data published for 2022/2023 by the MOD's Department of Defence Statistics Health.

However, Mr Carns highlighted that at the moment a lot of veteran support is carried out on a volunteer basis.

He added: "I want to take a proportion of that, institutionalise it and make a solid structure that will be dedicated to delivering for veterans."

"No matter what changes, politically, environmentally, economically, there is a structure and that's what I look forward to the next six to 12 to 18 months."

The former Colonel added: "Watch this space. We're going to try and design something with veterans, with military personnel, with the Civil Service that can deliver that for veterans as a group."

Veterans were more likely to seek help after two years of leaving the Armed Forces (66.3%) than within two years of leaving (38.7%), according to the results of the Government's Life After Service in the UK Armed Forces survey.

RAF veteran Keeran Morar was medically discharged before joining Jaguar Land Rover.

She told BFBS Forces News that she would have "loved it if there were more organisations that could reach out to me".

She added that they would need to be more obviously available.

"When you're leaving it's almost like a deer in headlights," Ms Morar said.

The Armed Forces Covenant aims to ensure the defence community faces no disadvantage when it comes to public and commercial services.

"I'd like to see it far more institutionally brought into the system and taken into law in the future," Veterans Minister Mr Carns added.

Normandy visit

An interesting Battlefield Tour visit to Normandy organised by members of 168 Pioneer Regiment



■ Members of 168 Pioneer Regiment on their Battlefield Tour

Picture: Supplied

MY Army name is John Aitchison and have been asked by Robin Alistair Grieve to send a write up and photos of our recent trip to Normandy .

A little bit about ourselves first, we're from Berwick-upon -Tweed and surrounding area and most of us rebagged in 1999 from 6RRF to 168 Pioneer Regiment RLC, 100 Pioneer Squadron, with the Berwick being designated as C Troop. Many of us were more mature volunteers and we had a few soldiers with construction skills which could be put to use for the artisan tasks put to the Squadron.

C Troop Nostalgia Group was formed in 2013 after the disbandment of 168 Pioneer Regiment to keep the camaraderie of the troops most of whom served on OP TELIC 2/3. Our Battlefield Tours run by ourselves started in 2015 with our first trip to Normandy, followed by two trips to Ypres/ Belgium in 2017 and 2019, a plan for a Normandy trip in 2021 fell by the wayside as the Pandemic took hold and an uncertainty about travelling abroad followed, with the passing of the pandemic we restarted our trips in 2023 with a few days visiting National Arboretum, Imperial War Museum, Duxford , RAF East Kirby, and the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight at RAF Coningsby, and Cambridge American Cemetery.

The 2024 Normandy trip started off with all those going meeting up on Saturday night at Berwick Drill hall with the kind gesture from Berwick Branch Fusilier Association to use their bar and have a bite to eat before the long overnight haul from Berwick -- Dover, catching first ferry to Calais, then another long haul down to

Caen with a stop off at the CWG cemetery at Etaples for one of the group to pay their respects to his great uncle that he had recently found out about.

After which we headed to Caen to the Best Western Royal hotel (can recommend this hotel, staff and accommodation were amazing), after we got settled in our rooms headed out on a recce to find where the eateries and bars were (plenty of choice around this hotel).

Monday started with a trip to St Valery en Caux and the monument to commemorate where approx 11,000 men of the 51st Highland Division were surrounded and taken prisoner, no Dunkirk evacuation for these heroes, for the rest of the trip it's a matter of packing in as much as we can per day with visits to SWORD, JUNO, GOLD, OMAHA, UTAH BEACHES, Point Du Hoc, St Mere Eglise, Pegasus Bridge, Bayeux CWG cemetery, Merville Battery, British Normandy Memorial, La Cambe German war cemetery (where we put a cross in Remembrance of a German Pioneer and an unknown German soldier as we did in 2015 on our first trip). also with a cultural visit to Mont Saint Michel (which is worth a visit if you are in the area), also during the trip to let our hair down those that have some we have a shirt night and the last night is collar and tie meal night.

Friday morning its 6.30am departure from hotel for the epic journey home, arriving back in Berwick 12.30am Saturday, each tour that we do always gets better and this one didn't disappoint.

I would like to thank James Munro who takes the time to put together and organise all of the Battlefield Tours we've been on since 2015.



■ Mayor of Kensington meeting Chelsea Pensioners

Pictures: Royal Hospital Chelsea

Chelsea Founders Day

The 2024 Founder's Day at the Royal Hospital Chelsea took place on 6th June 2024. ~
The event commemorates the founding of the Royal Hospital by King Charles II in 1681.

THE ROYAL Hospital Chelsea is home to around 300 Chelsea Pensioners who have served in the British Army and reached State Pension age. The Royal Hospital Chelsea celebrates its annual Founder's Day parade and is the most iconic event in the Hospital's calendar!

The event includes:

- Chelsea Pensioners: The Chelsea Pensioners gathering in their scarlet uniforms and parade around the square.
- Royal Family: A member of the Royal Family attends the ceremony each year.
- Oak leaves: The Chelsea Pensioners wear oak leaves on their uniforms.
- Gold statue of Charles II: The statue is adorned with oak leaves.
- Military precision: The event features military precision.
- Bands: Bands perform at the event.
- Beer tents: Beer tents are available at the event.
- Food: Food is available at the event.
- Dancing: There is dancing at the event.
- Music: Music plays at the event.

This year, the Royal Hospital was delighted to welcome Her Royal Highness, The Princess Royal, who was invited to review the parade of Chelsea Pensioners.

The Princess Royal also delivered a touching speech – dedicating a special tribute to the

veterans of the Second World War, as this year's Founder's Day coincided with the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy, France.

At the end of the parade, a contingent of Chelsea Pensioners who served during the Second World War, marched past the Reviewing Officer to mark the 80th anniversary of the D-Day landings and honour all of those who served during the war.

An over centuries-year-old tradition, the Royal Hospital's Founder's Day honours its founder, King Charles II.

Each year, Chelsea Pensioners gather in the Hospital's iconic Figure Court, dressed in their scarlet coats adorned with oak leaves.

Also known as Oak Apple Day, the oak leaves symbolise the famous tale of the future King's escape after the Battle of Worcester in 1651 when he hid in an oak tree to evade capture.

The renowned gold statue of King Charles II is decorated with oak leaves alongside the Chelsea Pensioners uniform as a tribute to the tale.

They were also thanked for their service by the Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea who was also in attendance at this year's event.

In this photo above, sat in his wheelchair is 'In-Pensioner John Morris' (pictured left).

John is now 103 years of age and is the

only original survivor from the 1st SAS when they formed in the early 1940's.

He served with both David Stirling and Paddy Mayne during the 1943 raids throughout Sicily and Italy.

Their exploits are legendary and are featured in the BBC series 'Rogue Heroes', whereby shortly a new series is due to air and looks to be epic!

The Pioneer Association currently has 2 In-Pensioners, IP - WO2 Roy Palmer who is now in his 6th year of residency and IP - WO2 Reg Parramore who joined the hospital in Feb 2024.

The Pioneer Secretary Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes visits our IP's every 4-6 weeks throughout the year and they both remain very active attending most Pioneer functions. Founders Day is primarily Roy and Reg's opportunity to invite family and friends to visit the Hospital and witness the parade in all its glory.

Sadly, tickets to attend this event proves more and more difficult each year with the Pioneer Association only being allocate 4.

Ed Note: If you're interested in visiting Roy and Reg (The Pioneer Krays) at the Royal Chelsea Hospital then simply drop an email to the Pioneer Secretary at thepioneerhq@gmail.com and we'll do our utmost to arrange something.



■ THE WOs & SNCOs Pioneer Reunion Club held a Ladies Dinner Night on Sat 7 Sep 24 at the Littlebury Hotel, Bicester where 25 members sat down to a wonderful meal. Unfortunately we had received apologies from 18 members who were unable to attend.

Maj Will Ross (former RSM 23 Pnr Regt RLC) attended for the first time since leaving the Regiment with his lovely wife Emma – it was nice to see them both again.

Billy Dilkes had his starter served in a mess tin with kids knife and fork supplied by Mr Tom Appleyard – he is really a kid at heart!

We sat down for the meal at 1930 hrs and ended up leaving the table at 2300 hrs, the time seemed to fly, afterwards more drinks were enjoyed in the bar.

Pics from this event can be seen on the Photos page.

■ THE Reed Group has recently been awarded the Gold Employer Recognition Scheme Award.

The Reed Group has created an internal Armed Forces Veterans and Reservists Group (AFVR), a Group-wide community for Armed Forces/ex-Armed Forces staff to connect.

The AFVR Group's benefits include:

- Offering employees a support group of people with similar experiences
- Recreating a sense of camaraderie that they may be missing from their time in the forces

- Offering an optional buddy system for mentoring new staff, especially when this is a member's first civilian job
- Sharing Armed Forces events, news and experiences

Joanna Chapman, Reed Group business development manager, has said:

This shows our commitment to supporting Armed Forces personnel and ensuring they are not disadvantaged by their Service. We work continuously to create new and improve existing policies and initiatives that support those who have served and those who continue to serve, including guidance documents for our recruiting staff and job application support for those applying to work for Reed.

Their working group will also hold group-wide talks to raise awareness for employing the Armed Forces Community, the benefits they bring to employers, and how they can be supported. Reed opens group talks to external stakeholders to host and bring their expertise, and they welcome anyone who would be interested in attending. If you would like to participate, email the Reed Armed Forces Community at ArmedForces.Community@reed.com

■ HAVE you applied for your Veterans ID Card yet? The cards offer much more than a memento of service, as the Government recently announced veteran ID cards could be used as a form of voter identification in forthcoming elections.

Veteran ID cards are also now being recognised as valid photographic identification on domestic flights by British Airways – the first airline to do so.

Until the veteran ID card was created, there was no way for former personnel to easily prove they had served in the Armed Forces.

Previously, they had been required to hand back their ID card, known as a MOD 90, when they were discharged.

Ride to the Wall

On Sat 05th October nearly 10,000 motorcyclists gathered at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire



■ Nat Chaun on his amazing trike, love the Pioneer badge on the bike Nat!

Picture: Billy Dilkes

NOW in its 17th year, the Ride to the Wall is a community tribute paid to those who "can no longer ride by our side". Riders from all corners of the UK and overseas roared into the Arboretum in a convoy, each group departing from one of 11 designated starting points across the country.

This was my 1st Ride to the Wall, and after bumping into so many Pioneers whilst walking around, it struck me instantly that this event needs to be added to the Pioneer Association MEL for 2025.

The rumble of engines can be heard across the 150-acre site from early in the morning as thousands of motorcycles process into the Arboretum, it remains an incredible sight. The ride from Bicester to Stafford absolutely blew my mind. Our group met at J10 Services on the M40 and as we entered, I couldn't believe my eyes. I literally couldn't find anywhere to pull up, so we proceeded to the 'Start Point' and waited for instructions.

Everyone was so friendly as you'd expect with veterans' bikers, but their bikes sat 4 abreast in their 100's as far as the eye could see. I was blown away...

At 0830hrs our escort arrived, and we followed on in formation up to the motorway. As we joined the M40, again, I was gobsmacked that our huge convoy of about 1000 bikers immediately took over 2 of the 3 lanes, this continued all the way to the Birmingham Toll Road. More and more bikers joined on the back of our convoy and as we were waved through the barriers (FREE) at the 'Toll Booth' and witnessing the many bridges filled with people waving as we passed underneath, I felt a real sense of pride, to not only be British but to be part of this special Veterans community.

As we approached the Arboretum, a Fusilier called David "Blu" Sheaf, a veteran of Northern Ireland, stood to attention for five hours, saluting each rider as they passed.

I read that since its inception in 2008, the Ride to the Wall has raised over £1.66m to support the ongoing upkeep of the National Memorial Arboretum which is amazing.

On Sat 04 Oct 2025, the 18th RTTW will take place. If you own a motorbike and interested in attending, we will arrange a meet up at the Pioneer Memorial... until then, 'Stay Safe' and 'Ride Carefully'!



THE PIONEER

■ CAMINO de SANTIAGO - What a challenge, well done Ivor! Many of Ivor's photos are too low res to publish, apart from above. Picture: Ex WO2 Ivor Whittaker

Camino de Santiago

A year ago Ex WO2 Ivor Whittaker decided to walk The Camino de Santiago. The French Way. He was joined by a friend, Royal Engineer Karl and on 1st May they set off.

SINCE before the year 1,000 AD millions of pilgrims have walked the Camino de Santiago in Northern Spain, it is believed to be the burial place of the Apostle James

The Way of St James el Camino de Santiago The French Way is 800km in distance from Sant Jean Pied de Port in France to Santiago de Compostela. It was the rivalry between England and Spain which is believed to have forced the Archbishop of Santiago, D. Juan Clemente to reopen the tomb of James and rebury his remains for safety. In 1837 the church in Spain was dealt a blow with the confiscation of land. In 1879 however along the pilgrim route a historian guided workmen in the Cathedral to where he thought the relics may have been buried.

A year ago I decided I would walk The Camino de Santiago. The French Way. On 1st May we, my friend and ex Royal Engineer Karl set off on our Camino. The route from St John starts with a long days walk up to an altitude of 1,450 mtrs following Napoleons route into Spain over the Pyrenees mountains a difficult and hard day of 35km crossing the border with Spain and heading down the mountain to Roncesvalles in the valley below.

As I took the first step out of the front door a dream, a long awaited pilgrimage/challenge had begun. For years my wife Yvonne and I

said one day we will walk "The Way". That never happened due to time and Yvonne's illness and her passing in 2020.

DAY 1. Early morning and we would already hear other pilgrims greeting one another Buen Camino a regular passing comment that would greet all pilgrims for the coming weeks along the way. After the first 15 mins of a steep climb, the weather became our enemy for the rest of the day, heavy rain turned to snow. We later discovered that 28 pilgrims had been rescued off the mountain that day. Karl and I arrived at Hotel Roncesvalles, what a welcoming sight!

After an absolute horror of day one, day two proved to be a little more forgiving. The expected high winds and thunderstorms didn't materialise and day two start was a pleasant days walking. The sting in the tale, the final 6 km downhill into Zubiri down the aptly named dragons teeth was not fun.

Day 3: I had early blisters to contend with, no pain no gain. Zubiri to Pamplona sunshine and a difficult but very enjoyable walk.

Our plan was always to arrive in Santiago on the 5th June allowing 2 days for admin and sightseeing. 1 May - 5 June 36 days, this allowed us to split one 30km leg into two 15km with an extra overnight stop, but only one full rest day during the walk. 43,364 steps today over some of the most beautiful

Spanish countryside and through lovely villages and ending up here in Punta La Reina. Punta La Reina to Estella.

The days begin to blend into one another, it was a very long hot day. Now on day 9.

Day 10 Rest Day. Finally today the town festival starts, this goes on for the next 5 days, we have to move on. Santo Domingo de la Calzada to Belorado tomorrow's 22km.

Day after exhausting day and feeling as we did absolutely drained, we were up and ready on time and ready for another day. After a taxi ride to Bergos where we will travel back tomorrow to complete the walk into Bergos.

DAY 36. The walk into Santiago de Compostela. Our final day was a mixture of excitement on reaching Santiago and one of sadness that an epic unforgettable adventure was coming to its climax. Those final few kilometres from the city outskirts into the old ancient city of Santiago, finally seeing the spires of the Cathedral, the sound of bagpipes playing pilgrims through the arches into the square joining so many other pilgrims sent shivers down my spine and also brought a tear to my eye. I was asked what would I take away from this journey, best of all will be friendships forged with other pilgrims from across the world and a profound sense of personal pride and achievement.

Buen Camino.



THE PIONEER



Pioneers Remembered

The 4th May marks the anniversary of the deaths of fallen soldiers Andrew Roberts and Rutu Silibaravi, killed in an indirect fire attack on Forward Operating Base Ouellette, in the northern part of Nahr-e Saraj district of Afghanistan.

CORPORAL Roberts and Private Silibaravi were both of 23 Pioneer Regiment Bicester, The Royal Logistic Corps and attached to the 1st Battalion The Royal Welsh Battle Group, serving as part of Combined Force Burma.

They repeated the annual residents' mark of respect on Friday 3rd May 2024 at 6.30pm (due to military availability), with the poignant gesture of joining together to clap in memory of the men who our roads are named after.

Ribbons were tied to the road signs on

the day and photos sent to the relatives families.

This year's location is the entrance to Silibaravi Drive and regiment members and family joined us to share their memories.

We have included some other Pioneer road names below you will see in the area.

Pictures: Paul Brown





Sherringham Jolly 2024

The now annual Sherringham Pioneer Jolly took place in May and again we had a great turn out. At the Jolly we learn't of the very sad loss of one of our own Wendy Micklethwaite whom had been with us at every jolly. Rest in Peace Wendy.

WELL, what a weekend! But first, I must mention the sad loss to one of our own, Wendy Micklethwaite. Very much a loss to not only to Mick and family but her Sherringham family. We will truly miss her.

Now to the rest of our Jolly family. THANK YOU for all your help and support. For my wife Jos, Admin, the Civvi Street Catering Corps and the Red Hart Public House for saving the chippy night. The brilliant support Pioneer veterans and wives and partners for making the reunion and absolute honour to put together and with next year mostly sorted already, the pleasure of knowing we are doing something right. Our newest members who attended, the

Fieldings, just fitted in perfectly. Eva and Grace and raffle caller Steve Kohut, for raising around £230 on the raffle. Kev Hilton for being Parade Marshall, and also with his wife Linda for supplying the Hilton Breakfast.

A Pioneer effort for packing the camp down on Sunday was very much appreciated. H and Dale for the comedy and not forgetting Dale's superb nerf gun!

Thanks also to Ben Little for playing the last post, perfect as always. For Duncan with all of his input, the Tyneside Club for welcoming us and honouring us with the Pioneer flag and 'Pioneer Ale' which was sold out by 2200 hrs. I must not forget my brilliant daughter (admin) – you're a legend, thank you.

I was very honoured to receive such an unbelievable Pioneer statue, words failed me, definitely choked me up.

If I have forgotten any names all I can say is that you are my genuine friends and hero's, who travel very many miles to support me and my family and friends. I really do salute you all, I'm not a big talker, so I hope you all know it's my special time of the year and I know Jos has fallen, as I have, in love with you all. You will never know how special you all are. So again a massive THANK YOU to all you legends.

Here's to the 14th May 2025 – once again at Breck Farm.

If anyone is interested, I'm afraid we do have limited space, but please contact, if interested, Peter Wegg (07900 890514). ■

Pictures: Peter Wegg



Arnhem 20-23 Sept 2024

The 80th Anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem Commemorations and Celebrations by Phil Maddox and Lt Greg McCloud

I 'M ex WO1 Phil Maddox and I served with the Royal Pioneer Corps in late 80's, early 90's before transferring to the Army Physical Training Corps. I attempted and passed P-Coy in 1991, whilst serving as a Pte with 216 Parachute Signal Squadron.

My Instructor on Pre-Parachute Selection was non other than Cpl Billy Dilkes. He was already established within the Squadron as not only one of the fittest soldiers but also the most respected, largely for his outstanding soldering skills. I quickly identified Billy thereafter as my mentor for some years to come. We've remained good friends throughout and when I approached him to confirm he was attending the 80th Anniversary at Arnhem, I asked if he wanted to jump in or take the camper van... He chose the van; I chose to jump... I started planning the opportunity to jump in rather than spectate as I knew this would be my last opportunity to Military Parachute. Here's what happened!

Sometime early on in this year of 2024, I was introduced to a group of fellow Airborne Forces Veterans (and a few civilians that wanted to be paratroopers but never did it in their early life but decided to jump out of planes later on in life in the good old fashioned "Static Line Round Canopy's" and call themselves "Re-enactors") with a group called: The Pathfinder Group UK.

I friend of mine from the good old 216 Parachute Signal Squadron – HQ 5 Airborne Brigade days posted something on social



media about jumping into Normandy as part of the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day landings and subsequent Airborne Assault in June of 1944.

Turns out this group of men jump regularly into various WWII drop zones

(DZ's) on the Anniversaries of a particular battle for example: D-Day (June 1944) and Arnhem (September 1944). So, I decided I would love to be a part of this and do a parachute jump the way we used to do using: Static Line with a Round Canopy.

I got in touch with the President: Mr Roy Mobsby (ex 1 Para from wayyyyyyyyy back) and he invited me to come along and do a day 'synthetic training' (basically a day pretending to jump out of a plane, roll around on the floor and hang in harnesses suspended from the ceiling and go through drills whilst pretending to be in the air. This was phase 1 of getting prepared to do a jump into Normandy and Arnhem.

Following this, I then enrolled onto the Dutch Basic Static Line course at an airfield in Teuge approx. 25mins drive from Arnhem itself whereby I attended a 'refresher course' for 5 days and hoped to get 5 static line parachute jumps in and be awarded the Dutch Basic Parachute Wings meaning: I could legally jump static line into the anniversary jumps anywhere in the world.

After this course I was to pay Roy the fee to be loaded onto the manifest for Normandy and then show up with my Parachute gear and helmet and go for it.

Off I went to Normandy got issued my parachute and designated "Chalk & Stick" (basically the order I'm getting onto the plane and the order when I'm jumping out the plane)

Well, the jump was fantastic and brought back so many exciting memories from my Military Airborne service days and I signed up immediately with Roy to jump into Arnhem in the September. I paid my fee and was signed up to jump again with the other guys at The Pathfinder Group UK

To say I was excited to be heading over to Arnhem to do my part in the 80th Anniversary of the famous: Battle of Arnhem (commonly known as: The Bridge Too Far) by "Parachuting out of one of a Dakota aircraft that actually flew the troops across the English Channel during World War 2 and dropped British and American Paratroopers into these very battles, was an understatement of the century !!

So far, I had attended the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landings and this was amazing, as one of the few Airborne Pioneer's I was so proud to be doing my bit and to represent the Royal Pioneer Corps.

So, when I was told I was allocated a slot on the 1943 Dakota (Placid Cassie – one of the actual Dakotas to be used in both the D-Day & Arnhem parachute drops as part of the 1st British Parachute Division involvement in June 1944 & September 1944) I was "Über"

excited again.

Thankfully this time round, there were to be no enemy forces lying in wait on the DZ as there was 80yrs earlier!

So, it was set, I travelled to Arnhem and was issued my parachute, my reserve and the order for which I was to jump out. I was to be "Number 1" in the door, and jump out 1st out of 48 Paratroopers onto the Polish DZ called "Driel" on the Sunday 22 September (this is the actual date 80yrs ago that the Polish Airborne Brigade jumped so it was very special especially as there was 20 Polish jumpers that were going to be jumping on the 2nd Chalk but I, was going to be the 1st).

Sunday approached and

we boarded the Dakota and set off from the Teuge airfield and flew the short distance to be over the Arnhem area and circled over the Driel DZ so that both the pilot and the Jump Masters were happy with the weather, the wind speed, aircraft speed and direction before allowing us paratroopers to be dispatched.

Finally, I heard those famous words of command that stirs every paratrooper: "ACTION STATIONS" whereby everyone gets ready to step out into thin air!

With heart rates jumping and Bum cheeks tightening myself and the rest of the guys move forward to the open door toward the rear of the plane and wait the

next famous words:

"GREEN ON – GO"

. And there I was:

Gone! This time

saying: 1,000 –

2,000 – 3,000 –

4,000 Check

Canopy!

Upon looking up,

I saw this amazing

sight of a fully inflated and opened green canopy and I was floating silently back down to earth.

Adjusting my drift and spotting my landing, I prepared for the landing "Thump & Roll" and to my surprise there was quite a crowd that had formed around the DZ and they all clapped and cheered as we all landed and subsequently stood up after landing on the Polish DZ "Driel"

The adrenaline was still pumping, and I was absolutely pumping with excitement. After all it isn't every day you get to jump out of a plane that was dispatching British Paratroopers 80yrs ago into Battle and it

isn't every day you get to parachute and land onto the very Drop Zone that was an actual battlefield 80yrs ago only now, it is a beautiful piece of farm land and quaint village with the local population still clearly pleased that the British helped liberate them 80yrs ago from the occupying German Armed Forces during World War 2.

I hope to be jumping again somewhere else into history and more than likely at the 85th and 90th anniversaries (health and fitness allowing of course) there were gentlemen in their late 70's jumping so there should be no reason why I shouldn't be either.

It is an amazing weekend in Arnhem even if you have no intentions of jumping 'ever' just going to visit and do a tour of the battlefield sites, museums and cemeteries' it is such a lovely and peaceful place to visit. Oh, and the beer is lovely too. Lest We Forget! ■

THE PIONEER



The Pioneer Weekend

Once again the Royal Pioneer Corps Association Reunion was held at Bicester. The turnout was amazing with 368 on the Friday and 426 on the Saturday!

THE decision was made early on in 2023, to build on previous successful reunion weekends and where possible encourage better numbers in attendance

We must ensure that we maximise every opportunity that allows an even busier programme during the weekend. We must also encourage Pioneers to return the following year if we are to continue as an association but also get the word out there to both young and old Pioneers that this is a well organised weekend that is FREE to attend and should be supported where possible.

Friday 20 June 24

The Friday allows most Pioneers and their guests to arrive, settle and take the opportunity for a nostalgic tour around some of the old pubs in and around Bicester; some may have changed their name but most still look and feel the same as they did in the past. Accommodation

remains the biggest problem surrounding the Pioneer Weekend as we're constantly competing against those visiting Bicester Retail Village; that said, as Bicester Town itself continues to grow at pace, more and more accommodation opportunities presented themselves. As an association we need to jump at every opportunity that allows us cheaper/more affordable accommodation for all events ran throughout the calendar year.

The AGM took place slightly later than planned at 1830hrs in the Ex-Services Club to allow those attending James (Beaky) Upfield's funeral in Nottingham to get back. The AGM is the one meeting that is required per annum which allows us as an association to take stock of where we are currently at and where we wish to get too moving forward. Although 12 months goes by quickly, we must inform our membership of any actions, updates, and any information over the previous period. Finally, it allows members in attendance to

raise any points or concerns to the council.

Our new Pioneer Secretary (Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes), controlled the meeting very well with updates from our President (Brig D Clouston) on the Association and his future perceptions, the Pioneer Champion (Capt S Soper) gave an update on current serving Pioneer soldiers including promotions. (2024 AGM Minutes can be found within this magazine).

Special mentions went to Norman Brown and Lt Col (Retd) John Starling for their 'Historical' support.

We should also make a special mention to Norman's son Paul; he has been the silent backbone in most of what Norman has achieved. Paul and Norman have spent many hours on the Pioneer Magazines that go out to us year in, year out and its FREE of charge. Paul's input into the magazine continues to be remarkable. His resilience in providing both stories and photos, plus the ability to put it all together is something we all take for granted so a huge 'Thank You'.

Pictures: Paul Brown



We ran out of space on our letters pages hence have put the below ones on this page from the Reunion Weekend....

■ BILLY Dilkes and the Reunion team of 2024. Just want say a huge thank you for all the time and effort you put in to make it happen, a super successful reunion.

It was fantastic to see so many old faces from yesteryear, I apologise to those I did not recognise initially, but the years have changed us. I would also like to say thank you to all the local businesses that supported this event and further gave some great discounts, thanks also to the Bicester community who have tolerated us over the decades and every year welcome back to our beloved Pioneer home.

And finally to our civilian friends who over the years have become more than friends, "You are also our family"

Glen Rosser

■ BILLY Dilkes your first big RPCA weekend (75th) was a resounding success, I am sure Norman is pleased the day to day running and the continuation of functions and the Annual get together is definitely in safe hands.

Great weekend and really pleasing to see so many new (old) faces attending. Not sure how you are going to top this one!! Many thanks too, to the staff of Bicester Ex Serviceman's - nothing was any bother to them all weekend, it was certainly a weekend of Labor Omnia Vincit.

Paul Davis

After the AGM, Billy Dilkes donated a number Military statuettes and pictures for the annual auction. Bob Gillespie also provided a couple of sculptured artefacts and finally some bottles of Pioneer Port and spirits kindly donated by Pioneers vets in attendance. Our aim was raising as much money as possible for the Pioneer Association and in doing so, we raised £655. Thank you to everyone involved in the auction!

The Friday evening function had a solo artist playing a mix of genres, a Disco and a hot and cold buffets provided by the Association. The huge numbers in attendance fluctuated throughout the evening with many Pioneers filling both rooms in the Ex-Services Club. Many drifted in and out taking the opportunity to visit some other watering holes around Bicester before returning to the Ex-Services Club. At 2130hrs we counted 368 attendees which is huge compared to 2023.

Saturday 22 Jun 24

Saturday had change to the annual programme in that the Memorial Service would take place in the St Edberg's Church at 1230hrs due to a Wedding in the morning. Again, we had significantly larger numbers than 2023 with Capt (Retd) Taff Thomas marching the veterans down from outside the Littleberry Hotel to St Edberg's Church. They halted next to the WWI/WW2 Memorial and after a quick group photograph entered the Church. Rev Peter Wright headed up the service with an outstanding organist playing in the background. The acoustics within the Church made the 'Last Post' sound amazing and our gratitude to the Bugler from The Rifles.

The Pioneer veterans had time to reflect and



remember those close friends and comrades who had sadly passed but used this opportunity to show their respect. Thank you to everyone in attendance.

Our hope was to follow on after the Service by attending the Armed Forces Day Festival on Pingle Fields, but Bicester Town Council changed their dates last minute to the following weekend.

Instead, Billy Dilkes had organised a coach leaving Bicester Town Centre at 1400hrs, which took about 60 Pioneer veterans around the new estates in which about 15 streets have been named after deceased Pioneers. Other locations bearing legacy to the Pioneers, such as Pioneer Square (the Main £50m shopping centre), Pioneer Way, the main road as you enter Bicester Shopping Village, the New Pioneer Memorial in Graven Hill estate, St David's Bks, Ambrosden, and finally the Memorial Garden in St George's Bks. This was truly

amazing and beautiful. We had the opportunity to get off the coach, visit certain areas of the site such as the EOD Dive Tank before a short Service in the Memorial Garden. A last-minute change to the programme that proved to be so emotional but also mind blowing on how much the local community respect the Pioneers...

Saturday evening finished off back in the Ex-Services Club with a Live Band, a disco, hot buffet, and the raffle. Attendance on the Saturday increased in numbers to approx. 426 attendees with a really nice atmosphere throughout; last orders being called at 0100hrs the Ex-Services would have been delighted with both the amount of alcohol consumed but also the way our Pioneer veterans continue to conduct themselves. Long may this continue!

In Summary, this was another good opportunity to meet up with old friends/

comrades, have a few sociable beverages, pay our respects, and make more fond memories. As already stated, accommodation remains our only sticking point, but Billy Dilkes is working hard to alleviate this by providing a 'discount code' for larger hotels, gaining a better rate on smaller hotels and utilising what the Garrison has available. He'll also be liaising with local Publicans to provide (where possible) another discount on certain beers throughout for the 2025th Re-union.

Thank you for all those that continue to support the Pioneer Association, whether that be through attending or providing a contribution to the Pioneer Association Fund. This year was absolutely massive in numbers, and we will continue to attract more Pioneer members both young and old with the hope of maintaining the longevity of the Pioneer ethos for some time to come. ■









This picture is available in hi-res size 18 x12 inches in a Ltd Run. Because of postage costs it is to be picked up from Billy in Bicester or at the next Reunion weekend. Price £10. Make payment via Paypal using address, thepioneerhq@gmail.com



The Royal Pioneer Corps Association
REUNION WEEKEND 2024

Scottish Reunion Club

The Scottish Reunion Club held their Reunion at Perth on the weekend of 27th-29th September 2024. The next reunion will be in Edinburgh for 26th-28th September 2025.

A SMALL but spirited band of Pioneers gathered in Perth, Scotland, for the Scottish Pioneer Reunion Club. After a weekend of reliving our teenage years—including a memorable stint at a nightclub—it was unanimously decided that the next meeting would take place in Inverness.

Fast forward to the weekend of 27-29 September 2024, when we reconvened in Inverness. Although the group was slightly smaller this time, owing to the high cost of accommodation, the enthusiasm was undiminished. We kicked off the weekend with a visit to the local Wetherspoons Pub before moving on to the Malt Room, Inverness's celebrated whisky bar. There, we indulged in some of Scotland's finest drams, toasting to old memories and creating new ones.

Saturday began with a hearty breakfast, followed by a solemn visit to the local War Memorial. Together, we laid a wreath to honour the fallen, marking the moment with a brief but poignant service.

I drove our group to Spean Bridge, where we retraced the historic footsteps of the original Commandos. Starting at the train station, we followed the path to Achnacarry House, which served as the Commandos'

training ground during the Second World War. Achnacarry, still maintained by the Cameron of Lochiel family, holds a special place in military history.

It was regarded as one of, if not, the finest of all the Allied special training centres established in the Second World War.

Its reputation was widespread and held in the highest regard by all the Allies, for not only were soldiers and marines of the British forces trained there, but also those from the USA, France, Holland, Belgium, Poland, Norway, and surprisingly, some Germans. These were the 'Free' Germans and included Jews who had escaped the tyranny in their own country. Many other Units also used the facilities of Achnacarry.

Located on the banks of the River Arkaig the castle is flanked by daunting and desolate mountain terrain. Ben Nevis is just 18 miles away and waiting as a final challenge at the end of most courses.

The BBC's recent film *Castle Commando* vividly highlights the intense training undertaken by over 25,000 men on the estate between 1942 and 1945. A visit to the Clan Cameron Museum, which houses a growing collection dedicated to the Commandos, further deepened our appreciation for their remarkable legacy.

Returning to Inverness that evening, we were met with a new challenge. Accommodation prices had soared (a staggering £350 for two nights in a Travelodge!) due to the Loch Ness Marathon, which had filled the town to bursting.

Our plans for a fine meal at a local restaurant were thwarted, leaving us to settle for McDonald's. It wasn't quite the Highland feast we had envisioned, but it served its purpose and prepared us for the night ahead.

The weekend was another roaring success, though my own ended on a humorous note—I awoke the next morning to discover I'd misplaced both my credit card and mobile phone. Needless to say, my other half was less than amused when I got home!

With Inverness behind us, we now set our sights on the next reunion, scheduled for 26-28 September 2025, in Edinburgh. I'd like to extend an open invitation to all Pioneers—past and present—to join us for what promises to be another unforgettable weekend of camaraderie and celebration.

A heartfelt thank you to Bluey, Martin, and Andy for making this gathering so memorable. Here's to the enduring Pioneer spirit and the adventures yet to come! ■



85th RPC Corps Birthday

The Northampton Branch celebrated the Corps' 85th birthday (17th Oct) by holding a small ceremony at the memorial in Simpson Manor – the site of what was the RPC Training Centre. This was organised by Mr Tom Appleyard.

THE Northampton branch of the Royal Pioneer Corps celebrated its birthday on the 17th October in 2023, however, following a discussion with the members and comments on social media from veterans who would have liked to attend but work commitments restricted them, so in order to try and increase veterans attending it was agreed I would plan the 2024 birthday celebrations for the 19th October which was a Saturday, Venue was at the memorial garden Pioneer Obelisk in Wootton

The theme for the birthday in 2023 was a potted explanation of our History, after consultation the theme for 2024 would be

to try and inform the residents of Simpson Manor the history and meaning behind their street names, to that end each of the volunteers, note I said volunteers were given a name of a road/close with an written explanation of the reason why the name was chosen, one by one we moved to the spot and read out the name of the street/close and story behind its name, followed by the last post two minutes silence reveille and wreath laying.

We all then retired to the Toby for lunch, The numbers did increase to around thirty-two however, the increase was predominantly retired veterans.

The date for the 2025 celebrations will

be decided by the members at the next meeting.

I always believe we should try different things so for the 2025 birthday I'm in negotiations with a school to include the children in our celebration, so watch this space.

Thank you to everyone who took the time to join us, to Kevin Broom for arranging the bugler Bobby Crick for giving his time, the Parish Council for the use of the park, again the Toby Inn who continue to look after us and the civilians who turned up to support us and not forgetting the volunteers who took part in the presentation. ■

Picture: Paul Brown



Officers Dinner Night

The 76th Past and Present Dinner was held on Friday 18th October 2024 at Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess, Ambrosden.

WHEN organising the 76th dinner, I knew it was always going to be a difficult task especially after the huge success of the previous 75th dinner in 2023. That said, I set out early on to get some VIP guests and we certainly hit the jackpot when Maj Gen Jo Chestnutt CBE agreed to be our 'Principal Guest'.

Gen Jo has been a very good friend of mine for many years and someone I have looked up to and admired throughout my officer career but even though with his new busy appointments as both Chief of Staff 'Field Army' and the 'Master General of Logistics', he still agreed to attend. I was so excited and grateful as I knew how busy Gen Jo's schedule was, but I also knew his presence alone would 1, encourage more to attend this dinner and 2, allow pioneer officers' both past and present to benefit from what Gen Jo has to say throughout the evening.

The bonus of Gen Jo's attendance also meant that we could apply for the RLC Corps of Drums to attend and play during the evening which, for many years had been a bridge to far so things were most certainly looking good early on.

In previous years we also struggled to get accommodation within Bicester Garrison, largely down to a 'change in policy' but also the lack of availability. In 2023, we relied on the larger local hotels which as you can imagine, made for a much more

expensive evening which we were trying to avoid this year where possible. Thankfully, the new Bicester Garrison Quartermaster (QM) Maj Wayne 'Fuey' Fuller had taken over appointment, and being a previous Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) of 23 Pioneer Regiment, he quickly set out to help us and my goodness, he definitely pulled out all the stops.

Having been involved in the organising of this dinner for well over 10 years, I knew we were on borrowed time in relation to an immanent rise in costings, especially food and labour increases. It was always coming but largely depended on the 'garrison contractor' at the time. Increase in food prices and the withdrawal of the 'Formal Function' chit, which we'd relied upon for so many years were all factors. Although the HQ RLC have been very generous in financially assisting us in previous years, we knew the time was coming where a significant increase in 'cost to attend' would increase. Additionally, the dinner night had kept to the same menu for the last 5 years, largely to try and counter any increase in cost. The regulars were growing tired of 'pan fried duck' and felt a more extravagant menu was required so 'beef wellington, it was... and I must say it was amazing!

Names of those individuals attending starting to come in and I was confident we would match the previous year's numbers from 2023; this was until I was informed that the dates for annual RLC Military Skills

(Ex Northern Strike) had been changed and the new dates fell on the weekend 18-20 October 2024. I was gutted to say the least! The 'so what' from the change of dates meant that many serving pioneer officers' in command or competing, had to attend this Exercise... this also included our 'Principal Guest', Gen Jo Chestnutt. We'd not only lost our amazing 'Guest Speaker' but also 12 Pioneer Officers' from the original attendance list. Additionally, from the busy 'battle rhythm' that is the ever-changing military tasks, another 6 sadly had to also withdraw.

The only positive from all of this, was Gen Jo kindly agreed we could still use the RLC Corps of Drums as they were passing Bicester on route to Ex Northern Strike at the Defence School of Transport (DST) in Leconfield.

The Garrison Officers' Mess has always been the ideal location for the dinner night. Since the disbandment of the 23 Pioneer Regiment in 2014, the Garrison kindly stepped up and allowed us to use their Mess. It's geographically central for guests to travel and holds a great deal of pioneer history within the Mess from paintings, statuettes and silver pieces which are on display during the dinner. The layout of the mess is perfect with the ability to comfortably seat anywhere between 90 – 110 guests. It also allows us the option of the traditional 1 long table or 12 circular tables for a more relaxed environment. As I



Pictures: Paul Brown

THE PIONEER

arrived at the mess on the Weds to start setting up to my horror, I noticed all the mess curtains were missing. This was quickly explained that not to panic, as they'll be returned from dry cleaning and hung before Friday.

I remember nodding in agreement at the Mess Managers explanation but as the previous Garrison Quartermaster for over 6 years, I knew that this was a big ask of the contractor, and sure enough, 3 of probably the most important curtains failed to make it back for the evening. Thankfully, the lighting in the mess curtailed anyone taking much notice on the night.

As much as we all enjoy the Military traditions of any formal dinner night, the one thing we all really look forward too is the 'we will now retire to the bar' announcement, which allows copious

amounts of alcohol to be consumed and the opportunity to 'spin some dits' and remember those great periods of service, whilst serving with the pioneers. Unfortunately, when organising a dinner, the last thing you wish to hear is; "we have NO DRAUGHT, due to a faulty cooler system" ... I was horrified at the thought, but in true military fashion there was a plan in place, with the QM arranging extra fridges for the bottled beers require to replace draught. Disaster avoided!

Our NEW 'Principal Guest' happened to be the current Bicester Garrison Commanding Officer, Lt Col Ged Hennigan. Col Ged has been very forward leaning towards any requirements the Pioneers have requested during his tenure and it was befitting that we had the opportunity to thank him in person during this dinner

night.

In summary, the 76th Pioneer Officers' Dinner Night was another huge success with 50 in attendance, which was great when you consider losing 16 so early on.

The menu was outstanding, and accommodation was delivered. Breakfast the following morning was well received after a heavy evening and the Garrison staff were superb throughout.

If you're interested in attending the 77th Pioneer Officers' Dinner on Fri 17th Oct 2025, then please email the Pioneer Secretary (Lt Col 'Retd' Billy Dilkes) at the pioneerhq@gmail.com for further information.

"Thank You" to Bicester Garrison and to all those who continue to support this dinner year in, year out... Much appreciated! ■





Field of Remembrance

The Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey has been organised by The Poppy Factory since 1928 and we continue to work closely with the charity each year.

EVERY year we honour and remember all those who sadly lost their lives while serving in our Armed Forces but especially those who served as a Pioneer.

I personally see 'The Field of Remembrance' as our opportunity as a small group to represent every Pioneer that has ever served or is still serving. It allows them to represent the Pioneers on your behalf and remember every 'Pioneer' who sadly lost their lives whilst serving. It also allows us to formally establish this small garden of remembrance which many Pioneers or their Families visit throughout the 10 days period.

Many Pioneer veterans also use the National Day of Remembrance (Cenotaph) the following Sunday to visit the garden and pay their own individual respects.

The Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey was officially opened on Thursday 7th November 2024.

From Friday 8th November until Sunday 17th November the Field was then scheduled to remain open from 10am to 4pm, though please note these times may

of change if there are events or other constraints dictated by Westminster Abbey.

The numbers attending the Field of Remembrance has fluctuated over the years with most Military organisations being allocated between 6 – 8 tickets. This year we, the Pioneer Association were awarded 8 tickets. Additionally, we could also apply for a VIP ticket which is allocated to the 'Pioneer Representative' who stands, front and centre, at the Royal Pioneer Corps (RPC) allocated 'Garden' and often gains the opportunity to talk to the 'Royal' representative.

I also identified in previous years that the Pioneer 'In-Pensioners' from the Royal Chelsea Hospital, London, were often ushered through without showing their tickets. I used this to our advantage allowing 2 extra pioneer tickets.

As a result, it meant that the Royal Pioneer Corps Association (RPCA) had 11 Pioneers in attendance from many different generations. It was also the first time I can remember where every Pioneer in attendance served a 'full term contract' with the Army, accumulating in 282 years

of experience.

Our 2024 Pioneer representative was none other than Mr Kev Foster. Kev reached the rank of WO2, but unfortunately whilst serving in Afghanistan was hit in the head by a Taliban sniper.

His injuries remained critical for some time, but thankfully after great support from surgeons, nurses, rehab and his wife Ginette, he pulled through.

Kev continues to support the Pioneer Association living in Bicester and working as the Clothing Storemen in the Garrison. On behalf of every Pioneer veteran Kev, 'Thank You' for representing us and we appreciate your continued support.

After the Service, all attendees made their way to 'The Admiralty' public house, at Trafalgar Square for a lunch and Beveridge.

Attendees: Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes, Maj (Retd) Stuart Woodward, Capt Stevie Soper, Capt (Retd) Kev Jessop, WO2 IP Roy Palmer, WO2 IP Reg Parramore, Mr Kev Foster, Mr Brian Fielding, Mr Paul Monaghan, Mr Martin Brimacombe and Mr Jim Reeves.

Thank you all for your support... ■

Background Pictures: Supplied





Cenotaph Parade

This year we had 110 tickets for members of the Pioneer Association to march at this year's annual Cenotaph Parade at Whitehall, London

THE RPC National Service of Remembrance, held at The Cenotaph in Whitehall on Remembrance Sunday, provides the nation with a physical reminder of all those who have served and sacrificed, with British and Commonwealth soldiers, sailors, airmen and women represented, together with members of the emergency services and civilians, ensuring that no-one is forgotten.

Members of the Royal Family always pay tribute alongside Members of the Cabinet, Opposition Party leaders, former Prime Ministers, as well as the Mayor of London and other ministers.

Representatives of the Armed Forces, Fishing Fleets and Merchant Air and Navy also attend, as well as faith communities and High Commissioners of Commonwealth countries.

The Cenotaph parade is held on Remembrance Sunday, the second Sunday in November. This year, it fell on Sunday 10th November with the service led by His Majesty, The King, the Royal Family and HM Government and featured the annual

March Past involving 10,000 veterans.

This year the Royal Pioneer Corp Association (RPCA) chanced its arm by requested 150 tickets but as always happens, we were allocated 110 tickets by the Royal British Legion. This is still a considerable number when you look at other associations and what they receive. Some Pioneers also opted to apply individually to avoid the disappointment and in most cases were successful but were required to march with other organisations.

The Pioneer Secretary annually sends out 'requests for applications' throughout the month of March via social media and the 2024 Newsletter, and this year we received 156 applications. Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes applied for 110 applicants in June 2024 and was successful. He also placed 20 applicants on the 'Reserve List' as with every year, and from experience we encounter last minute cancellations. The 2 weeks leading up to Cenotaph parade, we, as expected received no less than 17 cancellations. Many of those unable to attend were for legitimate and unavoidable reasons but we still had 10 'no shows' on the day that made no

attempt to contact the Association beforehand thus allowing us time to find a last-minute replacement. PLEASE! In future, if you 100% wish to attend and are successful during the application stage but, something comes up, just simply let us know in good time. Thank You!

On Saturday 09th November, many Pioneers (approx. 35) made their way down to Bicester (mostly from up north) and utilised the accommodation available. It was a great opportunity for them to meet up and socialise before the 'big day'.

It was nice to wonder around Bicester and see so many pioneer visitors mixing with the local lads from the Bicester Pioneer Association.

The White Hart late on Saturday evening was like turning the clocks back 10+ years seeing so many familiar faces and re-visiting all those comical stories from the good old days. It was also pleasing to see so many of the 'younger Pioneers' who, back in the day their perception of life was simply, 'they were at the stage of their lives of being at their strongest, most active and with little to no responsibility'... Fast forward over a

Pictures: Paul Brown



decade and most are now married or in a long term relationship, with children, a mortgage and huge responsibility in managing it all. In summary, they have all grown up, and it was great to see.

Like most train stations around the Country, at 0730hrs on Sunday morning (10 Nov 24), Bicester Village train station was already buzzing with Red & Green ties, Poppies, Medals and Veterans' Badges proudly on display.

The direct train from Bicester to London Marylebone arrived just before 0800hrs and was already full of other people/veterans attending the Service.

As we exited this major train station, a young lady stood to one side with her 'high vis' vest and clipboard and politely asked 'how many are there in your party,' we replied 40, and off she walked towards the taxi rank, hotly pursued by 40 veterans... a quick as a flash, she turned and said, 'okay, 6 of you in the first 6 Poppy Cabs and 4 and the last 1, and don't worry, it's all free – have a lovely day'. We witnessed something similar in previous years, but it still gives you a sense of pride that people are so respectful and generous on this day.

We all arrived collectively at the bottom steps to Horse Guards and as we exited the 'poppy cabs' and made our way towards the longest queue ever, a young man shouted, 'gentlemen, would you like to come through this entrance (VIP entrance) as it's currently not that busy'.

We were both ecstatic but relieved at the prospect of avoiding the huge queue.

On arrival to Horse Guards parade ground, one of the early arrival Pioneers, Neil (Salty) Salt had already collected our

forming up marker and was proudly holding it aloft making it far easier for us all to find our spot.

As more and more Pioneer veterans arrived, they were met with cheers, handshakes and hugs from those already in situ. It was a great atmosphere and apart from the inevitable parade ground dust on everyone's shoes, you could see everyone in attendance had made a special effort to look as smart as they could before paying their respects in front of the cenotaph.

Later than usual at about 1015hrs, the Pioneer contingent gracefully moved as a collective through Horse Guards main entrance and on to Whitehall.

We were positioned in 3 different locations before the organisers finally agreed. We were now settled in 6 ranks, with Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes heading up the Pioneer Association. Directly behind him was Lt Col (Retd) Mike Potter, Lt Col (Retd) Steve Berry, Lt Col (Retd) Mike Tikner with Chelsea Pensioner, WO2 Roy Palmer pushing Mr Josh Campbell (double amputee from Afghanistan).

In addition to the 6 leading the Pioneer contingent, we had another 93 which included a great mixture from all 3 cap badges, Miss Tara Mee who was marching in memory of Gary English and finally 88 years old 'Pioneer Veteran' Harry Booth. This was another great turnout and next year we hope to reach our full ticket allocation of 110.

The Service of Remembrance began, and we could watch most of it on the big screens but you're sadly too far away to really take on board what's happening.

The '2 Minutes Silence' sent a shiver

down your spine especially as we were placed very close to guns that started and finished this part of the parade.

The 'March Past' suddenly happened with us being brought to attention by Kev Hilton, he proceeded to step us off in quick time and we approached the Cenotaph... finally, a quick eyes left, x3 wreaths to the cenotaph, a eyes front, we were on our way back around to Horse Guards. The pavements were filled with onlookers cheering, clapping and shouting 'Thank You'... As we approached Horse Guards, a final eyes right for His Majesty Prince William, who kindly took the final salute. As we entered the parade ground, we halted, had a 'Pioneer Group Photo'. Col Billy explained 'very quickly' that a FREE curry lunch had been arranged at the Civil Service Club and we all dispersed and made our way there.

Most Pioneer veterans that marched met up at the Civil Service Club and were welcomed by a small number of Pioneers that didn't march but still attended.

The Civil Service Club was packed, as you'd expect on this day, but after a few hours drinking and chatting, we proceeded to the 1st floor where lunch was served.

People started to filter away at approx. 1700hrs with the main group heading back to Bicester to carry on the opportunity of getting together.

This was a great day and an ideal opportunity for the Royal Pioneer Corps Association to collectively pay our respects to all those who sadly are no longer with us.

'Thank You' to everyone that played a part... We look forward to 2025. ■













FUTURE EVENTS

2025

RPCA CHRISTMAS DRAW 2024

■ The famous Christmas Draw is being drawn at RPCA HQ on 17th January 2025. Your full support is highly appreciated!

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH BREAKFAST – 18 JANUARY 2025

■ The Northampton Branch is to hold a Breakfast at the Conservative Club, Billing Road. 9.00am.

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH RPC ASSOCIATION – BURNS NIGHT – 25 JANUARY 2025

■ The Northampton Branch is to hold a Burns Night on 25 January 2025, the venue is the Conservative Club, Billing Road, Northampton.

The Branch holds a variety of events in 2025, details will be published in the Branch Newsletters, if you would like to receive a copy of the Branch Newsletter please send your email address to: normanbrown@myself.com

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH BREAKFAST – 15 FEBRUARY 2025

■ The Northampton Branch is to hold a Burns Breakfast at the Conservative Club, Billing Road. 9.00am.

39/93 CLUB – RED LION HOTEL, FAREHAM – 28TH FEB - 2ND MARCH 2025

■ The Club is to hold a meet at The Red Lion Hotel, Fareham, all Association members are welcome to attend.

Further details can be obtained from Mr Les Rowley (07955 237932).

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH MEETING - 15TH MARCH 2025 AND BREAKFAST CLUB

■ At the Conservative Club, Billing Road. This includes Veterans Breakfast for which the Northampton Branch have a Veterans Breakfast every month at the Club and a Branch Meeting every quarter.

CENOTAPH APPLICATIONS WINDOWS FOR 09 NOVEMBER 2025 IS FROM 1ST MARCH TO 31ST MARCH 2025

■ Want to march at the Cenotaph then get your application in!
Email thepioneerhq@gmail.com

ARMY VS NAVY - BIRCHFIELD ROAD CRICKET CLUB - 3RD MAY 2025

■ Once again we will be watching the Army vs Navy on the big screen. 2024 was the best match that have ever seen! Don't miss out. Probably roll out the Pukka pies etc again!

WO'S AND SNCO'S PIONEER REUNION CLUB BATTLEFIELD TOUR - 16TH-19TH MAY 2025

■ This trip will be visiting the area around Dunkirk.

FOUNDERS DAY - CHELSEA - 5TH JUNE 2025

■ Tickets only

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH - ARBORETUM TRIP - 19TH JULY 2025

■ National Arboretum, Staffordshire

76TH PIONEER REUNION WEEKEND - 27TH-29TH JUNE 2025

■ We will be at Bicester again and an itinerary of events will follow in due course.

RPCA SUMMER PRIZE DRAW - 28TH JUNE 2025

■ This will take place at Bicester HQ

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH BLETCHLEY PARK TRIP - 6TH SEPTEMBER 2025

■ A group of us will be departing Northampton on train enroute to visit the famous Bletchley Park Code Breakers

RIDE TO THE WALL - 4TH OCTOBER 2025

■ Stafford, National Arboretum

NORTHAMPTON BRANCH PIONEER BIRTHDAY - WOOTON - 17 OCTOBER 2025

■ This is in morning, so still can goto Officers Dinner in the evening.

77TH PAST AND PRESENT OFFICERS' DINNER NIGHT – 17 OCTOBER 2025 – OFFICERS' MESS, AMBROSDEN

■ The dinner will be held at Bicester Garrison Officers' Mess , Ambrosden on Friday 17 October 2025.

If you wish to attend please email Lt Col (Retd) Billy Dilkes on: thepioneerhq@gmail.com

FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE – 6TH NOVEMBER 2025 – WESTMINSTER ABBEY - 10 TICKETS

■ If you wish to attend please let the Controller RPC Association know on thepioneerhq@gmail.com

CENOTAPH PARADE - 9TH NOVEMBER 2025

■ This is to be held on Sunday 9 November 2025, if you would like to march with 10,000 other veterans please supply the following details (these are required by the British Legion) to:

- Full name
- Place and date of birth
- Full address (including postcode)
- Service number and dates served
- Telephone number and email address

We have at least 110 tickets and hope to get more tickets and a record attendance!

RPCA CHRISTMAS DRAW 2025 - 23RD JANUARY 2026

■ Held at Pioneer HQ, Bicester.

TOM



A SOLDIER'S LETTERS TO HIS WIFE



577 letters over
a 5 year period!

Ed note: Thomas Henry Hugh BOSSINGHAM (13058917) (Date of Birth 19 Dec 1013)

joined 2 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 3 Aug 40 and served until 20 Jan 46.

Although his daughter published the letters if full I have omitted the personal details. Please remember that his letters would have had to pass through the censor!

**Report: Thomas Henry Hugh Bossingham
1305891 Pioneer Corps**

TOM and Vera were married on 27th April 1940. On 3rd August (just three months later!) Tom was in the Army. Tom wrote to Vera regularly during the War and his final letter was dated 19th January 1946; he did his best to explain to Vera what was happening and how it affected him --- some of what he wrote the Censor took exception to, so those particular stories and anecdotes are lost for ever!

Obviously Tom came home on leave now and then --- towards the end of October 1941 a child was conceived and on 30th July 1942 Margaret was born.

Tom died in 1971 and when Vera moved away to a new life in Gloucestershire, she took the letters, which she had carefully kept over the years, with her to her new home.

Vera passed away in 1998 and Margaret took the collection of letters back home with her to Australia where she lives with her husband --- it is a fair assumption that Tom would never in his wildest dreams have ever thought his letters would travel so far!

Margaret has provided various notes and remarks to these letters as we go along. There was much boredom --- all this drilling and inspection and for what? And again the boredom shines through in Tom's letters and he does tend to repeat himself! Also, Tom must have had the unhappy feeling that he was, in the beginning at least, in 'comparative' safety, while Vera was at home, coping with the Blitz on her own!

Tom's Army life began in Scotland and from there he moved to Northern Ireland where he stayed until April 1943. There were times when nothing seemed to be happening --- there were rumours that 'something' was in the air --- but then it all fizzled out; and again there was the boredom!

But Margaret arrived and that became a most welcome distraction.

Then came D-Day and it seemed that all the preparation, etc was going to mean something, at last! Some of Tom's comments during this time are interesting, describing the horrors of what he had seen --- the carnage, the dust and dirt, the destruction, the noise and most of all, the smell!

(Ed note: the original document is over 860 pages long so has been reduced for publication --- only location will be shown when a change has occurred.)

**1940, 2 Centre Pioneer Corps
Notts Hill, Glasgow
Saturday (Postmark 3 Aug 40)**

Here's your first letter from your soldier husband.

The journey up was not too bad, I soon palled up with some chaps. We arrived at Glasgow about 20 minutes late and had half an hour to wait for the buses. On getting to camp we were dished out with

plate, mug, knife, fork & spoon. Three blankets and ground sheet.

My full address now is :- Pte BOSSINGHAM, 13058917, 13th Coy, No 2 Centre,
Pollock Estate Camp, Glasgow
S.W.1, Scotland

Friday

There is a pretty substantive rumour floating round that we are moving on the 16 or 17 of this month. There is also the choice of three places, Colchester, Watford or Northern Ireland. So just pray & pray that I might get to Watford.

Going on our first route march tomorrow so think of me about 2 o'clock.

Sunday

Our Section leader (a section is 9 files = 27 men) is Sergeant Miller, he says we are the smartest section at drill marching and rifle drill.

Tuesday

**Section 4, 174th Coy, Sunnylands
Camp, Carrickfergus Co. Antrim, N.
Ireland**

As you can see by the address we have moved. First impressions very favourable but rumour has it that we are not likely to be here very long.

I understand that, providing no more serious outbreaks occur we are entitled to 7 days leave after 3 months service and two free travel warrants a year. Married men get preference and the leave is taken alphabetically.

Belvoir Park,

Saturday

Our Captain has just left us for some other place and we are just wondering who's coming in his place.

Sunday (morning)

.Our equipment has to be cleaned at least once a week, this includes ammo pouches, belts, straps, water bottle and haversack to be blanched and the brass polished, to say nothing of our rifles caps and boots.

Saturday morning we spent digging gun pits, that's the first bit of pick and shovel work I've done since joining the Army.

The food down here is improving greatly, better quality and more of it. Our barracks are getting on all right and we shall be moving in at any time.

Sunday

Just a line to help keep your chin up. No sign of our billets yet and its beginning to get chilly at nights and what with the black out starting at about 8.30 we are beginning to feel these long dark evenings.

Monday

Yesterday we were working up to seven o'clock in the evening and the same today. As things look now, we should be very busy all the week so don't be disappointed if you

don't get a letter for a bit.

Tuesday (In Billets)

The weather has got so bad these last two or three days that the Major has ordered us into billets before they are properly finished.

We had a few barrack room rules read to us and shown how to fold ground sheets and great coats, etc. The building should be comfortable and very warm..

Thursday

What a treat it is to sleep in a bed again. I have never appreciated one so much in my life before. The wire mesh on them is rather wide and consequently ones backside looks rather like a fruit flan in the morning. Our lighting is not installed yet, I am writing this with the aid of a hurricane lamp and a candle.

That friend of Beryl's tell him if possible that he's talking through his hat. Does he realize that it was the AMPC that fought most of the rear-guard action at Dunkirk?

Sunday

I am very sorry to keep on changing my address, but that is evidently the nature of the AMPs. We only had two days at Carrickfergus then we moved to the other side of Belfast. This place Belvoir Park (pronounced Beaver Park) is the derelict grounds of what was once a beautiful old house. There are dozens of armed sentries, and after dark is a nightmare. There is a very well known Irish Regiment stationed here mostly youngsters and when we have a different password every night and about ½ doz sentries challenging you between the main gates and camp one has to be careful. The work here is very heavy and tiring, loading & unloading lorries.

We had a nice speech by our C/O this morning, he told us that there is no Sunday in the army.

Friday

This well-known regiment stationed here are billeted in the house. They have a wireless set and we have been informed that we can go in at 9 o'clock and hear the news. You mention that I could ask my CO about postage. Don't you know that in the Army it's a crime for a common private to approach his Commanding Officer. His request has to go through the usual channels: Lance Corporal, Corporal, Sergeant, and CO.

We are being issued with new badges and name tapes soon, when I get mine I'll send you my old one. We are now known as the Pioneer Corps. After the Dunkirk affair.

Some time in the near future I want to get a dress cap to wear. They cost 5/6 and are maroon and green, but look very smart.

Friday 27

This morning I had my first experience of shooting with a rifle. Had five rounds issued to us and proceeded to the range. The

were troops sprawled in every possible corner. When we reached the open sea and she started to roll, then the fun began.

(Note from Margaret - The next letter came in an ACTIVE SERVICE envelope, the first seen, and a reproduction follows. In subsequent letters Tom refers to these as "Green Envelopes" or "GEs".)



The Company are issuing special Christmas cards, I only took two (one for you and one for Ma) as they are all I intend sending this year.

Sunday Dec. 22

Reveille on Christmas Day and Boxing Day was at 8 with breakfast at 8.30. The dining hall was all decorated with chains and evergreens. The dinner was a great success, the Major brought his wireless along as ours is out of order and we heard the King's Speech. The officers and NCO's waited on the men. The menu consisted of Roast Pork, greens, potatoes and apple sauce, Christmas pudding, sausage rolls, mince-pies, cheese and biscuits and a pint of beer per man. I was very much surprised to see the number of TT's. Several toasts were drunk, and I honestly don't believe there were many dry eyes when the Major toasted "the Folks at Home". After dinner there was a singsong with a piano accordion accompanying.

Tues. Dec. 31

Since Christmas there have already been some changes. Two or three sections of our Company who were previously stationed at some other place near Belfast have rejoined us at Belvoir for a special job.

1941

Belfast

Wed. 1.1.41

As regards leave I learnt just lately that troops stationed in Northern Ireland are to have in future a leave every three months with a travel voucher, whereas troops in England are entitled to a leave every three months but only get two vouchers which means they have to pay their own fares on two trips. We shall have to see how this works out.

The following is a reproduction of the photo Tom received from Vera:-



Friday Jan. 3

By now you have probably read that little ode that Danny wrote on the bombing of London, and if I know you at all you would be rather touched. Well, he happened to show it to one of our Corporals. This man was so impressed with it that after a short time the next person to see it was the Major. He read it and straightaway sent for Danny and congratulated him on a very fine effort and asked him whether he would be interested in writing a weekly report of the Company's activities to be inserted in a publication known as the "Pioneer" which is a collection of reports of all Pioneer Companies in Northern Ireland. After a lot of thought Danny managed to turn out quite a good article for next weeks "Pioneer". He had by now been duly appointed Coy. Scribe or some such personage.

Sunday Jan. 12

Our Major and Lieutenant have left us now to go to other companies. Both of them have been promoted and judging by what they have said just recently they owe their rewards to the good work put in by the company on various occasions. The new officers seem quite alright. The lieutenant seems quite a nice chap, very thorough from what I have seen of him. He is the only one that I have come into contact with up to now on barrack room inspections and such like.

Wed. Jan. 15

Before I forget, here is the recipe for the Soda bread:

IRISH SODA SCONES
1 lb. Flour
2 oz. Margarine
2 oz. Sugar
½ Teaspoon Baking Soda
2 Teaspoons Cream of Tartar
1 " Salt

Rub marg. into flour, mix ingredients together with 2 eggs (?) and half pint of sour or buttermilk. Sweet milk will do. Bake in very hot oven.

PLAIN SODA BREAD

2 lbs. Flour
1 Teaspoon Baking Soda
1 " Salt
1 Pint or more of Buttermilk or Sour or Sweet Milk

Mix until very soft and bake in a moderate oven or hot gridiron

Fri. Jan. 24

The thaw has set in, what a mess. Water water everywhere. What with that and a slight frost each night certainly makes a change.

Sunday Jan. 26

As I told you before the piquet job is no longer mine so I must needs work for my living now and that does not give me much spare time. Coupled with this all my kit had to be transferred to another barrack-room and then all our equipment had to be blanched a khaki colour as a change from the green.

Thurs. Feb. 6

Yesterday we had the first exercise of a

Gas Alarm. What they call in the army – PAD (Passive Air Defence). At the signal we have to parade in gas equipment and proceed to our various posts of duty.

Sunday. Feb. 9

The show on Thursday went off very well. As it was rather late in finishing, we had the usual supper after it, the Major, who was there, gave permission for the fellows to be out until midnight.

Friday was rather a hectic day, there was a big job for us all, it took from quite early in the morning until after dinner.

By the time we had our pay the afternoon was well passed so our usual half day was gone.

To go back to Friday for a minute I finished the evening off in an RC canteen. My companions were two corporals and another private, very nice chaps. The private stands 6'2" in his boots so is obviously known as "Tiny".

Sunday. Feb. 9

I saw the sergeant-major about you coming over. He gave me the authentic ruling on this matter which is: You must come and be prepared to stay six months. The only way to get over this is either, if we move anywhere when you automatically go back to England, or if you are sent for on compassionate grounds.

Wed. Feb. 11

The photographs I told you about will soon be on sale. Unfortunately at the last minute I was taken out of the squad because of my belonging to a special party. Nevertheless I did my best and managed to get in one.

You seem by now to have "met" all our officers. The Major's name is Longley.

Friday, Feb. 14

No we are still without gasmasks and as you say we wave the slip of paper about.

Sunday. Feb. 16

When we are out working the garb generally is battle-dress, overalls, jerkins, rubber-boots and tin hat. There are no fires allowed to be lit until teatime & no change of clothes, and certainly not enough time to change at dinner.

Wed. Feb. 19

Our winter seems to have started again. Since Sunday the weather has been terrible. Rain, snow and biting cold winds that seem to cut right through you. On days like these, in the words of the Army, "Bed is favourite".

Friday, Feb. 21

When the troops are issued with service respirators, one of the exercises is for the troops to wear them for so long every day.

Sunday. Feb. 23

We have at long last actually been issued with respirators, just imagine! No more shall we be able to wave our slips of paper about under the noses of interfering "Red Caps" etc.

Sat. March 1

From next week our working times are being drastically revised. Reveille at 6.30 and working hours from 8 until 5.

Wed. Mar. 5

Monday I ran into my first spot of bother. We have started P.T. early in the morning clad only in slips & singlets, gosh it was nippy. After this I had to change ready for the baths and happened to be a few minutes late so got myself charged. As I had a clean crime sheet I was let off with a caution.

Tues. Mar. 11

Before I acknowledge the receipt of your letters and parcel I have some rather good news for you. Next Tuesday, all being well and God willing, etc., I should arrive at Euston Station some time in the evening so you had better make arrangements, get some spaghetti and go ahead as I have advised you.

The Major has said that any man who changes his leave or wishes to defer it goes to the end of the list. As leave is liable to be stopped any minute he advises everyone to take it when it comes.

Wed. March 26

Back again at last, the journey seemed to last no time.

After leaving Euston we arrived in Liverpool at 1.30 and had to be on the boat by 3. Les and I (the one with the coloured hat) walked from Lime Street to Merseyside but did not see any damage to speak of. There is a great shortage of cigarettes up there. The boat left at 3 and got into Belfast at 2 the following morning. We were not allowed off the boat until 7.30.

Unfortunately this trip I was not lucky enough to get a bunk so had to make do on the floor.

Sunday, Mar. 30

This Yugo Slavia business certainly is a bright spot, it might help some of the other smaller states to unite.

Tues. April 1

You said that this Yugo-Slav business was one of the few occasions when you felt quite elated by the war news. How about the Navy's effort in regard to the Italians?

Sunday April 6

Well now for this piece of very good news I promised you. There is a form obtainable from somewhere or other (I have seen one) which enables you to come over here for one month, if you stay for more than the month you will have to stay six. Over the week end I went round to various offices and places to try and get one but was unsuccessful. You might do the same at home. The form is No. R.G.10. and is to do with food control office. You might try this office and the Police Station and let me know how you get one, meanwhile I will carry on here and keep you informed.

Thursday, April, 10

Here we are back at Belvoir again. We only spent two days away after all. It was a place much about the same as Belvoir, some estate or other only about three or four times as big as the Park. While there we worked so hard that in the evening practically everybody was too tired to do anything else but sleep.

For this special job we did during the week we have been promised an extra day off some time, so we have something to

look forward to.

Easter Sunday

Owing to the pigheadedness of some of our senior NCO's the list of men allowed out have become rather mixed just lately. This means that when we get an afternoon off we are on fire piquet so cannot get out.

We must definitely not discuss enemy action should there be any, the only thing I can tell you is that I have seen nothing and am still complete in body and soul.

We moved about 25-30 miles into Co. Antrim, still the same type of job, that's all I can tell you.

Sunday April 20

On Friday I felt lousy, tired, hot as fire, aching everywhere, deaf and goodness knows what. I decided that night to go sick in the morning. When morning came I had broken out in a rash, I nearly had a baby there and then. When I saw the MO he took one look at me and said "Oh!! Nazi measles" – the sequel being I am now in a fever hospital for a week or so. I make a total of five (so far) from the Park. We are all eagerly waiting to see who's next. All letters have to be fumigated before leaving the hospital so there is no point in sealing any. My letters may consequently take a bit longer in getting home, but don't get upset, by the time you get this I shall probably be walking around again. But think of it – German measles, I feel very unpatriotic.

Tuesday, April 22nd

Four of the fellows here are from Belvoir, all Pioneers out of different barrack rooms, the greatest "fun" we get is for someone to get up to the window whenever a car stops outside to see who the next victim is.

Thursday, April 24th

There are only two chaps from Belvoir in here now, it looks as though the infection was caught in time. These few days I have spent inside (today was my first day up, and incidentally I was allowed out.

Tuesday, April 29th

The doctor saw us Monday morning and gave his OK then after a bath in some disinfectant we turned our backs on the Fever Hospital, for good I hope. The hospital is in Belfast, not a great way from the Park, as I knew I should not be there long I decided not to let you have the address.

Sunday, May 4th

Unfortunately the Major is on leave this week so I have been unable to get an interview with him but next week when he is back I shall see about it.

Thursday, May 8th

We seem to be getting quite a quota of attention just lately. Don't worry though we have no casualties --- yet. What has happened to the city heaven only knows, we are not allowed in there yet.

Sunday, May 11th

There are a whole lot of new faces here but they don't mix in much with the old original chaps of the Company.

Tuesday, May 13

Here is some good news for you at last. I

saw the Major yesterday and he told me it was possible for you to spend up to a month here. All you need do is to apply at the local Police Station for a form asking for an Exit Permit. I can get the forms here only they refer to Permits from Northern Ireland. Fill it up and take it back to them and then you will have some waiting to do.

Great happenings are taking place in the Park just lately. A piano has been procured and above all American cloth on the tables, and there's a War on.

It is the soldier's privilege to see his CO on any matter. He just approaches the SM and tells him and then the SM tells the CO and he fits it in at his convenience, easy.

Saturday May 17th

Should you be able to arrange your stay here so that it complies with my leave, it may be possible for you to accompany me on my return journey, we must wait and see though. Whatever you do though, don't wait for me to give you the dates of my leave, make your own arrangements and I will have to fit mine accordingly.

Tuesday, May, 20

Tonight is my night for duty, I have just learned that at 6.30 I must report myself to the cookhouse to peel potatoes for tomorrow's dinner.

Thursday, May 22nd

First of all you will find enclosed a letter of authority from the Major. When you go to the passport office with your photos be sure & have them signed on the back first by a clergyman, J.P. or Police Sergeant. About the railway ticket, you will have to see to that I am afraid. Take your letter of authority to the RTO at Euston and he will do what he can. Be sure and pick a time to see the RTO when he is not busy otherwise he may not be able to give you much time. As far as I know the Passport Office is in Dartmouth Street, Broadway, Victoria, S.W.1.

Sunday, May 25th

This morning we had a heavy job, it lasted from 8 until 2 without a break, now everybody has the afternoon off to rest in.

Wednesday, June 4

I hope you realize by now that the RTO decides when you travel. Trains and boats do not always run together. You might get into touch with the RTO at Euston and find out. Also about the travelling warrant. There is no such thing, your letter of authority will do if you show it to the RTO.

Judging by the date of this next letter, it seems as though Vera travelled to Northern Ireland to spend a holiday with Tom, then he made the journey back to England with her, as his leave was then due – just as he thought, and hoped!

Friday, July 25th

Here is some information that maybe useful to you. When, I say when and if you are interviewed about this conscription business, state definitely that you have no desire to join the Forces or any Ammunition works. Play on your office knowledge, Kodak's and D & D's. You do at least stand a chance of an office job instead of munitions. The Forces for men are bad

enough, but for women they are b----y awful. Excuse my "French" but ---. Do your utmost to keep out of it. Best of all, try for the Ambulance driver.

Sunday, July

The dinner we had today was about the best I have ever tasted in the Army. Roast beef, Yorkshire pud, new potatoes and butter beans. Boy it went down well.

Thursday, July 31

I managed to get back into the big room but unfortunately there have been a few more alterations and now there are only a very few chaps that I know left up there, so am waiting my chance to move.

Thursday, August 7th

Another point in the married men's favour has just been granted to us. A certain number of sleeping out passes have been allotted to the Coy. As there are not sufficient for each man with his wife in Ireland to have one, they are being drawn for, and each man has one for a week.

Thursday, August 14

You are grouching about the black-out, what about us over here with only oil-lamps? I must see about getting myself a small torch for the dark nights.

Sunday, August 17

Friday being pay day we were rather late in getting back to work. The OC troops must have been a bit liverish because he came ranting and roaring for us and make us work half an hour later.

Our new officer's name is Baker, he is a middle-aged chap, rather tubby. Now we are waiting for another one to arrive as one of ours from another detachment has been transferred.

Tuesday, August 19

Monday was a whole day's holiday for us. You see we had rather a big job on over the August Bank Holiday so did not get any time off. The only fly in the ointment as far as I was concerned turned out to be that I was detailed for Dental Parade that morning. The thoughts of it spoil my day off. Talk about wind-up. Anyway I got there and had two more teeth filled. As is nearly always the case it did not turn out to be as bad as I thought it would be.

Sunday August 24

There are two padres who take the parades for us, they each take alternate weeks. There is one who professes to be able to tell the course of the war by the Bible. He preaches politics to us, pure and simple. The other one is the same chap who interviewed us and is a really nice chap. Sunday mornings we work from 9 till 10 then break off to be on parade again at 10.30 for a C of E service in our dining hall.

Nelson and Cullum have both left us, now we have a Lt. Baker and a Capt. Mercer. He is a professional cricketer, used to play for Glamorgan and Sussex.

Wednesday, August 26

Monday was a terrible day, it poured with rain since the time we got up. The working party went out as usual and best part of our little party got very wet. We could not get back to barracks so the things dried on

us. There were no ill effects.

Thursday, August 28

This Income Tax is becoming quite a nuisance isn't it? I expect you thanked Mr. Kirton, I think I am very lucky to have such a friend who is ready and willing to help me with my "financial problems". From what you say the allowance seems as though it must go.

Sunday, August 31

Please don't be too hard on me for not writing to you earlier but honestly My Vera we have been working so hard these last few days that in the evening there was only one desire between the lot of us, namely sleep.

This morning there was no church parade, we had too much to do. Then to cop it all while I was having a hair cut I witnessed a bit of a do between a private and an NCO. Now I have to appear as a witness in the morning before the Major.

Wednesday Sept. 10

I am very much afraid that this letter will be rather short as I have been inoculated and so cannot go out of camp. I don't feel half as bad this time as I did in Scotland. There I felt I only wanted somewhere to lay down and die.

Sunday Sept. 14

Friday was a heavy day for us again. My 48 hours were up Friday morning so it was back to work for me.

Tuesday Sept. 16

Tomorrow our working hours are being altered again. We must do without a NAAFI break in the morning and work until 4.30 in the afternoon.

Friday Sept. 19

Today should have been our half-day but during the week some brass hat came round inspecting the place and decided we were not putting in enough hours work. The consequence is that we now have to lose our NAAFI break of ½ hour and work till 4.30 instead of 4.

Thursday Sept. 25

There has been an alteration in the troops here, consequently our fire-piquet have been altered.

There is another small matter that cropped up again today. We had a medical inspection this morning and the MO spotted my trouble and wanted to know all about it. Why I did not get it seen to, etc. He said it would only get worse and in time to come might in fact prove very detrimental to my health. He also mentioned that the present was a golden opportunity. Free treatment and the best of attention. Finally I told him I would consider it very seriously but not just now as I hoped to be going on leave shortly. He laughed.

Sunday Sept. 28

Saturday afternoon was terrible. We went out to work as usual at 7.30. We worked until 8.30 then it began to rain and continued to do so until night. Needless to say we finished work and sat about in the sheds until dinner-time. After dinner it was rather comical as all the boys sat down to clean their great-coat buttons. .

Thursday Oct. 2

Our leave rota has started again this week so it should not be so many weeks now before I am home again.

There are about a dozen chaps in the room I am in now, and apart from being bed-mates we all work together on the same party. You want to know what we argue about, well to be as clear as I am able I should practically every subject under the sun.

On our nights in we have to do the vegetables for the next days dinner and cut enough bread for breakfast and tea. Its not a hard job, the only drawback is having to parade at 9.30, this stops us from going to bed early.

Sunday Oct. 5

Today we worked this morning, church parades are alternate weeks now.

Tuesday Oct. 7

The income tax is a bit of a shock isn't it, but we may able to remedy that when I get home, don't worry about it.

Sunday Oct. 12

As for the stockings, I have had rather a rude awakening. I saw some in a shop for a reasonable price and fully fashioned so decided to get you a pair, but found out later that I would need some coupons. I am dreadfully sorry darling but my intentions were good. I seem to make a habit of leading you on, don't I.

Sunday Oct. 19

We have been having some terribly wild weather just lately. Torrential rain and winds at gale force practically all day and night without a stop. Some days it has been raw cold too, I was pleased with my woollies then. As you can imagine everywhere is soaking wet or up to ones ankles in dead slimy leaves. Still they will not allow us to have fires of coal or coke. We have to spend a few minutes each day looking for wood, enough to last us the night. This is not a very pleasant task when its raining heavens hard and the wind is blowing like fury. Then when you have it, its all wet and muddy and takes no end of a time to light, so say nothing of the smell and smoke it creates.

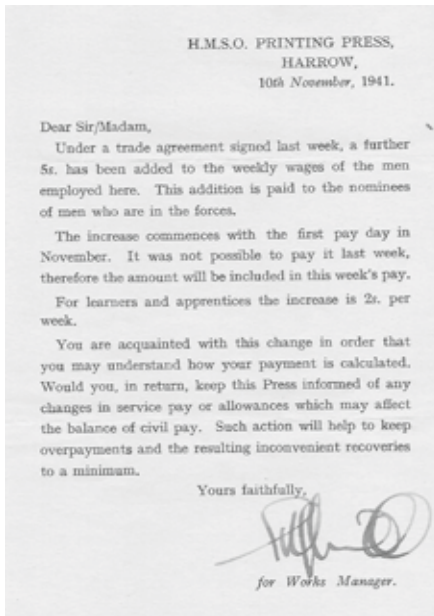
Now for some real news. I am detailed to proceed on leave as from Wednesday 22nd but as this does not comply with your wishes I am doing my best to get it put on until the 29th. If I succeed I shall be home Thursday week, if not I am afraid I shall be there Thursday, DV

Sunday Oct. 26

Well Vera Darling, this will be about the last letter, expect me Thursday but at what time I am afraid I don't know, keep an eye open for me. Have a bath ready for me and get my suit out ready. Are you excited, I'll bet you are, what a time we will have, have you got those clothes of yours put by?

The letter on the next page answers how Vera was receiving money on a regular basis, some of which she sent on to Tom to supplement his Army pay.

This next letter is dated "Friday Oct. 14th but Tom seems to have got his dates a bit mixed up --- it should be 'November'.



Friday Oct. (Nov.?) 14th

Now listen to my tale of woe, and believe me it is a tale. After leaving you we had one or two stops and a pause or two and finally got to our jumping off point at about 3 and got on to the boat where we slept for nearly 6 hours until round about 8.30 to 9 before we sailed. It took us until 10.30 to get across and then we waited for the train to pull out. By the time we got into Belfast it had turned eleven. After a wash and a lunch at the YMCA we got back to Belvoir at approximately 3.30. Then surprise, shock, calamity!!!! The Company had gone, all strange faces, what a turn-out, I have never felt so utterly desolate. Tired out and fed up after our journey and then to be greeted with this and on top of it no beds!!!! The boys have moved out to Bally somewhere or other and we are to join them next week. So its goodbye to Belvoir,

Here again, Tom has his dates mixed up – he dated the next letter

“Sunday Nov. 16” with the word “Oct” in the middle, crossed out! Sunday Nov. 16 Well, having got over our initial shocks we are just beginning to shake ourselves down. What a to-do though, hardly a soul we know, a real tough lot, mostly Welsh and Scots. I am very much afraid that after a month or two here the place will not look the same. We took a pride in the place so naturally we feel very bad about leaving here.

You may remember that I mentioned to you how when we return from leave we have to go before the MO for an inspection. By some chance he happened to spot my rupture. Of course he wanted to know all about it, how long I had had it, when did I do it and did it hurt. I told him the truth about it and he went on to tell me that I was a fool to leave it as it was and told me quite frankly that without attention I should be extremely lucky if I reach middle age. He told me that I was responsible for myself as well as you. In fact he told me so many things that in the end I felt quite ashamed of myself and a little frightened.

He cannot force me to have attention but should I refuse he threatened to put me on Excused Duties which would mean that I should not be allowed out until I made up

my mind. I have a week in which to think about it.

But to get back to the present, I am on light duties and should not have gone out into the dump in the first place so I have a life of ease.

Monday

I visited the McCormacks, Molly had only just come home that afternoon. She looked very well and felt it, but just a trifle tired. They were all sorry to hear about our change but hoped we should get along alright.



(The McCormacks)

I have seen the MO again and he says that he is making an appointment for me to go to the hospital for a specialists examination, so I must look forward to that I suppose.

Ward 5, Stranmillis Military Hospital, Belfast Friday Nov. 21

I hope that this address will not cause you too much alarm, but it had to be. By the time you get this I hope the worst will be over.

After a few weeks down at Bangor I may be fortunate enough to get some sick leave.

Sunday Nov. 23

Yours truly is still very much alive and comfortable, but on his back.

I was butchered on Saturday morning round about midday. On Friday I had my tum-tum shaved (I don't half look funny with no wool where the wool ought to be). Then the orderly bandaged me up. There were two of us went into hospital on Friday for the same thing. The other fellow was in the RAF. He went in first. The whole thing did not take an hour. First I was put into long woollen stockings up to my thighs, then a jacket that did up the back with a scarf of cotton wool. After this the sister injected a dose of morphine into my arm to steady my nerves.

The next thing I remember in fact they woke me up, were two orderlies lifting me onto a trolley. They greeted me with “The Block Awaits”.

The doctor administered a spinal injection and I went dead from the waist downwards. Mind you I was best part asleep. For the next half hour or so it was a matter of instruments tumbling and rattling with two masked figures hovering over me. The thing that struck me as very strange was the doctor who now and then leant over me and wanted to know how I was.

For the rest of Saturday my bed was about a foot higher at the foot than at the

head. This was uncomfortable as well as a lot of blankets and a rubber sheet. At about 11 o'clock the sister gave me another morphine injection and then I went off to sleep. My only real discomfort is hunger. Mind you I am a bit sore where I am cut. Saturday morning I had two half slices of toast and a mug of tea. Since then I have only had toast, a rice pudding and plenty to drink.

Wed. Nov. 26

I went back on to normal diet today. Up till yesterday I had been on a light diet, tea and toast, gosh I could have eaten a horse.

I am now considering a transfer into the Medical Corps. I spoke about it to one of the sisters & mentioned my qualifications and she told me the correct procedure was to approach my own CO.

There is always a lot of gossip about hospitals. This one was the first Military Hospital in Belfast & therefore the best equipped.

Sunday Nov. 30

The food here on the whole is very good, only occasionally something goes wrong and there is a little grouse.

Monday Dec. 2

When I eventually rejoin my unit I shall probably get a batman's job or something that does not entail any hard work.

All these little things you want to know seem so uninteresting but here goes. There are 25 in this ward, broken arms and legs, two more hernias besides mine, internal troubles, appendixes and an amputation. There are all three services represented. Nurses are very nice and obliging. Our food is very clean and wholesome. As for my own case I cannot say anything as I have not seen it yet, I am still all bandage and cotton wool.

Thurs. Dec. 4

Today I had my stitches out, so I am now well on the road to getting up, only nine more days in bed. I was so interested in watching the unstitching procedure that I did not notice how many there were. Anyway I have a scar about 4-5 inches long and it had upwards of a dozen stitches. The dressing must stay on for another day or so until it dries up and then it can come off.

Sunday Dec. 7

I am not at all unhappy or uncomfortable or anything like that just the reverse in fact, because the sister told me that I shall be able to get up next Saturday.

When I was admitted to the hospital I had to draw a suit of blues and leave the rest of my kit in the QM's stores and that's where all my snare blades are



Not much has changed, has it? They pay you too much and then have to take it

away !

Tues. Dec. 9

Yesterday I had my dressing taken off altogether so now we shall not be long (I hope).

Any sick leave I am liable to get depends on the MO when I leave the coast, if I go there.

Thurs. Dec. 11

The parcel was very nice, where on earth did you manage to get the toffee and chocolate, I thought those things were almost extinct.

When your telegram arrived I told the fellows I was to be a proud father, you should have heard the congratulations I received. I only managed to save my bacon by giving them a Manikin each. Yesterday after dinner it smelt just like Christmas.

That 21 days absence does not seem to apply in the case of our Coy. there have been two or three chaps go into hospital and come back, so I am expecting too.

I can sit right up in bed now without any discomfort at all.

Sunday Dec. 14

Well they have at last allowed me up and I am happy to say that I am not doing too bad.

Yesterday I got out of bed while the nurse turned my mattress.

The first thing I did was to collapse on the floor. What a sensation when my legs hung down for a bit and then when I stood up I felt about 8 ft. tall, I kept going up and up, Today I was up for an hour and walked for a bit, that was strange too, I felt giddy and very unsteady, but another day or two will see me a bit fitter I hope..

If everything goes according to plan I may be fortunate enough to get out next Thursday.

As regards this sick leave one of the other fellows asked the doctor (the same one who operated on me, a Major Moore) about the chances of leave and he said it depended on the MO at Bangor.

Here is a little point of assurance for you. This Major Moore is a specialist on stomach operations. The sister told me that to have him operate on me in civvy street for the same complaint would have cost me 30 guineas.

126 Convalescent Depot, New Savoy Hotel, Bangor, Co. Down

Tues Dec. 16

You will be pleased to see that I have managed to get out at last. Yesterday they told those who were due to go out that we were going to a place called Ballymena, but this morning for some reason they changed it over and here we are for a bit.

It's a very nice looking place from the outside, very modern looking, just exactly where it lies I cannot say yet as I have not been out. Just imagine in time to come when I mentioned that I stayed at the Savoy for a few weeks. Bow-wow. It's rather chilly here, but that of course is only to be expected seeing that today is the first time I have been out.

Once a week I believe there is a medical inspection and if the MO is satisfied with your progress your grade is changed and the day becomes rather more strenuous. The last grade is W. In this you go for route-

marches and do PT in a slip and shorts on the front somewhere.

Sunday Dec. 21

I am glad to say that I feel very fit, my aches and pains seem to be disappearing very fast. My only grouse is the cold, it seems to go right through you. There are only two places where I can get really warm, by the fire and in bed.

The food is good, better in fact than it was at the hospital

Well it seems the last leave did the trick and from Tom's comments in this letter Margaret is definitely on the way !

Wed. Dec. 24

Here on Christmas Day there is a film show in the afternoon and a dance at night. The menu has been posted up and looks very tempting, it should be a very enjoyable day, we shall only have ourselves to blame if its not.

When I was examined last week (we have a medical each week) the MO left me in category 2 so that means another easy week.

Tues. Dec. 30

There is still a great lack of news, yesterday I had another medical exam and was made grade X so that is rather encouraging., Today I had my first duties, scullery orderly, washing everything up after meals, its rather a greasy job, but not heavy. My op. is giving me no trouble at all now, all the stiffness and uncomfotableness has gone out of my legs, my back does not ache now. I am sorry to disappoint you, but we don't wear blues here. We were brought here in one of those big Army Ambulances with an ATS driver.

1942

Thurs. Jan. 1 1942

It was at least compensating in a way to know that as the troops over here are getting such marvellous treatment from the civvies, our people over there are doing the same for other folks sons and husbands.

Sunday Jan 4

I am afraid there is not a great deal to tell, the weather just now is lousy, high wind and torrential rain. In fact some of the fellows say that on the front the sea is coming right over the promenade. Yesterday it rained nearly all the afternoon, my day out too.

We came down here to Bangor in one of those big grey ambulances, driven by an A.T.S. We sleep two in a room, "married apartments" no doubt, the RSM asks for volunteers for potatoes every day, if he does not get enough volunteers he details the rest, so sometimes you get caught and sometimes not. There are about three or four hundred chaps in here apart from the staff. When we go out for exercise I usually manage to find someone to chat with, but in the evenings I either read or go for a stroll along the front, then I prefer to be on my own with just my thoughts.

Tues. Jan. 6

There is not much to tell from this end. My duties week are landing orderly or paper-chaser. I have to sweep the whole landing twice a day, or at least half of it, there are two of us. We are excused all

parades and can go out as soon as we have finished. During the summer this would be an ideal job, but just now it's a trifle draughtly walking along the front.

This morning I had another medical exam, the MO seemed quite satisfied with my progress and put me in category 'X' so in about another fortnight at least there ought to be a living here.



Fri. Jan. 9

I have just finished my job of sweeping the corridors, so now having an hour or two to spare I though it a good opportunity to sit down and write your letter. Friday is about the busiest day here. We get paid, dirty laundry must be handed in, sheets changed, applications for week end passes put in, etc.

Washing up at home would be a pleasure after this, turn on three hundred plates and mugs, up to the elbows in hot greasy water and no soap flakes, thick with steam, etc.

Wed. Jan. 14

Today has been my lucky day, this morning while out for a walk I found a 2/- piece. Then at the medical inspection the MO put me into group 'W'. He examined me, felt all round my stomach, asked a few questions and seemed very satisfied. It should not be long now before I am out, which brings up that question of leave again. First, all leave is cancelled for a week at least, second, sick leave is not granted from the depot, if the MO thinks fit the patient is given a recommendation for leave to take back to his unit. If he is lucky enough to get leave it is counted as his ordinary privilege leave. So in my case, if I get one of these recommendations, it would mean a leave in a week or so's time, but my next one would be in 16 weeks time, plus the balance of this period. What do you think?

Fancy you trying to use a saw, I can very nearly imagine just what sort of a caper you would cut. Anyway, it was very decent of the caretaker to lend you a helping hand. He did not by any chance recognise it, did he??

Sun. Jan. 18

This afternoon I have just had a room mate thrust upon me. He is an old chap, about middle-age, but very well spoken and gentleman like. We should get on very well together. He has a son in the Air Force but unluckily he has been reported missing. If you see a book on sale called "Bomber Command" get it, will you please. It is very interesting, one photo in there is of some airmen, the photo is entitled "Back From Bergen". This man's son is the third from the right.

In a chat with a sergeant of the staff here, I found out that all sick leave was stopped as from January 1st. The MO's cannot grant sick leave unless the man has been in hospital either 16 weeks or more, or that it is over 16 weeks since the man

had his last leave. Mind you I have not tackled the MO here about it yet, but I will do.

Sectn. 1, 174 Coy. Pioneer Corps.Home Forces

Sunday Jan. 25

As you can see I am back with the boys. Your letters will take a few days to catch me up, but don't get alarmed if you don't hear from me for a day or so owing to these moves.

I left Bangor on Friday and arrived here in the evening. When I left the MO told me that he could not give me any sick leave. Then when I arrived here I had to report sick on Saturday morning but as the MO did not turn up I shall have to report again on Monday morning. Then on top of that Mercer is away on a course and from what I hear there is not much chance of him coming back to the Company. The MO will be my last chance and you can rest assured that I will tap him. Apart from all this my privilege leave is due in about four weeks time.

One consolation is that I have managed to get back with Joe Tyce and all the rest of the lads.

There are two more chaps in the company who have been grizzling and crying for some months now for a compassionate transfer and have at last after about six months got it.

This state of affairs is only succeeding in making hate the Army and everything to do with it. On top of that I am getting to despise anyone who is not in it and having the same discomforts and shortages we have to put up with.

Wed. Jan. 28

As you can see I am still alive and kicking in spite of these newspaper reports, etc. about some mention of unwanted attention we have had. Personally speaking we have heard nothing of it here.

This place is not at all like Belvoir. I can't tell you much as the censoring of letters is getting very tight. We are not allowed to comment on the weather now, why I don't know as today's weather is no use to anyone tomorrow.

30.1.42

This place takes a bit of getting used to but am glad to say that I am getting a bit more settled. Just a present I am doing the job of MO on the job attending to cuts and bruises, etc. I must have a light job for a little while you see. When this period ends I shall put in my say about SJAB and show someone my letter of recommendation from Shrosbree. I am quite certain that without pushing myself to the front, I have more qualifications and am better suited for this particular job.

Sunday Feb. 1

Thanks for the cuttings about the Yanks. We heard all about them and whilst I was in town last week I saw a few.

Occasionally up on the notice board there are notices for application to the Military Police (Blue Caps) or Intelligence corps. This company has so changed and the place so depressing that the next time one of these notices appears I am going for it!!!!

I don't want to appear "catty" to you, but being a woman you will never

understand. If it was just a case of going into the Coy. office and enquiring about a transfer, or any other business for that matter I should not mind in the least, but when it comes to the point, when the only way of getting on is to soft-soap someone you detest, or crawl round and buy a few drinks, you can rule me out of it altogether. Don't you think our rights as men and educated men at that are taken from us enough without expecting us to go through the degradation of kow-towing to someone, who probably through graft of one sort or another has some senior rank to you. If an army career, such as it is, depends on that sort of education, I prefer to remain as I am.

I don't think there is much danger of us going on Overseas Service. If we do it will be voluntary service, and I shall be too keen on my home to think of anything like that. When your time comes I shall try and defer my leave until then. Compassionate leave is granted now, but it counts as a privilege leave unless the leave is due to enemy action.

Tues. Feb. 3

We shall have to wait and see how the arrival of the Yanks affects us, as you can no doubt imagine there are numerous rumours floating around, but that is about all.

Sunday Feb. 8

There is also a plentiful supply of meat here, would you like me to bring some home with me?

This time you see I may not be able to get any soda bread or butter milk. There is a slight chance that I can also lay my hands on some stockings, but don't expect them.

The MO's job is still going strong, but no messes -- yet, only cuts and bruises.

The next time there is a notice on the board for transfers anywhere I shall be after it. This company gives me the creeps now. I only know half the chaps, and practically everybody is jostling everyone else for a better position. There is not an atom of comradeship between them at all. Just here and there you find a few chaps sticking together, like our chaps at Belvoir but that's about all.

There are two kinds of Police, Red Caps who keep law and order, and the Blue Caps who do traffic control, troop movements, etc. These latter are called VPPs, Vulnerable Point Police.

My Dear Vera, if I was to write a letter to you complaining about living conditions, food, officers' habits, the administration of law and order in the company and go into details, the letter would never get through the office. I should be sent for and asked to rewrite it!!!!

Tues. Feb. 10

My Dear Vera,

As far as I can find out my grade has not been altered, I am still A.1???

Tues. Feb. 17

The last group of chaps to go home on leave did not reach town until nearly ten o'clock. I hope that this will not be my case but in case it is I shall have to phone Jill when I reach London. We will leave that for a bit though.

Thurs. Feb. 19

There are rumours going about that there will be a break of a fortnight between the end of this leave and the beginning of the next. Anyway I am keeping my fingers crossed and hoping for the best.

My battle dress cost 3/3 to be cleaned but it looks very smart again now.

Sun. Feb. 22

I had a letter and cheque from the H.B.S., but unfortunately on the cheque itself they have spelt my name BOSSINGTON with all my initials right. How they did this I don't know as in the accompanying letter it has been spelt twice correctly. This will mean the cheque going back to the H.B.S. or I am not sure if I should send it to you completed and then have it altered.

Another job I must do before I get my leave is to blanco my equipment so that I shall at least look like a soldier.

Tues. Feb. 24

There are still rumours floating round about leave, but nothing very definite yet so will not trouble you with them.

Tom has obviously been home on leave and is back again in Northern Ireland – also suddenly all the letters have envelopes (there have been no envelopes prior to this for a very long time).

Tues. March 17

There has not been a great deal of activity around here just lately. Ireland is living up to its name just recently, you probably know that today is St. Patrick's Day. All the Irishmen have got the old Shamrock in their hats. I expect there will be a few broken heads knocking about today.

Thurs. March 19

You will be pleased to hear that I have still retained my MO's job. It really is one of the few things I can do, as I must keep on Light Duties for a few more months.

Sunday March 22nd

Quite a few things have happened here since my last letter, so pin your lids up and take notice. Firstly on Thursday I had to assist the MO with 180 inoculations, quite an experience seeing the needle go in and out and not having to be done myself.

Friday pay day thank goodness, then there were some faint traces of rumours floating round that concerned me, the first being that I had been transferred to section 5. That was not so bad, one of my pals was coming with me. On Saturday morning at breakfast all the sections names were read out and we were told to change our blankets and also our palliasses. Lay all our kit out for an inspection and also parade for a medical inspection.

It was only then that we learned of the impending moves. This new section was going out on detachment to that place where you landed on your visit here, and I was to accompany them as MO. Our quarters from what I hear are in a small hotel, but the nature of the work is unknown as yet.

This has come as a very welcome change, just to get away from this place but I wish it was section 1 going all the same.

Today we have to pack up all our kit and

bedding, draw a rifle and bayonet and hold ourselves in readiness to move out in a lorry at any time. I will give you some more details and my address later so please don't worry.

14 Coy. Pioneer Corps, Attchd. No. 5 DID RASC, Home Forces Tues. March 24

Another move, gosh I am getting quite dizzy, never dreamt that I should do so much moving. Anyway as far as conditions go this place is a vast improvement on the last. It is almost like my period of convalescence, two in a room, I seem to be very lucky regarding hotels.

We came here by lorry, and after being allotted our rooms etc. and respective jobs we, that is, Johnny and I, decided to "view the joint". That crack of the SM's about a first-aid man was plain bunk. It stands to reason that an established company would not rely upon a detachment for their MO. Anyway I have still got a light job, dining room orderly. My duties consist of sweeping and mopping the dining hall floor, keeping the tables clean and cutting bread, etc., but it keeps me on the go all the time. When we return I shall have to see the SM about getting my old job back.



Still nothing changes very much – they give with one hand and take away with the other !

Thurs. March 26

This place is certainly a lot more lively than the last, more shops and more people, to say nothing of the ozone. The food is a lot more plentiful too.

I do not mind this dining room orderly's job at all. No one bothers me, I have the job to do and only myself to blame for anything. The only drawback is that I do not seem to get much time to myself during the day, on the go all the time preparing one meal and then clearing up after it.

Good Friday

Since I last wrote to you there have been some rumours floating around concerning myself and B---. I will not enlighten on them in case they prove groundless and I do not want you to suffer any unnecessary shocks, so be prepared for another change of address.

This afternoon a man arrived and gave us a very interesting lecture on "Russia, our Ally". He opened my eyes on quite a few points and there were several good questions put to him afterwards. This idea is to become a weekly affair, but

unfortunately it looks as though I am going to miss them. Tonight I am on fire picket.

My job ends at carrying dirty plates, dishes, etc. into the kitchen, another chap does the washing up. The tables have american cloth on so only need wiping down. No, I do not do any cooking, I have not risen to that yet.

Sectn. 1 174 Coy Pioneer Corps., Home Forces

Wed. April 7

As you can see I am back once more with the lads. I had notice of my move on Monday evening to be ready by mid-day Tuesday. After one or two very fond farewells I at last very reluctantly tore myself away.

On my arrival I was very pleased to be told to report to the billet I had already been in. Joe is out of hospital and looks none the worse, he wishes to be remembered to you.

From what I have heard up to the present our store-man is desirous of a change so somebody suggested me as a likely successor so here I am. It is an indoor job and I have no need to do any heavy or dirty work, there are always a few fatigue men to hand.

Fri. April 10

This new job of mine is going to be rather a responsible one. It will be a change for the best, not being used to accepting any amount of responsibility it may help me to assert myself as you often wish I did.

At present the old store-keeper and I are going through the store to check everything and leave the books, etc. in a good order for me when I take over. There are about another ten days or so before I am on my own, then the fun will begin. The job itself does not scare me, but all the different forms, etc. are rather forbidding at first look, but with another day or so's working under supervision will, I hope, see me quite confident.

Another rather interesting point I have run across through this new job of mine is unique in a way. The cobbler who does our repairs is a deaf and dumb mute. The other storemen had to carry on a conversation with a paper and pencil. I am afraid I rather shook everybody when I began to "speak with my hands".

We received our increase in money this week. I feel very well off for a change. Next week I shall see the QM and have it made payable over to you.

Wed. April 15

The fellow who is in the store at present gives up at the end of this week and then I shall be on my own. Up till now it has not been too bad, I only hope that next week no complications arise. There is a dickens of a lot to be responsible for so I shall have to be careful and sharpen my memory up and not leave things laying about. Anything I lose will be charged against me.

Fri. April 17

On pay parade today the Major asked me how I was getting on with my new job. I don't think that once I get hold of it there will be much chance of me losing it.

Fri. April 24

Our NAAFI is now stocking tobacco at

the old prices, as you probably know we can already get cigarettes there. I thought that this budget was going to hit me this time being a pipe smoker.

This job of mine is rather like the one I had at the DID. Once I got into the run of things and know how to arrange my various tasks, I found that the time went quickly. I had time to myself and also finished at a respectable hour.

Maybe in a year or two more your wish will come true. Stripes or no stripes, this Army life like we are experiencing it is so monotonous. I have had quite enough of it. The experience has done me a lot of good, opened my eyes and also sadly to say, has disappointed to me in a few respects. However, there are a lot of very pleasant memories to look back on.

Wed. April 29th

Some time this week I must change my billet. It is essential that I sleep near the store, so as the previous storekeeper slept near there I must do the same. It's a bit hard leaving all my mates, but there are a few chaps in this other place that I know.

Sunday May 3

On Friday I should have had a half day but "circumstances beyond my control" would not permit so I had to work. In the evening I went out for a walk so was not entirely miserable.

Yesterday when I asked if I could have the half day off I was told yes, when I had finished. I finally finished at about 4.30 so that was another half-day spoilt. Then today, just to cap everything it came out in orders that some big lug was paying us a visit some time next week so that means some spit and polish with all the usual trimmings. Equipment to be blanched, boots dubbined, buttons polished etc., while a few a few hundred miles away some of our fellows are dying by the hundred. My only hope now is that I shall be able to get some time off during the next week. Don't think I am getting browned off, but a day in town would be very acceptable.

The Major is offering a prize of £1 for the smartest billet, talk about bribery and corruption.

Wed. May 6

Tonight I have been working late again, the wireless is blaring out in the billets so I have moved into the store to get some peace and quiet. I am only just across the road from it now.

You no doubt remember that I told you I may have to move. The billet I am now in is much tidier, no odd corners and things, and what I am most thankful about is that I now sleep on the lower deck. All the "home comforts" are just the same, wireless, electric light, etc.

Regarding my leave, at present all leave is off, when it will restart heaven knows, so keep your fingers crossed and hope for the best.

Friday May 8

Yesterday I had a nice trip on one of the vans. I had to go down to the DID and draw our rations. I saw the lads again and heard from them that they are still enjoying life down there.

Sunday May 10

Friday I heard that I might have to visit the DID again in the morning on rations. When I got back yesterday the big noise had arrived so I had to keep out of the way for a couple of hours.

Yesterday morning I had to visit the DID again, but I believe it will be my last visit. You see I signed for 56lbs. of cooking fat and left it there. It is a nice break and I enjoyed the ride, but it is the extra responsibility and I have quite enough of that already. When I got back a whole lot of stuff had arrived at the store for me, so all that had to be sorted out and counted. This meant another half day going west, so the QM told me I could either have all day or Sunday or a half day in the week so I chose the half day.

This morning I was still checking off some kit. At dinner today I found out that tomorrow we all have to pay a visit to a, go careful now, a psychiatrist, I believe that is right. He is one of those chaps who asks you all sorts of questions then decides what category your intelligence puts you in!!!! From what I hear it is part of the medical test nowadays.

All our laundry is done by a Mobile Unit and is very unsatisfactory. Every week there are shortages, so I have decided to send my washing to some woman in the village who takes it in. She is quite a character from what I hear. Her eldest daughter is an illegitimate, and she has a son by the batman of the last company here. What a mess!!!!

Tues. May 12

Yesterday there was not a great deal happening. I took my mirror over to the carpenter to see whether he could make a little frame of some sort for it. Yesterday was also the previous storekeepers last day in the store, so from now on I am entirely on my own.

Thurs. May 14

Tonight, I was busy up until about 8 o'clock when I went for a wash and shave, made my bed and had a supper in the NAAFI, then came back just to finish a few odds and ends off and write to you. When there is nowhere to go or nothing to do I might just as well busy myself in here and keep the place ship-shape. I am not open for business though some of the chaps seem to think so. I believe they imagine I sleep here as well as work.

I listened too, and enjoyed Churchill's speech. Like the majority of fellows I think it is about the most cheerful one he has made up to the present.

Tues. May 19

Here is the best news as yet, you will be very pleased to hear that leave has re-started. When I am due I am not quite sure but it should be in about five or six weeks time I hope.

Our cobbler the deaf and dumb one is a very ardent trout fisher. We had quite a long "talk" about it last night in the cinema queue.

leave it till tomorrow.

This test we had was an observation exam. All sorts of patterns with pieces missing and we had to supply the missing piece from about half-a-dozen specimens. There were quite a few questions and by

the time I had finished there were stars, stripes and dots all over the place. You may have seen something about it in the papers a few months ago. I remember seeing it.

Thurs. May 21

You may remember that a few days ago I told you we were losing one of our Sergeants and Cpl. Schaeffly. Well now there is some further news which is even worse. Joe is leaving. I am beginning to believe that I really do put the evil eye on anybody I befriend. Joe will be about the sixth or seventh who has left the company. It won't be long now, the way things are going before there will not be a single chap left of the old original 174th.

Don't upset yourself about this psychiatrist fellow, we all went through the same, so it stands to reason that we cannot all be MD, though there are times when I doubt it.

Sunday May 24

There is a bit of bad news this week. Joe has left us now. He has been after a transfer for some time and has now got it. He has gone to somewhere in England.

Wed. May 27

Tonight was our changing night and the QM has been up here in the store with me changing worn shirts, battle-dresses, etc. I have only just finished and it is now 8.30. Tomorrow I shall be very busy too, checking up on all the "swaps" and sending all the unserviceable stuff away.

At long last our NAAFI has managed to get a stock of tobacco in so now the war can carry on.

Don't you know what a QM is? Surely, you know it stands for Quartermaster, haven't you ever heard the song about his stores? He is the next rank to a full sergeant and responsible for the Coys. kit, equipment, rations, pay, etc.

The results of the test were never published. I expect it like a good many more things in the Army, you only hear anything further if you don't come up to scratch.

Sat. May 30

On top of that I have struck my first patch of trouble and it has given practically everybody a very severe shaking. Someone has pinched some stores from me, I reported it and then discovered that none of the windows have properly latched and also that one had been tampered with fairly recently. The outcome of it all is, that everyone, Major, Captain, QM and myself have been busy on a stock check. Fortunately, apart from what I know is missing, nothing seems to have been touched. The carpenter has been up and fastened all the windows, I am having a counter fitted in and worst of all, I shall have to sleep here in future.

Last night, the QM and myself were in here until turned twelve going through the ledgers, I had supper with him and his wife at about one so I was repaid in a way. Egg, liver and bacon, biscuits, cheese and pickles.

So tonight I am all behind, no time to sort the laundry out, boots for delivery all over the floor and a great pile of old equipment alongside my table. To cap it all I have picked up a terrible heady cold, cannot hear, my ears sing and crackle and a pocket

full of snotty handkerchiefs and just to complete my picture of misery, it has been real Irish "weather" all day.

All these lads, with the exception of Joe have volunteered for overseas service, I cannot say where. "Tiny" is still here, at least I have him for a while I hope. I am getting in such a way now that I am almost afraid to befriend anybody.

Sectn 8 174 Coy Pioneer Corps, Home Forces Tues. June 3rd

As you can see by my address I have been posted to my new section. By a stroke of luck it is the section whose billet I am at present sleeping in so the change is not quite so bad as it might be.

Yesterday there was not a great deal happening. I had a good clear up in my store and re-organised the place a lot. There is a hint of another inspection shortly, more spit and polish.

Thurs. June 4

I feel very fed up and browned off tonight. Nowhere to go, no one to go out with, broke and bored stiff. Don't let me upset you by sounding so miserable but it does at least help to fill a letter if nothing else.

This morning the policeman nearly forgot to call me. He eventually got up here at about 7.15 so I had to get up at the double and nearly lost my breakfast.

"Tiny" Thompson is a sergeant now, I expect if Joe had still been here, he would have been one too. I had the pleasure of congratulating him and giving him his issue of stripes. I am very glad to see it as he thoroughly deserves them.

Sunday June 7

In the evening I met the cobbler and had a long "chat" with him. He had been fishing the previous night and done very well. He has promised to take me one of these evenings.

This morning at breakfast I found out that I was on leave so had to get down and blanco all my new equipment. It was not dry at tea time so I asked the lady next door if I could use her fire. She very kindly consented and I made another friend.

At the moment of writing it is about 12.30, I have just returned from changing the guard. It means an almost sleepless night as the guard is changed every two hours. I had a long nap this afternoon so I am hoping that I shall not feel too bad tomorrow. Funnily enough Sgt. Thompson (Tiny) is Guard Commander.

13058917 L/Cpl T Bossingham

Tues. June 9

What is the idea of addressing the papers to "Pte" can't you get accustomed to my new title?

There is not a great deal of news, last night I went to bed extra early to make up for lost time. It is not all honey being a lance-corporal you know, especially on guard. The men do stand a chance of getting an hour or two's sleep but I have to get up every two hours to march the relief out.

Surely you don't imagine that because I am in the store I shall not look after myself. I have a nice all-metal bed with springs for a start. It goes "Pung" each time I turn over, just like home.

So the doctor is still satisfied with you, that's a good thing, look after yourself and don't get overdoing anything.

Thurs. June 11

At last I have some news of leave. Two or three of the fellows with whom I went home last time are going on leave this next week so with a bit of luck you can expect me during the week commencing 22nd.

Sunday June 14

This morning I managed to get all my papers and forms and vouchers, etc. done. Then in the afternoon I got Les to give me a hand and get some figures that are needed in the office by the morning. It is now just after 10 o'clock and we have just finished. What a job this is. Tomorrow I shall be very busy all day again. The laundry has to be got away and boots taken into the cobblers. Another corporal is leaving us. This time it is Jimmy Manning, you met him in the canteen one evening. He has volunteered for overseas service and has to collect his deficiencies and make a few exchanges tomorrow. In between this there are men coming in continually to get soap or soda, disinfectant or toilet rolls. Some want articles of kit, others want their overalls changed, I tell you, Monday morning is a nightmare to me.

Tues. June 16

Again I am afraid there is a great lack of news from this end. One rather unfortunate item is, that as the QM has gone on leave this week it will probably mean that my leave has been put back a week.

Today, during the course of my many and varied duties in the store a tiny kitten found its way in. It followed me about for quite a time mewing and rubbing round my legs. In the end I did what I used to do with Winky, put it on my shoulder, it seemed to be quite content there, until there was a gentle tapping on the door and the lady from the house next door wanted to know if I had seen her kitten.

I was actually on guard relief duty Sunday night. Tiny was Guard Commander and my job was just to see the guards were relieved and mounted at their proper times.

Thurs. June 18

What do you think? At last you have committed the almost unpardonable sin. Your letter had been cut !!! Are you slipping or being a trifle too indiscreet? Something about the factory where Wilf is. Giving information to the enemy, and you a soldiers wife, my, my.

So Ray has taken the plunge, now we shall see what sort of soldier he really is. Has he "private means" because he will need them. As our Major said, commissions are not all they look. You take several courses and then come out glorified with one pip and broke to the wide.

Tues. June 23

I heard, quite unofficially of course this morning, that I may be home next Tuesday. Don't rely on this too much, but when I do know for certain I shall wire you in any case.

Sunday June 21

Well, again there is the usual lack of news. Last night I was on duty in the NAAFI

for 3½ hours. Hardly long enough for a good turn of duty but just long enough to spoil an evening. This week I managed to get Friday off and went up to town. For about the first time on record I think, I went into town but no further. Practically every Sunday morning I am very busy and cannot get away from the store at all. This morning was no exception. I should like to, once in a while and go to church instead.

The QM comes back from leave on Wednesday, so again I say, with a bit of luck I should get my leave shortly after.

Tiny Thompson and Bill Lusky, both went on leave today, I should have gone with them.

In the cook house now we have a Sgt. Cork an instructor, and boy oh boy can he turn out some meals. I hope our cook-house staff turn out to be very ignorant so that he stays here a long while.

There seems to have been a longish period of leave, judging by the date of Tom's next letter.

Sunday July 12

I expect my wire reached you safely. The journey up was quite uneventful. The rain kept on up until passed Leeds. I did not see my chum at all. He eventually turned up today. It appears he missed some local train and got into Leeds about a quarter of an hour late. Funnily enough, when we got here it was a beautiful day, just by way of a change.

Thur. 16 July

They have the nerve to say "Join the Army and see the World" "The Army of today's alright" "Good food ??? good beds and good quarters". All for 2/- a day and civvies of our own age lounge about at street corners trying to take the rise out of us. The whole country and empire at present need all and every effort they can possibly lay hands on. So what do these folk do? Just because a few hundred years ago some "fruity" Monarch crossed a shrivelled up stream on a broken down old hack, everybody has a week off to celebrate it. A new form of patriotism, part of the local war effort.

If Englishmen have to join up and do their bit, why not Irish? "All for one and one for all" should be the country's motto, not just Cornwall. If that is the "higher ups" conception of fair play my answer is not a word --- it's a noise.

You must have some weird ideas at times of what I am like in soldier life. Don't worry, when I am home I am just plain Tom, but here its 1305----, well you know the rest. I hope this scrawl will not upset you, but there are times when everything in our favour goes against us. The only way to get over it is to have a real good grouse, there are two things the Army can't stop us doing, Grousing and Thinking.

Apart from all that though, since the "other" troops have arrived the poor old Tommy has to take second place. For all their modern equipment and posh clothes, to say nothing of their pay, when it comes to soldiering, they are not even on the map. I am speaking now of real soldiers, not Labour Gangs !!!

Sorry to feel in such a filthy mood, but what else is there to do. I wish this whole business was over and done with. I am just

living now for the day that my old friend Rudyard Kipling speaks about :

Oh, there'll surely come a day
When they'll give you all your pay,
And treat you as a Christian ought to do,
So, until that day comes round
Heaven keep you safe and sound,
And Tommy, here's my best respects to you.

Sunday July 19

My name was up in orders last night, to the effect that from the 17th of this month I was a paid L/Cpl.

Tuesday July 21

Lucky for Stan, let me know how he looks and remind him that I am still in circulation.

Thurs. July 23

Last night I was very busy all on my own till past midnight. The place certainly looks a lot cleaner and neater. What gets me is all the red tape attached to various items. It would be useless for me to try and explain here but believe me some of the tin pot little rules and regulations are enough to drive me mad at times.

The carpenter has put in a whole lot of extra shelves for me and I have been amusing myself facing them all with cardboard. Even if I do say so myself, it looks very neat. I must now wait and see what this Lt. QM has to say about it. I am expecting the worst.

I shall be glad when this suspense is over, you will too I expect. Keep your chin up and don't worry about yourself or about me. You will be in good hands and I, well like I always tell you, I shall be alright. Am glad that the doctor is still satisfied with your progress. Don't forget now, be off to her like a shot at anything unusual, don't take any chances. For all she says I still think you should have someone there with you.

Sunday July 26

Well were are now all set for this big inspection, I hope he does not find too much fault otherwise I can see myself falling out with him. For the past five or six nights I have been working here until turned midnight. The carpenter has made a lot of alterations for me, new shelves etc and I have been amusing myself facing all the shelves with cardboard, labelling, arranging, stacking and goodness knows what. So you can well imagine that if he does pull it to pieces too much I shall not be in a very nice frame of mind.

There are also very peculiar things taking place here. Things that have never happened before, rumours are ten a penny, in fact they are so rampant that something must be afoot this time.

Sect 3 174 Coy Pioneer Corps

Tues. July 28

There is still a great lack of news from this end, nothing ever seems to happen. Oh there is just one rather important military move that has just recently been very successfully completed.

If you pay great attention to my address you will notice that I am now in Section 3 !!!!!

Having got our inspection over I did at least think I should have a few days quiet, but no, off we go again. This time it is just

a check to see whether we are holding more or less than we are entitled too. *The next six envelopes have been addressed to Vera at : College Hill Nursing Home, 123 College Hill Road, Harrow Weald It seems Margaret has arrived --- at last !!*

Sun. August 2

You must be very proud just now, a daughter and just what you had set your heart on. I am very pleased and happy. Thank God (and the doctor) that you are still safe and sound. I shall not be content now until I can get home to see you both.

The peculiar thing was, that on Thursday night I had another guard and believe it or not, I could not settle down anywhere either to sleep, read or write. I was getting very het up as the next day looked like being a heavy one and I had visions of my being fit for nothing, then in the morning at about 10 o'clock I had the wire given me. It was signed Mother, whose Mother, mine? Had she been down there all night.

Be sure and let me know how you feel, because until I hear I shall be very anxious. Take care though, don't tire yourself and do exactly as you are told. Tell me what she looks like, what colour are her hair and eyes? Is she normal weight, who does she look like? What do the doctor and nurses think of her. Let me know what everyone thinks of her.

As corporals leave, or lance corporals get another stripe it means that some have to be shifted around a bit so as to bring each section up to its full complement of NCOs.

Vera darling, I don't think you will have to try hard to train our daughter into the correct way of living. I am sure that if she grows up to be only half as good and useful as her mother she will, without a doubt be a very charming young lady.

We are in a terrible turmoil here just at present, I cannot tell you much as it is Hush-Hush, but anything is liable to happen at any time so be prepared. On top of that we have another inspection tomorrow and that doesn't help matters.

Monday Aug. 3

My Dear Vera,

Most of my pals know now and everywhere I go its either cat calls or Dadda, Dadda, etc. One fellow suggested that I should call her "Blitzelina" rather a mouthful, sound more like a new specie of potato. Now all I want to do is get into town and tell the folk there.

What did you think when you first saw her, I suppose you hardly knew what to think, and as for belonging to you, well, it was almost out of the question? Well, she is yours, or at least ours and now it is up to both of us to see that she grows up thinking and doing the right things.

Wed. Aug. 5

My Dear Vera and Margaret,

The inspection was quite OK, but it looks to me as though the more time and care you put in on making the place smart, the less chance you stand of having it looked at. Anyway, what bit he did look at seemed to meet with his approval.

Keep me busy. Believe me, I have quite enough to do without chasing around seeing that everything is nicely stacked etc.

There is not much notification to worry about. Don't forget she must be registered

before 21 days I believe, and when you get the birth certificate forward it on to me and then your Army Allowance will arrive. No doubt the Registrar will be able to tell you about the other allowances, ration books, etc.

Fri. Aug. 7

Today I am not feeling quite so good. This morning I had the annual inoculation TAB and at present I have a bit of a head and my arm feels very sore and stiff. As you very probably know we get 48 hours excused duty so I am taking things a bit easy. Don't worry, I shall be quite alright by tomorrow --- I hope.

By the way, another piece of good news is that my stripe money has at last come through so after this week I shall have it made payable to you.

Tues. Aug. 11

Do the nurses etc make a practice of weighing and measuring Margaret every few days? I expect you eagerly await each time they do to see how much heavier and how bigger she has got.

Thurs. Aug. 13

Don't be disappointed if this letter turns out to be a trifle short as I am on guard again. Last night was changing night and as we were expecting a busy night the QM arranged for my guard to be transferred to tonight.

This pleased me in more ways than one as it enabled me to see that film "The Next of Kin". Talk about a film, it certainly shook me, not only for the story and pictures, but the moral, it might be anyone. Everyone should see it. But really, the way people talk about troop movements and the variety of rumours that get about, even in our own company. It may surprise you to hear that there were chaps in this company who have seen khaki shorts and topees in the store!!!! I had a good clearout but I am hanged if I can find anything that even faintly resembles a topee.

That film taught me a lesson, in future I think my stock phrase will be "I don't know". It is a standing joke here, that if you want to know what troops are entering or leaving, just ask the civvies.

Sat. Aug. 15

There is a big muster parade tomorrow morning, everybody in full marching order, it is little things like this and other incidents which I cannot for obvious reasons put in here that "make you think". I shall have to take a chance of these days and bid all the St. John's people farewell, as when our time comes we shall only get 48 hrs. notice.

I bet you were pleased when the doctor agreed to let you come home. I wonder what Lady Margaret will think of it? Be careful now, take things very easy and don't for pity's sake get straining yourself or anything silly and have to go back into hospital.

My arm is quite better again now, but there is another jab to come soon, anti-tetanus this time but that is nothing. These inoculations never upset me like they do some people. The only effect they have on me is to give me a very painful arm for a couple of days.

About this leave business darling. There is hardly any leave of any sort just at present.

No weekends, no privilege and only a few compassionates. Maybe if your telegram had been a compassionate it would have been different. But keep hoping, I will get on to the office and see if I can find anything definite There must be something in the wind to explain all this sudden upheaval. You mention also about our new officers, that is another point, I wish I knew something. But there is one point darling, there may be a day in the not too distant future when my address will be considerably nearer home!!!!

Tues. Aug. 18

My Dear Vera and Margaret,

Today in the office I got hold of a form to make an extra allowance to you so watch out for it.

That was very nice of the doctor to pay you a visit so soon, she sounds very homely. I shall be glad to get home soon, and then you can tell me all about it. Such things take a lot of explaining and paper is getting very scarce.

I am sorry about this registration business. Where is the nearest registrar? If he is to far away for you to walk, why not get Jill to phone for a taxi, it would not take long. There is a time limit for these things I think but probably in war-time the laws are waived a bit, but in any case, do what you can because you will need the extra rations, etc.

Sunday Aug. 23

The extra 3d a day is rather puzzling to me. That is service pay, but now that I am a L/Cpl I forego any service pay. By the way, I made my money over to you from this week, once again I am back to 14/-, what a wallop from 21/-.

Tues. Aug. 25

You should get my stripe money soon now, but the other allowance will take about a fortnight after you let me have the birth certificate so for your own good make it as soon as possible.

Don't worry about me coming home, I shall be there some time, but just a present everything is topsy-turvy, rumours are ten-a-penny, but they will straighten out.

Probably the doctor and the nurses told you how much she should gain, so if she is exceeding that there cannot be much wrong with her.

Things are still very much in the air at present and as usual there are a fresh crop of rumours every day. Don't worry though, you will hear as soon as possible everything that I shall be allowed to tell you.

Sunday Aug. 30

Don't let these income taxes and reductions get you all flustered, they will straighten out in a week or so, but you will have these babies and mess all the books up so what can you expect.

Tues. Sept. 1

So Margaret is improving every day, sorry to hear that she is a trifle "thin" on top but that will improve in time, I hope. You make some remark about me wishing that she has hair like yours, my one hope is that she grows up to be like her mother in every respect.

This latest communication from the SO is a bit of a shock. One consolation though is

that it won't be for long. I showed the letter to our pay clerk and he advised me to get into touch with the cashier at SO as there seems to be some muddle concerning my rate of pay. In their letter they have me down as drawing 3/9 per day as a Pte and 4/9 per day as a L/Cpl. But my money has always been 3/3 as a Pte to 4/3 as a L/Cpl, so cheer up in a little while they may be owing you some money.

Now that you have sent off the necessary information it should only be a matter of a week or ten days before your allowance comes along.

The two months will be up this next weekend, then there may be a chance of me getting my leave brought forward a bit. I shall make enquiries in the morning.

Judging by the date of the next letter, Tom has been home on leave, and has seen Margaret for the first time!



Wed. Sept. 30

Well, here I am back again after a very uneventful journey. It rained practically the whole way up, in fact I don't know when or where it left off. For the first time on record it was actually fine when I landed on this side. The boys were still in the same place, one or two new faces and still the same rumours floating around. The Major is in hospital (serves him right) Les is back, otherwise everything is just as I left it.

Taking everything into consideration I enjoyed my leave, of course Margaret was the attraction, I am looking forward now very much to seeing her again. Please don't think that I shall forget you, Vera my darling, if it had not been for all your pain and discomfort we should not have had her.

Everyone back here wanted to know how you were and how the baby was getting along, especially the cobbler and his wife who were very pleased with the cake and the tea.

As you know, this last leave may be the last time I shall see poor old Grandad. His one wish is to be buried at Fenstanton with Grandma. Ma wants it, so does Dad. If anyone asks you, you know the answers, also, if you get a chance, go down, it will make a nice change and I should like you to see the place.

John Greer caught 27 rabbits last weekend including four black ones, these furs bring quite a bit of money. He sells all the carcasses to greyhound owners. Would you like a couple of rabbits next time? Mrs. Greer gave me a leg for supper tonight.

Thurs. Oct. 8

Even Mrs. Greer said that Margaret looks like me, so I suppose she must, but I still cannot see any resemblance.

Don't get so concerned over me please, there is quite a lot of fruit here and when I can afford it, I often lash out on a pound of

apples or pears. There seem to be quite a few oranges around too, but up till now I am not sure of whether they are controlled or not. A week or so back, before my leave, we had half an orange each after dinner, Boy oh Boy, Christmas is coming.

Sunday Oct. 11

We were issued with an extra blanket yesterday and not before time believe me. We are not allowed fires until the 1st of next month, but gosh, just lately it has turned out perishing cold especially in the early morning. I have just managed to collect myself a bit of a runny nose so don't feel too good.

During the week, one of our officers, Mr. Brooke, came to me with a pair of his boots and wanted me to explain to the cobbler how he wanted them repaired. By the way he received them back he was evidently very satisfied and complimented me on my ability to converse with the cobbler.

All the NCO's were issued today with booklets on Small Arms Training, I am not sure of whether that is a good sign or not.

Orders have just recently come from our GHQ that we have far too many company employed, i.e. postmen, sanitary men, cooks etc. so doubtless there will be some drastic changes before long. I am not bothered, this job gets me as "browned off" as anything else. Besides that, I am becoming quite morbid minded, due, I expect, to spending so much time on my own.

Tom seems convinced that Margaret's hair, although blonde, will turn red, like Vera's!

Thurs. Oct. 15

All the snaps reached me quite safely and I am now waiting for a studio photo of Margaret all on her own, so do what you can. I am pleased to hear that the ciné films have come out so well.

Sunday Oct. 18

Owing to the shortage of rubber we shall not be able to have any rubber boots to issue this winter. Instead we are getting a supply of clogs. Just imagine what a row we shall make marching in those.

There is a rumour floating about that some MP's are coming to take over the guards. I hope so, these night "ops" get me down.

20.10.42

Well, the course is over now, thank goodness. I enjoyed it while it lasted and would not object in the least to attending another one any time. We were not told definitely how or whether we had passed. The sergeant told us we had all done very well so I am hoping that my 1st Class has materialised. Reports will be sent to each company about the results and what the officer there thinks of us as NCO's.

Wed. Oct. 21

This morning for breakfast we had some black pudding. This was the first time I had ever tasted it, and believe me I hope it's the last.

Mon. Oct. 26

Saturday we spent practically the whole day in painting scenery and getting the stage ready for a show on Sunday evening.

The stage is quite 10' square, but with blankets and odd pieces of canvas, borrowed curtains and some black out material we have done wonders.

Wed. Oct. 28

We have just had a new officer posted to us who is very keen on getting up entertainments of our own, instead of depending so much on outsiders. But the same old snag is still there --- lack of co-operation. If people cannot be top dog they refuse to have anything to do with the scheme. Then there are the other type who are always ready to be-little and criticize the effort that is being made, but never have any better suggestions to offer. But still, I suppose we shall struggle along. It is almost like old times being behind the footlights and getting stuff shifted about, etc.

Today has been much the same as any other day. We had a special meeting for NCO's tonight. Various complaints and grievances were thrashed out. You would be surprised at the number of incidents which crop up during the course of a week when a Cpl is not quite sure of his duty.

As the SM said tonight, a large number of men and NCO's are treating this business as a grand holiday. I have noticed it too among the men. When an order is given or something about guard duty or fire piquet is posted up in orders, their first thought is how to get round it. They are in here for a good time and the minimum amount of discomfort. I did not join the army to be comfortable and certainly not to do my best to attempt to alter standing rules and regulations to suit my own personal convenience. There is a tendency not to "look after ourselves" but to "look after ourself and selfishness is a thing I cannot stand.

Sunday Nov. 1

Fred's letter was about his registration. Evidently he has upset the folk at home by expressing a desire to join the CMP's. Stan told him to try and follow his trade in the RAF but he seems dead nuts on the Army and asked me what I could do for him.

I did not advise him either way, merely left the choice to him then he will only have himself to blame for whatever happens. He wanted to be with me over here, but I emphasized the fact that until he has his papers and finds out what mob he has been detailed for I cannot do a thing.

In any case, if he is lucky or unlucky enough, as the case may be to get himself graded A1 I won't stand an earthly chance of hoping to get him transferred to this mob.

All these rumours concerning us and a move have died down very considerably, but, like everything else the Army does it will happen at a moments notice and before we know where we are we shall be packed and away.

Surely after the blitz and all that you went through a few stray guns are not going to upset you?

I don't think you have any need to be afraid. Jerry's day in the air is over. We had a warning last week, but nothing happened.

Tues. Nov. 3

Are you expecting another Doctor's bill? What for this time? The vaccination or for

strapping up your back? Surely neither of these items will amount to very much.
Sat. Nov. 7

Now for the plunge. Tomorrow I go away from here for six weeks to one of these Battle Schools. Don't get alarmed, I'm not, in fact I am looking forward to it. The place we are going to is not far away. Quite close in fact to the place where I had my first leave from. The course lasts six weeks and if everything goes according to plan my leave should be due Christmas week. Be like me, hope for the best and keep your fingers crossed. Things always happen to me in threes and this will be my third Christmas in the Army !!!!!

As I believe I have told you before, I never looked for stripes or crawled for them, but if ever they came my way I was determined to do my best to hold them and improve myself, so you must excuse me a bit for the next few weeks darling, I shall be working and learning as hard as I know how. So, until you receive a different address, don't send anymore letters here.

This new officer we have now is a real treasure. He has taken the bull by the horns and got two fellows to alter the stage. He was in the theatre business before the war so knows his onions. He has already succeeded in getting quite a respectable sized party together to do a show for Christmas, so now at last we may get something done.

**Pioneer Corps Training Centre, 38 High Street, Newtonards, Co. Down, NI
Mon. Nov. 9**

Just a few lines in haste to let you know my new address. From what I have seen of the place it looks alright to me, a darn sight better than where we came from.

There was a sick parade this morning, I mentioned my operation to the MO and he told me to lead a normal life. I shall do so until it bothers me, which I sincerely hope it does not. The officer i/c gave us a preliminary talk about the course. He said it had a name for being tough and believe me it is. The sergeant i/c of our squad has had the highest marks in passes so far and hopes to continue to keep this record. Think of me each morning now, running round in my PT shorts at 8 o'clock on a raw cold morning.

Wed. Nov. 11

My Dear Vera and Margaret,
You realize of course that I am unable to tell you exactly what we are doing, but believe me just at present I feel just as though someone has given me a good thrashing. I shall come home either as an A1 Commando or a very picturesque corpse.

Our Sergeant-Instructor, from what lads who have been before tell us, is the best of the lot. He is certainly very patient and thorough.

He told us today that he expects at least three distinguished passes and no failures. I rather envied other fellows coming on this course, but now that I am here I want to put up a satisfactory show.

Our new officer wants me to spend the weekend in B----- rehearsing for the Christmas show.

This next bill from the doctor should not be for such a great deal.

Don't let it worry you. By now you should

be quite straight again financially and a few shillings will not take much finding.

Fri. Nov. 13

You will have guessed by this that I am still surviving this new experience – just. I am still rather stiff but hope that it wears off soon. It is all they say about it and more. I shall have something to talk about this time. It certainly looks like the most hectic six weeks I shall ever spend, but even so I am enjoying it. Don't think for a moment that I am becoming "soldier daft" but this training certainly seems more beneficial to the war, from my way of thinking than humping stuff about all day from one place to another.

Sun. Nov. 15

Today we have had a Church Parade for Remembrance Sunday. Talk about swank!!!! Belts and anklets blanched, sidearms polished, boots dubbed everyman shave and hair cutted. Without a doubt they were smart. It is the first time I have headed a procession behind the town band. Eyes right to the Mayor, all Civil defence personnel represented.

Tues. Nov. 17

We have our first exams on Saturday of this week. I feel fairly confident up to the present, we have question bees amongst ourselves and it is surprising what little points you are liable to miss. These exams at the week end decide whether we have learned enough for them to carry on with our instruction. After this there are no more exams until four weeks time at the end of the course when from what I have heard we get a full two hour written exam.

Now that most of my stiffness has worn off and I feel almost normal again I am beginning to enjoy life. The first few days were sheer agony. I don't think I have done so much note taking, writing and reading since I have left school. I want to do well, but even if I don't, believe me I shall have benefited both physically and mentally.

Thurs. Nov. 19

Today during our PT early this morning I accidentally trod on a rock of some sort and turned my ankle over. It has not swollen at all and there is nothing to show but is very painful.

I hope it gets no worse as I don't want to miss any periods. The course is still very interesting and I am even more glad I was included in this party. Honestly I have learnt more in this fortnight than in any other period. Believe me, when this is over I shall be more of a soldier than at any other time of my life so take good notice of me when I get home.

It is all very well making notes, drilling, listening to lectures and such like, but by far the hardest part to my way of thinking is getting out in front of the squad and teaching them.

If they were recruits it would be a bit easier, but when your squad consists of L/Cpls, Cpls and sergeants, who know as much, if not more than you do it is quite a task. Especially when they start grinning when you make a slip.

As I have already told you, our first exams are on this week end so I must spend the rest of my spare time swotting. When we return to our units we should be capable of

teaching our sections what we have learnt. There will be some sparks flying if they turn us loose on some of the men.

Mon. Nov. 23

Well, Saturday has passed, thank goodness. You know how exams get you all worked up. When it eventually did arrive it was not so bad. There were actually two exams. One, drilling a squad in arms drill and gas drill. There were 150 marks for each. I managed to get 95 for arms drill and 110 for gas. At the end of this fortnight there are two more exams and then the finals. If I can do as well in the rest I shall not worry.

About the most important piece of news is that we have lost Major Longley. He has been regraded. Our Major now is a fellow named Montgomery, a cousin or brother to the chap out East.

You know I expect that I have an open mind on politics!!! The fellow sleeping over me named Holly, from our company is an out and out Red. He has numerous books and things which are very interesting and above all, before the War he worked at the Soviet Embassy in London. I like to listen to him, he is very interesting and his points of view make you think.

Wed. Nov. 25

They are trying to cram a dickens of a lot into us, my mind is in a turmoil now, so goodness knows what it will be like at the end of the course. Believe me, I shall deserve that 14 days leave.

Fri. Oct. 27

The last lot of fellows on a course here had photos taken of them during their training. Some are for sale and I want to get a few then maybe you will be able to realize more fully what I have been doing during these few weeks, with these and what I shall be able to tell you, I hope to make you appreciate why I am looking forward to this next leave.

I am happy to say that apart from my foot which troubles me now and then, I am in the very best of health and enjoying myself thoroughly. Believe me, I have never felt better in my life. All I hope now is, that when these exams arrive at the end of the course I shall be able to put up a good show.

This taking a squad for drill is like anything else, it needs a lot of practice. The main thing is being absolutely certain of what you are going to do. At present, the ideas are there and provided you have the time to put it into your own words instead of quoting the textbook things happen according to plan. But more often than not you miss a little point, the sergeant-instructor steps in and reminds you and away goes your train of thought. That's what happens to me anyway.

Sun. Nov. 29

We had three good meals today. Egg and bacon for breakfast, roast meat, roast potatoes and boiled, cabbage and gravy for dinner and baked apples and custard for afters. Then for tea we had another egg and chips.

Our sergeant gave us ten questions to answer over the week end, so that is another job we shall have to get on with. My poor old brain is in a whirl trying to

grasp all these subjects.

Well, we have got half way now and are all still alive – just. I only hope that they do not try to pump much more into us during these next three weeks.

I spend about an hour each evening reading up the pamphlets we are using, don't be surprised if when I get home you find me mumbling under my breath about, "On the command one, in, out on guard, the main points to consider when selecting cover. Aim off into the wind one targets width, revetments camouflage, rate of fire, correct position of holding, how to deal with unexploded bombs, etc." gosh I am in a hell of a state.

But still, I can honestly say that I have learnt a whole lot since coming here. Whether I shall be able to put it into practice remains to be seen.

During the last week I understand we get instruction and a chance of firing all sorts of small arms, that should be very interesting. I still get a great kick out of aiming at and hitting a target.

Tues. Dec. 1

There seems to be some doubt as to when this course actually finishes. I have heard also that sailings will be cancelled from the 20th. How true this is I don't know but hope to find out.

With a bit of luck we may be able to get the exams brought forward a day or so then maybe we can get back to the company in time. It remains to be seen. Don't get too disappointed, anything may happen yet.

The next exams are the finals and they are liable to cause us some trouble.

There are such a lot of points to remember.

We shall deserve a leave after this, but it seems a pity that we stand a chance of not being able to get home for Christmas.

The only way I shall be able to grasp these facts is by continual reading and swotting. I am still keen on putting up a good show. Wish me luck, (I shall need it) and there will be such a lot I can tell you about what I have been doing here.

Thurs. Dec. 3

I heard quite unofficially that this course is liable to last a day or so longer this time. In that case away goes our chances of a Christmas leave, but with a bit of luck we may spend the New Year together.

Mon. Dec. 7

The course is still going very well this last fortnight we look like having a hectic time. There is a squad of instructors coming along to teach us about the various weapons.

Mr. Stevenson, our new officer wanted to see me this week end about this forthcoming show, it is taking place in our recreation room on Christmas Day and in all probability in the Town Hall on Boxing Day. As far as I can find out, he, Mr. Stephenson is the only one who's at all pleased that the course is finishing later.

Anyway he paid my fare over 2/5 so he cannot be a bad chap. During the rehearsal on Sunday afternoon it was Steve this and Tom that, he is just like one of the boys.

Wed. Dec. 9

If all goes well, I should arrive home again about next Monday week, so keep a sharp look out for me.

Sun. Dec. 13

During this passed week we have had a squad of infantry instructors down here putting us all through our paces, and boy, have we covered some ground.

On Monday and Tuesday we have some revision lessons on all the various subjects ready for these practical exams on the Wednesday. Thursday and Friday, weather permitting, we shall be out on the range using all these different weapons, Saturday morning there is the full 2½ hour written exam with some more range work in the afternoon and on Sunday something else to struggle through and the dispersal on Monday, so heaven only knows when I shall find time to do anything else.

The new officer, Mr. Stephenson, has told me I shall have to rehearse every night for the show on Christmas Day so it still looks as though I shall be rushing about all the time. Just to aggravate matters Jessie told me I would be welcome up there over Christmas --- gosh what is a chap to do?

What with this coming exam, parts of guns, drill movements and thoughts of coming home soon running through my head I hardly know where I am. This is about the most hectic time I have ever had. Believe me, I shall be glad when it is all over and I can rest in the chair by my own fireside.

Thurs. Dec. 17

All swotting and learning have finished now. Four practical exams and four hours of written. That is about enough for any man. We still have some practice to get in, firing and grenade throwing, but owing to the weather breaking up suddenly we must take advantage of all the fine spells and get out on the ranges.

By the time this reaches you I shall have probably changed my address again so please watch out, any valuables you may send. Before we leave here we may get to how we fared in the exams. I can not remember any occasion before when I spent so much time learning. Honestly darling, my head is just one mad whirl, it takes some hours for me to get off to sleep and I have great difficulty in concentrating on anything. I am looking forward to that leave in more ways than one.

This next letter appears to have the wrong date, also the 'style' of the date, i.e. the way it's written, is different to every other letter; possibly the date should be '12' and not '10', i.e. 'December' and not 'October'. Tom is referring to the end of the course and also the fact that he's just about to come home on leave; in his excitement to get away on leave, Tom has got his dates a bit mixed up!

Sect 3 174 Coy Pioneer Corps, Home Forces 20.10.42 (maybe should be 20.12.42?)

Well, the course is over now, thank goodness. I enjoyed it while it lasted and would not object in the least to attending another one any time. We were not told definitely how or whether we had passed. The sergeant told us we had all done very well so I am hoping that my 1st Class has materialized.

Reports will be sent to each company about the results and what the officer there thinks of us as NCO's.

1943

Wed. Jan. 13

Well, once again I have completed my world tour and arrived back here safe and sound. We completed the journey more or less on time and were greeted at L---- by the usual rain.

There were quite a few troops on that Euston train for S-----r. I met the boys and we all managed to get in a carriage together. The train journey was very tedious, the boat journey even worse. The boat did everything but stand on its head. Rain and wind, terrific waves, but I managed to keep all my meals.

On reporting myself in the guardroom, I was just in time to give my assistance when some chap decided to have a couple of fits. They took him away in the evening. Then at night when I got into bed two fellows got into a very heated argument, one called the other a dirty b----d, there was a sharp smack and one fellow collapsed on the floor out cold. What a home coming.

The rumours about our impending move are very strong. Some are even bold enough to suggest dates and places, who knows, so be prepared for anything.

Another little point, if you want me to go East for certain, I will go ahead with this commission business!!!!

Sun. Jan. 17

The talk about leaving this charming little spot is growing daily. I sincerely hope that it is more than rumour this time. We have had quite enough l-----d a change would be a very welcome rest and change. I shall hate leaving all the very good friends I have made here, but that is all a soldiers life consists of, making friends and losing them. We could not be a great deal worse off anywhere in these islands that what we already are.

If and when we go abroad we shall not expect these various little comforts, but why in heavens name should we be denied them when they are there just for the taking. A move is always a treat, the only drawback being the long time it takes to settle down and make friends again.

Most places now have had some experience of soldiers, some good and some bad, but the novelty of uniforms has worn off now unfortunately and we are not greeted with open arms.

You remember the officer we had named Thompson, he has left and we had a fellow named Pipes or Piper in his place. Last Thursday during the rehearsal, Pat, the pianist was playing a rather lively number when in tripped Pipes or Piper like a huge fairy. I thought to myself then here's a bright spark, but he is a very decent chap. Now we have a good team of officers all young, Stephenson, Piper, and Brooke.

The carpenter has agreed to make me a small box to keep my tricks in so when he does I shall return you the large tin I have here. I also want to get rid of these books too so they will be arriving before long.

Tues. Jan. 19

There is nothing to report from here, I got the carpenter to make me a box to keep all my tricks in, I bought a lock and key and now I hope to be able to hang on to the key. Very soon I shall send the two tins home to you they will be more useful to you.

Fri. Jan. 22

Yesterday (Thursday) I had to go into town with two or three others for an eye test. As a matter of fact we killed two birds with one stone. Each man who wears glasses should be in possession of two pairs, this visit was to get "measured" as it were for our second pair, but I will tell you something more about that later on.

I read about the raids in the paper, it must have been strange to hear the guns and sirens after all this time.

There have been several rumours about the improved barrage and some of our fellows who were on leave at the time told us how heavy it was. So all the neighbours still treat your place as a haven of refuge.

What is there about you that inspires confidence in their fainting hearts? Would they be so keen on coming in if I was there do you think?

To think that an air raid had such an effect on neighbours, even the ones next door. Wonders will never cease, how long have they been there without talking, is it six months.

I can understand your feeling nervous during the raids, it must be like starting all over again. Am very glad to hear that young Margaret slept through it all. It wont do her any harm if she never hears a gun or siren, she will not have missed anything.

Sunday Jan. 24

There are a few points from your various letters of last week which I want to make a bit clearer. First of all, the commission.

The situation is this, if I apply for a commission and get it, I shall definitely have to go abroad. Secondly about this eye test I had during the week. After reading the chart right through, with both eyes I just mentioned the fact that I could not see in the dark. So we had a black out test.

This consisted of sitting in a black room with black goggles on for twenty minutes, then had to look at various lantern slide sort of things. As I expected I could not make out a single shape. Consequently the report went back that "This man is unfit for any night duty". Now I could kick myself, because it may mean that I shall be posted to another company and I don't want that to happen.

The church parade we had this morning was rather a tame affair after the last one. We had about three times the number, but they had not been drilled like us so were nowhere near so smart, but all the same they made quite a good show. It was our first opportunity to meet the new C of E minister for this area.

The last one, in addition to losing his post got himself into some very hot water for referring to the soldiers in this village of ours as a lot of barbarians because we had the cinema open on Sundays.

Mon. Jan. 25

This is a note in haste and I am sorry to say rather a disappointing one. The worse has happened, as from 11 o'clock tomorrow I shall be a member of the 36th Coy. It may be an act of providence that I spoke up when I did, who knows, after all you will be relieved to know that if I cannot go abroad I shall not be any further away.

I am very disappointed at leaving all my pals but what I have lost on the swings I may make up on the roundabouts. The HQ

of this company is at the Park!!! How often I wished to be back there, well I have my wish, but !!!! I shall have a good try to stay there, wont Jessie and the rest be surprised. Sec 11 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Home Forces 29.1.43

Tomorrow I shall be able to let you have a definite address. I did my best to stay but the powers that be have decided I shall move so tomorrow I move. This present address will find me until I tell you different.

2.2.43

Well, I am glad to say that the shock of parting with the 174 is wearing off gradually. The hours here are not bad, 9-5 and mid-day on Saturday until Monday morning. The work is similar to what I was doing at the DID only on a much larger scale. We supply the DID's and the DID's the various units, if you understand my meaning! It is only a few minutes walk from the main road, for buses and trams then 1d into town, in fact I can get into town quicker from here than I could from the Park. There are two good cinemas within easy reach, duties come round about once in six days so I shall be alright.

One thing I am very thankful for is that here we can keep clean and dry compared with B'clare no mud etc. My only complaint at present is our billets. Everyone is in nissen huts and they are always cold.

Don't let these invasion forms worry you. I personally believe that all fear of that has passed, it is only a routine matter.

Now remember what I have told you. Don't worry, I shall probably stay here in the emerald isle for quite a time, I know it is a long way from home, but not quite so far as some other places I could mention. I am sure you would prefer me to stay here and be sure of getting home occasionally than to go further away still and probably not come home until the war was over.

Thurs. Feb. 4

When I found out that I had to move I was of course naturally very disappointed, but I was afraid you would take it worse than I did.

By now you will know that I have left the Park again. The few days I spent there were very enjoyable and am hoping one day to return. I did not have an opportunity to do much 'exploring'.

Wed. Feb.10

I am still waiting to hear from some of the lads from the 174, to hear where they have arrived and see what they think of life in general. Two or three promised to write, I hope they remember, because I shall hate to lose touch with them altogether.

Monday Feb. 8

Up to the present I have not heard from anyone of the old 174 yet but am still hoping. There are still rumours of where they are, the latest ones are that although they maybe still in the British Isles they are further from home than I am just at present.

Mon. Feb. 14

We have been having some terrific weather just lately, wind, rain, snow and hail. There is snow on the hills at the back of us, the wind is biting cold, but we are managing to live in spite of it all. Last night

I woke up frozen stiff to find that one of the doors had blown open!!!! The other day I saw some men blown over and yesterday I had the same experience.

Sat. Feb. 20

You must be prepared for another change. Since leaving the 174 I appear to have become something of a rolling stone. This dinner time I was warned to be ready to move at 10 o'clock tomorrow morning. This time by what I can understand I am going to a spot that is more remote than anything else I may have encountered, so my entertaining ability may be more useful than ever. What a change, from a food dump to petrol. Wait for my next letter before answering then I shall be able to let you have my new address.

Our rush of work here is over. I expect that is one reason for these moves.

My job here was to put it quite simply just storing and stacking all the various foodstuffs.

In the Army there are seven days a week and twenty four hours a day and we are on duty all the time.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT 109 PD RASC, Home Forces

Tues. Feb. 23

Once more I have changed my address and this time it appears as if I have left the frying pan for the fire. As you are well aware I have been in a variety of places but this caps the lot. For security reasons I cannot tell you anything about the actual locality but believe me it would take some describing. The work here from what I have seen of it is not hard but like the last place, comes in spasms.

Do you remember the fellow in the 174 who I sent to hospital with chest trouble just before I went on the course? Well, I have caught up with him again. Like me he has heard nothing of the 174 but was living in hopes.

Sun. Feb. 28

I must tell you before we go any further that I have been moved again. It won't affect my address this time though. First I have been moved into another hut, and secondly I have been put in charge of the dining hall again. These staff jobs haunt me. The sergeant called two of us into the office this morning and the outcome of it was that we decided to toss for it. Needless to say the other fellow won the toss and decided to go on the dump, so here I am.

The last L/Cpl to be in charge here has just been made up to a full rank.

Ever since I joined this company I have been paid 1/- short each week, drawing 15/- instead of 16/-. Yesterday the QM came over here so I spoke to him about it. The explanation was quite simple and satisfactory. He said that in order to simplify matters in the office they always make a point of paying everybody out to the nearest 2/6.

Don't get me wrong now, I am not trying to insinuate that these "rough soldiers" are not capable of appreciating good music, but when you are like we are, here and now, two miles from the nearest hamlet, five miles walk from the nearest cinema, a bus route that cannot be relied on, two trains a day, no wireless and no papers until the evening, you will understand why I

think the lads need a concert with a bit more life attached.

About this DRO's job, the sergeant told me I could have it for a few weeks and see how I get on, then if I did not like it I could turn it in. I decided to give it a trial, until my leave anyway then see what I think of things in general.

Friday. Feb.

One of those snaps of Margaret is very good indeed, but in the others she looks for all the world as though she has a severe attack of german measles or something. Ma in her letter said she had been lucky enough to get a film at the chemists, so this time, weather permitting of course, I hope to have a bit more luck with a photo of Margaret and Grandad.



Here as at the last place we have a Corporals' Mess, in other words a separate NAAFI. There are the usual chairs, tables and a fire, cards and darts, etc. Also what surprised me most a daily paper & some periodicals. The greatest drawback however is that there is no wireless. At the last place the Mess was a little gem, settees, arm chairs and a wireless.

The next five letters have been addressed to Vera at Tunbridge Wells, she obviously is having a holiday with Aunt Bess. The first of these envelopes bears the letters CUT on the front --- the reason for this appears later!!

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Home Forces

Thur. March 4

Many thanks for your letter of the 27th which managed to catch me just in time. You will notice by my address that we have moved again, sorry to have become so nomadic all of a sudden, but it has affected me too, I am becoming quite giddy.

Whether we are to stay here for long or not I do not know, but your letters will take quite a time to reach me again. One thing that pleases me a great deal is that we are once more on the a few words have been cut out here probably using scissors but in this case it and here the rest of the paragraph has also been clipped. Whatever Tom said or referred to, the censor definitely did not like!

When we were paid today the Major raised the question about that letter concerning my money. He seemed to think that there was a slight mistake somewhere and he told me he was going to get into touch with the Regimental Paymaster about it. I hope that before you left home you made some arrangements about having your mail sent on as you might be hearing something about it.

The whole of the next paragraph has

been clipped out! Tom must again have incurred the censor's wrath!

Sunday March 7

There is not much news from this end. The day before yesterday I saw a chap from the old Company over here on embarkation leave. They have been stationed near Grandad's home and have been having some very stiff training. There have been some more very drastic cuts too, all the fellows who were not able to put up an average performance were all weeded out and drafted into other units.

Your letter had been opened but was quite intact, Ma's was the same. They seem to be opening a lot more letters just lately.

I do not know what is happening as regards leave, we have heard nothing for over a week. Anyway I am not due for a few more weeks so there is not much need for me to start worrying, but all the same I am waiting patiently.

Wed. March 10

Owing to my various moves I have not received any of your mail for quite a few days now, but I suppose they will catch me up eventually.

Frid. March 12

I cannot for the life of me understand why my letters should be cut. After nearly three years in the Army I ought to have some idea of what I can say and what I cannot. I have been trying to think what he took exception to.

Sunday March 14

I cannot tell you what we are doing or even drop any broad hints so please do not ask me. Everyone is asking questions, no one knows the answers so taking it all round we are enjoying ourselves. All I wish is that something would happen and put us all out of this suspense.

It is very difficult trying to write a letter when the censorship rules are so rigid. I could tell you quite a lot, but it would be of no interest to you and I should only succeed in getting my knuckles very severely rapped.

I honestly think this year's end will see a vast difference in the state of affairs in Europe. It is pretty obvious by the papers, etc. that something is going to break loose sooner or later. The end may not be so very far off then. Experts say that it will finish sooner than we expect. I sincerely hope they are right.

Frid. March 19

We have an inoculation on the way so we shall probably be getting some excused duty. If this one has no more effect than the last I shall not worry.

Sat. March 27

Today I had another inoculation the only effect I have felt so far is rather a sore arm, but nothing more. Some of the lads take it very badly, I cannot see why I should be an exception.

It seems from what I have heard from some of the lads here that the leave period usually runs to about fifteen or sixteen weeks. Counting this week I have only been back eleven so by the time my turn comes round I shall be almost anywhere.

As a matter of fact I did listen to Winston, he sounded very cheerful I

thought and seemed to be making plans for the future. Can the end be so very far off?

Tues. March 29

This increase in my money will in all probability become payable this week. All I have heard about it up to the present is that one week instead of drawing my usual 15/- I drew £1, has that squared things up at all regarding the amount you had been stopped?

Today I met another fellow from the old 174. he was in hospital at the time of their move so was transferred into this company.

Frid. April 2

We have been very busy here all this week, you have most probably seen something of our trouble in the papers. All I feel fit for in the evenings now is to have a good wash and shave, a smoke, a few chips for supper and straight into bed. I have not got the energy to do anything else.

I was called into the office the other day about my money. Evidently our Major had got into touch with the Regimental Paymaster and had arrived at an agreement. According to the letter you received from the SO you had been overpaid by 10/-. As they cannot refund it to you, they are making it payable to me, I have already had 5/- of it and am now awaiting the balance.

Sunday April 4

Today being Sunday I did at least think we should get a break, but nothing doing. Reveille at 5.45 same as all the week an hours march, work all day and then march home. These ----- strikers!!!! Then to crown it all the clocks must go forward. I felt like nothing on earth when I got up this morning.

Tom's next letter is written on paper that is nothing like he has used before. It is about quarto size, a kind of buff colour and in the style of the modern-style airletter and the paper is lined. At the top are the words "These Letter-folders are supplied to H.M. Forces with the Compliments of Singer Sewing Machine Co., Ltd." and the familiar "Singer" logo is alongside.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Ashbrook, Roman Road, Middlesbrough, Yorks.

Sunday April 11

At last I can write again after an unavoidable break. As you can see I have moved and bettered my position. How long we shall be here. We took three days to do the journey and afterwards there was all the cleaning and tidying up to do apart from being allotted to the various billets. We are in houses along the main road and as the wireless puts it "a north east coastal town".

Today is the first one we have had to ourselves since our arrival, I hope this good news and the excuse will go a long way to soften the break of no news. It is hard to realise we are once more in England it feels altogether different to know we are once more among friends and any part of the town is open to us. Up to the time of writing we have done little or no exploring but hope to have a walk round this afternoon.

We were doing a bit of heavy work for a bit back in Belfast when the dockers were out but apart from that we had been doing just nothing.

Tued. April 13

I told you in my last letter that we may move, well, here we go. Tomorrow we move to a little place about 8 miles away called Stokesbury, there is only our section going so it cannot be very much of a job.

Where we are now there are no tables or chairs, no beds, we are on the floor, it is so darned awkward writing etc, I get the cramp in some very awkward places.

The leave has started again, 26 are going this week so I should not be so very far behind. Our Sgt. has just returned from this new place of ours. It seems quite nice but it remains for us to see it now and pass our opinion.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT RE Stores, Stokesley, Yorks

Wed. April 14

Just a few lines to let you know my new address. We arrived here just before dinner, then what shook the lads most we had to start work right after dinner.

The camp itself is an absolute peach of a place, I mean that honestly. Wooden huts, well spaced, clean, everything handy and set right in the heart of the country. The work is something after the same style as Ballyclare but on a much smaller scale. We are one section on our own. No officers, one Sgt. in charge and two cooks. We are entirely self-contained. This sort of life is much too good to be true it can't last. We are still without beds but are living in hopes.

The station is on the LNER so it should not be so very much trouble to get home. We have to catch the connection at Darlington then it is only about 6-7 hours run. There are no troop trains from here so we must make our own arrangements.

When I compare the 174 with this company I don't think we shall be going abroad just yet awhile, there are far too many crocks in this lot.

Next time the QM comes round I shall have to approach him and see what he intends doing.

In Middlesbrough we were in houses, 1 section per house and I had just begun to get on speaking terms with the lady next door when we had to move. Just my bloomin' luck. We had baths here in the Municipal Baths, what a treat to lie down instead of standing under a shower. Here in Stokesley we are under showers again.

We left Ireland or at least Brookfield on Wednesday, spent the night at Larne Transit Camp, left the next dinner time reached Stranraer late in the afternoon, spent until midnight in Stranraer Transit camp and eventually reached here at about 8 in the morning.

Frid. April 16

I learned another piece of good news today. No more carrying all that equipment when we come on leave, just a steel helmet and respirator. Some of our lads went home today and from what they had found out they should reach London at about 4 o'clock this afternoon. We have to travel from here to Middlesboro' change and then on to Darlington where we change again for the main LNER line. Our leave starts at midnight you see and we are travelling home on our first day. The lads are seeing the officer next time he is here to see if it is possible for them to travel over night.

The pioneers we relieved from here were

an alien company and evidently not very well liked. The lads here with us are quite passable sort of fellows but unfortunately we have one or two tough eggs who may spoil things for us. Yesterday when we were paid the officer brought a wireless set over with him so now we have practically all the comforts of home including a newspaper each day.

From now on, back to the old style of writing paper! (The Singer letter folders have obviously finished).

Sunday April 18

The weather here continues to be grand but today a terrific wind has sprung up. I cannot get over this place, it is like soldiering under ideal conditions, the layout here reminds me more of a holiday camp than anything else. Right away from everywhere. The road runs alongside and buses into Middlesbrough pass about every hour, otherwise we hardly see anybody apart from a few labourers and an occasional land girl. Working like this seems too good to be true, I have a funny feeling that this state of affairs cannot last.

It does not matter where you go or who you are with, there will always be at least one person who is a nuisance, unfortunately we have been blessed with three real hooligans. One is an Irishman. I think it was a mistake to bring any of them over here. They have already been warned by a Major in the RE's about their behaviour. The trouble is we all get classed the same because of the foolhardiness of one or two.

Stokesley itself is a very quaint little place, an old market town to be exact. There is a cinema?? and a dance hall not to mention about a dozen pubs. There are only four NCO's here so we catch a fire piquet every fourth night.

We only worked for a week down at the docks and was I glad. Reveille at 6, breakfast at 7, parade at 7.30 March to the docks, start work at 8.15 until 5 or 6 at night, haversack rations and a hot meal at night. The work was not all heavy but there was plenty. I was glad when it finished, I don't like that area.

Tues. April 20

Well we are still jogging along here very happy together. The weather is grand but the wind will not drop. One of our corporals cut his hand rather badly and has had to go into hospital so we are again short handed.

There is a hen farm quite near us and they have just hatched out a lot of chicks. There were also quite a few misfires which were thrown out and one of the lads picked up a couple and gave them to our pet aversion. One of the lads I told you about who is continually making a nuisance of himself. We are now anxiously awaiting results.

I had rather a shock the other morning. The Sgt called me to one side and said "Oh Cpl. I want you to take the sick parade down this morning. I could send L/Cpl Spech but I can't trust him!!!!"

There is now news of leave this week yet, I don't suppose for a minute that my name will be on it but there is always the chance.

This evening I tapped the Sgt. about this query in my money and he told me that if you are not satisfied to write to the Regimental Paymaster at Bournemouth and

state your case.

According to the Army it is now Summer Time. We have had one of our blankets withdrawn and there is no issue of coal for the billets. The days and evenings are quite alright but it gets terribly cold during the night, so each evening one of the lads in our hut goes round the dump with the wheelbarrow and collects a load of wood. We also sieve the ashes and use the large lumps.

Another new order came out today. In future all brasses will be kept highly polished, boots dubbed and chin straps are to be scrubbed. I wonder what will be the next thing they will think up for us.

The last two days we have been on salvage. Loading up trucks with old scrap iron, all sorts of old junk, tons and tons of it that must have stood about for years. It is rather dirty and we are glad of a shower in the evenings.

Our Sgt. is an old chap named Lewin, and incidentally we are the only detachment without an officer which speaks very well for old Lew. This is a full section and consists of 1 Sgt. 2 Cpls. 2 L/Cpls and 28 men.

Thurs. April 23

Last night we had quite a bit of excitement, there was a big heath fire burning about three or four miles away. It had been on all day but did not show up much, apart from the smoke, until night came when it looked like Belfast after the blitz.

The workings of the army, especially where the Pioneers are concerned get more complicated every day. The latest stunt is reveille at 6 with 20 minutes PT, as if we do not do enough work and exercise all day without rubbing all the extras in. Then we must have at least four hours training each week so this means half an hour each day after working hours.

This PT should have started this morning but at reveille it was raining so we had to cancel it. Anyway we did have a little arms drill just before tea.

We have just had a new chap posted to this section, a compassionate posting this time. His wife is carrying and is about seven months gone. A few weeks ago she fell down the stairs and is now in hospital in rather a bad way. He only lives about eight or nine miles away from here.

That Cpl. I told you about who cut his hand rather badly came back today. He had four stitches in it so it must have been rather a bad cut.

These tough eggs are with us, much to everyone's disgust. The old Sgt. is just about fed up with them. If they don't alter their ways he will probably end up by getting them shifted, I hope so.

The back of this envelope shows the postmark 'Hounslow' --- how did it get there?

Sunday April 25

The Sgt. picked me out for another job on Friday, rations this time. The Cpl. who cut his hand is on light duties so he could not go, the other Cpl. had to go back to HQ on business so it was left to me. It was a morning out and quite enjoyable. We went to Stockton-on-Tees.

I am not sure, but I believe our Sgt. has

at last got a lever whereby we may be able to get shot of two of these hooligans. Yesterday they had a pass into Middlesbrough and did not get back until this morning. They were absent without leave all night and are at present under open arrest. I sincerely hope we shall be able to lose them.

Another one of the lads here has been made up to L/Cpl. and I have heard that the Sgt. is trying to keep him and lose the other. You see a section is only allowed two L/Cpls.

All those fellows who report sick, there are usually two or three, have to be taken down to the MO's in the village. I wait there until they have all been attended to and then bring them back.

Tues. April 27

Last thing last night they sprung it on me that I shall have to go for the rations again in the morning. The Cpl. who usually does it is going on leave tomorrow so I have a whole week to look forward to. The first morning I went I managed to scrounge 14 lbs extra bread and then this morning I was lucky enough to fall in for 7 lb extra beef. It must be my kind face.

Thurs. April 29

Yesterday I did not go out, but stayed in and wrote a letter, sewed a few buttons on and darned two pairs of socks. The QM arrived in the afternoon with some clothes for exchange. I was lucky enough to get my denims, a towel and a pair of socks exchanged. We kicked the old football about for a bit and went to bed.

Today when we got up there had been a sharp frost and gosh was it cold. I had to go for rations again today and had quite a good mornings ride.

I had a chat today with the Sgt. about leave and he informed me that I should be among the next five to go which as far as I can make out will be either next week or the week after. I will wire you as soon as I hear anything definite.

All the training we have is rifle drill and foot drill, just something to deprive us of a bit more spare time. As far as I am concerned it is nothing more or less than a waste of time and energy.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT HQ 102 REME 'C' Block, Cavalry Barracks, York Sunday May 2

Well here is a further address for you to add to the many you already have. I cannot for the life of me understand why it is that every time I tell you anything it gets changed at the last minute. One of these days I shall have to write and tell you that there is not the least possible chance of me getting out of the army and see what happens to that.

The Sgt. told me I was going to Wakefield and then he found out that all the leave men were all in the same half section so he had to re-arrange them, consequently I was sent here.

We had a glorious time getting here. I am not sure how far it is, only about 25-30 miles but we had to change and wait about three times. The Sgt was in a terrible puckatery, he is not a bad chap, but he worries too much. I was glad when we left him at Darlington.

I am glad to say the roughs have been

split up and we have managed to lose the toughest two.

Another good point I have learnt is that I am the third on the leave list in this section, it only remains now to see how many they will let go a week from here.

We are not far from the LNER station. I understand there is an LMS station here too, that would save me any messing about so I must find out all I can about it, train times, etc.

Reveille was at five o'clock yesterday morning and we had a glorious time rushing about getting cleaned up. The same company took over from us at Stokesley as left it. The Group Commander came down during the week and told us we were moving but we should only be away for about a month. Surely there are some Pioneers nearer here than us. All that travelling just for a dozen men, I don't know. But now we are here I am glad. I always wanted to see York Minster and the old city inside the walls in such a quaint old place.

Tues. May 4

My Own Darlings, Vera & Margaret, The work here is absolute child's play. I thought Stokesley was easy enough but this has it beaten all ends up. We start at about 9 and finish between 4 and 5. It is on a railway siding again but up to the present we have lifted nothing of any weight. The lorries are all driven by civvy girls and a nice lot they are too. Our governor is a civvy so we have a very easy time. One of these girls comes into the barracks every morning between 8.30 and 9 to pick us up and brings us back every evening.

Before I forget will you take note that I have changed my address again. I am now in 'A' Block and not 'C'.

In this new block we are upstairs now in the real billets and the stables are underneath, and believe it or not there are actually horses in them.

Thurs. May 6

We are here in a room with other Pioneers who are working here. A Cpl is in charge of us, we have no officers to bother us and are quite a happy little family. I don't like these barracks tho, we may go back to Stokesley after a month, I shall prefer living there than here, there is too much red tape here.

Sunday May 9

As I said before we shall not be here for long because there is insufficient work. If next week is not busier than last I shall be thoroughly browned off.

Wed. May 12

The Cpl. had a note from HQ today telling him to forward the particulars of all A1 men in the section. Those who were not A1 have to be re-examined by the doctor to see if it is possible for them to be up-graded, so it looks as though there is something in the wind again.

Sat. May 15

My Own Darlings, Vera & Margaret, I have heard nothing definite about leave yet, but going on how the others have proceeded, the nest chap from this section goes on leave Thursday 20th and if all goes well I should be home about a week or ten

days after that, somewhere at the beginning of June. This period has taken a dickens of a time to pass. I can see what is going to happen now, we shall be done out of a leave this year.

Thurs. May 20

Here is the most welcome letter of the year. Before I do anything else, here it is. If all goes well and nothing unforeseen happens I shall be home on the 31st of this month.

Going by what the other fellows do I shall be home very early in the morning, so as not to disturb you unnecessarily I should not bolt the front door that night and so as we can get down to business straight away you might get your gadget into position.

Sunday May 23

I am sorry to say that there is a further disappointment for you. Now don't get alarmed, I am still coming home, but instead of arriving early in the morning I shall not be there until the afternoon. I have only heard this, it has not been confirmed yet but we are moving back to Middlesbrough next Sunday. Whether we stay there or not remains to be seen.

Sometime this week we have to polish and blanco everything again ready for our return to HQ, that will take at least two evenings.

Friday May 28

My Own Darlings Vera & Margaret, We have received official information at last. Sunday morning will see us leaving here. We arrive in Middlesbrough at dinner time so I shall have plenty of time to make some enquiries about train times.

Obviously leave came through and now Tom is back, this time in Middlesbrough.

36 Coy Pioneer Corps, 'Ashbrook', Roman Road, Middlesbrough, Yorks. Thurs. June 10

Well, here we are again all safe and sound. The journey up was quite uneventful except for the fact that it was terribly hot, the train was packed and I had to stand till we reached Grantham.

You know it was a good thing I caught that 3.50. As it was I did not get into Middlesbrough until 10 o'clock.

I was very much surprised to see some of the old section still here. They had been split up again, some going to Northallerton. From what I hear, the rest of us are going to Stokesley on Saturday so that will not be so bad.

DET 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT RE Stores, Kirby Road, Stokesley, Yorks Sat. June 12

Well as you can see we are once again in dear old Stokesley. As before it is still very windy but fine and still gives me the impression of a holiday camp.

Our reveille this morning was at 5 o'clock in order for us to be down the station and catch the 7.25. As both the full Cpls are on leave it is left to me to assume 'full command'. There is another L/Cpl but he has only held his stripe for a few weeks. I had to be certain of getting up at 5 this morning so made arrangements with four different people to call me, they all turned up so I was well away.

The alien coy that were here before us last time had been replaced by another Coy. 100% British this time and they left the place very tidy. We had radishes for tea out of the garden!!!! There are also quite a few onions, spring onions, lettuces and potatoes, but from the rumours we shall not be here long enough to enjoy them. The Major told the Sgt. we should only be here for a fortnight at the outside. Where next God only knows.

There is a notice up on the detail board that I may at last be able to take advantage of. Various trades & such like but among them there are Nursing Orderly and Operating Theatre Assistant. I have an application already written out and my letter of recommendation attached and am now just wondering Yes or No. It is something I should like but it may lead anywhere. What do you think?

Tues. June 15

Unfortunately this time we were unable to bring a wireless set with us. Papers are very difficult to get, but the woman who delivers them locally lets us have what she has over.

I have been into Stockton twice for rations and go again on Thursday and Friday. It is a morning out for me and a good opportunity of making any small purchases I require.

Tomorrow four of the lads have to go to Scarborough in the lorry to fetch some stuff. That will be a good days outing for them. Their reveille will be at five o'clock in the morning and they leave at six.

Thurs. June 17

How did I like being in full command? I am still in full command and shall continue to be so until these Corporals come off leave.

Well the Major has my application now so all we can do for the present is to wait and hope for the best. I do not know much about the duties but it should not be any harder than what I have been accustomed to.

Sunday June 20

The Captain came over today and saw me about this transfer of mine. He wanted to know all about it, to see any recommendations I had, etc. He also informed me that I should have to revert to the rank of Pte. And also that I should not go in as a Nursing Orderly but as a Learner. I knew all of this beforehand of course, now I have to wait and see if anything develops.

Some lads returned from leave today and came out here to us. Amongst them was a Cpl. so my reign has come to an end at last. All I hope now is that he will not do me out of my ration job.

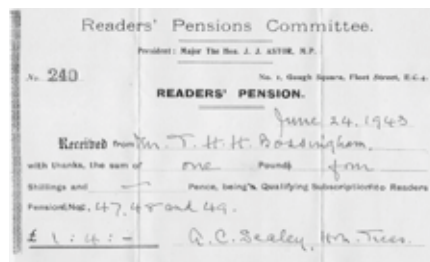
Tues. June 22

The other day when our officer came up to see me about my transfer he brought all my documents with him. I managed to get a glimpse of them and saw the report of the course at Newtonards. I was very surprised indeed that the lowest I had for any subject was 'good'. My percentage was 78%. 85% or over would have got me a distinguished. I know now that had I concentrated more I could have done it easily.

There are some REME's stationed near us, last night about tea time one of them was playing about with a bomb and it exploded. The net result now is that one is dead and two more are in hospital in a very bad way. Believe me it gives you a very queer sensation to see fingers lying on the floor!!!!

I had a farmer stop me tonight, he wanted to know if any of my lads were available for haymaking in the evenings. I told him they were free to do as they liked after working hours, so he asked me to tell them he would pay them 1/6 an hour if they cared to come along. The camp is deserted tonight.

The next envelope is in Vera's writing, showing a London postmark. She had obviously sent it for the return of a document, and received a slip showing a receipt for the payment of a subscription to Tom's Readers' pension.



SEC 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, RAF Station, Cottom, Nr. Driffield, E.Yorks Friday June 25

I shall be writing you later, but this is just a note in haste to let you know I have changed my address again.

Sunday June 27

I hope that by now you have received my short note about our latest change. There are rumours that we maybe here for a month or so. The job is cable laying and digging trenches for it. There is about 25 miles of it to do so it's likely to take us some little time.

This place is right off the map completely. The nearest place of any size is Driffield and that is about 4½ miles away. A liberty wagon leaves the camp at about 6 o'clock every night. The camp is all laid out ready for the RAF but we are the only troops here. There is no NAAFI or canteen, no buses or pictures, not even a pub for miles. All the land round about has been bought for the Army and we are warned not to lie in the fields or by hedges for fear of getting run down by tanks.

Tues. June 29

This job is bound to last for a month or so, what happens then goodness only knows. There are various rumours as usual. Things are moving in the same direction as they did in the 174. When the medical inspections start I am going to speak about my rupture and see what happens. That is of course unless my transfer does not come through.

The company seems to be getting together here now, I have heard that the HQ is moving here too.

I shall not altogether enjoy losing the stripe, but so long as I am doing something more in my line I shall not object. As for a becoming a two-striper I must hold the 2nd

tape 90 days before I am substantiated.

Thurs. July 1

The company is all together here and it looks very suspicious. We all had a thorough medical inspection the other day. I am still A2 and the MO passed some comment about this other rupture of mine!!!

If this company suddenly decides to go abroad they will have to find a b---y great boat to get me on!!!

We have a new SM, a new Major and two new officers and boy are they turning things round.

I learnt today that my name has a query by the side of it regarding this overseas business. At present I cannot find out whether that is due to my eyesight or this rupture. Then again it may be due to this potential transfer to the RAMC. Anyway, there is no immediate need for you to worry as I have decided definitely against going out of this country again.

Thanks for the cutting about the Pioneers. Was that the same one that I read while I was home?

Sunday July 4

Life here still continues in its own sweet way. Numerous kit inspections etc. We have been promised that all our old kit would be exchanged and made up. It is the same as in the 174.

The scenery round here is very nice. Fields of all different shades of green. The fields of clover smell lovely. The rabbits are plentiful too. What browns me off is the fact that I am to be transferred again. It is a terrible experience to be dumped down in a crowd of strange chaps. But still I am determined now to put up with anything rather than go abroad. So now I am waiting day by day for my name to appear in orders for a move somewhere.

These new officers of ours are making things hum. Yesterday two L/Cpls. were stripped. It seems hard but it is the only way of bringing some fellows to their senses.

Wed. July 6

You must forgive me for not answering sooner but we have just started a 10 day course.

This one is for almost certain promotion as there is a lack of NCO's in the company. It is a condensed form of the one I was on at Newtonards. The officer in charge is one of our own who is an ex RSM in the Coldstream guards, so you can probably imagine what we are doing. Every one on it is an NCO with the addition of one or two likely privates. We have moved into a new billet and had to start by cleaning the place out thoroughly. Wash the floors, clean the windows and scrub our beds. All our equipment has to be scrubbed and blanched. All brasses highly polished. Everything that could be polished was, even down to fire buckets. Kit laid out in line, holdall scrubbed. Battle dresses creased, and God knows what. Last night we were up until nearly midnight. The training is arms and foot drill. Bren, Sten and Tommy Guns. Grenades, PT and Battle drill. It will last for ten days and at the end of that time we shall know the worst. So, if I am rather erratic in my letter writing you will know the reason why.

There are all sorts of rumours going about regarding this company. We are

designed for service somewhere, but just where --- ???

The SM told me I could stay on the course but I stood a chance of being posted sometime. Evidently the MO when he examined me and found the beginnings of this other rupture has made arrangements for me to see a surgical specialist at some time. I am not worried in the least and I do not want you to be. The position is this, if I refuse this operation I shall definitely have a few weeks training and then away over the seas. On the other hand I go into hospital and eventually get posted to a new company. If I desire I can ask to be claimed by the CO of this company when I come out. That is the situation as it stands at present. You know my point of view and how I consider things. Make your decision and I will abide by it!!!! On coming out of hospital I shall lose my stripe, if I come back to this company I shall keep it.

Sunday July 11

I am sorry not to have written before but have been very busy taking notes on this course. It is quite like the course at Newtonards, attending lectures and drills then staying in of an evening writing them out in full.

It has been very interesting up till now and looks like continuing to be so. The officer i/c Mr. Boddy is taking all the drills and lectures himself. He is a first class instructor as well as a soldier. He knows it all and has the whys and wherefores at his fingertips. Although he bawls and shouts a lot the lads don't mind because he knows what he is talking about.

The lectures are on subjects that we as efficient NCO's should know. The duties of an O/Sgt and Cpl. The CSM and CQMS. Sgt i/c of a detachment duties of Cpl and L/Cpl. On top of this there is the usual foot and arms drill. March discipline and a host of other subjects. I am thoroughly enjoying myself and hope to benefit by it.

I can have as many 36 hour passes as the CSM will grant me, but a 48 hour pass will come off my leave. Regarding the 36 hour pass. Taking a good margin it would take me 7 hours to get home. 7 to get back making fourteen which would only leave me 22 at home. Do you consider it worth the time taken in travelling and the fare, for such a little while at home? Say what you think, when you want me to get one and what you can do towards a spot of cash.

Wed. July 14

I am expecting any day now to hear that I have to report sick, that is the time when I shall have to enquire about being put into a hospital near home. Don't send any more parcels or books until you get a new address from me. Because once I leave here I shall not return.

Things are reaching a fever pitch here. Some of the lads including myself are beginning to feel very browned off. We do not get enough time to do all our note writing, letter writing and cleaning. One evening we are kept in to draw new rifles, another evening to have our next of kin checked, another to sign rates of pay, kit inspection, drawing new kit. It is practically a week now since anybody has been out.

Fri. July 16

Today is the last day of our course,

tomorrow we have to pass out. Answer a few questions and drill the squad for a few minutes. So tonight is another night of spit and polish apart from trying to do a bit of swotting, not to mention letter writing.

This afternoon the officer who took us on the course, Mr. Boddy, had us in his office one at a time. As far as I can make out all the interviews were the same. He asked me how I liked the course, had I learnt anything, swot up my instruction notes. There were vacancies in the company and he was recommending me for a full rank. I have my own ideas about that and maybe you have yours, but anyway I must wait and see --- .

This transfer I speak of will be to another Pioneer Coy. The application I put in for a transfer to the RAMC will take some little time to go through the "usual channels". As far as I know I am medically unfit to go abroad.

If this 'promotion' of mine comes into being I shall put the operation off for a bit until I get more settled. But please do not worry I shall not refuse it.

Mon. July 19

Catterick is not very far away from here & if this coy. has to undergo some intensive training I would not be at all surprised to see them go there.

Thurs. July 22nd

My Own Darling Vera and Margaret, As you know (I hope) I was given the option of staying on this course or coming off. The SM told me I could stay on 'it would do me no harm'. Well, I stayed on and enjoyed it and am glad to say I learnt quite a lot. The officer who took us, Mr. Boddy, did not know I was being moved. I told you in a previous letter that I was one of the three to come out and drill the squad when the Major came down.

We were all interviewed by Mr. Boddy after the course and he definitely told me he was recommending me for my second stripe, but I knew something that he did not. Anyway, orders went up and my name was not amongst the promotions. I was not altogether surprised but it is rather disheartening.

Now to make matters worse Mr. Boddy is being posted away from this company. He was about the only man who could have done anything for this company, it needs someone's help I can tell you.

I am afraid a 48 hour pass is out of the question just at present. Our new Major a chap named Bishop is a real swine, he will not grant 48's for any other reason bar for compassionate.

Sunday July 25

Things are rapidly going from bad to worse in this coy. we do not get hardly any time off at all now. The evenings are free after 5 o'clock and Saturday afternoon, but Sunday morning there is always a parade of some sort. Kit inspection, changing clothes or some drill. It gets you very browned off not being allowed any time to ourselves.

Tues. July 27

I heard some little while ago thru many channels that the 174 had not gone abroad after all so I wrote to Mrs. Lockett and asked her about it. I had a very nice letter from her on Monday to say that the 174

were in Folkestone, and that she had forwarded my letter on to Les.

Last night the Sgt. Major got on to me about working in the office for a bit. Well I was not at all keen and told him so. I said I did not mind giving a hand now and then but did not intend making a habit of it. Anyway I spent today in there and am out on the dump again tomorrow.

Then on Sunday the Major sent for me. I went down and he had a chat with me about running first aid classes for a man for each section. He wants me to write out notes for a series of lectures for an hour each day for a week on elementary first aid. Just the essentials you know so that someone at least knows a few things about. Well, I have done it and submitted my notes and am now waiting to see what else develops.

Sunday Aug. 1

The full Cpl. in my section had his wife arrive here yesterday for a week or so's holiday. Don't think for a moment that I am offering this as a suggestion, I am merely quoting the facts, but of course if it sounds at all practicable I would like you to come here.

He lives at Ipswich and it took her about 10 hours to get here, what with all the changing and waiting for connections. The train was due in at about 3.45 and finally reached here about 5 o'clock. There are no buses from Driffeld to Cottam except the one used by the lads at 10.30 at night. The only way is a taxi. There are one or two farms fairly handy and they both charge about £1 week all in.

Sunday Aug. 8

This new Major of ours is proving a real tartar. Last week there were some fellows left here 16 hours late for their leave but it was not being made up. Up till now the chaps have been allowed to leave the night before, but he has knocked all that on the head and now we leave the morning of our first day. There is a train that leaves Driffeld at 8.13 in the morning right through to Kings Cross. I hope to catch that when my time comes.

The two days last week when it was too wet for us to work we had some instruction instead. I successfully gave two lectures on the Bren gun, but nothing more has been said yet about the first aid.

I fail to see why you should offer your congratulations on my third anniversary. I am not at all pleased about it.

The next envelope had been re-addressed from home to Cf- Mrs Coles, Greencroft, Edwin Road, West Horsley, Surrey - Vera seems to be having a holiday!

Thurs. Aug. 5

I feel fed up tonight, thoroughly browned off in fact.

This new major is as ignorant as he possibly can be, such a lot of useless red tape etc. The men are fed up with him so are all the NCO's from Sgts down. I should not be at all surprised to hear that someone has beaten him up.

Now regarding this office job, just ask yourself this question, which would you prefer me to be, healthy looking and happy or full faced and unhappy?

That is all there is to it.

Tues. Aug. 10

This new major of ours is a real sight, well I could write it but I won't. There was a fellow last week 1¼ hours late on parade, he got 28 days detention. Anybody a day late off leave is getting 14 days detention for certain. Now we are having a kit inspection one night, a rifle inspection another, fire piquet another, and now guards, on a great mass of open country. Soon we shall consider ourselves lucky to get one night off a week I am thinking. The sooner I am out of this lot the better.

The leave parties now are being roused at 5 in the morning and taken down to the village by van in time to catch the first through train to London.

Friday Aug. 13

Tonight I have fallen for a guard, the first for a very long time. Fortunately it does not involve any outside work so I do not mind, anyway it hardly manages to get dark at this time of year. Here the guard is a 24 hour turn of duty from 7 o'clock tonight until 7 o'clock tomorrow night when, if all goes well I hope to get into Driffield. I cannot see why there should be a guard really, but I suppose it is necessary in the eyes of the Army.

Wed. Aug. 18

My Own Darlings Vera & Margaret, Well there is still a great lack of news from this end. Rumours are once more plentiful regarding our presumed move. It is supposed to be taking place within the next few weeks and of course we have been all over the place. I do not mind much where we go so long as we stay in England but I would very much like to come further south.

I verified the train times at Driffield some week or so back and the first train right through from Driffield to London is 8.13 in the morning. I believe I told you in a previous letter that arrangements were being made for getting us to the station in time to catch that train. It will probably take me between 6 and 8 hours to get home. I will do my best to find out the travelling times better and let you know.

Friday Aug. 20

At last the higher ups have realised that the only way to get a Coy trained is to teach all the NCO's one standard way then let them loose on the company. Yesterday half the NCO's were taken by the CSM and today the other half, then on Sunday we shall be let loose on the company. Then some time in the near future we are going on whole time training, part of which will be done here and then we shall move somewhere.

Today during the training when I was busy taking a squad in rifle drill the Major came up and asked me my name, if these officers here take some notice of me maybe I shall be getting somewhere.

Wed. Aug. 25

Sorry not to have answered earlier but for the passed two days I have had a job in the office again. It was just my luck that the two days I spent inside were fine and then today when I go out on the job it pours with rain and we get wet through.

My job this time was ruling up a big thumb-indexed ledger and making a

nominal roll of the entire company. It was quite a good job and one at which I could excel as it called for a lot of lettering and you know I can do it if I put my mind to it. Anyway I must have made a good job of it as the SM was very pleased with it.

Well, there are some moves in the near future, but unfortunately it will only concern our section for two days at the outside. Half the company are going away on a job that may last a fortnight. The rest of us have one or two jobs of cleaning up round here. We shall know no more until the other half of the company come back.

Sunday August 29

Please do not be too angry or worried over me for not writing earlier but we have been having a hectic time just lately. Working late to get this job finished on time, then they bunged me in the office again to finish off that book I started. The Major remembered my name, when you get well known it is not always a good sign. Then we had to blanco and clean up ready to start on some training this week.

Tuesday Aug. 31

Well here is the news you are waiting for. If everything goes according to plan I shall be home on Thursday 9th at or about 3 o'clock at Wealdstone Station, so if you can manage it I should very much like you to come and meet me.

Well, another leave has passed, but here are some photos of Margaret --- showing her with Uncle Stan, Uncle Fred and Daddy, and another with Grandma and Grandad.

**Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, C/- GPO, Bridlington, Yorks
Sunday Sept. 19**

Vera Darling, Just a line in haste to let you know I arrived safely. Spent a night at Cottam then came on here today to join the section. It is a hell of a place, we are on a scheme and under canvas. The conditions are terrible. A letter will be following but I cannot write any more now it is dark and I am writing by candle.

Wed. Sept. 22

At last I have found time to write. As you already know I got back to Driffield quite safely. I had at first intended walking into Cottam but it was raining fast so I waited until 10.30 for the lorry. It was then that I heard about my section moving, so I had to spend the night in an empty hut on my own.

Sunday morning I got word to pack up my kit and report to my section. What a job. The same as I had at Belvoir, and to improve matters we are under canvas, and gosh it is cold.

Monday was quite a hectic day, we were working from 8 in the morning until 7 at night, then I had to go on guard. Ye gods I nearly froze to death. At 4 in the morning I

was running up and down outside to keep warm.

These are active service conditions alright, no lights except candles & torches, field kitchens and a dining hall is a stable, what a life.

Monday Sept. 27

As you know we are on this 'do' and are living under active service conditions. Under canvas, our kitchen and dining hall are stables, all ranks eat together in equipment and helmet carrying arms. No hot water for anybody, field kitchens, guards, tanks, troops, planes and lorries about the whole time, not to mention heavy gunfire nearly all day and night. I feel lousy, fit to drop, have not had my clothes off for four days, up all hours loading lorries and on guard in between. When we finished working all we want is a bed. I have not washed or shaved for three days, neither has anyone else, so you can imagine what sights some of us are.

We have caught fifth columnists spies, etc. and on top of it all everyone is absolutely perished with the cold. We all sleep bunched up together in the tents for warmth. Now there are rumours that we may have to move 'up the line' to a forward position. Some of the lads fall asleep at meal times. The sooner this scheme finishes the better. If this is active service I don't want any.

I hope that from this you will get some idea of how we are getting along.

Tues. Oct. 5

Just a few lines to let you know I am still alive and kicking. Sorry I have not written before but we really have been rushed off our feet. The Battle is at its height, it is 2 o'clock in the morning and we have just finished work and are in bed fully dressed waiting to be called again.

Sat. Oct. 9

As you can see I am once more on 'home ground'. We travelled back today by lorry but from what I hear we are only staying for about a week then moving --- worse luck back north again to Durham.

If the last two or three weeks are an example of schemes I do not want any more, no thank you, I much prefer to have a regular job somewhere.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Cottam Nr. Driffield, Yorks**Thurs. Oct. 14**

My Own Darling Vera & Margaret, First of all there was some trouble over the papers. They came addressed to the RTO Cottam, there is no RTO here so it was c/- the Station Master. Our driver had to report to the station for a parcel for me. They turned the place upside down looking for it. You should have heard what he said when they found it!!!!

As you know we are moving this weekend, Saturday to be exact, and are getting six weeks training. All this week we have been getting training of some sort and yesterday came the set piece. We left camp at 9 o'clock marched till 12.30 carrying our own rations, halted lit fires and cooked our own food, rested for two hours and then continued getting back to camp at 5 o'clock in the afternoon. In all we marched about 18 miles and did we know it!!!!!!

Today the section has been through the elementary tests and passed.. From Saturday onwards my address will be MARSDEN HOLIDAY CAMP, SOUTH SHIELDS, CO. DURHAM.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Marsden Holiday Camp, South Shields,. Co. Durham

17.10.43

Well here I am in a holiday camp again and what a place, not a patch on Duforth, if I had seen this first you would have had a job getting me to Duforth.

There are no De Luxe chalets here, all the places are after the style of one I was in with all the partitions removed making it into one shed. They are not at all substantial, no bricks or tile work, just wooden frames and bearer board, it is slap bang right on the front and the north sea winds whistle round us. I have a funny feeling that I shall not enjoy this place. We are out of South Shields by about 2-3 miles and very exposed.

Just my luck again to get put on guard last night, with two prisoners to look after. Last night was quite nice and clear but today it has started to rain. Standing about in the rain is a cold monotonous job at any time, it is a good thing we can gather some coal off the old dumps till our supply arrives. Extra blankets are being drawn today and we shall need them here, unfortunately the straw had given out when I got there so until some more arrives I must make do.

Tomorrow we start our training on whatever they decide to give us. So long as its not too hard I shall not mind, six weeks will bring my leave a lot nearer.

Tues. Oct. 19

There is a nice quiet writing room here so I have no excuse apart for working and duty. During this training I have the Bren Gun to look after. This includes cleaning & taking care in general of the gun, a spare barrel, 12 magazines, 4 Drum mags and a tripod. The first time (tonight) I did it all myself but in future, I have five men in my team, I shall see they do their bit.

This training is just the same as we were doing at Cottam but now we are able to devote all our time to it. Today we all had little schemes of our own. We did marvels, captured all sorts of places, climbed cliffs and fences, crawled through hedges, etc. and got thoroughly dirty and tired, but we all enjoyed it. Tomorrow we have another all day route march cooking our dinner out. At present it is raining hard, so we must hope for the best.

This camp is not a house in its own grounds, but just a selection of huts, as a holiday camp I don't like it at all. One side there is a main road, the other side there is a railway, road then the beach.

Thurs. Oct. 21

As you can see I am still surviving, but am not enjoying it nearly as much as the training I received at Newtonards. Our own officers and Sgts are taking us here so it is not very hectic. Furthermore, half these Sgts do not know sufficient about the subjects to be able to be thoroughly at home teaching or putting it over. We must not butt in of course, but it is very trying to hear things being wrongly taught. The

programme is not at all well laid out. We have to spend too much time standing and sitting about outside listening to talks.

Anyway, some of us will benefit no doubt.

Yesterday the cooks went out on a do and cooked for the Coy another meal from our mess tins.

There is a notice on detail this evening to anyone interested in visiting a coal mine hand their names into the coy. office. It should be an interesting experience, I have never been down a mine.

The next four envelopes are addressed to Vera at Aunt Bess's house ---- seems like another short holiday!

Sunday Oct. 24

Well, the training is still going along, but I am afraid it is not proving as interesting as it might. A lot of the stuff is old, what we had to learn as recruits, the only things I look forward to are Battle Drill, Route Marches and the Assault Course.

On the miniature schemes we have the lads won't 'play' so consequently the Officers get ratty and we usually finish up by punishment drill and two or three chaps in the guard room.

The first aid notes I had to write out for the Major have at last come to light and I give my second lecture tomorrow.

The training programme, to my idea, has not been planned at all well. We are continually getting very hectic periods during which everyone works up a lather followed by a lecture or something which necessitates us all sitting about catching chills. There are four chaps at least in bed this afternoon.

During the latter part of last week when we had the first assault course it finished with two chaps in hospital, one with a dislocated shoulder and the other with a broken arm!!!!

This morning we all had to march to the colliery pit head for a bath, three sections at a time. The showers there are the best thing I have seen here yet. Speaking about collieries, there were so many applications for the visit that it had to be cut down to two from a section and I was not one of the lucky ones.

Well tomorrow we kick off on another weeks training to see what it will bring. There is to be another all day route march, meals cooked out and finishing up with an attack of some sort.

27.10.43

Well, things are still jogging along here after a fashion. It is no worse than usual and I am sorry to say no better. To put the lid on things our Sgt. has been excused marching through bad feet, what do you think of that!!!!

We have at last got a specialist in one subject; a Sgt from the Physical Training Corps. He puts us through it with a long run until practically all the coy are on their knees. I feel sorry for some they are too old but others I should enjoy seeing run until their legs dropped off.

Today we had another route march about 12-14 miles. It started this morning. Everyman drew his own rations and we marched until dinner time then had 1½ hours in which to cook and eat our food then move on again. We attacked an enemy position which took about an hour,

got wet through and mudded up to the eyebrows by crawling round two sides of a cabbage field and then making the final assault through a young boy (?). You should see some of the lads but perhaps you can imagine what we looked like.

Tonight all boots and arms and mess tins have to be inspected ready for an inspection in the morning.

Tomorrow we are supposed to be going on the range with Stens. I am rather eager to see how these things fire.

Now that we are becoming more accustomed to our surroundings things don't seem quite so bad, but I am still very browned off. My main grouse is the cold wind. We stand for about 20 minutes to ½ hour each morning for a CO's parade and get absolutely frozen stiff. It takes about ½ hours smart marching to get warm again.

Sunday Oct. 31

Thursday we had a bit of a scheme we left camp then formed up into battle order a little way down the road and began an advance in arrow head formation across some open country. At a pre-arranged signal we were under fire and had to take cover. Two platoons gave covering fire while mine and another went right away out across the country over ditches walls ploughed fields and hedges all at a steady double. I and the other Pltn Cmdr. knew the location of the enemy and were endeavouring to get round his right flank. As we drew nearer utmost caution had to be maintained which necessitated our crawling on hands and knees along the hedgerow of two fields. By this time we had reached some good cover about 50-75 yds from the enemy position. As a matter of fact we were a field away from the road behind a stone wall. Word was passed along to fix bayonets and then on the Cmdrs word we went over the wall in a bayonet charge. Our objective was a position across the main road. As the lads came belting across about a dozen or so civies showed up on the road!!!! I, like a good Pltn Cmdr was leading my platoon and the whole lot about 30 or so, were all armed with fixed bayonets running and yelling like a lot of maniacs. As I came out on to the road I yelled to the civies 'look out for the bayonets, these b----y lads are barmy'. I think the civies were quite scared, who wouldn't be to see all those bayonets coming for you.

Saturday morning I was on the range with my old Bren and also had a shoot with the Majors .45 Colt revolver. It was like a young cannon and nearly knocked me over.

For some reason the top of the first page of Tom's next letter has been torn off! 'Wed' (for Wednesday) can be seen, but that's all --- the postmark on the envelope (which incidentally has the YMCA crest on it) is 4 Nov 1943. (Maybe Vera tore the address off to give to someone).

There should have been a period of night-ops. this week but owing to the weather (and one or two incidents) they have been cancelled. The weather here these last few days has been terrible. When I say terrible I mean terrible. Cold, rain, frost and very heavy mists. Not at all nice but we have to struggle along. Believe me it's no joke having to lie about concealed in wet

grass and hedgerows just now.

The first aid lectures have started again. Two a week now. I have a man from the colliery helping me.

Sunday Nov. 7

Things are still moving along here in much the same way. Everything we do always seems to have that same deadening and boring effect on me. I seem to fly off the handle very easily again. It must be my nerves but why I don't know. I can drill, march or play whatever they want me to, but I do hate being messed about by a lot of incompetents.

I had a surprise the other day to hear that there is about 10% of our blokes in hospital. Yesterday we had to draw our winter woollies, pants, vests and gloves. I must confess that I have fallen again and got into my 'coms'. I feel warmer its true, but they are terrible looking things.

Friday was Guy Fawkes Day and we celebrated it by going on the range. We had to fire from all sorts of positions both with and without respirators. I did not do too bad, a 4" group at 100 yds. if that means anything to you. We have to have a further do at the range but up till now I don't know when. I heard the other day that this training is finishing after 4 weeks, I am hoping so.

9.11.43

Leave still seems rather a long way off but it will pass --- I hope. I may be lucky this year --- I hope so. Christmas week will be my 13th week back. Even if I don't get home for Christmas I shall probably catch the New Year again. In any case, so long as I am home I do not really mind what time of year it is.

11.11.43

Yesterday we had about a 14 mile route march, cooked our dinner out and had a bit of a scheme too. This, as usual necessitated us crawling, wading in ditches half-way up our legs in water and the climax a mad dash across a marshy field to some cover. The mud was thick, black and very sticky. You should have seen some of the poor devils who could not keep their feet!!! The strange part about it was that no one caught cold and practically all our clothing was dry when we got back home.

I think this training has almost finished now because next week we have been promised plenty of range work, long marches in full kit and grenade throwing. Believe me, I shall be glad when it is over, I am thoroughly browned off here and besides I don't like the place, it is too darned cold.

Sunday Nov. 14

Things are still jogging along very nicely. The weather though is getting worse and worse. We were all on the range again during the passed week and I am now a 2nd Class shot. Some time this next week we shall be on the range again with the old Bren. We may also have some grenade throwing.

17.11.43

Things are much the same here, very boring and still a very large number of chaps going sick. The weather is getting really terrible, we have already had two or

three falls of snow not to mention all the frosts and cold winds.

No one seems to know now when this training is going to finish. It just seems to drag on and on. I hope we move before Christmas, this will be a terrible place in the winter and according to the locals what we are getting now is nothing compared with what we are going to get.

I was firing again last week end and just managed to keep my head 'above water'. I am now classified as a 2nd Class shot. Some time this week we are going on the range with the Brens, that's what I am looking forward to.

Sat. Nov.20

I have not yet been able to see anybody about changing my leave date yet but hope to do so sometime during this next week.

Things are still proceeding according to plan here, everybody is suffering from a terrible 'browned offness'. I shall be more than thankful when it is all over. There are still plenty of rumours floating around about what we are going to do or where we may be going, but ---.

There was one bit of excitement that nearly ended in disaster. All the markers were under cover, the guns were loaded and in position and the men down behind ready to fire, including myself. We opened up and my first burst went right through a 3 ft. bank into the target missing a Cpl. by about 2"!!!!

23.11.43

Well things are still much about the same. This week appears to be about the last of our training so I suppose that one of these fine days, before my leave I hope, we shall be on the move again, this time in the right direction???

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, Priory Road Camp, Cottingham.E. Yorks

Sun. Nov. 28

Sorry not to have written earlier but you will notice we have moved on again, a further try to reach the ever elusive South. We only arrived here today at about 4 o'clock so of course are hardly settled down. It is a camp built for people who might have got bombed out from Hull etc.

The billets are really good, four in a room, with real flock mattresses and bolsters, a small fire, four chairs, drawers and a wardrobe. As usual there is the inevitable catch, this time it is the work.

On the docks from 8 in the morning until 7 at night.

Our period of training is up and I do not think there is a single chap in the whole coy. who was not thankful to get away from Marsden. I can tell you lots more when I get home.

Thurs. Dec. 2

Well we finished loading our boat yesterday, so I don't suppose it will be long before she is on her way somewhere. This morning we were out of a job so they sent us home again. We messed about camp all the morning, got paid at midday and went into Hull for the afternoon. As usual, my luck held, it was early closing day, and now I am left until the weekend with a piece of soap about as big as a 1/-. We may be lucky and get another half-day Saturday so I must try again.

Sunday Dec. 5

I enquired at the RTO's in Hull about some train times too. The best and earliest I can get is the 9.45 from Hull which will get me into Kings Cross at 2.27, which if I am on time should help me to reach Harrow at between 3.30 and 4. The last train from Hull to Cottingham on my return is 9.40, but I should like to allow some margin in case of any mishaps. That's alright as far as it goes, for today there is a strong rumour that some of us are moving to Leeds or Pontefract so be prepared for a sudden change of address and times, etc.



Sunday Dec 12

We have worked again all day today, at least up till 5 o'clock, and tonight I managed to get a good bath, so feel very fresh with all my clean laundry on.

Another leave over and gone!

Monday Dec. 27

Well I'm back and it is just as bad as ever. The train was in when I arrived and about 1 mile long, plenty of room as it was only about half full. Three of us met and got a carriage to ourselves but had to change at Doncaster. Anyway it's over now so what ---.

We had a day off today and was I thankful, it would have just about killed me to go down the docks today. I was in bed until nearly dinner time, went without breakfast and got up for dinner.

The only improvement I have found is that there is now a NAAFI in the camp. I believe I have told you before, that as soon as any improvements are effected it is a sure sign that we are on the move shortly.

1944 Sunday Jan. 2

Just a few lines to let you know that I am still surviving and staggering on. The weather is getting much colder and very rough and, I am happy to say they have at last considered us a bit and issued all the lads with leather jerkins.

There is just one point I would like to emphasize for your benefit that has cropped up here just recently. A fellow living in N. Ireland had a telegram stating that his wife was seriously ill and could he come home. Unfortunately whoever sent it had failed to get it verified by the police so of course the OC will not let him go. Now the poor devil is worrying himself silly wondering just what is happening while he writes home telling them what to do. So remember darling, if you or anybody else wants me to come home in the event of any emergency always

get the police verification before you even start to send telegrams.

Tues. Jan. 11

Life is still in much the same state around here with the additional exception that it's got a lot colder just lately. Today we had our first fall of snow, not much but enough to make things uncomfortable. On top of that, three fellows of my section and myself have spent best part of the day riding around in an opened back lorry so you can well imagine just how I felt in body and mind. After being cold and miserable all day to come back to billets all cold, no fires, no hot water, beds to make – Ye Gods!!! When will it finish.

Sunday Jan. 16

Today one NCO from each section had to stay behind from work for a conference with the old man. I was picked from this section so spent a good day at home. It was a very welcome change and rest. Unfortunately no fires were allowed to be lit so it took us all our time to keep warm.

Yesterday one of the lads fell and knocked his head on a boat somewhere. He carried on until this morning when he collapsed on getting out of bed. The doctor arrived and diagnosed concussion, when the ambulance arrived I had to supervise getting him into it as an ATS was driving and did not appear to have much idea.

Every night last week we worked until 7 o'clock so did not get much time to ourselves. I was pleased to get today off as it enable me to get a good bath. I do not intend skating about here at about 8-9 o'clock trying to get a bath after a hard day on the docks.

Tues. Jan. 18

There has not been much to write about happen here, we have been working until 7 o'clock each evening so do not get a great deal of spare time.

Wed. Jan. 26

Please excuse me for not writing earlier, the reason is still the same, long hours and I feel too tired for anything except bed. Please don't worry about me or get too anxious over not hearing more frequent. Maybe when and if we ever leave here I shall be able to devote more time to letter writing.

We have been having some terrible weather just lately. Talk about gales, I thought the billets were going to leave us once or twice during these last few nights.

Today we were fortunate enough to get on a boat that was practically finished so we got stuck well in and finished early so as to get home on the 5 o'clock bus, the first time for nearly a fortnight. I missed tea and hope to get it when the 7 o'clock party come in. However I did get a bath and enjoyed it too.

Sunday Jan.30

Well darling there appears to be a further move in the offing, but unfortunately it is again in the wrong direction. Up till now I have not been able to find out definite where we are going or what we are going to do. All I know is that this week, sometime we are moving up to the Scarborough district. What a life. Yorkshire seems to be my dead end.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, C/- GPO, Aberdeen Walk, Scarborough, Yorks

Thurs. Feb. 3

It is training we are on but from what the officer told us it is something which we have never done before.

Please darling forgive me for not writing sooner but these moves are really a lot of work for all of us and we do not get a great deal of time to ourselves. Apart from that I was tired out and spent what spare time I had asleep. We moved into a hotel and had to get allotted to rooms etc., draw palliasses and bolsters, etc. Am sorry to lose the beds at Cottingham.

I am afraid this place has not impressed me at all. It gives you the impression of being far too snobbish. I don't think I should have cared to spend a holiday here.

Sunday Feb. 6

As a seaside town I'm afraid I don't like it. The old part of the town, down along the front is quite nice, a little harbour, ships, etc., but hundreds of steps to climb. But this part here is terrible. In peace time here it cost the civvies 2/6 to use the WC then it didn't smell.

We do not appear to have bettered ourselves much. What we are going to do is not known yet so we are filling in the time by drilling, etc., up and down the sea front. What a waste of time and the worst of it is we don't finish until 6 o'clock. Saturday we get half a day and Sundays as well.

There are no fires and no beds in this house yet and the weather just at the moment is very cold and windy. In fact one morning there was a fall of snow.

Tues. Feb. 8

My Own Darling Vera & Margaret,

We are still training, had a route march this afternoon about 10 miles, one the day before about 6 and another one tomorrow. I shall be glad when this job starts so as we can finish all this messing about. After our return this afternoon we had tea at 6 parade again at 7 (NCO's only) for a lecture and finally left that at 9.25 just in time to get a cup of tea before they closed.

This training we are on just now is of a secret nature so --- Mum's the word. We moved here last Tuesday.

I think I am safe in divulging that now we are all here safe and sound. Unfortunately we are on the floor again and as they are wood there is not much likelihood of us getting beds --- yet.

Tues. Feb. 15

Believe me I am terribly sorry not to have answered sooner but as I told you on the phone I am fed up, as for being browned off I have run through the entire range of colours and have none left. This life is getting a darn sight worse, I thought I could take a lot, either I am weak or the man in charge is a madman.

Things are beginning to look very sticky just now, the officers are always talking now of when we jump etc. Notices are appearing about sending all our surplus kit home.

Friday Feb. 18

Training still going along steady but I am glad to say that the route marches are off. The weather continues to be very cold and at present it is snowing.

My 'browned offness' is wearing off a bit. It will probably go altogether once we begin work and get no more messing about.

Last weekend we had to scrub all our equipment and this weekend it all has to be blanched, what a life.

Sunday Feb. 20

Well darling I still feel browned off, and to increase my worries I shall be in sole charge of the section this next week as all the other NCO's will be either on leave or courses.

The weather is very cold still so of course we must increase our discomfort by first standing about for nearly an hour this morning on an OC inspection, then this afternoon we fiddled about in cold water doing blanching. What a life!!!!

Another little thing to annoy us is the annual inoculation on Tuesday. If its not one thing its another.

Wed. Feb. 23

There is not much news from here. It's still very windy and cold but we are becoming accustomed to it now. We had a new injection yesterday, one for typhus, I don't know if it has any special significance.

It is very disturbing to know you are being raided again. Am sorry to hear they were so close and frightened you. Anyway you are both safe and sound and that is all I want. Believe me when I hear you have had raids in the London area I am always on hooks until I hear from you then I thank God for your safety.

Sunday. Feb. 27

Things appear to be going from bad to worse in the Coy. Parades of an evening, Saturday afternoons and Sundays, just to keep us in. I believe they are trying to break our spirit you know. I cannot understand them and am just wondering how long the lads will put up with it.

Tues. Feb. 29

Well, there is still a plentiful supply of nothing happening here. The latest trick we have to endure is an arms inspection at 5.45 each evening, weekends as well, just because the officer was a bit liverish and found one or two dirty rifles.

One piece of fairly good news is that the sections are all being reorganised and I am to change my Bren for a Sten, and believe me it wont be a big loss.

This morning we spent working and this afternoon we had to parade in battle dress for a second typhus inoculation, then just to improve matters I was down on detail for a Dental Parade. So straight from the inoculation I visited the dentist, he was quite good and only filled two. We have another inoculation next week & that completes the issue.

The Cpls. and Sgt. come back from leave tomorrow so I shall be rather more free next week --- I hope.

Friday March 10

I intended writing last night while I was on guard but felt so tired and fed up I hardly knew how to keep awake, let alone writing. Now today we have just had another inoculation and 48 hours excused duty. Unfortunately we are confined to barracks until 2.30 on Sunday and it is such a lovely evening. That makes four

inoculations in three weeks and a fifth on the way. My left arm looks like a pin cushion. Don't worry about me I am quite alright only a little sore and stiff. We are still doing a lot of training but not much marching. The training is the same as we had at Marsden and seems only a waste of time to me. We should all be happier and feel a lot more contented if we could start work again somewhere.

Tom is now using NAAFI notepaper and envelopes!

Sat. Mar. 4

Well things are still going along in the same old muddling way. When these various tiffs are over and done with, life does not seem so bad after all, but at the time, believe me, I honestly wonder whether its worth while going on living.

We are still proceeding with our usual programme, training in the mornings and a route march in the afternoon. Up till now we have encountered practically all types of weather so nothing short of a blizzard will stop us now.

All day yesterday and up till dinner time today it has been snowing so you can well imagine what the place is like now, and it is still bitterly cold. We are still without fires in the billets and look like continuing to be so.

We have a training programme laid out for next week and we look like having a good time, believe me.

Remind me when I get home to tell you about this special job we are on and also about the trouble there is over two of our officers.

Tues. Mar. 7

Well, I have finished my course of typhus inoculations today, now there are the annual TT and TAB to come some time in the very near future.

Wed. March 15

I have some good news so had better get it over quick. Providing everything is under control I shall be home on the 23rd of this month. I am a bit disappointed as I hoped to be home for Easter and Ma's birthday. Well get well and cheerful like, I am looking forward to having a good time. Do you think we could work a show in again somehow?

Training is still carrying on in spite of everything. Today and tomorrow we are going thru some of this hush hush training.

Today we were on the sea front nearly all day so consequently my face burns like mad.

Sunday March 19

On Thursday and Friday evenings I was busy at a new trade. Helping a one-man undertaker to make a coffin!!!

We had another inoculation Thursday, that makes five in four weeks.

Yet another leave --- gone!

Monday April 2

Well, once again we must start writing. As you can see I reached here quite safely and gosh did I notice a difference in the temperature, it was quite chilly here and has been the same since.

Everything is more or less just as we left it. Same old routine, work and training,

what an existence. It makes you think about the Israelites in their travail "How Long Oh Lord, How Long ---".

The train was pretty full but I managed to get a seat then some more people arrived who wanted room so we had to have eight in each compartment. In ours there was a sailor, a WAAF, one civvy girl and five soldiers. After a while we were all chatting together and I found out that this girl lived in Kenmore Avenue, near the Red Lion, and that her husband, before he joined up worked at the SO.

Well, after arriving and getting my bedding, etc.,

Tomorrow (Tuesday) we have a route march in the afternoon, or at least starting about 10 o'clock in the morning, marching until dinner time, cooking our own dinner, having a 'do' of some sort and then marching back.

There is another point of interest. Whilst at Hull we unloaded a whole lot of books and magazines from Canada for the Canadian Forces. Needless to say, like the rest, I 'won' a few. In one I found the name and address of a little girl.

By chance I kept it and for a joke more than anything I wrote to her. Just imagine my surprise when I received an answer today. She is only seven, but I had a very nice letter from her Mother. There was a snap enclosed, I will let you have that and the letter when I have answered it.

Thurs. April 6

Yesterday and today we have been out working on the sea front. Today I brought back about two pints of winkles and at present they are boiling very nicely downstairs. Yum yum.

Tomorrow we go on training again. What a bore. I hope it pours with rain all day so that we have to have lectures.

Tues. April 11

Here is something off the tracks completely. How would you like to spend a few days here? I can get you digs, they are quite prepared to take Margaret and it will cost you about 30/- a week.

Please let me know by return what you think and when you can arrive as the accommodation is being kept open. Anything further I can tell you over the phone if you give me Jill's No. and a suitable time.

Wed. April 19

My Dear Vera,

This is a note in haste so hope you will understand. I can tell you lots more when I see you. As for the new restrictions I have heard nothing fresh so carry on, they are bound to tell you at the station if it is so.

The next letter is addressed to Vera c/o Mrs. Naylor, 3 Back Oriel Cres., Scarborough, Yorks.

Monday April 24

Well as you can see we have arrived quite safely. The journey was lousy, trains overcrowded and late, connections missed etc. which resulted in us reaching here just after midnight.

This is the 74 Coy we are attached to, an alien one, I cannot altogether make up my mind whether I am still in England as English is rarely heard. Even the Sgt. i/c is a

foreigner of some sort.

We shall not have to do this day again and it brings me one nearer home. I have not bothered to find out the address as its hardly worth while your writing to me here.

The course ends officially next Saturday midday.

Wed. April 26

My Dear Vera,

There is just one point of interest, guess who I met here --- Irwin Ornstein of all people. He was interned at the outbreak of war and went to Canada and is now in the Pioneer Corps. Needless to say we spent the whole evening yarning and spent some very enjoyable times together.

As far as we know up till now, we shall leave here Saturday midday and I shall spend Saturday night at Harrow then come on to Scarborough Sunday. The only train worth our while is the 11.00 from Kings Cross which should get us there by about 7.30 if all goes well. Meet me if you can.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, APO England

Thurs. May 11

It is rather a sudden wrench this parting but it has to be. Be patient darling, one day it will finish and until then you occupy first place in my thoughts. Give little Margaret a special hug and kiss from her Daddy. Take great care of her as she is such an adorable little mite and I love her so. Let me know how you finish your stay at Scarborough and whether you sent the parcel OK. I am hoping to see the photos soon, if they come out.

The next letter is just a single folded sheet, addressed simply 'Vera'

Saturday

When you get this both you and I will have left Scarborough, I know where you will be but myself --- well.

Thurs. May 18

Well, I am back safe and sound once more. The leave was short but very sweet, more so because of the surprise element attached to it.

From what I hear we may not get another short leave until the period has passed the whole company, but never fear as and when opportunity permits I shall be home like a shot.

23.5.44

My Dear Vera,

I do not know yet whether these passes will be cancelled over the weekend, if not I hope to get there some time then.

Friday May 26

The usual routine still runs here, nothing new, all the same and very monotonous. Thanks to some of these ignorant, selfish louts we have here I am rather afraid that as far as passes are concerned I have had them. Time is getting short again, the ominous signs are appearing again, so once more it's a case of Quo Vadis?

Monday May 29

Things are still the same here, no passes, if only something would happen and lets

get it over. The weather for this last few days has been terrible. The heat is terrible, much more and I shall be a grease spot.

Sunday June 4

Firstly, we NCO's are being treated worse than cattle, the Major, I am convinced is quite mad. Things are going from bad to worse, in fact it is about time I played my cards.

All the week I have been giving lectures on First Aid, not that I mind that of course, but what I do object to is the fact that I was not warned until about two hours before the time. Even then I thought that I had only to give one, but it went on day after day until on Thursday I was told that this training programme includes one First Aid lecture each day. On top of that we have quite a few periods on gas and as I am the Gas NCO for the section they fall to me too.

I think now that any further chance of promotion as far as I am concerned in this company is right out of the question. As things stand now I am the senior L/Cpl in the Coy. Before I went on that Gas Course the officer gave us a talk on gaining laurels, further promotion and all that tripe, then when a vacancy does occur as it has this week, the L/Cpl who gets made up is one of those clients I have probably told you about who have the manners and habits of a pig, illiterate in as far as he can hardly spell his own name, no principals, in fact he's useless.

Last night about 11.45 I was called out of bed to see to some chap who had cut himself about. Ye Gods, when I saw him, blood and plaster everywhere. I could not see his face at all for blood. To help matters he was a bit drunk. He knew me and spoke to me one minute, the next he wanted to fight me. I got rather frightened as he was rather big and an Irishman. Anyway, I did him up, got him some tablets and eventually got him to sleep and he went to hospital this morning.

The following leaflet would most assuredly have relieved Tom's boredom! He would have felt most apprehensive as to what was about to happen especially as at present he is still many hundreds of miles away from the 'action'.



Wed. June 7

What do you think of things now? Lets hope like everyone else, that I shall be home for good before this year is out. Things are bound to move fast so don't be surprised at anything. Where we shall go next goodness, but keep your fingers crossed.

You are bound to hear rumours the same as us, but pay no attention to them. I will tell you all I can, when I can. Where there are post boxes available I shall write so please don't worry. Just at present, though what with one thing and another I don't get a great deal of time to myself.

Thurs. June 15

You have probably guessed what has happened. One day we were and the next day we weren't. I shall write more fully later, but this is the first opportunity I have had up till now.

Sat. June 17

My Own Darling Vera,
At last I have a few minutes to spare, and I hope to let you have a few more details. Well to begin with, we had a sudden order to move from our last place, where I came home from. From there we went to one of these closed up places. It was not until we left that I found out that no mail left there until we left. We were there about three-four days, closed up all the time.

Then again very suddenly there was an issue of extra kit, rations, etc. and off we went. As far as I can remember we landed last Monday.

We may as well be home for all the difference. As quiet as a grave. The nights are noisy but that's all.

The little villages are pretty but terribly broken up. Not many people left. The children cannot make us out, but a bar of chocolate soon makes us friends. Everyone is friendly.

Don't believe any rumours. I will tell you all I can, so rely on me.

20.6.44

Well, its still very quiet, the nights are rather noisy though, but nothing to worry about. The weather is grand. Yesterday was our first wet day but fortunately we had the day in camp.

We appear to be making quite good progress. Eisenhower is supposed to have said it would be all over in three months, I hope he's right.

Friday June 23

I forgot to tell you earlier that I had not landed more than about half an hour before I met a fellow I know. He was in the old 174 but now had a transfer to the RE's. We had a little chat but not long as we had to get on the move.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, BWEF 28.6.44

Things are still very quiet, just like the English countryside, he has not bothered us much at night just lately. So long as he stays that way I shall not mind.

Up till the present all the cafes are out of bounds, they say this is to prevent profiteering. So until we are allowed out the money keeps piling up each week. These 100 and 50 franc notes are some queer looking things.

The kids around here are still very keen on English sweets and chocolates. They are already picking up scraps of English.

There are all sorts of rumours about how we are living. We are in bivvies or holes in the ground and tinned grub and biscuits is becoming rather monotonous. One day last week we got caught out in the rain and were soaked. Everyone in camp received a rum issue. Believe me I could have pushed a house over. That night the world could have ended and I would have known nothing about it.

When we were in the concentration area for the last few days all mail was stopped to prevent any leakage I suppose. I can sympathise with you in these worrying times.

Margaret still sounds very well and full of beans. I hope it wont be very long before I can see you both again. I am hoping that when I do see my daughter again she will have quite a chatty way with her and be able to use a spoon quite unaided. She is so very contented and happy that there is absolutely no need for you to worry. She will grow in time.



Sunday July 2

There is not much happens out along the job, we occasionally meet children and give them our sweets or chocolate. The cafes etc. are still out of bounds so there is not much opportunity for us to spend our money. ENSA have already begun giving concerts over here so I don't suppose it will be very long before we get NAAFI's etc.

Today I had quite a pleasant surprise. I ran into two officers that I had known. One of them had met some of the lads and had been asking for me. It was Mr. Brooks from the old 174, do you remember him? The other was John Stott. He was a Pte. with me in the 174.

Sat. July 8

Many thanks for your letters of the 29th June and 1st July also for the papers which have all reached me quite safely. By this time I am hoping you have received my permanent address. Now our mail should travel a lot quicker.

I am very sorry not to have written earlier but have been very busy indeed. Another reason is that just lately we have been

having quite a drop of rain and when this happens letter writing is out of the question as we (Bill and I) are living about 2-3 ft. down in the ground, with ground sheets and gas capes as cover. It's very comfortable and warm but only useful for sleeping purposes.

Wed. July 12

Last night I went into town. I think there is a curfew of sorts as we have to be out by 10 o'clock and the shops and cafes close before that. It's a very quaint place almost untouched. As I remarked to one of the lads, it's very strange walking around here with a pocket full of francs while in England we often walked around without a penny to bless ourselves.

Sec 7 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, BLA Sunday July 16

Before I go any further have you noticed my change of address it was BWEF but is now changed to BLA --- British Liberating Army. Use this and your letters will travel quicker.

There is still a lack of news I'm afraid. Things are very quiet during the day, he only pops out occasionally, but I have seen one or two shot down. Our own too for that matter. The nights are still very noisy but we are safe enough here.

I have seen now like the papers show, tanks, cars guns etc. all lying in the ditches. Fields, houses and roads all torn up and everywhere smothered with a thick white dust. I could write for a long time on things like this but it would take too much paper.

About Wednesday or Thursday we had a real occasion. A half slice of bread for each man, the first we had seen since our arrival. Then yesterday our Sgt. Mason, you remember him, he won 1½ loaves in a raffle so we had some more, then again today everyone had a slice each.

Wed. July 19

I understand that there are quite a lot of letters from here being held up so maybe some of mine are among them. You do not say definitely when you had the last letter from me so I am rather in the dark. Anyway my address is now B L A not BWEF. I have mentioned these changes in various letters but you still persist in using an APO.

Each day we go out to work and move a bit further up and on clear days you can see from some high spot gun fire and clouds of dust and smoke in the distance.

Tues. July 25

There is still a lack of news, you know more about the war and its progress than me. It is still very noisy at nights. The weather is well medium. Not much sun, overcast but very warm.

There is one piece of news which I hope will not disappoint you too much. The details are too many, but the fact is I might lose this stripe of mine. The Major is still as piggish as ever and well that's all I can tell you. I have an interview with him tonight and if I don't get any satisfaction I shall see the Colonel. Anyway don't worry darling there is always my other trouble to get me out of it.

Sunday July 30

I listened in to the news today and it seems exceptionally good. If only we can

keep going I can see it being over now this year.

You can rest at ease now about this stripe business of mine, it has all blown over. I will tell you all about it when we can get together sometime.

This living in and under the ground is quite a novelty --- for a time. But what worries me is will it have any after effects. This continual wet and dampness cannot be doing any of us much good. At present we are about three feet down, with steps!!! It has big wooden beams and covered with sandbags so that we can almost stand up. The walls are lined with our ground sheets and old sand bags. On the floor is a layer of straw and more sand bags, then tear gas capes and finally our bed.

There are pegs and wire hooks hanging from the beams for equipment, helmet, gun and all the little odds and ends are on a shelf at the back. We are quite comfortable and the envy of the Sgt. Major. It's under an apple tree in an orchard so we are well provided for.

Thurs. Aug. 3

People in this part of the world are very backward in their farming methods, in fact today I actually saw a plough being drawn by two bullocks. Practically all the water has to be fetched from wells, and up to now I have seen no mechanical farming implements. Whether Jerry borrowed them or not I cannot say.

Another strange thing is that whereas in England cows are always brought into stalls for milking over here they just walk up to them in the fields with a stool and bucket & get cracking.

The news seems very good just lately, I hope that all these successes on various fronts can be maintained. What did you think of Churchill's speech? I did not hear the actual speech only the summary. He was not very encouraging I thought, but then he never is. If the present rate of advance is kept up I don't see any reason at all as to why it should not finish this year. Personally I don't think Jerry will fight in his own country.

Sunday Aug 6

The further we go on this job, the more we see. Up to the present I have seen some pretty rotten sights and often wonder what else is in store for me.

Wed. Aug. 9

Well things are still progressing very favourably here, the weather is exceptionally good. I like it hot and sunny but we still have our grouses - the dust.

The further we travel the more we see of this war and its effect upon the countryside. I believe I have told you before, but it is so eerie to find whole villages with every house wrecked & not a soul in them anywhere. Burnt out tanks in someone's front garden, graves on the roadside, lorries blown up into trees, planes strewn all over the fields. It's a ghastly sight at times believe me.

One unit near us at present have a very fine wireless set. We go there to hear the news, then at about 9.15 they turn the French news on for the locals.

Wed. Aug. 13

The news just now is very good indeed. I think the doodle bugs are just about out

altogether now. I wonder what Adolf thinks about having the Yanks fighting inside his domain.

Tom's last letter was dated Wed. Aug. 13 and this next one is dated Sunday Aug. 13. --- Sunday Aug 13 would be correct, so Tom has got his dates mixed up somehow!

Sunday Aug. 13

Today after doing my laundry I had quite an exiting time for about half an hour. I was lowered on a rope to the bottom of a 40ft. well to get all the old cans and buckets out. It was a bit nervy at first when I had to let go and trust to the rope. Then about half way down when both the top and the bottom seemed a long way off I wondered whether I should continue. Anyway I went on and eventually reached the water which came to my knees, it was very cold, damp and eerie down there believe me and I was glad to see the sunshine again.

You will probably be pleased to hear that our Pltn. Officer is the best officer in the Coy. Mr. McKellar, he comes from Greenock and is only about 24.

The Coy. managed to scrounge a portable radio from somewhere before we left home. Our trouble now is batteries and accumulators.

We saw some action just recently and did cheer.

The following is the cutting Tom refers to in his letter. This has been fully typed out as the original is very fragile and not easy to copy or scan.

Normandy Battle Impressions

L/Cpl. T. Bossingham, of 130, Bishop Ken-road, Harrow Weald, writes from Normandy to his colleagues at H.M.S.O. Press, Wealdstone:

"I was glad to get the 'Harrow Observer' and to read about the meeting in Malta of my two old colleagues, Stan Atherton and George Hopper. Funnily enough, I had not been ashore half-an-hour before I met a fellow with whom I joined up four years ago.

"The first night after we landed was rather shaky, but it passed and now we are accustomed to the heavy gunfire and the usual traces of a bombardment. The German sign 'Minen' (mines) with a skull and cross-bones over it has become quite familiar, particularly as part of our job takes us over ground we are not quite sure of. Believe me, it leaves a nasty taste in the mouth at times, just to think that ... well, why worry? There was some trouble with snipers for a bit, but that has all been cleared up now.

Children Excited

"Some of the people were obviously pleased to see us, while others seemed to be of opinion that we were just another invader. I cannot blame them, they have had such a rough time these last four years. The children are excited and they all ask us for sweets and souvenirs.

"The lads have been at the cafes for 'vin blanc.' It is nice when you can get it, but for some reason these places have been put out of bounds.

There have already been a good many laughs over 'soldiers' French,' but we get along.

Home for Christmas?

"It has been said that this job should be over in three months, so keep an eye open for me. I may be back in Harrow for Christmas yet."

Wednesday Aug. 16

I believe that at last I have found out where the 174 are hanging out and hope if possible to pay them a visit.

What do you think of these fresh landings? My hopes of it finishing this year have risen considerably.

I think the further we get into France the more these Doodle Bug raids will drop off.

Saturday August 19

I have at last found the 174 Coy and paid them a visit, but unfortunately there were not a great number in camp. However, I had a good time meeting those whom I did know.

I am enclosing the cutting and also the Broadsheet, we have both read and enjoyed it. Let me know when your book arrives.

My Pltn. Officer, Mr. McKellar did not know Tommy Wilson by name, but knows quite a few of the other lads. I should like that photograph, but don't worry, any time will do.

Sunday Aug. 27

First I must apologise for the delay in writing but as I mentioned once before it is due to a move. This one is the worst till now. Two moves in two days.

Up till now I am two nights behind with my sleep. The first, what with the rain, thunder and Jerry we got none or very little. The next we were on the move and had to sleep in lorries and stables.

Now where we are close to the 'pocket' the stench is terrible. Flies by the thousand, bits and pieces all over the place and so much quick lime it looks like winter, and with this hot sun it is unimaginable.

I have seen some bomb damage but nothing like this.

How well do you know the Bible? Can you remember an occasion where one man slew his brother?

The reference to the Bible and the occasion when one man slew his brother refers to Cain and Abel, and seems to indicate that Tom is in Caen.

Wed. Aug. 30

This letter writing business is becoming something of a problem. We leave camp in the dark and return in the dark so we have to find time at midday or when we have a lapse in the work. You must excuse me if this is scrappy but I have to leave it and then start again.

There is not a great deal of news from here now. We have moved back some way on another job so feel as though we are out of the war altogether. This particular job is very hard, the hours are long too. Yesterday we were on the go for 17 hours. Today looks like being the same.

Friday Sept. 1

Things are still very quiet in our corner during the day, but now and then at night he pays us a visit but not very often. Judging by the latest news it should not be long now before he is out of France altogether.

I don't think I should be doing any harm now in telling you that we landed at a place called Ouisterham. If you have a decent atlas of any sort you will find it. It lies on the mouth of a river at the extreme eastern edge of the beachhead.

I heard Paris was freed in the French news, but then later we heard they were still fighting in the outskirts, just what the position is now I don't know for certain.

These folk at the SO have a nerve printing these letters of mine. I was always under the impression that the writer had to give his permission before allowing letters to be printed.

The following is a transcript of the second of Tom's cuttings. As before, this has been fully typed out as the original is rather fragile and in some places very worn and therefore hard to copy or scan.

SIDELIGHTS ON LIFE IN NORMANDY

Harrow Weald Man's Impressions

Interesting sidelights on life in Normandy are sent by L/Cpl. T. Bossingham, of 130, Bishop Ken Road, Harrow Weald, who writes to a friend:

"The farther we go the more we see what war can do. Small villages completely vacant; empty houses and cattle stalls – nothing alive left at all. Churches and graveyards ripped to pieces by bomb and shell. We often come across burnt-out tanks and cars pushed into a ditch; and almost everywhere without fail some little wooden crosses."

Booby Traps

L/Cpl Bossingham is in the Pioneer Corps, whose work includes the clearance of obstacles of all kinds. He says:

"Our particular task is proceeding very well and the 'powers that be' are very pleased with the results. It is rather hard work and requires us to move up now and then so we cannot hope to stay in one place very long.

We shall shortly be starting work on a strange piece of country and shall be wondering if it is clear of mines and booby-traps, live ammunition and so on, but that's all in the game.

We often get a laugh. We were on the way home one wet evening soaked through, when our lorry passed an old chap aged about 90 odd. He wore a peaked cap, semi-military coat and gaiters. Someone on the lorry, a Cockney, suddenly shouted out: 'What! On leave again! You lucky old blighter!'

Rain Welcomed

"The good roads here are good, though rather narrow, but the second and third class roads are right out of it. We do not get much experience of marching along them, but believe me, riding on them is bad enough. One is either being thrown from side to side and getting tangled up with rifles, equipment, picks and shovels, or else being torn to pieces by the hedgerows. Then, when somebody yells 'Heads!' we have to duck to avoid low wires. On top of that, but only in the dry weather, is the dust. At the end of a day one is inches thick with it – getting into eyes, nose, hair and mouth. The rain we get is welcome for a while because it keeps the dust down.

Cafes Sold Out

"Some of us have been fortunate enough to get into a town for a few hours, but there is not much to do. Every place is crammed with troops. The cafes are sold out or closed and we are left in the predicament of having a pocketful of francs and nowhere to spend it."

L/Cpl. Bossingham was employed as a proof-reader at H.M.S.O. Press, Wealdstone, before joining up on August, 1st, 1940.

Wed. Sept. 6

I must apologise for not writing sooner, but the reason is the same as before --- a move. This time we have rejoined the Coy. We were in Bayeux and have up to near Rouen. The job is going so fast we have to work all hours in order to keep up. You must expect letters now when you get them as I do not get any time of an evening.

It gets worse and worse now, railway bridges blown up, river bridges, shell holes and bomb holes in the roads, dead cattle, etc., and what a terrible smell everywhere.

After the tanks and infantry we are usually the next so now wherever we go the people are pleased to see us all as liberators. Cider and wine flow like water.

Sunday Sept 10

You must forgive me this very scrappy note as we and everything else are moving very fast. Our next move according to rumour is a long one, three or four days, to where Leo used to hold sway. I often wonder if he is such a twerp.

Tues. Sept. 19

The weather during the last 2 or 3 days has been terrible. Rain and very cold, it makes this life so miserable. Today is much better, at present I am sprawled by the roadside after dinner in warm sunshine watching the convoys pass. The stream of traffic is endless both ways.

It is pitiable to see the people walking along the roads begging lifts to all parts. There is hardly a day passes but we share our rations with some poor devils.

Well the war seems to be taking the right course and I cannot for the life of me see how it can last much longer.

Saturday Sept. 23

The weather is not at all bad just now but these early nights make things very miserable. There are no lights allowed so at about 7.30 – 8 there is only one thing left and that's bed.

I see according to the news you are still getting some flying bombs. What are you going to do now, stick it out? The war news is very good too. I don't think he can hold all the Allies for long now. One more break through and it's over.

Monday Sept. 25

Well we are still here, no move yet but am expecting it any time now.

We are still right back from the actual war and noise so have not much to write. Had some excitement last week. One of the lads threw a lighted cigarette down in his bivvy and a few minutes later it went up in smoke. This was during the night so you can imagine the excitement it caused. I do not know if he lost anything much.

Then last night I was on guard and someone was in around the cook house

Looking over some big German gun emplacements we noticed a very bad smell and then by candle light we found the cause. About a dozen dead Jerries lying in bed, on the floor and all over the place. They must have been killed by blast.

There is a sweep running in the Coy at present on when the war ends. It includes the last two months of this year and the whole of next. It costs 10F a time. The winner will pick up roughly £20. I am having two tickets and will get both you and Margaret two each and let you have the dates. The official ending time is the 'Cease Fire'.

Sunday Nov. 5

There is a lot of work for us to do now so once more we shall be probably working all hours. Your candles came in very handy as they are about the only means by which I could get any letters written at all.

Wed. Nov.8

There is not a lot of news except that we are once more within the sound of the guns so it is quite like old times. The weather is nothing short of lousy. Cold winds and bags of rain. We got wet through again today and I have just had a rum issue and got into bed.

All the stoves have been removed from the billets so bed is the next best place in any case. There are fires in the dining halls and I have heard talk of them being put in the billets but when --- ?

Just to increase our pleasure here we have just had the order that great coats will not be worn on working parties. Can you imagine that? We wore them for a bit then got stopped. I don't know.

I drew your dates for the War Ending Sweep today. You have two, I have two and Margaret has two.

Yours are 2 Mar 45 and 17 Dec 45

Margaret's are 12 Aug 45 and 18 Nov 45 I have mislaid mine but can always find them out and let you know.

Monday Nov. 13

The powers that be have at last condescended to let us have stoves so we are slowly but surely getting ourselves quite comfortable. Rumour has it too that we are soon going to be issued with rubber boots and jenkins.

Did I tell you that up to date I have crossed the Orne, Seine and Somme?!!

The lorry ride was practically without incident. We joined up with another mob going the same way so made a good show of about 30 lorries. Three or four dropped out. We had rain part of the way that's all.

Friday Nov. 24

Well, things are still going on as well as can be expected here. The weather is rotten. Bags of wind and rain not to mention the cold. However we have a good stove and I have a plentiful supply of candles and books. There are two points which may interest you. I did think when we first arrived here that as everyone was doing their best to make themselves comfortable, that we were here for Christmas. Now I learn that it is not so, (rumour of course, but a very strong one). It appears that very shortly we are to make another long hop.

The second point is something of a more serious nature. You may have read things or articles in the paper or even heard by various means, that is, we are not getting sufficient food!!! Don't panic and send some as that would only aggravate matters, but nevertheless it is perfectly true.

You know by experience, or should do, that normally I am not a big eater. Can you picture me, after eating all what they call breakfast, then a mid morning break,

getting hold of half a French loaf, which is about 1" x 8" x 2" - 2 1/2" (without butter) and eating it together with a few raw carrots, turnips and leeks, then enjoying dinner.

A few nights ago I was on guard and had rather a misfortunate accident. When I turned in and put my glasses on the floor, one of the fellows rifles fell on it. The consequence is, one lense smashed. Anyway I managed to take one out of my spare pair and rectify the damage. Now I must report sick one day and get a new pair.

We have been working in Calais today. Gosh, what a mess. It is impossible to even attempt a description. Apart from all the destruction from this

time there are all the overgrown ruins from 1939 onwards. It is a second Caen.

Sec 10 36 Coy Pioneer Corps, BLA Monday Nov. 27

Before I go any further there is one little item of news which, I hope, will tend to satiate your desire for power and ambition that you try to foist on me; namely take careful note in the change of my address!!!!

Regarding leave, I have heard rumours that there will be none for any Forces engaged in the European Theatre of War. On that I believe the powers that be are looking for a sudden crack up.

Sat. Dec. 2

There is still a lack of news from this area. The only interesting items are that two planes have made forced landings quite close to us which have called for extra guards. I had one, fortunately it was a lovely moonlight night and I could see to get about.

The lads are getting very browned off just now as our work here has finished and we are just killing time by doing odd jobs. Our advance party has gone away, but by all accounts are having a rather rough time owing to V1 and V2. Another unit that moved up have returned so we do not know what is going to happen.

My 'good luck' is taking on a very queer turn. Two or three Cpls. have been made up including L/Cpls and 1 Sgt. now we have had Cpls. posted to the Coy. so I do not know just what is going to happen.

Give her a big hug and kiss from her Daddy. Tell her how much he loves her and is longing to see and hold her again.

13058917 Cpl T. Bossingham Monday Dec. 11

Well at last we are settled, this time in a great big RC Church School. It is a lovely place and very extensive. They are by far the best billets we have ever had, but unfortunately we shall not be here for more than a few weeks at the most.

We left France by way of Armentiers and passed through places like Ghent, Bruges, just passed Brussels and Antwerp and have at last finished up about 10 miles out of Antwerp.

The conditions here are totally different, the buildings too, everything is so much cleaner. The chief drawback now is the language. I had just begun to make myself understood in French now it is all Flemish --- what a language. Our rate of exchange has been altered too --- 176F's to the £. The shops are full too, sweets, clothes and nearly everything else we need including ice cream.

Having now attained my second tape I have a lot more duties to fulfil. I am responsible for waking all the duty people and rousing the Coy. in general.

The next two envelopes have been addressed to Vera at Aunt Bess's place --- looks like another holiday!

Friday Dec. 15

I have met a little chap here who is only 12. His father is a prisoner of war in Germany somewhere. At present he has shown me over the town, where the pictures are and also all the best shops. His

FRIDAY Home Service
OCTOBER 27

203.5 m. (147.6 kw) 395.1 m. (469.1 kw) 48.54 m. (1747 kw) 448.1 m. (518 kw)

BLAK-OUT

London	8.00 to 1.00
Birmingham	8.20 to 1.20
Cardiff	8.20 to 1.20
Leeds	8.30 to 1.30
Manchester	8.30 to 1.30
Nottingham	8.30 to 1.30
Sheffield	8.30 to 1.30
Southampton	8.30 to 1.30
Wolverhampton	8.30 to 1.30

7.0 a.m. Times, Big Ben + NEWS
Programme Parade

7.15 "THE DAILY DOZEN"
Stories for men and women. (BBC Home Service)

7.30 This Week's Composers
DELLIUS and BACH
Gramophone records of today's best composers.

7.55 "LIFT UP YOUR HEARTS"
Lift up your hearts and sing.

8.0 Times, Gramophones + NEWS
Programme Parade

THE KITCHEN FRONT
"Feasting Vegetables in the Dutch Way" by Mary Marlowe

8.20 pop "TAKE YOUR CHOICE"
From a selection of records

9.5 SHORT MORNING SERVICE FOR SCHOOLS
Ministry music

9.55 LESLIE BRIDGEWATER QUINCY
Leslie Bridgewater - Gramophone records of today's best composers.

9.55 I YGOLHON CYMRU
Welsh songs and music.

10.15 FOR THE SCHOOLS
Songs and music.

10.55 Times, Gramophones + THE DAILY SERVICE
Programme Parade

11.30 FLUTE AND PIANO
Flute and piano.

ONE FINE DAY
The original Apollo came down to earth to enquire into the new mythology of the cinema-screen. The curious consequences of the visit you can learn from Emery Bennett's fantasy tonight at 9.30

10.45 "HEALTH MAGAZINE"
Only People in God's Word.

11.0 FOR THE SCHOOLS
Songs and music.

12 noon JACK PAYNE
with his Orchestra, and article with his Orchestra, and article

12.30 a.m. BREAK FOR MUSIC
Gramophone records of today's best composers.

1.0 Times, Gramophones
Programme Parade

1.15 THREE-BAND SESSION
Songs and music.

2.0 FOR THE SCHOOLS
Songs and music.

2.15 AMERICAN COMMENTARY
American news and views.

2.30 MUSIC WHILE YOU WORK
Music while you work.

3.00 RECITAL
Recital of music.

3.30 KING KID CROSS RADIO CONTEST
Radio contest.

4.20 STORIES, OLD AND NEW
Stories, old and new.

4.35 THE JIMMY DURANTE PROGRAMME
Jimmy Durante.

5.0 Times, Gramophones + YERAGLEN GYMRAEG
Welsh songs and music.

5.30 NEWS
News.

5.45 AMERICAN COMMENTARY
American news and views.

6.0 Times, Gramophones + NEWS
Programme Parade

6.30 "WOMAN'S PAGE"
Woman's page.

6.55 AMERICAN COMMENTARY
American news and views.

7.00 KING KID CROSS RADIO CONTEST
Radio contest.

7.30 "CHALLENGE OF PEACE"
Challenge of peace.

8.0 BACH
Bach.

8.15 "BANDS ACROSS THE SEA"
Bands across the sea.

8.30 "ONE FINE DAY"
One fine day.

8.55 AMERICAN COMMENTARY
American news and views.

9.0 Big Ben NEWS
Big Ben news.

9.30 "ONE FINE DAY"
One fine day.

10.45 News in Gaelic and portulig
News in Gaelic and portulig.

10.55 IVY BENSON
Ivy Benson.

11.30 MIFF FERIE
Miff Ferie.

12.0 HIGHLIGHTS-12.30 a.m.
Highlights-12.30 a.m.



mother has done my washing and also made you a bead collar, an initial and one or two birds. I am sending them on to you with the writing paper.

There is a chance now of a short leave in Brussels. There was the same for Paris. I was unlucky for Paris but should like the chance of seeing Brussels.

Sunday Dec. 17

Now at least I am sure you are alright. This buzz bomb news gives me the creeps. But then on the contrary we are not without our incidents. We get either a bomb or a rocket about every 20 minutes. Two or three times we have got up in the morning to find one or two windows missing.

Still it is no use worrying. If one has our number on it we shall get it so that's that. Each time one goes off someone puts a mark on the blackboard for another that has missed us.

This job is only due to last a month I shall be glad when it is up believe me.

My little pal Franz, he is on the bed with me now. He is in the billet practically all the time with me. Yesterday he made my bed, sewed a tape on and put two buttons on my trousers. I am seriously thinking of adopting him for my batman. Did I tell you he is only 12 and is a Boy Scout.

Sunday Dec. 24

We are absolutely infested with V1 and V2s. Everyone is jumpy and on edge including me. It is nothing to wake up during the night and see cigarette ends glowing, blokes who cannot sleep. The day before yesterday we had a V1 drop 50 yds away, please do not worry now, but I like a good many more are wearing the signs now --- a bandage, but only glass cuts.

I believe I told you, we are in an RC College, St. Germanicus. It has two floors, we are on top unfortunately and there are bombed out civilians sleeping in the shelters underneath in the cellars. There are bags of windows in the place so of course there was a devil of a mess. It fell at dinner time so we lost a good dinner. We had been warm, but now with best part of the windows and doors gone it is somewhat draughty. I have a cut on my head and face but nothing to worry about.

Now tonight of all nights I am on guard. I shall at least be able to see Santa Claus coming.

There are many queer things here. Women dressed in the height of fashion, fur coats, silk stockings etc., these can all be bought in the shops at a price. As a contrast there are always one or two old women, men or even children at the back of our school sorting out the ashes for odd bits of coal and coke. I have even seen them raking the ash over along the railway track.

Sunday Dec. 31

As per usual I must apologise for not writing sooner but I will explain in detail later.

To begin my tale of woe. To be perfectly honest, this is about the worst Christmas I have spent up to now. I was on guard Christmas Day which meant I was on fatigues all Christmas Day so could not get out anywhere. The food was good but no concert or anything. The CO, old Bishop

made a speech after dinner about us and our job etc. but not a fellow in the hall either clapped or cheered. He must have felt that. I was in bed at seven o'clock that night.

Then on the 28th I was detailed for a 48 hour leave in Brussels. It is only about 30 miles from us. It took 15 hours to reach it. We spent the first night makeshift, all part of our 48 hours. The next morning we spent in getting settled into a Hostel, then our leave began proper.

In all and to be precise I am fed up to the eyebrows, browned off and just about at the end of my tether. Now the Yanks have let Jerry break through & that has caused it altogether.

When I go on guard now, I am the Guard Commander and the only one who does not sleep so consequently I do not feel fit for much next day.

1945

Wed. Jan. 3

We are still in being apart from the V1s and 2s. They are still very troublesome but they have their spasms.

There are still all the usual rumours concerning leave etc. and we are still living in hopes that some of them will materialise.

I found out the other day that the 174 are somewhere handy and must try and pay them a visit.

Monday Jan. 8

You realise I hope that my position as a Cpl is still rather precarious until Feb. 28. I am not war established so am not listed as a full rank in the monthly returns, therefore the Coy is shown as being 1 Cpl under strength, which means if the Group decide to post another Cpl here I shall have to come down.

Our time here is shortening now, it will not be long before we are on the move again, this time to the land of canals and windmills. From various accounts this next place is absolutely free of any canteen, pictures or any other source of amusement for the troops. Also there is no light so we must resort once more to candles. I have about a dozen at present but will keep you well informed.

Yesterday we had a rocket fall about 100 yds away. It completely demolished a small cottage and stunned all of us for a few minutes. All I remember was a flash, a shriek then a tremendous bang and showers of debris falling everywhere. There was a mother and two children in the house, we got in but need not have bothered, they were all dead.

Friday Jan. 12

This leave business is turning out to be something of a disappointment. The papers have made a lot of it I know, about D day men etc. and in any case you must have six months service abroad before you can even qualify. Incidentally we landed seven months ago today.

We still get our usual rockets and buzz bombs. Some days are very quiet, but when this happens we always look forward to a very noisy day or night in the very near future.

Monday Jan. 15

Everything is still OK here though a trifle

noisy especially last night when two explosions very close brought some more glass and plaster down. The weather is still terribly cold and the ice shows no signs of thawing yet.

There is another 'hop' in the offing but I do not know when yet.

Even as a Cpl. when the section goes on fatigues I have to be there so I might as well give a hand just to pass the time away.

Everyone who knows Bishop at all have the same opinion about him. Even the officers are getting just as bad. Honestly V. we could not get a worse lot than we have at present even if we took ex Gestapo men.

I am afraid that you folk at home are being sadly disillusioned about the 'good times' we get here. True the beds had sheets and the food was good --- but what they do not tell you is that all the beds are double deckers with no springs or mattresses. Crowded together with not enough room for two men to pass. About 40-50 men in a room and only one wash basin. The nearest lavatory about 10 minutes walk away.

There are only seven sections here at the school, three are in a different part of the town. Consequently we get a guard the same night every week.

My 'wounds' have quite healed now except for a cut on the little finger of my left hand. Frank and his family live about 15 minutes walk away from the school.

Before I forget, if possible, could you send Franz's mother some crochet cotton, organdie, soap and soap flakes. Soap is unobtainable here even on the Black Market, and she needs cotton and organdie to make more collars, etc. I will put her address in at the end.

Soap may have been totally unobtainable in Belgium, but in England you still needed coupons to purchase soap --- this coupon was found amongst Tom's letters!



Sunday Jan. 21

Sorry not to have answered before but as you can guess we have hopped again and are now in Holland. As a great change we are billeted on civilians. Myself and three others are with a very good family. There was a fire and coffee ready for us when we arrived and a cup of hot milk at bed time.

They have very little to eat here, no coal at all only wood, so today we brought in three sacks full and she has promised us milk each evening.

Poor Franz was sorry to see me go. I went round to supper with them and his Mother made a cake for me. I left my address because he promised to write.

Friday Jan. 26

Our 'landlady' has a jug of hot milk on the stove for us every night we come in from work. Then later on in the evening she

brings us in a cup of coffee each so taken all round we are doing very well. In repayment we bring her a load of wood each day, as these people, like in Belgium, have no coal.

Things are so bad here that even razor blades and apples are only obtainable on the Black Market.

Sunday Jan. 28

There is absolutely nothing at all to do in this town. No cafes or canteens. It boasts a cinema but this has no fire so loses most of its popularity. The shops have nothing to sell so all we can do is save our guilders. We get 12 to the £1.

I understand from the Coy. office that during next month there will be a fresh allocation of leave vacancies, so if my usual luck holds I may be drawn in the ballot.

It is very quiet here, not a bit like Antwerp. Our only bother besides the cold is a range not very far away.

Thurs. Feb. 1

How are you affected by the V1 and V2 nowadays. The reports still say they are falling in southern England. Are they anywhere near you?

Thanks for getting the brush and candles, but please hang on to them until I ask for them.

Sunday Feb. 4

I cannot give you a description of our whereabouts as apart from going backwards and forwards to work I never set foot outside.

There is a shortage here as everywhere of tobacco and cigarettes but there is an abundance of cigars so I am in my element. I hope to bring dad home a few.

Friday Feb. 9

There is not a lot of news from here just now. Just lately the electric has begun to go off for an hour or so. I do not know what the reason is, but it is rather difficult times. It has been off tonight for a couple of hours so now the time is getting along.

Sunday Feb. 18

Still more about leave. Owing to weather conditions etc. the boats have been put about rather and every now and then leave is cancelled for 24 hours. I do not know whether this is published at all. Up till the time of writing this has happened four times. With a bit of luck I shall be leaving here a week today --- 25th.

I understand that some of us become due for re-vaccination or inoculations shortly. If it occurs before leave I hope the effects wear off pretty quick.

Tom did get some leave after all!

Thurs. March 8

I thought at first that I had 'blotted my copy book' and missed the train from Victoria but managed to scrape in by the skin of my teeth. The journey was quite uneventful. We spent the night in Folkestone and the following night on the train and got back here about midday yesterday.

I managed to fall into a soft job. The MO orderly is on leave so I have to take his job overt appears I only just managed to be lucky enough to get here as we are expecting a move before the week is out.

newspaper cutting was found amongst Tom's letters just about here.

The original is rather yellow and fragile and cannot be copied satisfactorily so it has been typed out in full:

A Soldier-His Prayer

The poem to which Field-Marshal Montgomery referred in his personal message to men of the 21st Army Group (reported on page 1) is entitled "A Soldier-His Prayer." It was written on a scrap of paper which a soldier found fluttering over the desert sands during the battle of El Agheila on December 14, 1942.

Subsequently it appeared in the Eighth Army's magazine, Crusader, and in a volume of Eighth Army verse, "Poems from the Desert," published by Harrap last year.

The full poem-the anonymous author of which was never found-reads:

Stay with me, God. The night is dark,
The night is cold. My little spark
Of courage dies. The night is long.
Be with me, God, and make me strong.

I love a game, I love a fight.
I hate the dark, I love the light,
I love my child, I love my wife.
I am no coward. I love life.

Life, with its change of mood and shade,
I want to live. I'm not afraid,
But me and mine are hard to part--
Oh, unknown God, lift up my heart.

You stilled the waters at Dunkirk
And saved your servants. All your work
Is wonderful, dear God. You strode
Before us down that dreadful road.

We were alone and hope had fled.
We loved our country and our dead,
And could not shame them, so we stayed
The course, and were not much afraid.

Dear God, that nightmare road! And then
That sea! We got there We were Men
My eyes were blind, my feet were torn
My soul sang like a bird at dawn!

I knew that Death is but a door.
I knew what we were fighting for
Peace for the kids, our brothers freed,
A kinder world, a cleaner breed.

I'm but the son my mother bore,
A simple man, and nothing more.
But-God of strength and gentleness,
Be pleased to make me nothing less.

Help me, O God, when death is near
To mock the haggard face of fear,
That when I fall-if fall I must--
My soul may triumph in the dust.

Sunday March 11

Our move came off after all over the weekend. We were very sorry to leave, but fortunately are not far away. I think that by this move we have actually bettered ourselves. Civvy billets again, but this time most of the people are only taking one or two soldiers. I am on my own in a very nice place and a nice family.

The husband and wife are about the same age as myself with two children --- William and Caroline.

I was only in the house five minutes and

became an Uncle. I have a bedroom to myself and a bed with my blankets and two sheets. If I stay here long I shall get thoroughly spoiled as she makes my bed, calls me in the mornings, cleans my boots and gets hot water and puts my shaving kit out ready to use.

The kiddies and I are already very good friends. We do not understand each other very well but we get a laugh together at games. As you see, I have just had a pen forced on me. It is absolutely useless to refuse anything from these people.

Friday March 16

The man in this present billet of mine, by the way his name is POPPAS is a Sgt. in the Dutch army and stationed at home. Consequently I have access to an unlimited supply of Green Envelopes.

As MO I have quite a bit of time to myself and this afternoon I have been invited out to a party. It is the birthday of my hostess's sister.

My reign as MO comes to an end this week. I have had a good time so must not grumble. Incidentally I have bought a bead frame for Margaret and will be sending it home shortly.

Tues. March 20

My MO's job came to an end yesterday, so today I went back to work. Last night I was on guard so today we only did fatigues in camp and had a bath in the afternoon.

Yesterday Queen Wilhelmina made her first tour of the country since war broke out. I was fortunate enough to see her twice. She is still very popular. At least that was my impression by seeing the people lining the roads everywhere.

Thurs. March 29

Things are still much the same here. Our weather seems to have gone off a bit but I am hoping for it to improve before long. Yesterday and today I have been for some very long lorry rides as errands etc. There are stacks of daffodils in bloom & almond trees too. They make a lovely picture and I often think of you when I see all the flowers.

I do not think there is any immediate danger of us moving from here, in any case we should not move back.

Monday April 2

I am rather miserable at present as hours of working have just been extended to 7 o'clock at night.

The good news I have for you is that at long last and after many trials & tribulations we have at last lost our 'beloved' Major and Captain.

Yesterday, Easter Sunday, we had to work all day again, and then today as an Easter present we had to work until 7 o'clock.

Sat. April 7

There are two things I must tell you before I forget. Our stay here has ended rather abruptly. By the time you get this I shall be in Germany.

When we do eventually get into Germany we shall probably get a lot more time to ourselves.

10.4.45

My impressions up to the present are not much. The Siegfried Line was nothing here,

just a thick forest. People say the Germans would prefer us to the Russians. I am beginning to doubt that. We are living in ruined houses on borrowed beds, etc. These places have been very badly shelled and bombed, but the troops who were in here first have just gone through the place and systematically wrecked everything. There are smashing suites of furniture slashed and smashed. The whole contents of the houses are lying rotting out in the gardens. Electric sewing machines, washing machines, vacuum sweepers and everything else right down to children's toys. Honestly darling it is pitiful to see such a wanton destruction.

I told you something of their life here and apart from downstairs furniture, a couple of beds, a kiddie's cot and a perambulator, they have just about nothing.

Sunday April 15

Well, life is very different here to what it is in Eindhoven. The people are beginning to come back, but very few of them will even look at us let alone attempt to speak.

You cannot possibly imagine what this place looks like. The shelling and bombing have done quite enough damage, but the first troops through here absolutely stripped the place. Every mortal thing is smashed. All the furniture and fittings are out in the gardens. Grand suites of furniture, pianos, beds, clothes, food of all sorts is just laying about stinking. Now with the warm weather it is worse than ever.

Today is a whole day off for us. No parades or anything. It is a well earned rest and much appreciated. Our new Major and Captain are a couple of toffs, but I doubt if we shall keep them long, they are too good for us.

You will be pleased to hear that at last I am a fully War Established Cpl. As soon as the official notification comes through you will once more get your money made up.

We are only about 35-40 miles from Eindhoven.

Another thing this new Major has done for us is to get the hours of working back to 6 o'clock instead of 7.

Thurs. April 19

You might like to know that I have just recently been right up to the Rhine. I have not crossed it yet.

Monday April 23

Well we are still in Germany and not liking it. You cannot imagine now that the people are beginning to come back, just what it is like to walk about and ignore them. Our days in France, Belgium and Holland were very enjoyable more so towards the end when we were all living in civvy billets. This did us no good in view of the fact that when we got into Germany there were no more civvy billets and non-fraternization.

There are many rumours floating around of when this War is going to finish. I do not care to give any prediction myself. I did for a while see a quick finish as our job was until last week finished, but we have just learned that we have to go an extra 100 miles into Germany so now I am all at sea again.

Friday April 27

Things are much the same here, the guns have moved up and except for an

occasional distant rumble, quiet reigns.

We are just beginning to settle down nicely in these billets now. What with everyone having either spring beds, settees or divans to sleep on, bedside tables, carpets, wash bowls and pails, brooms and dust pans. We are becoming quite domesticated.

The war news is both good and encouraging. I cannot possibly see how they can last out much longer.

Tues. May 1

I believe that this time next week will see us even deeper into Germany. It is not a very encouraging thought as we have heard that people were turned out of the houses to make room for us.

Short leave has started again for Brussels, 72 hours this time instead of 48. No doubt owing to this next move of ours it will all be messed up again as will the mail.

By all accounts this next move should finish our job. I am hoping so, then we may be able to get out of this god forsaken country.

Much more of this ruin and desolation and I think I shall go stark raving mad. More especially when we are not allowed to talk with the people. Believe me Vera, it is all very well saying ignore them, but can you imagine what it is actually like to refuse old people or children water.

Friday May 4

Today marked a further milestone. Apart from your birthday I crossed the Rhine at about 11 o'clock this morning, journey on through Germany for a bit and eventually reached the Dutch-German border again. Our present billets are going to afford some further difficulties. We are in houses and reasonably comfortable, but unfortunately one side of the street is Dutch the other is German so we do not know whether to fraternise or not.

When we first came into Germany, there was the usual frontier guard, Dutch soldiers, with the coloured pole over the road and passport office etc. These barriers are only over the roads, no other marks or wires on the fields either side.

We came through the Reichwald Forest, you may have read about it. Jerry made a stand here, you should see it, a great pine forest and not a tree left standing above about 6 ft. At this point it was the Siegfried Line. There is a notice on the roadside THIS WAS THE SIEGFRIED LINE. Then about two hundred yards further up a further notice which simply says THE WASHING and has an old shirt and a pair of pants hanging up.

Needless to say there were plenty of dead-buried both ours and Jerries. Also we found a few more in the woods --- gosh what a stink. Dead cattle by the dozens.

We stayed in a little village named Materborn a suburb of Cleve. This had been a pleasant little place I am certain, but now!!!

We scrounged when we arrived and got ourselves beds, chairs, tables, mirrors and stoves etc. When we left the folk were hanging around like vultures for the furniture. Just imagine the state looting their neighbours.

All the damage in Materborn and Cleve was done in one raid of 15 minutes, you just cannot imagine what it looks like. It is estimated that there were 1500 people

killed here alone, and judging by the stench I do not doubt it.

Vera sweetheart, the guard has just been in and said the war is over. I do not know what to say or do but hope he is right. What a birthday present for you.

To continue, we came across the Rhine through Emmerich and then up the country.

We are at present in a little tiny village right on the border. Bad feeling has already been created as German people returning here took shelter in houses on the Dutch and have now been turned out again to make room for us.

Our wireless is out of order at present but the Engineers down the road say that this news about the war being over is official. All I can think of just now is 'Thank God I am still alive'.

Wed. May 9

Well darling, what were your reactions when you heard it had finished? I did not know whether to believe it or not, our wireless is defunct and there had been so many rumours.

I do not know for certain yet, but am keeping my fingers crossed. There is a chance of me being out by Christmas.

We have moved into a house in this village but unfortunately we were the wrong side of the border so have had to move. Now we are in a loft on our borrowed beds, etc. And ye gods it's hot.

You may have read in the papers that a belt from one to three kilos deep is being cleared all round the German border. There have been people moving everywhere. We are working in the prohibited area and there are some marvellous farms being evacuated, just as the crops are coming on too.

We have met quite a few of these Germans from time to time and believe me Vera, they are dead scared of us.

The people here are just like the others we have met, very badly off for cigarettes and tobacco. You can get four eggs for ten cigarettes here. Some of the lads are even keeping chickens themselves, but it is not policy to ask questions about how they came by them.

Today has been our V Day, and what day. Nowhere to go and nothing to do. I knew from the start that after all the places we had been in we should end up in a one eyed place for this great day.

Our present job, I think will be finished in about another six weeks at the most. The point is then, whether we get another job over here or get sent back to England.

Sunday May 13

Another piece of news this week is that we are no longer in the 21st Army group, the red shield, but are now in the 2nd Army, wearing the white shield. I do not know what this means, if anything.

We had our release groups entered in our pay books. Mine is 25C so keep your eye on the papers for that.

I am very thankful and pleased that the war is over at last, but am disappointed in the way we celebrated. Of all the various places we have been stationed in we had to pick a one-eyed place like this to celebrate the greatest day in our time. The accounts in various papers and photos make me very homesick. When we eventually get home the War will be forgotten and many of us

will just be considered as a lot of Ex servicemen. The good book is right again when it says how a prophet is not honoured in his own country. You must come here to see how much the Tommy is appreciated.

Wed. May 16

Now that hostilities have ceased we are allowed to disclose our whereabouts. Please do not laugh, but our latest stopping place goes under the imposing title of DINXPERLO.

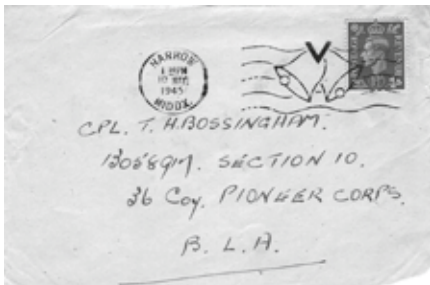
Again the rumour is running around that this is the end of the job and where we go, or what we might be called upon to do is a mystery.

Tomorrow we go for our weekly bath. This is still the mobile bath unit where we get a complete change of clothes. The chief difference in this case is that it is situated beside a river so that the lads can have a dip after their bath and also when we undress is right out in the open with no restrictions whatever so all the local belles or what's left of them can get a complete and uninterrupted view of British manhood.

I am enclosing one of your latest covers in case you have not seen the new Victory postmark.

The celebrations at home must have been a sight worth seeing, and evidently it was quite enjoyable. I should have liked to be there with you. I often wonder whether people will make such a fuss when some of us come home for good.

Victory Postmark !!



Saturday May 19

I have been feeling very depressed this last few days, due largely I think to the fact that the war is over and our chances of getting out the Army still seem very remote.

Yesterday on the detail board we were informed that unit censorship would cease forthwith, but all letters still stood a chance of being opened by the base censor.

According to the way we stand now our line is at last finished. What we do now remains to be seen. There are several rumours floating around about our next move. I am hoping we start on a return journey, but ---.

Monday May 21st

There are still rumours about the demobbing plan and now some papers say that only 20 Group will be out by Christmas. There is that, the terrific storm and rain we have had for the last two days, the place in general and a few other things in general. Believe me you are not the only one feeling fed up and miserable by a long way.

Tues. May 29

Now this morning we are training again, saluting, arms drill, instruction on the Bren, etc. Ye Gods Vera its enough to drive a chap daft. Then on top of that no one

knows what our next job is to be, where we are going or how long we are liable to be in this God forsaken hole.

Monday May 28

My chapter starts back at VE day when we were here in Dinxperlo for the greatest day in our time. The line is finished and we have a lot of time on our hands and little to do, consequently I sit about moody, thinking and in general finish up by making myself thoroughly miserable.

Thurs. May 31

There is still no sign of our next move, and does not show any promise either yet, if the lack of rumour is a good indicator.

We have had training programmes mapped out for the passed two days, but owing to the adverse weather conditions we have spent a long time in the billets, reading writing or playing cards. By the amount of traffic there is on the roads anyone would think the war is still on. There have been numberless tanks pass us these last few days, and funnily enough they are going in both directions.

Our bath place used to be at a place called Bocholt, but they have moved up and now we have about an hour's lorry ride to a village about the same size as this called Rhede.

Sat. June 2

We are still without a job although there are one or two rumours floating about. Today we spent the morning playing cricket and the afternoon was off and just to help us along our NAAFI supplies have gone astray so the lads are running short of cigarettes and my stock of tobacco is getting low.

The news in the papers about the demobbing is not very encouraging again. They are hinting at only the early twenties being out by the end of the year now. The trouble in Syria wont help much either. If that is how the French express their thanks and gratitude, well, they have fallen in my estimation. If I had my way I would put a 1,000 bombers in the sky and let them circle around for a bit just to show these folk we are still a powerful force.

What is wrong with the people, have they not had sufficient carnage for one generation?

Monday June 4

As I told you, things never appear as bad. There are rumours about a move again. From what I hear we are moving tomorrow but where --- ? I am hoping we move into Holland again, I have had my fill of Germany.

Sorry to hear you are so short of note paper, you are like me, I shall not know what to do when this pad has finished.

Wed. June 6

Vera Darling,
We were intended for Cleve again & I had made up my mind to put up with it, so you can imagine my surprise and pleasure when on my arrival at Cleve the Sgt. told me that three men and myself had to go to Eindhoven. How long we shall stay I have no idea, but this will probably be our final visit so I must make the most of it. If you have anything to send them do so at once.

I do not know what our job is going to

be here, but today the anniversary of

D Day is a holiday, so we may find out something tomorrow.

Friday June 8

I read in the paper the other day about the price of cherries and strawberries in England. In Germany everybody seems to grow them. I do not want to make your mouth water too much, but on one or two occasions I have eaten cherries and strawberries until I was very nearly sick.

I do not know for certain just when I shall be home, but do you fancy a holiday in the winter? I just want to laze about for a few days before I decide anything. Personally I should prefer a holiday proper either in the early summer or spring, but we must see what the powers that be have to say. I quite realise how you feel about a holiday I am the same, it is just unfortunate that we are at the wrong end of the year.

Monday June 11

Vera Darling,
There are rumours of our next leave allotment being posted up. I do not know if they are running in the same order or if they are being drawn for again, but as I told you before unless I am in England by the time my turn comes round I do not fancy making all that trip again. I want my next homecoming to be my last. Let me know what you think.

Sat. June 30

There is a new notice on our board regarding the demob. It is forecasted that group 16 will be out by October, so I may be a bit out in my calculations but not a lot.

Yesterday was quite an eventful day in Eindhoven. First it was Prince Bernhard's birthday and all the streets were decorated. Then the quising burgomaster of Eindhoven had been arrested and was paraded round the streets, you can probably visualise the rest, and lastly, there are a young couple just opposite Nellie who had only been married a fortnight when Jerry took him away for forced labour. He has been away for 2½ years in Poland and got back home yesterday. He was escorted all the way up the street by neighbours and children, the house was all decorated and the local band turned up and we had music and dancing in the street until midnight.

The next two letters are addressed to Vera at 'Broadlands', The Broadway, Sandown, I of W so obviously she and Margaret are managing to have a short holiday.

Wednesday July 4

There is not a lot to mention from here just now. We have had one of our officers with us for a few days and I understand he is going back with the Major when he comes tomorrow. There was an identification parade tonight at our quarters, all the RE's and us had to attend. What it was for I do not know, but our security police were there and some Hollands police with civvies but they picked no one out from us.

It is rather a nuisance having no idea of how long we are liable to be here. One day we hear we may move any time then again we hear we may stay for an indefinite period. If we knew something for certain we could change our address and get the

mail quicker.

I read about the 2nd Army being disbanded, but all it amounts to as far as I can see is that the various units concerned will just be absorbed into other Army's and Divisions. Nothing extraordinary will happen.

The rationing here is improving but very slowly, the only vegetable is still potatoes. I expect in time it will get better, but things seem so very slow moving. I had some real black bread one day last week. Only one slice but that was enough, it nearly made me sick. Coffee is still drunk a lot but tea is very scarce and cocoa unobtainable.

Friday, July 13

Yesterday some of the Engineers left us and today has been very quiet. We moved our billets and now have houses with electric light and water so feel quite comfortable. When these lads left they took all the stores with them so we had to set to and build ourselves an oven before we could have a cooked meal. We had a bricklayer amongst us so with a bit of scrounging and a few fags for a bribe we managed to get hold of some bricks and mortar and build an oven.

Today we swept the places out and washed everything down and made it all shipshape, now it can be lived in with comfort. In all counting Engineers and Pioneers I do not suppose there are more than 30 of us here all told so you can see we are quite a select few and are having quite a nice time as far as the Army will let us.

Probably this next letter should be dated 'July' rather than 'June' – the postmark on the envelope is 'July'.

Monday June (should be July?) 16

We have just heard some good news about leave. Instead of going right back to Dinxperlo from here and then having to make the journey right back to Calais we are leaving from here by bus to Tilburg and picking the train up from there. This will save a lot of travelling.

Friday, July, 20

I hope you have been watching the papers as I think the leave has been put back for 24 hours. There was something in the paper about it but I am not sure if it affects the whole leave rota, I must find out and let you know.

Sat. July, 21

I am afraid my typing is like my piano playing, all one finger, but even that is quicker than pushing a pen along.

The next five letters have been addressed to Vera in Tunbridge Wells. Vera has obviously taken up Aunt Bess's offer to stay so she and Margaret are having a holiday. Also Tom has returned from leave, and his letters are again hand-written, and in pencil!

Friday Aug. 17

Once more we are back to normal. My journey back was quite uneventful, but the trains to Victoria were terribly crowded. I had no trouble over the pass, but we returned from Dover this time and not Folkestone. I got back into Eindhoven at about 8 o'clock the following morning.

After a cup of tea and a couple of hours

sleep I went up to the billet. There the Sgt. informed me I was on the move in the morning so you can imagine how I felt. As I have often said, I am now the most miserable of men. So I asked the Sgt. what time I should be there in the morning and then told him I should not be back until then.

A very funny thing happened then. I went to hand my pass in and found the original one in the left hand breast pocket of my battle dress. We must have both looked very well. (Can't understand this statement, doesn't sound right).

Sunday Aug. 19

Unfortunately I took a dislike to this place before ever I saw it and now, no matter whatever may happen I shall never be able to enjoy myself here.

I have more time than ever on my hands now. I am in charge of this detachment only seven men and one of those are on leave. I go for about a 40 mile lorry ride each morning except Sunday to the other side of Lier for rations and then my days work is finished except for keeping my log and doing any official clerking that comes along.

As I told you when I was home, when they moved me from Eindhoven I was going sick. Well, I could not do so without causing a lot of bother so I have written to the Major explaining my case and asking him to post another Cpl. here and so release me for the hospital.

We are about two miles out of Herenthals itself and at present I have no inclination whatsoever to go out into the town. There is plenty of everything here at a price and it all seems so utterly absurd that an imaginary line across the country should cause one country to have so much and another to have so very little.

These drawings were at the foot of Tom's letter --- they're very good and hopefully Margaret loved them too !



36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT 43 (not 44) E & M Pltn. RE, BLA

Sat. Aug. 25

I believe I told you in my last letter that I had written to the Major telling him that he must send another Cpl. here and let me go to hospital. I am waiting now for him to make the next move.

I see now they hope to have Group 23 out by Christmas.

What a mob. Well it cannot come to soon for me, I can tell you. I have lost interest in the army and anything relating to it.

Monday Aug. 27

Now, I am patiently waiting for (a) a letter or visit from our Major with regard to me going into hospital and (b) a letter from you.

What the hold up is I do not know.

My change of address will not alter things as all the mail for places below Eindhoven has to come through Eindhoven.

It is just a fortnight now and I have had nothing at all yet.

36 Coy Pioneer Corps, ATT 44 E & M Pltn. RE , BAOR Thursday Aug. 30

I was in Antwerp today and there was a big funeral of someone. Soldiers, police all sorts of officials etc. I do not know who it was.

I was beginning to get rather worried, when at dinner time today there was still no news from you. I wondered if you were still OK. By the same mail I had an official notification regarding our change of address (BAOR), BLA leave was cancelled for a further 24 hours, and that a new Captain had been posted to the company. What I am waiting for is either a letter or a personal visit from the Major about my relief here.

As for my billets, well they are all corridors, little windows with bars up, stone floors and walls. Everything was whitewashed but is rather grey now. The yard is all bricked walls with big gates and above all a long way from anywhere and thoroughly depressing.

Sat. Sept. 1

The Major is on leave at present so I expect I shall have to wait for him to come back before I hear anything more about being relieved from here. We have a new Captain now, a fellow named Grant. The other one, Capt Dickinson is being discharged shortly, lucky devil. I have not seen the new chap yet.

Wed. Sept. 5

Well the day has arrived at last. Yesterday, Mr. Smith, one of our Lts. arrived here with a Cpl. to take my place.

I had yesterday afternoon to show him the ropes and today I must pack up and be ready to leave here for Lommel at 1 o'clock. Then either today or tomorrow I go on to Eindhoven, leave my kit there and report sick.

Wed. Sept. 5

Here are a few more lines to help those I dropped in haste this morning. Well, as I told you in that short note I have begun to make my way back to Eindhoven.

Up to the present I have reached Lommel which is about half-way, watched a football match between the RE's and the RA's, found myself a civvy billet for the night and I am comfortable now waiting for another lift in the morning to Eindhoven.

When Smithy arrived with the Cpl. who was to replace me, I was on the bed asleep, and an RE ran in and woke me saying "There is an officer of yours outside".

It was just a routine visit to see just how we were getting along. He brought passes and ration cards for those chaps going on leave, mail and some official notes for the NCO i/c.

He apologised to me for being late and hoped that he had not caused me any inconvenience.

I believe I told you that when the time came for me to report sick I was going to ask if I might go back to Eindhoven in order to do so.

Well, old Smithy did not give me that chance, he told me to go back to Eindhoven.

He also said I could either pack up there and then and go back with him or else make my own way back in the morning.

Well, the new Cpl. had to be shown the ropes so I voted for the morning and away he went.

I expect now to get into Eindhoven at about dinner time tomorrow.

Next, another typewritten letter!

**36 Coy. Pioneer Corps, Att. 44 E and M Pltn RE, BAOR
Friday, Sept., 7th**

I forgot whether I told you or not that the officer told me to come back here so of course I did not need a second telling. There is not much check on us these days so I decided to have a day off and go sick in the morning.

The lads here have moved from the houses they had and are now billeted in a pavilion with two grass courts and four hard courts attached. It is just my luck to miss all this as they can use the courts whenever they like.

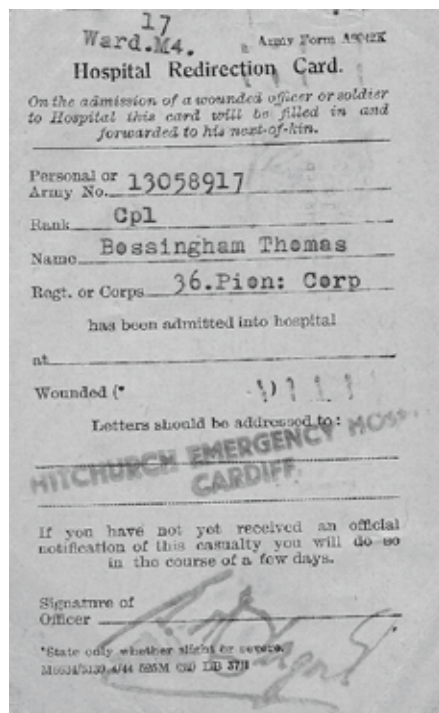
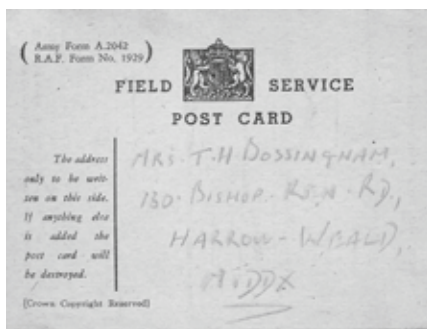
**Ward 57, 108 Brit Gen Hos, BAOR
Sunday, Sept. 9**

Well, as you can see I am at last in. My move back to Eindhoven did me no good as they promptly sent me back to Brussels.

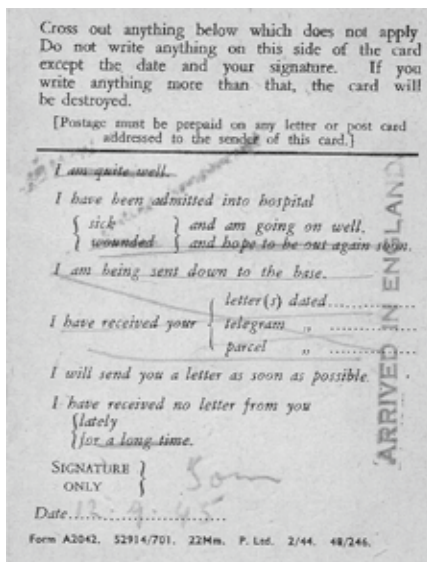
From the following 'Hospital Redirection Card' Vera learns Tom is in Hospital --- the card gives all the details as to which hospital he is in, and where! Tom has finally come home, but probably not in the way he thought it would happen.

This card would have been completed and sent on Tom's behalf.

The card.



Tom refers to a Field Card in the next letter, and this card was obviously completed and despatched by him to Vera.



**Ward M4, Whitchurch Emergency Hospital, Whitchurch, Glam.
Thurs. Sept. 13**

I flew back from Brussels yesterday to a place in Gloucestershire called Down Ampney. We spent the night there on an RAF camp and came here today by hospital train.

After the operation we go to a Convalescent Home for two months and there is some talk about getting near home, but I must find out more about this. There is a hostel near here where soldier's wives can put up for a few days. Evidently you can come in and see me anytime, but I must find out more about that too.

There were a large number, in fact a train load came to this hospital today, stretcher cases as well. There are seven new ones in this ward and five of them are hernias.

Our ambulance was held up in Brussels for Monty to pass, we had a very good view of him, then when we got on to the aerodrome he was there too flying somewhere.

We came home in a Dakota, it took just two hours and was a marvellous experience. If that is flying I do not mind it at all.

Monday Sept. 17

Friday night I was shaved, then no more to eat. An enema in the morning, then a bath. A nurse then shaved me again and prepared me for the op. I was put on a trolley and wheeled into a dark room and left there for a couple of hours. I got a needle then and was taken to the theatre. Here I got another needle in the arm again. They kept asking me if I felt sleepy, I kept saying no, but then all of a sudden away I went. Next time I woke up it was 7 o'clock in the evening. They said I made them laugh by what I said but I do not believe I gave any secrets away.

Wed. Sept. 19th

About this coming up here. You can if you want to and bring Margaret of course but you must realise you will only be able to see me for a few hours and I am flat on my back.

The sister says the best time to arrive is Tue. Wed. or Thurs. The place is a hostel and they may or may not take children, but could show you where to put up.

On my arrival at 108 BGH I was examined and poked about by two or three Drs.

Then sent to a ward. I drew some blues etc. but I only stayed there for three or four days and the sister told me I was being evacuated to England much to the envy of everyone else.

There were about eight of us from the hospital. We were held up on the way to the drome by Monty, then we ran into him again when he was boarding his plane.

Sat. Sept. 22

There is a scheme in the hospitals now called Occupational Therapy. This is only more or less handicrafts just to keep your mind busy. Some of the lads are making felt dolls, dogs or rabbits, some are embroidering their Regimental badges on table centres, and others are doing tapestry. I cannot make my mind up what to do.

There is no date on this next letter, and it seems from the postmark on the envelope (10 Oct) that Vera and Margaret visited Tom in Whitchurch.

**Pioneer Corps, Dunraven Castle, St. Brides Major, Nr. Bridgend, Glam.
(no date)**

Just a few lines to let you know we arrived here quite safely. In fact we passed your place between 9.30 and 10 o'clock this morning.

I do not know if it is the castle itself we are in but it is a great big old place. Oil paintings everywhere. Doors and passages on every side. Miles of tapestry etc. They call these places wards but actually they are just the ordinary rooms with about half-a-dozen beds in each.

**Pioneer Corps, Dunraven Castle Convalescent Home, St. Brides Major, Nr. Bridgend, Glam.
Sunday Oct. 14**

There is stacks of food here so maybe I shall put on some weight. There does not seem to be much chance of getting a transfer from here only I may get a leave for 10 days after being here for a fortnight or three weeks.

On the beach on Friday we had a bit of luck, we found 2/5¼ in all small coins lodged in the rocks.

**Pioneer Corps, Dunraven Castle Auxiliary Hosp., St. Bride Major, Nr. Bridgend, Glam.
Tues. Oct. 16**

Yesterday our ward was on potato peeling, today I am on dish washing just for the day. When these are done, we have no more fatigues this week apart from about 20 minutes PT every afternoon.

Sat. Oct. 20

By way of compensation I have some good news for you. My stay here finishes on Wednesday week and then I may get my leave before going on to this Convalescent

Depot.

Sunday Oct. 28

My period of convalescence here finished on Wednesday. There may be a chance of me coming home the following Friday. I will let you know as soon as I find out.

Tom has mentioned the Cottage Pie several times in his letters, saying when he enclosed them he wanted Vera to keep them for him. On this particular occasion, she did not keep it separately for him as it is still in the envelope with the letter. This publication is obviously news about staff past and present from HMSO Press, and also about the various staff members who were participating in the War Effort. Tom is not referred to in any way in this issue of Cottage Pie, but it is reproduced here to show just what was happening for staff to read about.



Hut 15 'F' Coy, 122 MCD, Stoneleigh Camp, Nr. Coventry (no date, but postmark on envelope 11 Nov 1945)

Vera Darling,

Just a few lines to let you know I arrived safely but late. It was 10 to 7 when I reached Leamington instead of five passed six. Anyway it was OK. An ambulance took me to the camp and I got received this morning.

Ye Gods it is a wrench too. Back to the army again. Everyone shouting and a glorious confusion.

After chatting with another Pioneer Cpl. and stating my case he told me there was a big Pioneer Depot at Prestatyn and instead of joining a unit I might get sent there. More good luck you see.

Wed. Nov. 14

Well life is fairly easy here, I arrived Friday night but was not officially on the strength until yesterday. All that happens is PT and remedial exercises, with route marches of 5, 8 and 12 miles according to the grade you are in. Mine is yellow, the lowest.

Tomorrow I do my first duty orderly NCO. What happens I do not know until tomorrow.

Monday Nov. 19

Being in a big depot like this is worse than a Company. I am not looking forward to moving to Prestatyn as that will be just as bad.

The food here is not bad, but it is always the Army way of serving it up and I am more than sickened of that.

I put in an application for a weekend pass today for 48 hours. If I get it I should be home sometime next Friday evening. I say 'if' because there is such a shortage of NCO's I may have a duty of some sort.

Fri. Nov. 23

I must disappoint you I am afraid as the SM cancelled all the applications for passes as there were 11 absentees last week, anyway I shall put in another application on Monday and see what happens.

Sunday Nov. 25

On Monday or Tuesday we have a General coming round to inspect the place so all PT and treatment have been suspended in order to get the place cleaned up for him, that just goes to show what a farce this place is.

Thurs. Nov. 29

My duty at present is Duty NCO. I have to sit by the telephone from mid day today until mid day tomorrow.

Yesterday we had some tin-pot General or other visit us. We had been preparing for this visit for darn nigh a week. Whitewashing, scrubbing, cleaning and polishing, etc. They have even had men sweeping up the leaves at this time of the year. Then yesterday --- the great day arrived. After all the fuss and bother and bother he never even came through our hut and to cap it all our first period was re-grading so we were all toggled up in PT kit and great coats. That was how we had to remain until almost 11 o'clock before the old fool decided to go. So much for a Con. Depot.

Dec. 9 Sunday

Tomorrow we have regrading and it is there that I shall learn whether or no I shall be home for Christmas. I will let you know.

Tues. Dec. 11

Tonight I am on NAAFI Guard again. We do not mount guard until 9 o'clock so it is only a short Guard until 6.30 in the morning, but it means losing a night's sleep.

This week I was regraded again into Green so I shall be here until next weekend at least.

Monday Dec. 17

I caught a Euston train at about 10 to 6. This got me into Euston at 20 to 7. There were one or two hold ups between Stonebridge Park and Willesden, something about the line. At Euston I found there was another train at 6.55, first stop Coventry. I caught this and was in Coventry 1 hr and 35 mins later. It was a good train but terribly crowded.

This morning we had our weekly medical inspection and I was again up-graded. This time to 'RTU' which means 'Return to Unit' followed by 'API' which means Applied for Posting Instructions. After all that I still do not know if I can get home for Christmas. I must see what the week brings. There is

now a possibility of me leaving here on Friday.

Wed. Dec. 19

At least I am moving on Friday and it will probably be Prestatyn.

12 PC H & TU, Prestatyn

Sunday Dec. 23

This is just a few lines to let you know I am still OK after travelling. I am afraid I must complain again about the Army. One place I never want to visit again will be here. It may be OK in the summer, but now its NBG. I have been perished with the cold since my arrival.

Christmas at home is out of the question now I am afraid as this whole depot is moving at the end of this month to a place just outside Chester so please do not worry about me or bother to write until you get another address.

This is a Pioneer depot in every respect. There is more spit and polish here than three infantry units put together. The conditions are vile and the food worse still, but as it is all on the homeward stretch so I suppose I can stick it.

Reception Wing 12 Centre PC, Delamere Park Camp, Nr. Coddington, Cheshire

Wed. Dec. 26

My usual luck held and I was detailed for fire piquet commencing at 5 o'clock last night until five tonight, I have only just finished, washed, shaved and packed my kit ready for moving tomorrow. The above address will find me.

Up to present I have not been able to find out anything further about this demob. From various rumours we are liable to be here for anything up to three weeks.

H & T Wing, 12 PC Centre, Delamere Park Camp Nr Cuddington, Cheshire, Sunday Dec. 30

You will notice a further slight change in my address, I move there on Tuesday.

Since my arrival I have met quite a few of my old acquaintances. From the Con. Depot, some from the 36 and even some from the old 174. One chap I met from the 36 was in the store and he told me my kit was still there so I wrote to the QM about it.

Did you read in the paper that you will be receiving an 8/- rise on the first pay day in the New Year?

It is certainly a very encouraging and comforting thought to think that I stand a reasonable chance of being out of the Army by this time next month.

Tues. Jan. 1

Today we have spent in changing over from the Reception Wing into the Holding and Training Wing. There were kit inspections, papers to sign and several other small jobs, nothing much but it took us the whole day. Where we are now is right on the outskirts of the camp and perishing cold. We have no hot water laid on and are the farthest from the Dining Hall.

There is nothing definite about release yet, all I have heard now is that we are liable to be here for about a fortnight. From here, so the rumours go, we are sent to Ashton-under-Lyne where we get sorted out for our various demob centres, mine I hope will be in London, probably Olympia.

You know by now what sort of a place we are in and the conditions, not to mention what sort of a time we are having. There are a few chaps here who I feel sorry for, apart from the youngsters who have just been called up, they are fellows who have had a few months on WT Reserve, had been demobbed then the War Office discover they have a few more months to serve so have recalled them.

There are some drawings following, and Tom obviously thought they would help make Margaret feel better for when her Daddy comes home. It won't be long now.



Sunday Jan. 6

Vera Darling,

I must thank you for your letters of the 1st, 2nd and 29th Dec. all of which I have received safely. I shall answer those of the 29th and 1st then leave the 2nd for a future date. Before I go any further I must first apologise for not writing earlier, but I have had a very special job that took me two days to fulfil.

Please do not get the wind up but I was nearly involved in that rail smash at Durham. Two Cpls myself and a Scots chap had to go to Durham Gaol and pick up another Cpl who had been serving a term there. We arrived the night before the crash and were on our way back again at 7.30 the following morning. We saw a lot of the folk who had been involved, they looked rather shaken. It put our return route out quite a bit as we had to come back via West Hartlepool. It was one of those Army jobs that are rather unpleasant but essential. He was still in custody from the Army point of view so he had to be handcuffed to me all the way. I have a raw wrist now.

Anyway the journey was completed without incident, he was quite docile. We had to spend a few shillings for meals and beds, but shall get it refunded on Tuesday. There are still more escorts to go, for Ireland, Penzance, Glasgow and quite a few other places, but I noticed all the London ones had been snapped up.

Tues. Jan. 8

Yesterday I had the first part of my medical and also lost some more kit, now I have only the barest essentials. Both of the Cpls. who I went around with have both gone, they were in 24 Group.

By moving into the H & T Wing only means I have moved into a different part of the camp. There are all sorts of fellows here. Compassionate postings, young soldiers training, men from hospital awaiting posting and of course the demob men.

Thurs. Jan. 10

I forgot whether I told you, but I met my prisoner in the NAAFI. He had been released and was kicking up a row because he had been escorted back after doing his sentence. He should have been conducted

back. The authorities here have just realised that so sent him on leave to keep him quiet.

I went into the Pay Office today for the expenses incurred by the escort trip. I am having 10/9d put to my account.

It seems pretty authentic now that I stand a good chance of being out on the 19th, that is Sat. week. If I hear anything at all to the contrary I shall let you know immediately.

Sat. Jan. 12

I have just finished what I am hoping is about my last duty. There are still plenty of rumours regarding our release but personally I still think I shall be out on the 19th. That is of course if we can do it all in the one day which I doubt. However, keep smiling and your fingers crossed, we should be hearing something definite during the week.

Monday Jan. 14

There are still plenty of rumours floating around, but nothing official yet. Some of the Sgts. are saying we shall hear how we are to leave here on about Wednesday or Thursday.

Believe me I shall be glad to leave here and the Army more than ever. These depots leave a nasty taste in your mouth. They certainly do nothing towards leaving a good impression of the Army.

Wed. Jan. 16th

In yesterday's Daily Mirror there were two cuttings which I thought were rather interesting so am sending them along.

It cannot be much longer now before they let us know when we go out. I am sincerely hoping and praying that I shall be amongst those who go out on the 19th.

"Ghost" brings scent of mimosa

WORKERS who spend their summer holiday this year at Dunraven Castle, in Glamorgan — leased by the Workers Travel Association — may wake up to find themselves entertaining the Castle "ghost."

If they are awakened by a strong perfume of mimosa, that's it—the Blue Lady of Dunraven.

Whenever the mimosa scent drifts, says the legend, so drifts the ghost, a gentle old lady whose grey hair falls over her pale blue gown.

She is hairless, and dislikes the light. She doesn't drag a chain, carry a head, or howl to scare you still.

She just likes to wander and sit by a fire anywhere in the old castle, that stands with its background of elms and beeches overlooking the sea at Witch's Snout, Southendown.

The old lady hasn't been seen for years now. During the war her haunting ground has been a Red Cross hospital.

Mrs. D. C. Edmondson, the Commandant, told the "Daily Mirror": "We've had over 4,000 patients during the war and a staff of thirty-four. None of us has seen the ghost although we've all heard of the legend."

Perhaps She'll Oblige

The fifth Earl of Dunraven, writing the castle's history, said the Blue Lady showed herself to people from time to time.

During the last war many soldier-patients reported seeing her, and a nurse told of three visitations to her room.

Now some of the villagers are wondering whether the Blue Lady will return to give hard-working holidaymakers a ghostly thrill.

5,000,000 STARVE

While European women in the South African towns continue to raid slaughterhouses for meat, 5,000,000 natives in country areas face starvation through shortage of maize, reports Exchange.

TO VISIT ENGLAND

More than 12,000 people have been registered by the Dutch Travel Association for a projected trip to England this year, says Reuters.

Friday Jan. 19

Expect me Sat. night or Sunday morning if unlucky.

This was the last letter Tom would write to Vera.

She collected 577 of them, and that is not counting those that Tom wrote that didn't reach their destination!

Now at long last the day had come, the day that Tom was looking forward to so much, for so long, when he could return to Vera's side and never leave her.

No wonder he had said in a recent letter that if he had known he would be in the Army for five years, he did not know what he would have done!



Tom and Vera eventually bought a house; they had always wanted something bigger than their flat and with more room, and together with Margaret moved into 132 Elgin Avenue, Kenton.

Two more children were born, David in 1948 and Chris in 1952; incidentally both boys were born in the front bedroom in Elgin Avenue.

Unfortunately, Tom tragically passed away in 1971 at the ridiculously young age of just fifty-seven years, so the years he thought he would spend with Vera did not eventuate, at least not as he had planned. He thought they would live out the rest of their lives together, hoping to make up for lost time all those years when there was such upheaval and the world seemed as though it would never return to normal.

Rest In Peace My Beloved Daddy

May you enjoy spaghetti on toast three times a day and a never-ending supply of hot water for baths!

"Keep Smiling"

Ed note: the following are extracts from the war diaries of the units in which he served:

No 2 Centre - Formed at Caister 1939. Moved to Glasgow July 1940. Disbanded October 1940.

174 Coy PC:

19 Aug 40 Landed in Northern Ireland
 HQ & 4 sections to BELVOIR PARK, BELFAST with RAOC
 3 sections to KINNEGAR with RAOC
 3 sections at BALMORAL with RASC
 Capt D C E Sexton — serving 2IC and Lt W R Bell MC — serving
 19 Dec 40 Capt S A Payne MC — tos 2IC vice Sexton (sos 36 Coy)
 30 Dec 40 Lt Paiba — tos
 3 Jan 41 Coy still at BELVOIR PARK and KINNEGAR
 Lt C J D Cullum — tos
 12 Jan 41 Maj R Longley MC — tos
 OC vice Cozens
 13 Jan 41 Lt Paiba — sos 810 Coy
 2Lts D Bryden & D J Bauer — tos
 26 Feb 41 Capt P D L Ainslie — tos

2IC vice Payne (sos hospital)
 6 Mar 41 Capt S A Payne MC – died in hospital
 31 Mar 41 Officers:- Maj R Longley MC – OC, Capt P D L Ainslie – 2IC, Lt C J D Cullum, 2Lts D Bryden & D J Bauer, CSM
 Phillpots
 14 Aug 41 Capt P D L Ainslie – sos to Middle East
 23 Nov 41 Moved to BALLYCLARE
 Capt A G M Cook – serving 2IC (sos overseas in Dec 41)
 12 Feb 42 Capt F R Battersby MM – tos 2IC
 20 Jun 42 Officers:- Maj R Longley MC – OC, Capt F R Battersby MM – 2IC, Lt S L Mann, 2Lt H W Braby
 1 Sep 42 Hutting, handling timber and bridging
 14 Nov 42 Maj W D Montgomerie MBE – tos OC vice Longley (sos 182 Coy)

36 Coy PC:

31 Dec 42 Officers:- Maj A M Cross MC – OC, Capt T H Ayland – 2IC, Lts T H Ellis, W R Ball MC & E C Stanborough, 2Lts G A Boddy & G T Thompson
 4 Feb 43 Capt E C Stanborough – promoted 2IC vice Ayland
 7 Mar 43 Capt E C Stanborough – sos embarkation
 1 Apr 43 Capt A G Bishop – tos 2IC
 8 Apr 43 Left Northern Ireland and proceeded to MIDDLESBOROUGH and joined 12 Group
 Jun 43 Maj A G Bishop – promoted OC

vice Cross (sos sick)
 1 Aug 43 Moved to COTTAM near DRIFFIELD, Capt W G Scruby – serving 2IC
 16 Oct 43 Moved to SOUTH SHIELDS
 28 Nov 43 Moved to COTTINGHAM near HULL
 31 Dec 43 Officers:-, Maj A G Bishop – OC, Capt S Frost – 2IC, Lts Allem J L McKeller, J Wright & W C McGinley
 1 Feb 44 Moved to SCARBOROUGH
 11 May 44 Moved to LINGFIELD (Concentration Area)
 12 Jun 44 Landed 'dryshod' in OUISTREHAM, NORMANDY
 14 Jun 44 Moved to PORT EN BESSIN, Officers:-, Maj A G Bishop – OC, Capt S Frost – 2IC, Lts T A Currie, J L McKeller, J Wright & W C McGinley
 16 Jun 44 Commenced laying 4" water pipe for fire service, loading sand on beaches and laying hard standing
 26 Jun 44 Commenced laying petrol pipe
 9 Jul 44 Moved to BAYEUX
 23 Aug 44 Moved to VIEUX FUME
 2 Sep 44 Moved to MESNIL
 GUILLAUME
 2 Oct 44 Moved to LE HAMEL – still laying pipe line
 28 Oct 44 Moved to MARQUISE near BOULOGNE – joined 11 group
 7 Dec 44 Moved to LIERRE near ANTWERP
 18 Jan 45 Moved to VALKENSWAARD near EINDHOVEN

2 Feb 45 Lt J L McKeller – sos to Infantry
 21 Feb 45 Lt C J G Smith - tos
 10 Mar 45 Moved to EINDHOVEN
 Lt A S Kelly – tos
 16 Mar 45 Capt W T Dickinson – tos 2IC vice Frost (sos 172 Coy)
 1 Apr 45 Maj R T Howells – tos
 OC vice Bishop (sos 31 RHU)
 8 Apr 45 Moved to MATERBORN, Germany – joined 48 Group – still pipe laying for 106 CRE Works Coy
 3 May 45 Moved to DINXPERLO, Holland – joined 14 Group
 31 May 45 Officers:-, Maj R T Howells – OC, Capt W T Dickinson – 2IC, Lts T A Currie, A S Kelly, C J G Smith & W C McGinley
 27 Aug 45 Capt A R Grant – tos 2IC vice Dickinson (sos release)

12 Centre: Formed at Liverpool June 1940. Moved to Pheasey Farm, Birmingham July 1941. Moved to Oldham March 1942. Moved to Prestatyn July 1943.
 This Centre between 5th June 1940 and 15th May 1945 formed 65 complete Companies and 11 Group and Company HQ.
 Its total intake was 120,163, and 5,754 officers passed through the unit.
 These figures give some idea of the standard of organisation required for the successful function of each unit.
 Throughout the whole period No 12 Holding and Training Unit was commanded by Lt Col H Greenwood VC DSO OBE MC ■

Empowering Pioneers to Thrive in the Workplace

IN today's fast-paced work landscape, the well-being of employees is more crucial than ever. The demands of the workplace can often lead to stress, anxiety, and overwhelm leading to sickness and burn out, impacting both professional performance and personal happiness.

Work environments seem to be the place that triggers the optimum level of stressors for most. Especially in high pressured or high-risk jobs, which eventually becomes the 'norm,' leading to many ignoring their body's warning signs. The Great news is that this can be turned around over time with support.

Melissa is a dedicated advocate for mental and emotional health, she is committed to highlighting and encouraging positive change within companies or work environments, with a far more personable approach.

She has worked with many clients supporting them to manage trauma, addiction, anxiety PTSD and stress. She is a certified practitioner in Physiology, Trauma, Neuroscience, Embodied Somatic Therapy, and Trauma Informed coaching, to name just a few. Melissa gives in person or zoom therapy, coaching sessions and in house group coaching.

If you are interested, or know someone that would be, for more information, please contact Melissa Connor.

Discounted sessions available for all military personnel and their loved ones.

Melissa is Bicester based and is happy for Pioneers to contact her or to arrange a group booking if required.

Email: melissa@melissaconnor.co.uk | highenergyhealinguk@gmail.com

 MEMBER
INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR
COMPLEX/EMBODIED THERAPISTS

Congratulations...

Thank you to members for purchasing Pioneer Summer Draw Tickets.
This helps the Association to carry out its work. The results are...



Once again with this issue you will find

Christmas Draw Tickets

As usual tickets for the Christmas Draw are enclosed (unless you have already indicated that you are unable to sell them). Please make cheques made payable to "RPC Association", however, we appreciate that a large number of people no longer use cheque books, payment can be made by either paypal, account is: royalpioneercorps@gmail.com or by bank transfer, details are: RPC Association, Account No: 01206610, Sort Code: 30-90-77.

Please indicate on counterfoil how payment has been made.

We have extended the draw until **17th January 2025** due to the newsletter coming back from the printers.

13052950 Michael Murphy

Michael "Mick" Murphy was from Kenmare, Co Kerry. He emigrated to Britain in the 30s in search of work. When war broke out he joined the Pioneer Corps and was promoted to Sgt.

Report: Paul Brown
RPCA Archive

EIRE as it was then known was neutral in the second World War, but tens of thousands of Irishmen, north and south, joined the Allied war effort, mostly in the British armed services.

Their Finest Hour is an Oxford University project that has digitised more than 25,000 previously hidden artefacts from the war and placed them online. These have been submitted by the families involved and include the testimony of dozens of Irishmen who fought in the second World War many of whom landed on D-Day.

Michael "Mick" Murphy was from Kenmare, Co Kerry. He emigrated to Britain in the 1930s in search of work. When war broke out he joined the Pioneer Corps and was promoted to Sergeant.

He participated not only in the D-Day landings, but also in the evacuation from Dunkirk. During the war he met a young Englishwoman, Margaret Fitchett, living in Southam in Warwickshire. She drove an ambulance and also worked as a voluntary aid detachment (VAD) nurse in addition to an office job in which she was covering the roles of two men who had been called up.

When she and a friend went to buy tickets for a dance at the Sergeant's Mess, Murphy said that he would only sell her a ticket if she promised to dance with him. She kept her promise, and it was the start of a true romance. They were married in 1942.

Margaret was very anxious as he was only allowed to send pre-printed postcards after they had landed to let her know he was alive. Her husband was with the Second Army in Northern Europe until the end of the war.

Michael was born on 13th Jan 1912, joined No 1 Centre for training, served from 25 Jul 40 to 03 Jan 46.

Sgt Murphy served with 276 Company throughout his service, the war diary for this unit is published below. He landed in Normandy with the first half of his Company on D Day, 6 June 1944. His unit did a variety of tasks including port construction, transportation of stores, PW guards, bridge maintenance and construction and POL stores.

276 Company

10 Jun 41 Formed at OLDHAM
Maj A G Warde MC – OC
Capt E L French – 2IC
Lts Watts, E W Clarke & A W Northcott
4 Jul 41 Moved to DUDLEY – 4 sections
cable laying remainder training
31 Aug 41 Working on AA gun sites



31 Dec 41 Officers:-
Maj A G Warde MC – OC
Capt E L French – 2IC
Lt A W Northcott
2Lts R P Lee & J A McGeachin
30 Jun 42 Officers:-
Maj A G Warde MC – OC
Capt E L French – 2IC
Lt F W Lane MBE
2Lts J H Leiper, D H Philp & C A Spenceley
14 Nov 42 Moved to KENILWORTH,
Warks
30 Mar 43 Capt J H Leiper – tos
2IC vice French

23 Apr 43 Capt T J Sellis MC – tos
2IC vice Leiper
28 Apr 43 Maj G W Mentz – tos
OC vice Warde (sos as 2IC 65 Group)
1 May 43 11 sections on camp construction
3 sections on ammunition salvage
20 May 43 Maj G W Mentz – sos
87 Coy
21 May 43 Maj J Archer – tos OC
22 Jun 43 Maj E W Wilson – tos
OC vice Archer
30 Jun 43 Officers:-
Maj E W Wilson – OC
Capt T J Sellis MC – 2IC

Lts C C Lampitt & G Woodfin
2Lts N D White, H Hawkes, F Walker & P J Tizzard
Aug 43 Capt H O Wood – serving 2IC
20 Nov 43 Capt C J McKenzie – tos
2IC vice Wood
9 May 44 Moved to FAKENHAM, Norfolk
13 May 44 Moved to LIEGH ON
SEA – training
1 Jun 44 Officers:-
Maj E W Wilson – OC
Capt C J McKenzie – 2IC
Lt H Cumella & H Hawkes, F G Prescott & G M Smith

8 Jun 44 Right Half of Coy landed in NORMANDY and proceeded to BANVILLE
 9 Jun 44 Moved to COURSEULLES – port construction
 16 Jun 44 Left Half of Coy – landed in NORMANDY
 17 Jun 44 Located BUSSY – working at RE stores depot
 2 Jul 44 Concentrated at COURSEULLES
 31 Jul 44 Most of Coy at COURSEULLES on port construction with a detachment at LUC SUR MER on transport stores
 24 Aug 44 Lt F G Prescott – sos
 16 Sep 44 Lt W Lees – tos
 Lt G M Smith – sos
 20 Sep 44 Lt T J Pender – sos
 23 Sep 44 Concentrated at COURSEULLES – training
 27 Sep 44 Salvage work on beaches
 26 Oct 44 Moved to BRUSSELS – PW guards at EGHEIM and other minor jobs
 18 Nov 44 Lts J P Butterworth & H H Sampson – tos
 22 Nov 44 Lt H Cumella – sos
 28 Nov 44 Maj E W Wilson – relinquished command
 4 Dec 44 Maj C E Thomas – tos OC
 Capt C A B Caufield – tos 2IC vice McKenzie
 31 Mar 45 Moved to QUIEDMECHELEN
 Officers:-
 Maj C E Thomas – OC
 Capt C A B Caufield – 2IC
 Lts T C Ancrum, W Lees, T J Pender & H H Sampson
 9 Apr 45 Moved to REES, Germany – bridge maintenance and construction
 18 Jun 45 Moved to NIEDER MORMTER near REES
 10 Jul 45 HQ moved to SUCHTELN
 8 Aug 45 Maj C A B Caufield – promoted OC vice Thomas (sos release)
 Capt A A Hurford – tos 2IC
 16 Aug 45 Moved to HUBBELRATH, DUSSELDORF
 27 Aug 45 Moved to DUSSELDORF – guards, POL etc
 30 Nov 45 Last Diary entry located DUSSELDORF
 Maj C A B Caufield – OC ■



I feel I cannot let you leave 21 Army Group on your return to civil life without a message of thanks and farewell. Together we have carried through one of the most successful campaigns in history, and it has been our good fortune to be members of this great team. God Bless you and God speed.

B. L. Montgomery
 FIELD MARSHAL
 COMMANDER IN CHIEF

BAOR-1945

As Commander of the Second Army I say to every man under my command and to all ranks of 83Gp R.A.F. who have supported us
 THANK YOU AND WELL DONE

M. W. Dawson
 Lt General

May 1945

ARMY FORM W5258

RECORD OF SERVICE

Record Office Stamp
Pioneer Corps Bournemouth

No. 12052950 Rank W/Sgt
 Name M.H.R. PHX M.
 Served in Regts/Corps as follows:

	Regt./Corps	From	To	Assn. joined with date	Remarks by Assn. (if any)
a	<u>PIONEER CORPS</u>	<u>25.7.40</u>	<u>20.3.44</u>		
b					
c					
d					

Date 9.1.46

[Signature]
 Record Officer Pioneer Corps
 Association he

1. This card should be presented or sent by the person named above to the Regt/Corps Association when the soldier wishes to join or from which he requires assistance.
 2. The Secretary of the Association should stamp and date the card in the relative column when the soldier joins the Association.
 3. If you send this card by post, do not fail to enclose your address.

(2757) 5/45 W/L 33166 DJ 18 350m (15) 12/45 Gp. 637 C&SLtd

From RLC to the Frontline

Lt Greg Mcleod reflects on his time from the Royal Logistic Corps to the Frontline -
A Journey to Afghanistan and Beyond

Report: Lt Greg Mcleod
Pictures: RPCA Archive

WHEN From RLC to the Frontline: A Journey to Afghanistan and Beyond. The Pioneers offered young officers a unique privilege: the chance to attend the Platoon Commanders Battle Course (PCBC) at Infantry Battle School in Brecon, South Wales. As far as I know, no other non-infantry cap badge offers such an opportunity.

Infantry Battle School was one of the toughest, most rewarding, and most enjoyable courses of my early career. It laid the groundwork for some of the most exciting and challenging roles I would later take on, including work with the infantry,

the Royal Marines, and eventually 21 SAS(R). Those months in Brecon taught me skills I didn't know I would need but that would later prove critical in both my leadership and survival. My posting to 23 Pnr Regt set me on a track for a fantastic career.

In autumn 2006, Mike Bennett was my commanding officer, and Tim Burgess was my OC at 522 Sqn. I was a huge fan of Tim—a gentle giant who was fair, intelligent, and an exceptional OC. Colonel Mike, on the other hand, was the worst CO of my entire career. To this day, I'm astonished by how he got that role and was promoted again.

By November 2006, I had been accepted onto the Jungle Warfare Instructors Course, scheduled for early 2007. I was excited, as

it was an opportunity I had long looked forward to.

But, as is often the case in the military, plans can change in an instant. In early December, I was informed that I would no longer be attending the jungle warfare course. Instead, I was being stood up to deploy to Afghanistan. Not only would I be attached to an infantry unit, but my entire troop of pioneers would be embedded to form the third platoon of the infantry company.

The challenge was equally exciting and daunting. I've often explained it to civilians like this: it's like being a doctor who never sees patients or a teacher who never has a class of kids. Operations are what we train for, and finally, it was our time to go.

The infantry unit we were joining, 1

Worcestershire Sherwood Foresters Regiment (later 2 Mercian Regiment), had already started their pre-deployment training. We were behind before we even started. As soon as Christmas was over, we joined them, trying to catch up before deploying in mid to late April 2007. To fill out our ranks, a few extra soldiers were pulled from across our regiment, ensuring we had a full-strength platoon.

Many of the soldiers were familiar faces, but some were brand new to the Army. I distinctly remember meeting one soldier who had just turned 18. He looked so young, and it hit me hard—the realization that I was responsible for his life and the lives of everyone in my troop. Eighteen was so damn young.

By January 2007, we were fully integrated with 1 WFR for the remainder of pre-deployment training. It was a steep learning curve for both the young soldiers and me.

I was fortunate to have an outstanding platoon sergeant—Chris Uren Palmer. He was a fantastic soldier with encyclopedic knowledge of both Pioneer and Infantry work.

Chris and I didn't always see eye to eye—he had a quick temper at times—but he taught me so much in such a short period. His mentorship shaped my approach to leadership, and I'm still grateful for that.

We also had three excellent section commanders, one of whom had previously

served in the infantry before transferring branches.

Their experience and professionalism were key to the cohesion and success of the platoon, though they also brought their share of challenges.

In April 2007, we deployed to Forward Operating Base (FOB) Price on the outskirts of Gereshk in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. From the moment we were attached to 1 WFR, I knew we had to prove ourselves. While our soldiers weren't Infantry by trade, they were more than capable of performing Infantry tasks. However, they were also Engineers and Pioneers.

Many of the Infantry soldiers saw the RLC cap badge and doubted our abilities. Truth be told, I didn't know what we were capable of either—not until we were tested. And tested we were.

Throughout our seven-month tour, we faced multiple challenges: IED strikes, cordon and control operations for US Special Forces missions, advance to contacts, hearts and minds patrols, direct contact engagements, handovers with foreign troops, casualty evacuations, embedded news teams, vehicle breakdowns—you name it, we dealt with it.

On one occasion, we deployed from FOB Price for a "48-hour" mission and didn't return for 9 weeks.

Those seven months in Afghanistan were

an intense test of everything we had trained for. The Fijian contingent, who in barracks sometimes caused administrative stress, were incredible warriors and mentors for the younger soldiers.

Our extraction to BASTION and meet up with Billy Dilkes and the other Pioneers was most memorable, especially from the perspective of a decent bed and proper coffee.

We returned from HERRICK in November 2007, and after Post Operational Tour Leave, I was promoted and moved to a new regiment. It felt sudden at the time, like I was leaving my family behind. But that's life in the Army—constant transitions, always moving forward.

I've tried to stay in touch with as many of the boys as possible. I've watched them promote, retire, have families, move overseas—everything life throws at them.

My first posting, straight out of Sandhurst, with 23 Pnr Regt at Bicester, set me up for my entire career. It gave me the resilience, adaptability, and leadership skills that would carry me through the challenges that followed.

Over the next few years, I returned to Afghanistan in a logistical role, deployed with the Royal Marines as a squadron 21C, and ended my service as Operations Officer for 21 SAS(R) in Regents Park Barracks. I truly believe these incredible roles were possible because of the foundation that was laid with the Pioneers.


Side Notes

Mark Comer: My new OC, Mark Comer, had been my instructor at Rowallan Coy, so I knew him well, though in a very different capacity. Mark had been in Iraq and was flying home to see his wife, who had recently given birth to twins. Despite this, he made a conscious effort to fly via Afghanistan and make his way out to the FOB to see me and the boys. Almost two decades later, I still talk about this in leadership training and will always think of him fondly. He probably doesn't realize how much of an impact that small gesture had on me. Sadly, I wouldn't spend much time under Mark's command because I was posted shortly after my return.

Colonel Simon Wheelton: Colonel Simon Wheelton was incredible. I sought his counsel later in my career on many occasions and remember him as one of the best Commanding Officers I ever served under. Unfortunately, I lost touch with him later in my career, but if he reads this: "Thank you for always believing in me and having my back."

Dan Read: Dan Read was another troop commander in 522 when I arrived. A former soldier in the Royal Engineers who commissioned into the RLC, he was Commando trained and an incredible mentor for me. He and Joel Rathbone (522 2IC) were great friends, and we shared many memories in work, the Officers' Mess, and in Oxford. Tragically, Dan was killed on operations some years later while deployed as an Ammunition Technical Officer (ATO).





Ed note: Rolph Friedland (Date of Birth 26 May 20) enlisted at Guildford and joined 6 Centre Pioneer Corps for training on 27 Jul 41 and given the service number 13805890. Service numbers prefixed "1380" indicated that they were Aliens (mostly German and Austrian who had escaped from the Nazi's). It was realised that if they were captured they would be easily identified as such. They were given the option to change their service number and, if they wished, their name. Rolph changed his name to Ralph David Freeman and had a new service number of 13106660. He served until 14 Sep 46.

**Tottenham football player
saves a Jewish Teenager
from Nazi Proceecution...**

AFTER Germany hosted the England soccer team in May 1938, Rolf Friedland waited patiently outside the stadium. The teenager was hoping to speak to some of soccer's biggest stars of the time – a feeling of anticipation that many sports fans have experienced.

But for the German-Jewish 17-year-old, a lot more was at stake. Friedland knew that one of the soccer players who lined up that day had the power to save his life.

And it was with the help of an England defender that Friedland was able to leave Germany, escape the persecution of the Nazis and start a new life overseas as Ralph Freeman.

'They're going to kill me'

Freeman's family had already fled Germany without him, and he was left alone and isolated, knowing that leaving the country was essential for his survival.

"Psychologically, he was desperate to get out," Ralph's son Alan Freeman said. "He was left there alone presumably with some sort of hope that his parents would be able to get him out, but I don't think he entirely relied on that."

A lifelong soccer fan, Freeman's desperation to leave Nazi Germany led him to the Olympiastadion on that fateful day on May 14, 1938. He hatched a plan to try and gain the attention of an England player who could aid in his escape from Germany.

"I think that my dad was a creative individual and to do something like that, you need a degree of creativity," explains Alan.

"While there was a certain element of creative initiative, I think that it [the plan] was principally done out of desperation," he added.

"I just need to get out," said Alan of his father's attitude. "I'll find any way to try and get out of it. If I don't get out of here, they're going to kill me."

When the players made their exit from the stadium, it was England and Tottenham Hotspur defender Bert Sproston who stopped and listened to Freeman.

"I'm not sure that he especially singled out Bert Sproston as the most likely person to help him," Alan said. "He simply spoke to that particular player and that particular player registered my father's desperation. "It obviously touched his heart and he decided to go back and do something about it."

While Sproston would not have known the exact details of what life was like for a Jewish person living in Germany at the time, author and journalist John Leonard thinks he would have been aware of the Nazis' hostility towards Jews.

In his book 'Salute!' Leonard looks at the how sport and politics clashed during this time – culminating in this famous match.

"I'm sure he did realize that for Jewish people in Germany that, to put it politely, they were in for a hard time," Leonard said.

Michael Berkowitz, professor of modern Jewish history at University College London, agreed.

"Everyone was aware of it," Berkowitz said. "It's again important not to read

backwards, but people did know that there was something going on that was just not normal by the standards of other places."

After speaking to Sproston, who took his details back to Britain, Freeman was granted a visa to the UK to watch England play in a friendly game.

He was finally able to leave Germany and avoid the events that would soon unfold.

'A crucial year'

Europe was on the brink of war when England headed to Berlin in 1938.

Geopolitical tensions were nearing a boiling point on the continent and Adolf Hitler and the Nazi party's power continued to grow throughout Europe.

As the Nazis' influence increased, the treatment of the Jewish population of Germany dramatically worsened.

"1938 was a really crucial year," Berkowitz said.

This was the year which saw the German annexation of Austria, commonly known as the Anschluss, in March as well as Kristallnacht – the night of broken glass – in November of that year.

Berkowitz explained that Hitler cautiously ramped up his abhorrent treatment of Jews after he came to power in 1933 but 1938 saw conditions dramatically worsen.

"Included in the annexation of Austria is incredible anti-Jewish action, including the burning of synagogues and Jews being beaten up on the streets," Berkowitz added.

"But then even more striking was ... what would later be called Kristallnacht," Berkowitz said. "Almost all of the synagogues in Germany were burnt down, literally hundreds, thousands of people beaten up in the streets [and], it was thought at first that there weren't that many people killed, now we know that there were many more people killed."

According to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, at least 91 Jews were killed, 30,000 German Jewish men were arrested and sent to concentration camps and hundreds of synagogues were set on fire during the events of November 9 and 10 1938.

"That was when the world really woke up. Unified in horror at what the Nazis were up to," Leonard said.

Thanks to Sproston's intervention, Freeman was able to board a train from Berlin and arrived in London just a matter of weeks before the events of November 9-10 unfolded.

'He saved his life'

Sproston's connections through the footballing world proved to be vital in helping Freeman leave Germany.

"You usually would need some sort of personal connection. You need someone to vouch for you, or you need to come in through some sort of organizational effort," Berkowitz said of the process of obtaining a visa to leave Germany as a Jew.

"But just say purely as an individual or an individual without means.

Wow. This is not easy to do."

Sproston sponsoring Freeman's UK visa therefore proved invaluable to ensuring his escape from Germany.

"Not only did Bert Sproston change Ralph Freeman's life. He saved his life,"

Leonard added.

"Without his intervention the chances were that young Ralph Freeman would have ended up in a concentration camp, and he would have been murdered by the Nazis."

Leonard also said that unlike the majority of his England teammates, Sproston could look back on this game with a sense of pride.

It was before this game that the England players famously performed the Nazi salute prior to kick off.

Leonard stated that the England team was under considerable pressure to perform the Nazi salute as a form of appeasement but, by helping Freeman, Sproston can feel less guilty about the pre-match salute.

"He [Sproston] was one of the players who left Berlin, after making a personal decision, as much as a team decision, that would haunt most of the players for the rest of their lives – he certainly could look back on that game with a touch of pride," said Leonard.

Sproston passed away in 2000 and Ralph Freeman passed away in 2010, but Ralph's son Alan said the pair remained close after their first interaction.

"To the day that Bert died they were in contact," Alan explained.

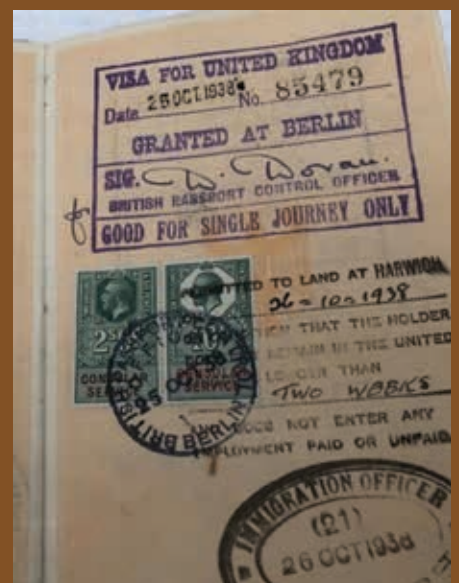
Alan added that the pair were always pleased to see each other, and this good relationship has been passed on to the next generation as Alan keeps in touch with Janice, Sproston's daughter-in-law.

Alan said he and Janice have a "deep, meaningful relationship and a friendship," built on the legacies and stories of their father and father-in-law.

A love for football, and in particular Tottenham Hotspur, was also passed down from father to son and Alan fondly remembers following Tottenham with his father.

But more importantly, so did the story of Bert Sproston helping Ralph Freeman in his bid to leave Nazi Germany.

"I just think that if all of us could just act with decency to other people in the way that Bert behaved towards my dad, then the world would be a better place," Alan said. ■



■ British visa that allowed Rolf Friedland to visit England for two weeks in 1938.

Time as a Troop Commander

Taff Teague reflects on his time as Troop Commander, 187 (Tancred) Sqn, RLC, 23 Pioneer Regiment (August 1997-April 2000)

Report: Taff Teague
Pictures: Taff Teague

DURING my tenure as Troop Commander of 2 Troop, I had the honour and privilege of leading a remarkable group of individuals through several significant and challenging deployments. These included a tour in Northern Ireland during the Troubles, participation in a NATO exercise in Slovenia, operational deployment during the Kosovo War, and a construction-focused tour on Ascension Island.

Each of these experiences shaped my leadership journey, tested my resilience, and underscored the extraordinary capabilities of the men under my command.



Northern Ireland

Serving in Northern Ireland during the height of the Troubles was both demanding and transformative. Operating in a highly sensitive and volatile environment, my responsibilities included maintaining the operational readiness of my troop, preserving morale, and ensuring the highest standards of conduct amidst a complex political and social landscape.

The primary task involved providing 24/7 security and defence for Kinnegar Logistic Base, a vital hub employing up to 1,000 civilian staff at its peak. The lads performed admirably, rotating through a rigorous schedule of three days on day shift, three on night shift, and three off, interspersed with additional training over a six-month period.



This deployment honed my decision-making and leadership skills under pressure, reinforcing the importance of adaptability, cultural awareness, and teamwork. The men's exceptional professionalism and dedication were the backbone of our success in this challenging assignment.

NATO Exercise in Slovenia

Participating in "Exercise COOPERATIVE ADVENTURE EXCHANGE 98 a NATO/Partnership for Peace (PfP) exercise, was a unique opportunity to work alongside multinational forces in a complex and dynamic environment. Held in Slovenia, this exercise involved over 6,000 soldiers from NATO and PfP countries and was one of the largest NATO exercises held outside Alliance territory at the time.

I led 2 Troop through scenarios simulating real-world contingencies, with a focus on logistics, mobility, and force sustainment. The experience deepened my understanding of multinational operations and highlighted the importance of communication, interoperability, and mutual support in a diverse allied framework.

The opening ceremony at Cerklje Army Barracks marked the start of an exercise that would stretch across southeast, east, and central Slovenia. This deployment provided invaluable insight into operating within a coalition, preparing us for future roles in joint operations.

Kosovo War (Op Agricola)

The Kosovo War presented perhaps the most challenging and rewarding operational context of my career. This deployment was a testament to the capabilities of the Pioneer soldier and our adaptability in the face of diverse and high-pressure missions.



During a trip in Albania, we managed to climb one of the local mountains and painted the Trig Point Red & Green.



Key tasks included repairing critical railway infrastructure, constructing reception camps and refugee facilities in Albania, Kosovo, and Macedonia, and providing force protection in collaboration with the Royal Irish Regiment and Airborne Forces. We also built UCK armouries, reconstructed a railway line, established an ammunition dump, created defensive positions for 4 Armoured HQs, and set up and managed a detention centre for war criminals.



This deployment was a prime opportunity to demonstrate the unique Pioneer skill set to KFOR Forces. The lads executed every task to the highest standard, contributing significantly to post-conflict recovery and stability efforts. Personally, it was the most fulfilling period of my military career, as it showcased the power of teamwork, resilience, and strategic planning in achieving mission success.

Ascension Island

The deployment to Ascension Island was a starkly different yet equally rewarding experience. This construction-focused tour involved engineering projects critical to operational infrastructure on the remote island.

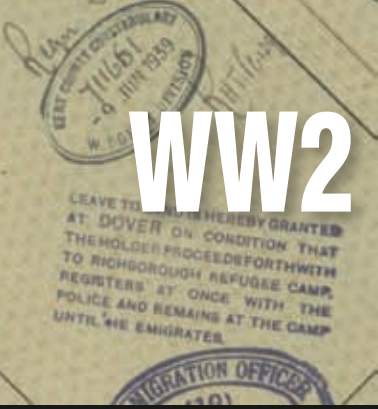
Operating in isolation and under challenging conditions required meticulous planning, resource management, and innovative problem-solving. Leading my troop in this unique environment reinforced the importance of resilience and adaptability in overcoming logistical and environmental challenges. Despite the harsh conditions, the troop performed exceptionally, meeting tight timelines and delivering results that left a lasting impact.

Reflections

These deployments profoundly shaped my development as a leader, enhancing my ability to inspire cohesion, manage resources effectively, and execute tasks in diverse and often high-pressure settings. While these experiences pushed me to grow, I owe my successes to the extraordinary men of 2 Troop. Their fitness, professionalism, and camaraderie were unmatched, and it was an honour to lead them through both good times and bad.

I am also humbled by the lessons I learned along the way, including from my own mistakes, which have made me a better man and leader. To all who served in 2 Troop during this period—thank you. You were brilliant, and it was a privilege to stand alongside you. ■





WW2 Kitchener Camp Rescue

During the WW2, a company of German-speaking soldiers arrived in Sedbergh. These men weren't Prisoners of War, but British Army troops. So, what was their history? And how did they come to be in Sedbergh?

Report: Clare Weissenberg
Pictures: Clare Weissenberg

KITCHENER camp has been largely forgotten today, but in 1939 this derelict World War I army base on the Kent coast became the scene of an extraordinary rescue of around 4,000 Jewish men from German concentration camps. The rescue was funded and run by the same organisations that ran the 'Kindertransport' for children. Indeed, some of the children of Kitchener refugees were saved on the Kindertransport scheme.

When war was declared, many hundreds of the Kitchener camp refugees enlisted in the British army in autumn 1939. My father was one of these volunteers.

For the first few years of the war, the refugees were only permitted to join the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps – an unarmed labour unit. My dad was in 69 Company, AMPC.

In January 1940, 69 Company was sent to France as part of the British Expeditionary Force. During the main Dunkirk retreat, Pioneer Corps soldiers stayed behind to 'hold the line', while thousands returned to safety. They were ordered to destroy vehicles and ordnance so they would not fall into enemy hands. Finally, 69 Company left St Malo for Britain on three unescorted fishing trawlers on 16 June 1940.

Next, 69 Company was moved around the country laying mines, digging ditches, and erecting miles of barbed-wire fencing. By autumn they were clearing bomb sites in Bexley, recovering victims, and bringing out the dead. In December 1940, five of the company were killed and 19 injured when a bomb hit their bus.

In 1941, 69 Company arrived in Sedbergh, to construct a large petrol and oil depot. Many were billeted in the old workhouse (image below, 2023), and some were billeted at the vicarage in Hardraw, including my father.



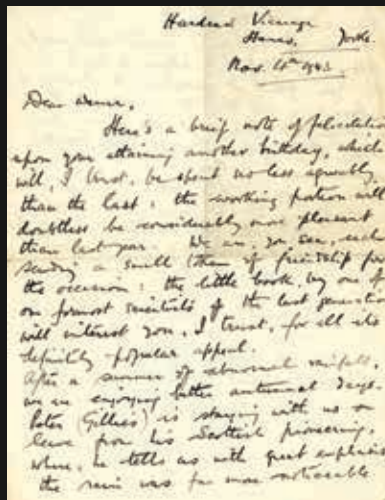
As a child growing up in Yorkshire, I often heard talk of 'Uncle John' Steele, vicar of St Mary and St John's Church, Hardraw. He and his wife Margaret (Meg) befriended my father and other German Jewish refugees in the heart of their home – a loving kindness that was especially needed

when my dad learned after the war that none of his close family had survived the Holocaust.

There is an account of the Pioneer Corps' stay in Sedbergh in a book by Norman Bentwich, I Understand the Risks. Bentwich outlines the work the soldiers were carrying out here, but also describes dinner parties and concerts, and the relationships formed with people in the town:

"It was not long before they had made friends in many quarters ... They were at first invited in the spirit of kindness and general hospitality to soldiers. But on acquaintance they continued to be popular guests for their own sake. They had good manners and were intelligent. But chiefly they were interesting persons ...

When the time came for them to leave some months later, there was genuine regret that they were going. Their association with the people of the town had been one of mutual benefit. Friendships then formed remain to the present day, and are preserved by letter-writing and occasional visits."



Letter from the Steele family to Werner Weissenberg, 4 November 1943

By this date, Werner had been transferred to work as a radiographer in the Royal Army Medical Corps.

When the time came for them to leave some months later, there was genuine regret that they were going.

Their association with the people of the town had been one of mutual benefit. Friendships then formed remain to the present day, and are preserved by letter-writing and occasional visits." ■

Dr Clare Weissenberg, Designer and editor of the online collaborative 'Kitchener Camp Project':

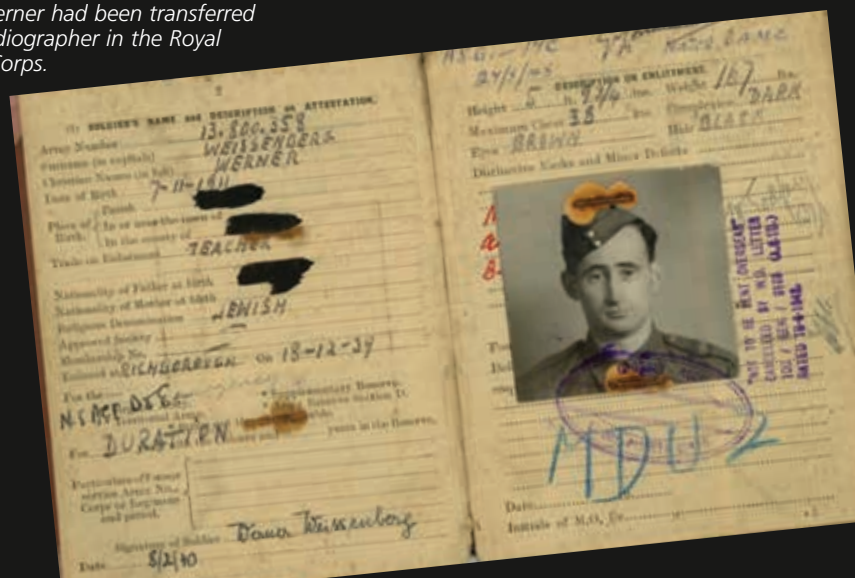
This can be found at <https://kitchenercamp.co.uk>. And of a travelling exhibition, Leave to Land: The Kitchener Camp Rescue, 1939.

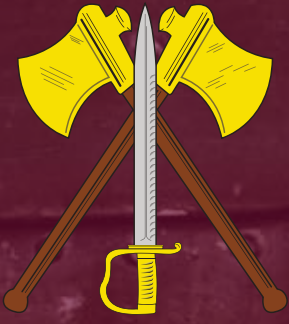
The online project and the exhibition were donated to the Wiener Holocaust Library, London, to mark the 80th anniversary of the Kitchener rescue in 2019.

Two of the newspaper articles on my research into the Kitchener camp rescue can be read at the following links:

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/01/27/kitchener-camp-sandwich-jews-fleeing-nazis-kindertransport/>

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/24/kitchener-camp-sandwich-kent-german-jews-haven>





Uncle Tom's Archive

Pioneer Tom Appleyard BEM has been about a bit... from rescuing the guns in WW2 and defeating the enemy to meeting our past Queen. Each issue we will feature some of Tom's photos from his own personal collection.



■ Uncle Tom aboard a submarine on a secret mission into enemy territory. Did you know he has a submariner badge! Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom, providing close protection detail to the Royal family and now King Charles! Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom (left) revisiting Normandy, with General Eisenhower and Double Agent Hans Major Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom, showing his famous moves at Woolworths Christmas Dance at Stratford Upon Avon Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ We all know Tom is a legend, but did you know his Grandad was also a legend! Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom and better half, pictured with his new patented device that removes litter and midges Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ We can now confirm the rumour that Uncle Tom trained Steve McQueen in the film The Great Escape Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom and better half, modelling the latest in active camouflage technology Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom beats everyone to win the smallest cup in history Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom pictured on left had picked up all the litter for the 1968 Shakespeare Birthday Parade Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Uncle Tom, wins the top prize after beating everyone in the Army at shooting the most Germans during WW2 Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Tom pictured modelling a Dino Suit, which he used to evade capture, whilst hiding in a zoo Picture: Uncle Toms Archive



■ Douglas, Garth & Andrew



■ Stephen Moore



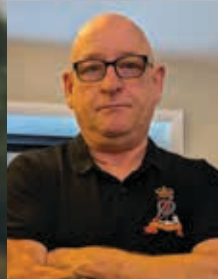
■ Steve Layzell



■ Back Row from BBC



■ The Hindmarshes



■ Steve Williams



■ Stephen McLaughlin outside Civil Service Club with Pioneers you may recognise!



■ Sid Blinston - Met this chap 10 times today & on each occasion it was an absolute pleasure



■ Todd Harrison ta Billy for inviting us



■ Tara Mee and Norman



■ David De Souza on GB News



■ Tony Rogers



■ SSgt Darren Swinney laying a wreath at the grave of Cpl Ginge Roberts on behalf of 282 MC Sqn RLC



■ Todd Harrison - thank you Billy Dilkes for inviting us.



■ Phil Cooke as promised I would do every year paid my respects to my best mate in the forces

REMEMBRANCE DAY PIONEER GALLERY



■ Father and Son, Welches



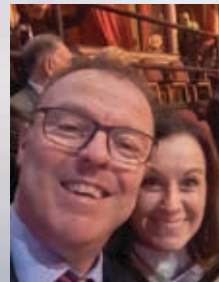
■ Chris Batty



■ Clifford Umpleby and Daz Pettit



■ Craig Lewi Lewis and Mrs



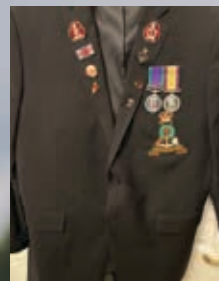
■ Dave Weakling Albert Hall



■ Todd Harrison One of the most humbling and overwhelming experiences I've ever had, thank you Billy Dilkes for inviting us.



■ Darren Burton



■ David Burns



■ Jack Chinn



■ Glen Rosser



■ Jay Leach



■ Jim Winters



■ Jed Bourne



■ Mark Cordy



■ Steve and Joy Waddomgton



■ Nick Screen

remembrance



■ Reg Brummie Lees



■ Rob Sturgeon

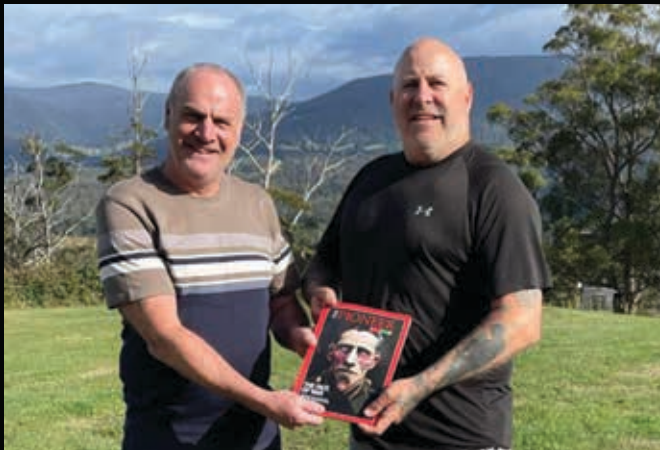


■ Mathew Shearer, lest we forget



■ Sheridan Hollands





■ Kevin Kittle and Jay Leach travels 12,000 miles to deliver the best magazine in the world. How far can you take yours? Picture: Supplied



■ Reunion Weekend 2024 Picture: Paul Brown



■ Phil Speddy Memorial Walk - Rawtenstall Remembrance with Louise Cooper Deputy Lieutenant of Lancashire Picture: Phil Speddy



■ Reunion Weekend 2024 Picture: Paul Brown



■ Reunion Weekend 2024 Picture: Paul Brown



■ Taff Thomas Yearly BBQ at his house Picture: Taff Thomas



■ Reunion Weekend 2024 Picture: Paul Brown



■ There must be centuries worth of experience here and no doubt a lot of stories to tell! Reunion Weekend 2024. Picture: Paul Brown



■ Good to see Geordie and his better half again. Pioneer Reunion 2024 Picture: Paul Brown



■ Kelvin and Crew. Reunion Weekend 2024. Picture: Paul Brown



■ Rare that I put a photo of myself in here, but when pictured with this cool dude at the reunion one has to make an exception Picture: Supplied



■ Reunion Weekend 2024. Ian, the badge on your top is tat) Picture: Paul Brown



■ Never Forgotten Wall at Bicester Pioneer Reunion Weekend Picture: Supplied



■ Pioneer Birthday, Wootton, organised by Uncle Tom Appleyard
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Birthday, Wootton, organised by Uncle Tom Appleyard
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Wreath laid at Graven Hill, in memory of Ginge and Sili
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Pioneer Birthday, Wootton, organised by Uncle Tom Appleyard
Picture: Paul Brown



■ Cenotaph Eve, Pnrs in White Hart, Bicester
Picture: Supplied



■ Cenotaph 2024 - Glad you enjoyed the day lads, see you again next year!
Picture: Supplied



■ Westminster - Garden of Remembrance 2024
Picture: Supplied



■ Ladies Dinner Night

Picture: Tom Appleyard



■ Billy with Will Ross and wives

Picture: Tom Appleyard



■ Did you know we have 2 In-Pensioners. Here is Reg pictured at Officers Dinner Night 2024

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Billy at Ladies Dinner Night, did you know he has special eating requirements? Mess tin and Mario diggers only!

Picture: Tom Appleyard



■ Officers Dinner Night 2024

Picture: Paul Brown



■ Ride to the Wall 2024

Picture: Billy Dilkes



■ Northampton Branch Christmas Party

Picture: Supplied

We dig through the archives of thousands of Pioneer articles and photos, picking out the very best ones that we think are of historical significance or are just very good photos.



Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: RPCA Archives

HAVE modified this section to not only contain some great photographs but also writeups on some notable Pioneers and featuring what they got upto.

At the top we have a picture that shows the construction of the huge Mulberry Harbour. They were constructed in a number of secret locations in the UK. Some of this was done at Lepe but this photo is likely to be Stokes Bay, which is very similar.

On this facing page we have details on a Pioneer whom joined 2 SAS in WW2 just after they were formed.

Over the page we have a bloody superb photograph that was kindly sent in by Douglas Miller and which is also featured on our front page. I got this colourised and what a photo! One of best have seen.

The caption that goes with this photo is 'A queue for Tea' - A study as Pioneers pause during their work in the demolition of dangerous buildings in the City, to enjoy a welcome cup of tea. Dated January 13th 1941.

Below that we have another superb photo sent in by Douglas, titled 'The packs are on their backs again' - Men of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps, about to go overseas, parading in full equipment at the East Coast town where they have been undergoing training.

These men, all over 35 and many of them veterans of the last war, will undertake non-combatant duties. Dated Dec 17th 1939. Many of these men did end up in combat, particularly during the withdrawal at Dunkirk and some of those pictured were likely killed when HMS Lancastria was sunk.

On the facing page we the details of an Irish Pioneer called Thomas Cartwright. What a character! He must of moved up and down the ranks more than any individual I have ever seen! And then bags himself a Military Medal. His medal collection is owned by our historian Lt Col John Starling and a great set of history to go with the set!

Due to space cannot show the full account of his history, but I'm sure you can get this idea - gets promotion, goes AWOL or steals something, gets demoted, rinse and repeat :) ■



Digging through the archives...

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

TOP SECRET

LEVEL 1
SECURITY
CLEARANCE
REQUIRED

3314921 L/CPL John McGuire

DATE: June 1941 ORIGINATOR: Lt Col William Stirling, 2 SOE

SUBJECT:
3314921 L/CPL John McGuire. Operation Sleepy Lad B.



John McGuire was born on 16 October 1921 in the parish of Blythswood, Glasgow. In May 1939, whilst working as an apprentice electrical engineer at D. H. Sutherland, he joined the 9th Gordon Highlanders Battalion, TA and was embodied that August. In February 1941 he was reposted to 2nd Battalion, Gordon Highlanders, and soon after transferred to the 'Special Wing Pioneer Corps' where he joined No 831 Smoke Production Company. He was promoted to lance corporal in June 1941 and to corporal at beginning of August, but reverted to lance cpl later that month on being surplus to establishment. He applied to join Airborne Forces in June 1942 but received no response. 2 months later he was posted to a new company in Ledbury where on of his NCO's noted 'small and plenty of punch'. In April 1943, whilst serving with 293 Coy in Gloucester, he reverted to the rank of private at his own request and embarked for North Africa as a reinforcement. Although it is not known when he volunteered for 2 SAS it is likely that this was soon after its formation the following month. He regained his stripe that August.

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McGuire took part in Op Sleepy Lad B in Italy towards the end of 1943. Tasked with destroying enemy lines of communication on the Adriatic coast his party of five was put ashore close to River Musene, on the night of 18 Nov. Led by Maj Sandy Scratchley the men moved inland and took refuge at a friendly farm. The following night McGuire and Para Selwyn Brown blew the railway line north of Porto Recanti, stopping an oncoming train and being shot at for their troubles. The arrival of fresh German troops restricted further attached and when the Royal Navy failed to pick the party up from their pre-arranged beach the men found themselves stranded, with McGuire now suffering from malaria. He struggled to keep up during the march to Porto Civitanova where Scratchley hoped they might steal a boat to return to Allied territory. They arrived on 2 Dec just in time to watch the Royal Navy sink the only 2 available schooners and bomb the town. Having waited for the enemy to repair one of the vessels so that they could take it from them, the intended ship set sail at night and they were forced to requisition a fishing boat. They weighed anchor on the 14th, crossing allied lines the following evening despite being shelled by a German battery enroute. McGuire died of 'aspiration asphyxia' on 20 February 1944 at No 1 Mobile Military Hospital having been found unconscious in his billet. A signal dated 2 May points to probable cause of inhalation of inhalation piece chewing gum into bronchus no delay treatment'. Buried Bari Cemetery II D 25 Italy.

CLASSIFIED

**DO NOT
PHOTOCOPY**

FOR YOUR EYES ONLY



CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

2714825 Sgt Thomas Cartwright

TOP SECRET

LEVEL 1
SECURITY
CLEARANCE
REQUIRED

DATE: 28 Dec 1945 ORIGINATOR: Lt Col John Starling

SUBJECT: Illegally enlisted as 13037716 Pte Charles BAKER at Wolverhampton on 30 October 1940 and being sent to 11 Centre. He originally enlisted in the AMPC as 13000458 on 27 October 1939. Went from Pte to A/Cpl, to Lcpl, to Pte, to A/Cpl, to LSgt, to A/Sgt, to Sgt, to Cpl, to A/WO2, to A/LCpl, to A/Cpl, to Pte, to LCpl, to ACpl, to ASgt, to Sgt, awarded Military Medal and Mentioned in Despatches. Action at Dunkirk, Salerno. Died 20 August 1970.

<p>Born 4th Feb 1900, Moville, Londonderry, Co-Downegal. Enlisted 27th Oct 1939 Illegally enlisted as 13037716 Pte Charles BAKER at Wolverhampton on 30 October 1940 and being sent to 11 Centre. He originally enlisted in the AMPC as 13000458 on 27 October 1939.</p> <p>8 Feb 18 Pte Enlisted in Royal Irish Rifles, Belfast - No 22022 9 Apr 20 Awaiting DCM "Striking a superior Officer" on 1 Apr 20 SENTENCE - 56 days detention, 6 Days remission awarded. 30 Dec 39 Cpl Promoted A/Cpl 27 Feb 40 LCpl Reduced to LCpl for misconduct 18 Mar 40 Reverted to Pte 31 May 40 Disembarked UK 2 Aug 40 Sgt Appointed L/Sgt 8 Aug 40 Absent without leave (AWOL) - declared a DESERTER 2 Sep 40 30 Oct 40 Pte Enlisted NORTHAMPTON - to 11 Centre as 13037716 Charles BAKER Address - 7 St Mary's Terrace, Paddington 16 Dec 40 Promoted Sgt 5 Jan 41 Cpl Reverts to Cpl</p>	<p>16 Mar 41 WO2 Promoted A/WO2 18 Mar 41 Reverts to Cpl 10 Aug 41 Apprehended by civil police in London - Under Escort 15 Aug 41 Tried by FGCM Absent without leave 9 Aug 40 - 30 Oct 40. Loss by neglect of clothing and equipment to the value of £18 1 3 1/2d To be reduced in rank and to undergo detention for 28 days and be placed on stoppages of pay until he has made good the sum of £19 8 0 1/2d 9 Jan 42 Reverts to old Army number - 2714825 11 Feb 42 AWOL (6 - 8 Feb 42) 1 day 23 hours Forfeits 2 days pay 16 May 42 Name changed by statutory declaration to Thomas George CARTWRIGHT 23 Jun 42 LCpl Promoted A/LCpl 31 Aug 42 Pte Reverts to Pte and forfeits 1 days pay 4 Jan 43 FCGM TRURO. Making away with and selling clothing. Stealing property of a person subject to Military Law. SENTENCE - 112 days 23 Apr 43 Disembarked North Africa 3 May 43 LCpl Promoted LCpl Sep 43 17 Coy comprised part of a Beach Group which fought through the North</p>	<p>African campaign and then played an active part in the historic landing at Salerno, where they fought side by side with 201 Guards Brigade. Fighting, unloading supplies, carrying wounded back to FAPs, this Coy well merited the praise bestowed on it by the Commanders of 46 and 56 (London) Divisions. - WO/253/9 Eastern Command Notes (26 Group) 6 Dec 43 Sgt On the night of 19 Jan 44 Sgt Cartwright led his section carrying supplies in the COCURAEO area. The section found themselves under devastating shellfire, ten men being wounded. Sgt Cartwright continued alone and delivered his load. He then returned, and used the remaining men to carry the loads forward until all the supplies were delivered. He was himself later wounded. 29 Dec 44 Awarded Military Medal 2 Feb 45 Mentioned in Despatches 3 Apr 45 AWOL 17 hours on 3 Apr 45. Forfeits 1 day's pay and a severe reprimand 20 Sep 45 Discharge certificate Conduct - FAIR "A good NCO, in forward areas especially, where he deserved fully his MM"</p> <p>Note: Above is abridged, he was a character!</p>
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Collectors Corner

Welcome, this time I discuss Cap Badge dies, dodgy 1985-1993 2nd Cap Badges and much more! Also we feature some of your Pioneer finds that you have unearthed on your travels !

Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: Paul Brown

WELCOME back to my Collectors Corner pages. I will be featuring a mixture of Pioneer finds that we have found since the last edition and also featuring some Douglas Miller has picked up for his ever expanding Pioneer Museum this year :)

Space permitting, I also have various interesting features to share with you.

So let's kick this off! I was fortunate to bid and win on a range of Pioneer related cap badges and made a discovery that we were unaware of.

Did you know that the first die of the Queens Crown Blackpool Tower badge broke and that they had to make a replacement!

Below is a Royal Pioneer Corps Officers Cap Badge. This is made with the first die and on the next column is one made with the second die. Both were made by J R Gaunt and Son.

The Crowns are different and there is more detailing in the original badge made from the first die.



Then below we have the Other Ranks Queens Crown, with the first die (made in London) on the left and second die (made in Birmingham) on the right.



Other Rank badges are normally made of a material called "stay-brite", which is a anodised aluminium. Anodising is an electro-plating process resulting in a lightweight shiny badge. This is used because it is cheap, flexible and does not require as much maintenance compared to say a Brass cap badge.

Officers Cap badges are usually made of more expensive materials such as silver, enamel and gilt and most Officers beret badges are embroidered rather than metal or "stay-brite".

It wasn't just J.R. Gaunt that produced Cap badges with the Queens Crown 'Blackpool Tower'. Below are Royal Pioneer Corps Officers Cap badges made by London Badge & Button Co. and also Firmin & Sons.



When I get a chance I will take some detailed photos of the different badges with a dedicated Macro lens, which will show the differences more clearly.



Pioneer Finds...



■ Douglas Miller picked up this gorgeous Trench Art Cigarette Box with a lovely crossed rifle and axe badge.



■ Another Douglas find and an unusual piece which am not quite sure what it is! Some kind of Trench Art which opens with storage for something or other.



■ Douglas Miller picked up this gorgeous Trench Art Cigarette Box with a lovely crossed rifle and axe badge.



As well as the Officers Cap Badge it wasn't just G R Gaunt & Sons that produced an Other Ranks Cap Badge. Below is a picture of the Other Ranks Queens Crown 'Blackpool Tower' which was made by the London Badge & Button Co.



And here are some Queens Crown Other Ranks Cap Badges.



Now, let's have a look at some Collar badges. The below are Kings Crown Silver Officers Service Dress and Collar Badges.



Below we have Other Ranks Cap and Collar badges.



Here are some 'Blackpool Tower' Queens Crown Officers Collar badges, made by J R Gaunt & Sons.



Here are some Queens Crown Other Ranks Collar badges, made by J R Gaunt and Sons (first die) and London Badge & Button Co.



Below are Queens Crown Other Ranks Collar badges (first die), they are not straight, but I think gilt.



Pioneer Finds...



■ Douglas is now getting quite a collection of Pioneer Sweetheart Handkerchiefs!



■ Douglas picked up these first day covers from 1st June 1966 featuring Anniversary of the Bechuanaland Pioneer Corps



I also picked up some Kings Crown Other Ranks Plastic Cap Badges. One is marked Mark A Stanley & Sons, Walsall, the other Mark I-A A Stanley & Sons, Walsall.



In addition I picked up some Royal Pioneer Corps 2nd badge Officers Cap and Collar badges, made by London Badge & Button Co.



Below is Royal Pioneer Corps 2nd badge Other Ranks Staybright Cap badge, made by London Badge & Button Co and also a black combat version.

Many regiments blackened or wore a subdued version of their cap badge as a shiny cap badge may attract the enemy's attention on the battlefield. The practice of British soldiers operating in theatre with regimental headdress (i.e. beret) has all but died out.



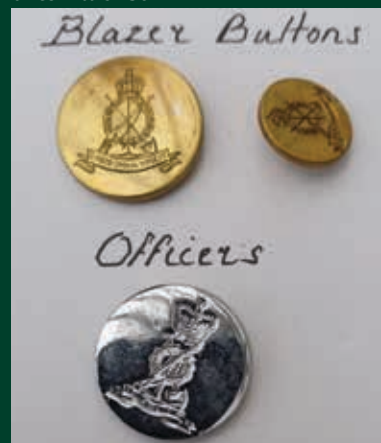
The above fills various gaps that I had in my own collection of Pioneer badges, I do however still require a Staybright Kings Crown Blackpool Tower badge! When I get this, the badges all framed should look rather impressive and probably be the most complete collection that have ever seen.

In addition to badges, I have also picked up some buttons. These are Uniform



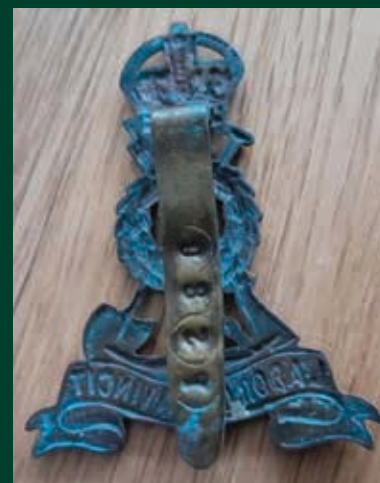
buttons and made by J R Gaunt & Sons.

Next up, some Blazer buttons made by Charles Pitt & Co.



I think that wraps up my recent badges haul. I am now in the process of putting together a complete WW2 uniform for a Pioneer, this should hopefully be in the next issue!

Now onto a badge that Douglas has picked up.



Someone has stamped 4 numbers of their regimental number on the clasp.

From our records it does not appear to be the last 4 digits but the first four digits, for which is shared by around 5 officers and numerous Palestinian Pioneers, so cannot pin point exactly who this belonged to.

It does not look brass but bronze, which can also go green with age. Officers wore bronze badges, it could of belonged to Lt Col Harry Wilfrid Salmon OBE but alas we would only be guessing. ■

Pioneer Finds...



■ A zippered pencil like case that is modelled on a WW2 Pioneer Side Cap. Never seen one before and a lovely find Douglas!



■ Douglas has picked up this nice WW2 Christmas Card from 121 Coy Pioneer Corps



■ Douglas has picked up a nice set of Bechuanaland Pioneer Corps badges. I particularly like the red backing with Bechuana underneath, quite scarce and you don't see many of these come up that often.

Union Flag or Union Jack?

Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: Paul Brown

TO get down to the bottom of this we consult the world's leading research and documentation centre for flags and flag information - The Flag Institute.

The Flag Institute is the largest organisation in the world that deals with flags and was founded in 1971. They provide services to HM Government and many other organisations around the world, on the use of flags.

Controversy persists about whether the British national flag should be called 'the Union Flag' or 'the Union Jack'.

Among those who are informed in the matter, it is generally accepted that either name be used. However, some people are convinced that 'Union Flag' is the only correct term and that 'Union Jack' should be used only when the flag is flown from jack-staff in the bows of a Royal Naval vessel or, at least when it refers to the use of the flag by the Royal Navy.

The general public almost universally uses the term 'Union Jack'. Today some people claim to perceive that this usage is being eroded by persons who deliberately adopt an unjustified viewpoint. The origins and relationships of the names 'Union Flag' and 'Union Jack' are historically far from clear.

Discussion on the matter is almost as old the flag itself. Each individual person tend to prefer and use the version of the name

he or she has always used. And while, since the mid 19th Century, most writers of books about flags have deemed the correct name to be 'Union Flag', they have nevertheless, often conceded that 'Union Jack' is widely accepted.

No definitive pronouncement or definition of a correct name of the national flag of the Union pattern has even been made. Mentions of names in royal proclamations or in statements made in Parliament do not have any statutory effect unless they are in the form of specific determination of the proper name in a proclamation, or an order in council of in an Act of Parliament or statutory Instrument.

It should be made clear that in the absence of any specific designation of a name, it is possible for the flag to have more than one name. Such names, may be equal in status, or one name may have more official status and the other more popular status, but either may be validly used.

Since its creation, the Union pattern has had many names. These include:-

1. The Britain; The British Flag.
2. The Banner of the Union; the Union; the Great Union; the Flag of the Union; the Union Flag.
3. His Majesty's Jack; The King's Jack; Our Jack; the Jack; the Jack Flag; the Union Jack.

Naval records of the early years of the 17th Century were mostly destroyed in a

fire in 1618.

The first Proclamation of the Flag by James I in 1606 says little about the new flag and no name of any kind is given to the new flag at this point. Even the word "Union" is not mentioned in the proclamation.

The next proclamation in 1634 by Charles I, was the perception that the merchant ships needed to be distinguished from Royal Navy ships and deprived the merchant ships from flying the Union pattern from the top main and be for Royal Navy alone.

After Charles I death, merchant ships continued to fly the Union Pattern.

Charles II in 1674 made several references to flags and jacks.

There is much more history in this time but not enough space here to publish.

However, during all historical periods no definitive pronouncement or definition of a correct name of the national flag of the Union pattern has ever been made.

The Admiralty for many years referred to the Flag as the Union Jack and in 1902 the Admiralty issued a statement stating that either name, Union Flag or Union Jack could be used.

In 1908, the Earl of Crewe on behalf of the Government replied to a question stating that the Union Jack might be flown on land by every citizen in the Empire. The Union Jack should be regarded as the National Flag and flown on all land by all His Majesty's subjects. In 1933 this was echoed by Sir John Gilmoure. ■

Pioneer Finds...



■ Douglas picked up this lovely Silver Cup featuring 405 Royal Pioneer Corps. It is the Marriott Cup.



■ Douglas picked up this Pioneer Corps badged ashtray. It looks like it is made from brass and has probably been made from a shell casing





Report: Paul Brown
Pictures: Paul Brown

Why buy cheap tat?

I discuss another controversial subject - the 2nd Royal Pioneer Cap badge that came out on the rebadging parade at Simpson Barracks on Wednesday, 13th February 1985.

THE second badge of the Royal Pioneer Corps removed the pick and shovel of the badge to portray that the outdated image of labouring was eradicated.

The new badge instead had the inclusion of the Pioneer axes and sword and is both traditional and portrays the symbolic skills by members of the Corps in their military role.

So you may ask, what is so controversial about the second badge.

Well to answer that question we need to look at what the badge should look like as signed off by our late Queen Elizabeth II below.

If you served under this cap badge then why would you want to go and purchase some cheap tat of a badge that looks absolutely shit?

The second Pioneer badge has been re-produced very badly by many people and Pioneers continue to get ripped off and buy them!

If you want the badge to look right and keep any profit within the Association than my advice would be to speak to the Association. Billy will sell you a proper badge!

To better understand the difference between a badge that looks the part and one that looks total shit, I will endeavour to show you some proper shit badges that people sell on Ebay and all over the internet.

Let's start off with a large flag. Just look how shit this looks!



Everything is wrong - axes, wreath, colour, font used, sword, crown etc. Absolutely dreadful. That gold colour with the fake glow is horrible and the real badge does not have this.

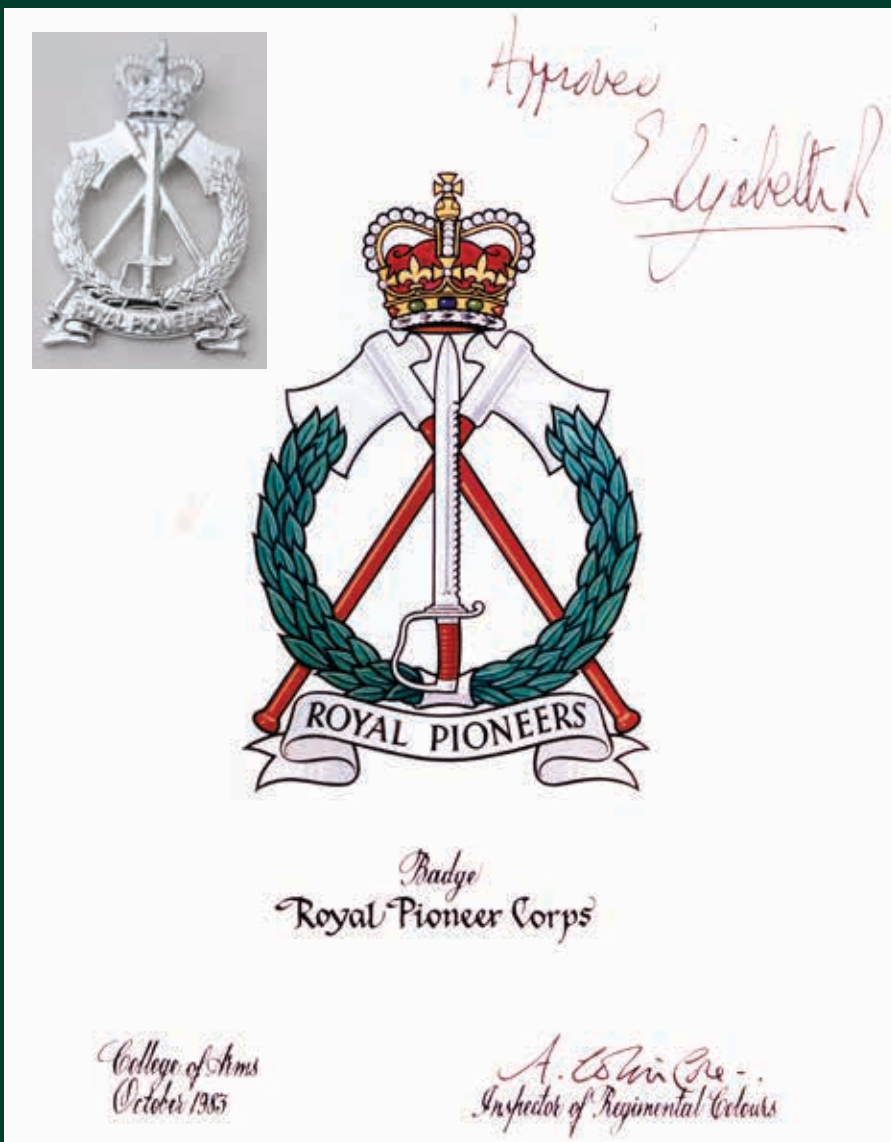
Now lets have a look at a truly awful blazer badge. Not looking as bad as the flag above, however completely wrong in every area! Rubbish!



And another blazer badge and am afraid it doesn't get any better! The person who produced has taken it upon themselves to completely get everything wrong!



This badge is truly exceptional tat being gold hand wired embroidered and available for £18!





Next up we have a shit sticker, more crappy gold colouring, wrong axes, wrong sword, wrong colouring, wrong font, crown nearly there but not right either. Laurel getting there but not right either.



Next up we have a truly awful plaque. The shit gold colouring seems to be a feature of most of the truly awful versions of this badge that are for sale out there. This badge is also wrong in every way.



Next up, an embroidered polo top. Wrong in everyway, crown was close, why gold laurels, lol!



Now for more tat! You have to be a mug to pick up this next item!



It's currently Christmas time so quite fitting to show you a right piece of tat to hang on your tree! Check out this bauble! Truly horrible in everyway!



It is one thing selling pure dodgy tat on Ebay etc, however when one produces the second badge so badly wrong and displays it in a Memorial Garden you have to question ones sanity.



The Second badge is not the only thing wrong with the plaque. The date on the plaque of The Pioneer Corps is 17th October 1939 to 26th November 1945.

The 17th October 1939 was actually the formation of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps. The cap badge was a Kings crown, not a Queens crown as shown above.

The Pioneer Corps came into existence on 22nd November 1940 and The Royal Pioneer Corps came into existence on 28th November 1946. The cap badge was the same, a Kings Crown Blackpool Tower.

On the plaque they originally spelt November wrong and have attempted to cover it up but not doing a very good job.

A truly awful plaque that was not well researched at all.

Next up we have a Remembrance Poppy Pin for which no doubt no proceeds got to any charity from its seller!



You may be thinking that doesn't look to bad. Certainly not there with the truly awful tat, but never the less it is wrong.

The laurels should be going over the axes and why are the laurels that truly awful gold colour again, they have used green, colour them green you muppets!

The scroll is also wrong, axes should be brown, not gold! Same goes for the sword handle.

Next up, we have a truly awful phone case!



This seems to be using the same shit design as seen on the mug and the flag and many other items of tat seen all over the place!

Everything is wrong with the design of the badge, a shame as case would be ok!

How can so many people get this cap badge so horribly wrong!

Even the RLC get this badge wrong. This is being displayed on the RLC Archive Page at [www.rlicarchive.org/Content/ RPC](http://www.rlicarchive.org/Content/_RPC)



Norman told them about it years ago. A truly awful badge that is completely wrong in all areas, truly horrible.

Next up, we have yet another shit embroidered blazer badge. This one the seller states as being MOD approved!



MOD approved or not it is truly rubbish in everyway!

Even Douglas Miller at the Unofficial Pioneer Corps Museum has the wrong badge on his house :) Sorry Douglas!



We have took off his address as don't want any thieving gits nicking his Pioneer Museum!

Well, I'm running out of space to show you more shit tat but I think you get the message! The 2nd badge is a great badge, avoid the tat!

There is one area that does differ from the one signed off from our late Queen to how the Cap Badge came out, pictured on the facing page and that is the font used.

The one signed off has a more serif font, whereas the one that went into production you will notice has smoother edges very much like a cross between a serif and a sans serif font. ■





Which one - SLR or SA80?

Well, I have discussed the controversial subject of the Union Jack and also the 2nd Badge, so let's discuss another - the SLR versus the SA80! (also named the LA85A1, L85A2 and L86A2 and LS85A3, together with some other weapons you may recognise...

Report: Paul Brown / John Starling
Pictures: Paul Brown / John Starling

THERE are many polls on the internet that pit the SLR vs the SA80 and it is always the SLR that wins the polls, is the SLR actually better though or the polls tell a different story.

Personally I have found that a lot of the polls do get filled in by much older veterans whom either have little experience with the SA80 or only fired the early version of the weapon.

I will admit though that I am biased towards the SA80 and had the SLR for many years before getting one. My personal reason I that I got more stoppages with the SLR than the SA80 and this was after trying many different SLRs.

Perhaps the SLRs I tried were old and knackered like many of the old stalwarts who praise it, lol :) - now I am in trouble!

This was not the only reason, I had more rounds in the SA80 mag, could fire automatic if required and I liked the weighting of the rifle and the fact that the bayonet was easier to pull out of a body and the fact that it seemed to be fine in all environments, hold, cold, wet etc.

Talking of the bayonet when soldiers of the Princess of Wales Royal Regiment went into battle with fixed bayonets on their SA80s during the Battle of Al Amara in Iraq on 14th May 2004, it was the first time that fixed bayonets had been used by British troops since the Falklands War. It was highly effective compared to the SLRs.

My only problem once with the SA80, was that after firing a dozen mags of mixed live and tracer on a night Ambush on Dartmoor, the next day when I went to clean my weapon, I could not release the working parts, hence a technique of taking the susat sight off, opening the parts and giving it a good whack on the inside of a 4 tonner soon released the parts flying up the inside of said vehicle!

The poll of SLR vs SA80 received around 360 comments, many by old timers. However, there were some telling comments from some whom served with both and had fired the A2 version, such as Daz Moore and he said "B, however A2 version, perfect in Afghan".

I thought it best to ask an expert on the subject and happen to know the very

person! Our historian John Starling whom for many years taught the subject at The Defence Academy. So, I got him to write a small piece for this article. Over to you John...

The British Army Rifle - 1950-2020

"The British Infantry Section will engage the enemy at 600 yards."

This statement, outlined in Operation Shooting Volume 1 (Shoot to Kill) was to lay the requirements for the Army Rifle post 1945. To achieve this range required a precision made, long barrelled medium calibre weapon.

It must be understood that there is no such thing as a 'perfect weapon' for all situations. The arguments as to the 'pros and cons' of the SLR vs SA80 will go on, much influenced by what personnel were initially trained on and personal experience. 'The old days were always better.'

Ammunition

The key element to any weapon design is the ammunition. It is the bullet that kills the enemy. At the end of World War 2 there were a number of infantry calibres of ammunition - .303" (7.7 mm) in the UK, .3" (7.62 mm) in the US (30/06 round) and 7.92 mm in Germany and much of Europe. With the formation of NATO in 1949 a decision was made to adopt a single calibre of round and a standard Semi-Automatic/ Automatic weapon (a weapon that uses the energy of the shot fired to re-load).

Simple physics dictate the size of the round. In the 1950/60' a "ball" round consisted of a lead core and a copper jacket. Mass (or weight is important) as it give range and energy.

You can throw a golf ball further than a table tennis ball because it is heavier. Immediately post war the British Established the 'Ideal Cartridge Panel' to look into the optimum size of round and after much research came up with a .280" (7mm) round as big optimum for the range.

They developed a new weapon, the EM2 to fire this ammunition.

At the end of the War the major industrial/economic power was the US and they dictated that the new round should be their 7.62mm round and all proposed new weapons were produced in .280 and 7.62mm.

In 1951 the EM2 was officially adopted

by the British Army. Winston Churchill the Prime Minister decided to adopt the Belgian FAL (7.62mm) to enable standardisation with Europe and in the hope the US would adopt the same rifle, of course this never happened and the US sided in May 1957 to adopt the 7.62mm M14.

The Self-Loading Rifle (SLR) was a British version of the FAL, and involved a number of modifications not least the removal of the Automatic Capability.

Later the US, without consultation with its allies, re-calibrated to 5.56 mm (.225") developed by Remington for use in development of a lightweight combat rifle developed by Eugen Stoner (later the AR 15/M16).

Initially selected by the US Air Force they were issued to all US service in 1963. The maximum range was 500m.

In 1970 NATO again signed an agreement to standardise. A new type of round was introduced the Belgian SS109. Although referred to as a 'ball' round the UA nickname of 'Semi armoured-piercing' is more realistic as it has a steel tip in front of the lead core to penetrate body armour.

The different physics involved meant a different spin rate for stability and so the US had to re-barrel the M16 to an A2 variant.

The lighter round required less propellant and made the ammunition lighter. The round weighs about half of the of the 7.62 round (12.3 grams compared to 25.4 grams) making the ammunition load much less. It also reduced recoil but in reality was only really effective to about 300-400m.

There has been much criticism of the lack of 'stopping power.' The round is designed to 'yaw' and deform in flesh but has to hit at over 600 m/s.

The recent trend to reduce barrel length on the US and other countries, and has caused lower muzzle velocity have resulted in the bullet not having this critical velocity on hitting the target.

This has reduced effective range to about 300m. (Well short of the doctrinal range of 600m). The SA80 still has a 20" barrel and so is effective to about 400m.

To enable body armour penetration at longer ranges the M80A1 7.62 mm round was developed in 2014.

This has accompanied the introduction of the Sharpshooter Rifle (L129A1) in 7.62 mm calibre into the infantry section for longer



ranges. Here is the what it looks like.



In the US the Enhanced Battle Rifle was developed around the old M14 frame.

Ergonomics

Ergonomics is about handling the rifle and ease of operation. Both the SLR and SA80 weigh about the same when loaded nearly 5kgs. The main difference is the 'bullpup' design. This design was first seen in the 1950's with the EM2 pictured below (the British .280" rifle mentioned above).

In moving the working parts forward of the trigger you can maintain a long barrel (which gives you longer range) for a much shorter weapon.

The other main advantage is that the centre of gravity of the weapon means you can carry it with one hand easily.

The biggest disadvantages are the complexity of the mechanisms and in the British case only being able to fire right handed.

The need to maintain a long barrel for accuracy and range has been recognised in other countries and they have adopted 'bullpup' systems, Austria, Australia, Israel and China.

Firing the weapon is more comfortable as the barrel is more in line with the shoulder so you do not experience the recoil 'jump.' This makes training easier for recruits.



Reliability

The other major factor that has 'bugged' the L85 programme is reliability.

The introduction was rushed and for political purposes although many of the original problems were identified in troop trials the issue still went ahead so we get the stories of magazines falling off etc and springs being too weak and the need to 'forward assist.'

Most of the problems were overcome by the re-work as the A2 in year 2000.

It has been further improved by the introduction of the A3 (pictured below) in 2016. It is now one of the most reliable weapons available.



Conclusion

There is no perfect weapon for all circumstances.

It is the author's opinion that for short range (up to 400m), mobile warfare where movement in confined spaces (vehicles, building etc) the bullpup 5.56 mm is the better weapon.

For longer ranges and defensive warfare

the 7.62 mm systems are better.

Finally even the US are not beginning to think that 5.56 mm is too light for the ranges required and have. Over the past few years been looking at 6.5mm (Credmore) & 6.8 mm rounds. If only they had listened to their British allies in 1950

So there we have it from John, so give me an A2/A3 SA80 :)

To further expand on the A3 version. This was first unveiled in 2016 with working models on display in 2017 and the official adoption of the weapon taking place in 2018.

There were numerous changes from the SA80A2 design, including a modification to the upper receiver and full-length rail system for optional add-ons such as a vertical foregrip, laser pointer and torch.

It also includes a weight saving of 100g and a new Flat Dark Earth coating offering improved durability and better camouflage across various environments.

The Mid Life Improvement project raised an initial investment of 5.4 million to have 5,000 weapons upgraded initially, with plans for more weapons to be upgraded in the future. The MLI Project should see the weapon in service with the British Military beyond 2025.

The A3 received further upgrades in 2020 following feedback from soldiers and these upgrades mainly included improvements to the ergonomics of the handguard a switch from Heckler & Koch's EKey accessory attachment to Magpul's M-Lok.

So I suppose the next subject would be LSW (L86) vs GPMG, lol :)

However, there is no contest here! I absolutely hated the LSW and how it was supposed to replace the L7A2 GPMG at the section level, I never know! Thankfully it didn't.

The role of the LSW was ultimately filled by the FN Minimi known in service as the L110A1-A3 light machine gun. It is a belt fed weapon with a quick change barrel in the same way as the GPMG.

Owing to its high level of accuracy in semi automatic mode, the primary use of the LSW (L86) shifted to that of a designated marksman rifle following the introduction of the L110A1.

I still remember having to lug along an LSW with my L96 Sniper rifle.

The LSW was withdrawn from service in 2019 and the Minimi L110A1-A3 was replaced by the L129A1 Sharpshooter Rifle, as pictured on the facing page.

The initial variant of the L129A1 was a 7.62 NATO round and the second updated variant was called the L129A2 which had a 6.5mm Creedmoor round. The change from 7.62mm NATO round to 6.5 Creedmoor was due to the 6.5 Creedmoor's better ability to successfully engage enemy targets at distances around and over 800metres.

The disadvantage being a shortened barrel life and new chambering into the logistics chain.

The British Army Sniper, long range weapon used to be the L96, however this was replaced by the L115A3 rifle as part of the Sniper System Improvement Program.

It is a large calibre weapon that provides state of the art telescopic day and night, with all weather sights, increasing a snipers range considerably.

I have been lucky enough to fire this

weapon but only on a short range, however I could see what a great weapon it was.

It fires a 8.59mm round, which is heavier than the 7.62mm round of the L96 and it is less likely to be deflected over extremely long ranges.

Both the L96 and L115A3 are virtually the same weight of around 6.5kg.

The L115A3 was first deployed to Afghanistan in May 2008 and the Sniper System Improvement Programme included night sights, spotting scopes, laser range finders and tripods.

The L115A3 largely replaces the L96 and L115A1 sniper rifles previously fielded by UK forces.

It has an effective range of 1500 metres with 8.59mm Lapua Magnum ammunition. With a 5 round magazine and made by Accuracy International whom also made the L96 Sniper Rifle.

In 2009, Craig Harrison, a Corporal of Horse in the Blues and Royals RHG/D of the British Army struck two Taliban machine gunners consecutively at a range of 2475 metres or 1.54 miles using a L115A3 rifle.

When this shot was examined using external ballistics software, it shown that the shot would have struck their target after nearly 6 seconds of flight time, having lost 93% of its kinetic energy. It also shown that it retained 255 m/s (840ft/s) of its original 936 m/s (3030 ft/s) velocity and having dropped 121.39 m (398 ft 3 in) from the original bore line.

Due to the extreme distances and travel time involved, even a light cross breeze would have diverted such a shot 9.2 m (360 in) off target, which would have required



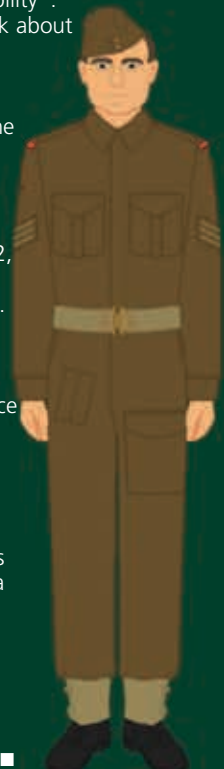
The Corporal reported that the environmental condition at the 1043m (3422 ft) elevation of Musa Qala was perfect for long range shooting, "no wind, mild weather, clear visibility".

In an interview it took about nine shots for him and his spotter to initially range the target successfully. Surprised he admitted this!

His record has been superseded by a Sniper (name withheld) from 2Cdo Regiment in 2012, using a Barrett M82A1 at a distance of 2815m.

Then in 2017 a Canadian sniper (name withheld) with a 50 Cal BMG achieved a distance of 3,540m.

Then in Nov 2023 Viacheslav Kovalskri, a Ukrainian Sniper, achieved a distance of 3800m with a Horizon's Lord .57 calibre, firing a 14.5 x 114 mm round, which is a heavy machine gun and anti material cartridge. 2 Ukrainian Snipers are in the Top 5 at present, both firing .57 rounds. ■



Researching Pioneers

I thought it would be fitting to give you an insight into researching through WW2 Pioneer Corps War Records. They can provide fascinating reading!

Report: Paul Brown / Rob Clark
Pictures: Paul Brown

TO fully understand how to go about going through the vast amount of research information available we need to understand how the Corps was structured and hence I will give a little background to begin with.

The overwhelming majority of those who served with the Pioneer Corps were either too old to serve in a front line unit or had been placed in a low medical category. Many of the older soldiers were veterans of the First World War. There were also thousands of refugees, many of them Jewish, who initially served in "Alien Companies" of the Pioneer Corps. After a period of service in the Pioneer Corps, many were transferred to other regiments or corps. There were also companies raised from across the world, including of Indians, Basutos (from present-day Lesotho), Mauritians and Palestinians. The photograph above shows men at a London recruiting office wishing to enlist in the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps on 26 October 1939, the opening day of the Corps' enlistment.

Most of the Corps' units were companies which were divided into sections which often worked away from each other. The Pioneer Corps served around the world during the war, from Iceland and Italy to Madagascar and Malta. Wherever the British Army was operating, there was usually a large number of Pioneer Corps companies.

The tasks of the Pioneer Corps were varied but often involved manual labour. Many units found themselves stationed at ports, railheads and bases to help load or unload supplies. Work was also carried out on the construction and repair of roads and railways, often with the Royal Engineers. Over fifty Pioneer Corps companies served in London during the Blitz, clearing debris, demolishing damaged buildings, keeping roads open and rescuing survivors of the air raids. This was dangerous work and over a hundred soldiers of the Pioneer Corps were killed or seriously wounded during the Blitz. The Pioneer Corps also formed smoke companies which produced smoke screens. These companies were used both in Britain and around the world and were used to screen areas from air raids, e.g. oil refining plants at Suez, naval sites at Plymouth and Chatham and dams in Britain after the successful raid on Mohne Dam by the R.A.F.

Pioneer Corps war diaries can be very hit and miss regarding the level of detail found in them. While some contain long detailed entries and lots of appendices, you'll often find brief and repetitive entries. Most

companies served as part of a group which administered a number of companies under its command. I'd recommend also looking at the war diaries of the group the company was serving in as these will usually add more information and contain appendices missing from a company war diary. The group a company was serving with was usually recorded in its war diary. For example a Field return of officers, often show the No. Group they were serving with.

Not all war diaries will contain field returns of officers as they are usually only found when a company was abroad. They will usually be found with a field return of other ranks which also recorded the group, or area the company was serving under. If the company was serving in Britain, you'll often find a mention of the group within the daily war diary. Companies also served with areas, on the lines of communication, as army troops etc. and these usually have war diaries to consult. Orders of battle are very useful for finding out which group, area or formation a pioneer corps company is serving with.

Without having a copy of a company's war diary in front of you, it's often impossible to know which group they were serving with. However, companies often moved between groups which made it more difficult.

I am not going to put here the complete list of the Pioneer Corps Companies Order of Battle due to space but we do have a list of Pioneer Companies with their associated War Diary number, together with their relevant Group and the Group's War Diary number, they look like this and there are hundreds of them!

Pioneer Company	War Diary	Group	Group War Diary
1 PNC (Basutos) 285/2411	1 PNC 285/2411	1 PNC 285/2411	1 PNC 285/2411
1 PNC (Mauritians) 285/2412	1 PNC 285/2412	1 PNC 285/2412	1 PNC 285/2412
1 PNC (Palestinians) 285/2413	1 PNC 285/2413	1 PNC 285/2413	1 PNC 285/2413
1 PNC (Jewish) 285/2414	1 PNC 285/2414	1 PNC 285/2414	1 PNC 285/2414
1 PNC (Indian) 285/2415	1 PNC 285/2415	1 PNC 285/2415	1 PNC 285/2415
1 PNC (Other) 285/2416	1 PNC 285/2416	1 PNC 285/2416	1 PNC 285/2416

We also have the Smoke Companies Order of Battle, Non Combatant Corps Companies Order of Battle and Mobile Bath Units Order of Battle.

Another source of possible information is the war diaries of other Pioneer Corps companies which were part of the same group or mentioned in the war diary of the company you're researching. An order of battle or group war diary will record all the companies under its command. Pioneer Corps companies often worked closely with Royal Engineer companies. As you read a war diary, note down any mention of field

companies, artisan works companies, general construction companies etc. and look at their war diaries.

The most important document to research a soldier who served in the Pioneer Corps is their service record which is held by the Ministry of Defence. Without a service record, most soldiers will be impossible to research unless they became a casualty, you have a large quantity of documentation relating to their service or they were an officer. Even in these cases, you often hit a brick wall with your research very quickly. A service record should provide you with all the units a soldier served with and when. With this information, you can then view the correct war diaries to find out where they were stationed and the activities of their units.

The process to get a copy of a service record has changed. They are now held by the MOD and the National Archives and it is much easier to apply for them now.

There are only a small number of resources available online if you're researching a soldier who served in the British Army during the war. One of the most important is the War Office casualty lists available to search on Findmypast. These record all soldiers who died, were wounded, went missing or were captured during the war. Often, the exact company of a casualty was recorded, though they may just appear in a list headed "Pioneer Corps". With the date and unit of a casualty, you can turn to the company war diary to find out more. Findmypast also has the British Library's digitized newspaper archive which is an important collection to search if you're looking for a casualty. However, only a fraction of newspapers have been digitized from 1939-1945.

Another source of information for soldiers of the Pioneer Corps which is online is the citations for honours and awards which are part of the WO 373 series. These can be downloaded for a small fee from the National Archives' website. If you're looking for a prisoner of war of the Germans, you can search the WO 416 series. However, this series has only been catalogued between the surnames Aaby and Lusted at present, though work is continuing. If you're researching an officer, you can search the London Gazette for the date they were commissioned, promotions and any honours or awards. Officers are recorded by both their full name and initials in the gazette. The London Gazette's search engine is very unreliable.

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission recorded the deaths of all soldiers who died between 3 September 1939 and 31 December 1947. Over 4,400 soldiers who died serving with the Pioneer



Corps are listed with information recording their date of death and where they are buried or commemorated. A soldier's company wasn't always recorded but if it was, you can turn to its war diary to see if the circumstances of the soldier's death was recorded. Other information, may also be recorded e.g. the next of kin, the soldier's age or any honours or awards.

As we know the Pioneer Corps was initially known as the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps before it was redesignated in November 1940.

As mentioned previously we have the Order of Battle for The Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps for France May 1940.

The information in the table was taken from the order of battle of the British Expeditionary Force in France for May 1940 held at the National Archives in London. Its catalogue reference is WO 212/235: Order of Battle: British Expeditionary Force in

France: including Lines of Communication units. Our table shows which group an Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps company was serving with at the time. Catalogue references for both the company and its group are also recorded.

A war diary was written by an officer of a unit and they are the most important document to view to find out its location and activities. The war diaries of the British Expeditionary Force are part of the WO 167 series.

Most companies of the Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps served as part of a group which contained multiple companies.

If you would like to find out as much information as possible regarding a company, then it is also best to look at its group's war diary. There is usually information in a group's war diary which isn't found in the war diaries of the companies serving with it.

Also, there may be reports from the company you're researching in the group diary.

For example, the 1st, 105th, and 109th Companies Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps served with the No.1 Group. If you're researching the 1st Company's involvement as part of the British Expeditionary Force, then it would be worthwhile checking the No.1 Group's diary and also the war diaries of the 105th and 109th Companies. It is important to note that many companies served with more than one group during the campaign.

A small number of company war diaries are missing the month of May 1940, when the unit was evacuated from France.

Or, the month only contains field returns of officers and other ranks and not the daily entries. If so, then the war diary of the company's group will be the primary source of information for the period. ■



■ The war diary of the 33rd Company Auxiliary Military Pioneer Corps contains an annotated photograph album showing the unit celebrating Christmas Day at Rennes. Headquarters section is shown enjoying their Christmas dinner. It is very rare to find photograph albums in war diaries.

Picture: RPCA Archive

Pioneer Finds...



■ I picked up this 1939 Pioneer Corps Great Coat. I am putting together a complete WW2 Pioneer Soldiers uniform and kit and this is in need of many repairs and holes etc, so if anyone has any contacts who renovate and can fix a garment like this please let me know! Thank you Douglas for the heads up on this one.

AGM Minutes

The 75th Annual General Meeting of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association held at The Ex Services Club, Bicester on Friday 21st June 2024 at 1845 hours

President: Brigadier D Clouston MBE
Secretary: Lt Colonel (Retd)
B Dilkes MBE
Members Present: 206

ITEM 1. OPENING MINUTES OF 75th ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

1. The Secretary opened the meeting at 1845hrs by welcoming all present and reading the following:

Apologies: Col (Retd) R McDonald, Maj (Retd) S Woodward, Mr C Brown, Mr D Eaton.

Note: A large collective number of members were also travelling down from Nottingham after attending a Pioneer funeral and joined the meeting later.

2. The Secretary requested the full attention of those attending by playing a 'Thank You for your Service' memorial video which recognises those 26 Pioneer Association members who sadly passed away since the 74th AGM; this was followed by a 1-minute period of applause.

3. The minutes of the 74th AGM which had been circulated with the December 2023 Pioneer Newsletter were accepted as a true and accurate record of events, there were no outstanding matters arising.
CARRIED!

4. Matters Arising:
Pioneer Memorial - Pioneer Memorial Update – The previously proposed re-established of the Pioneer Memorial from St David's Bks to Worthy Down remains an alternative. However, Mrs Donna Ford (Bicester Town Council) attended a meeting with the Pioneer Secretary (Billy Dilkes) on Weds 22nd May 2024, to discuss the opportunity of erecting our original Pioneer memorial plaques onto a new memorial forecasted to be built on the Market Square (Bicester) in 2026.

The Market Square is due to become a new pedestrianised, alfresco eating type location with changes to the road system allowing safe access onto the square. Councillor Donna Ford is heading up the project and has agreed in principle for our request to be added to the project.

The Pioneer Secretary then put this to the vote that; the current Pioneer plaques will be held in Bicester until we receive confirmation, and then placed onto the new Memorial on Market Square.
CARRIED!

The Pioneer Book – This is now ready for print and a sample will be checked by the President before ordering 500 copies.

UPDATE OF COUNCIL MEMBERS

5. The following members will remain on the council: Lt Col (Retd) John Starling, Capt (Retd) Kev Jessop and Mr Norman Brown BEM.

HEAD OF TRADE REPORT

6. Capt Steve Soper delivered a short trade update on what current serving Pioneers have been up to since last year's AGM:

Updated that both WO1 Pete Poole and Rustey Emmanuel are both now in post as RSMs at 150 and 158 Regt's respectfully and both smashing it.

Promotions: 2 in the last 12 months with WO1 Danny Ravenscroft selected and, just this past week taken the helm as RSM 9 Regt RLC, where he'll work alongside former Pnr Troop Commander and Sqn 21C, Lt Col Stu Lavery who takes Comd as the new CO. He's also got WO2 Deveroux Buckley as one of his SSMs but sadly, must deal with Capt Taff Hildreth as his RCMO. The other promotion is WO2 John "Fluffy" Payne, who is currently nearing the end of a 12-month deployment to Pakistan in acting rank. Serving as the RQMS for the UK contingent in theatre, he's been selected for promotion to WO2 and will take up SSM appointment within 77 Bde upon his return from tour.

Numbers continue to dwindle at pace, with now only 7 Pioneers remaining in trade. Even with such sparse numbers though, the spread of key appointments across the RLC is thoroughly impressive. x3 RSMs, x2 SSMs, x1 SPSI and x1 Phase 2 instructor up at DST looking after the next Gen of troops joining the RLC. Given there's only 23 Regiments (Regular & Reserve) and 16 Trades competing in the RLC, having x3 RSMs is still an awesome achievement in my humble opinion.

Being that we were briefing the AGM in Bicester it would have been remiss of me not to mention that 1 Regt RLC in St Davids Bks will shortly have x2 of its 4 SSMs cut from the R&G cloth with both WO2 Antony Gelling (Now P&C) and WO2 Ross Stevens (LSS) that transferred when 23 disbanded in 2014.

Farewells & good luck for the future to the following:

- SSgt Steve Eminey (Aug 23) Staying in green kit and has joined the Reserves.
- Cpl Jason Crowie (Nov 23).
- WO1 (RSM) Brian "Northy" Hinton (Jan 24).
- WO1 Russell Clarke (Mar 24) Again staying in green kit as he's successfully taken up an SSCP role in Pirbright.
- On current trajectory Fluffy Payne

remains most likely the last serving Pioneer with an EED date of Apr 27.

SECRETARY'S REPORT

7. The Secretary gave the following updates:

RLC Benevolence 23/24 update.
Increase in Association Membership continues to grow.

Negative activity on certain social media sites controlled by the association will see offenders losing their RPCA Membership.

The future vision of the 'Pioneer' in relation to expanding the membership continues.

The secretary finished by recording a huge vote of 'Thanks' all RPCA members that participated in both the Pioneer Christmas Draw and the 75TH Pioneer Anniversary Draw. Your support is outstanding!

PRESIDENT'S UPDATE

8. It is always sad to hear the names of ex Pioneers who have sadly passed since we met 12months ago. We should never forget and may they all RIP. On a brighter note, it is pleasing to report 58 new members have joined the Association since our last AGM. There are still many ex-Pioneers out there who aren't members; please spread the word – membership is free, and Billy will do his utmost to contact these individuals with encouragement to join.

The Pioneer Association has had another busy year, with the Pioneer Officers holding their 75th Dinner Night here in the Garrison Mess. 75 Officers were in attendance with the numbers due to increase to 100 in October 2024.

Last November 8 Pioneer members attended the Field of Remembrance at Westminster Abbey, numbers were again curtailed because of current building work at the Abbey, but this was followed by a lunch at the Civil Service Club in Whitehall.

We had 86 veterans march with the Pioneer contingent at the Cenotaph where both the BBC and Sky portrayed the Pioneers again, in a good light. The contingent was led by Brig Charles Telfer and sadly this was to be the last time Brig Charles will lead the contingent, he has decided the route has become too difficult, but he will continue to attend as a spectator. Many then retired to the Civil Service Club afterwards where the Pioneers, once again, took over the garden. This year, we have been allocated 110 tickets for the Cenotaph Parade and already received 76 applications to attend. If you wish to attend and march, can you contact Billy. I'm sure he will elaborate later with more details

regarding the Cenotaph.

The Association continues to support other 'Pioneer Events' both financially and in-person where possible:

The 39/93 Club got together at Fareham in March and are planning to repeat this next year, further details of the Club can be obtained through Mr Les Rowley.

The Sheringham Camping Weekend (4/5 May) led by Mr Peter Wegg and Mr Kev Hilton continues to grow in numbers and once again was supported by the Association.

The Northampton Branch headed up by Mr Bob McGinley also continues to do well with a possible 'Dinner Night' on the horizons.

The Bicester Branch headed up by Mr Mark Staples and Mr Al Batchelor continues to grow in numbers and the Veterans Breakfast remains very positive and well supported every 6-8 weeks.

The WOs & SNCOs Club is also good in numbers and headed up by Capt (Retd) Pete Thomas for any information.

Billy continues to organise, manage, fundraise and host many of the main events throughout the calendar year but he is also here to signpost, advise and support any Pioneer veteran where require. Use him!

'Thank You' to Lt Col (Retd) John Starling, Mr Norman Brown and Mr Paul Brown for all your hard work this year in providing 'Historical Information' to so many Families and your amazing work with Billy in providing the Pioneer Magazine. Your

support in these areas is very much appreciated.

Finally, a huge 'Thank You' to 'You' the Pioneers. Your support, not just to events, but to both 'Raffle Draws'.

Additional donations allow us to function far smoother and yes, the additional support we receive from the RLC Association is also very well received but together we continue to move forward in the right direction.

Thank You & Have a great weekend!

Finally, I continue to remain committed and justifiably proud to be the President of the Pioneer Association.

9. Next AGM (Fri 27th Jun 25 at 1800hrs) with the 76th Pioneer Reunion Weekend (Fri 27 – Sun 29 Jun 25)

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Secretary, Billy Dilkes delivered a speech regarding 'Pioneer reputation' in that every action has a re-action. Pioneer veterans as either individuals or as a collective must always remember when attending events, functions, memorials etc, that you consider the great reputation Pioneers have built over many decades. We must maintain this good name by the way we present ourselves, conduct ourselves and always leave behind a good repour, wherever you visit.

We will always have the odd hiccup that may tarnish our good name but please remember, you are who you are and that's

good enough. Don't try to be something you're not because you will get found out eventually and it could leave a negative effect on the Pioneer name which no one wishes to see. The Pioneer Association will no longer accept the excuse of "I'm not in the Army anymore so I don't care".

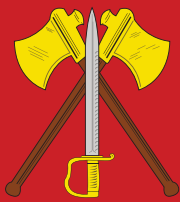
Wrong! as a Pioneer veteran you should care, because after serving your Country, if you wish to be respected by colleagues and the general population, then you must maintain that self-respect and pride you were taught whilst serving. Reputation is key!

Pioneer Membership is an 'entitlement' but not always guaranteed because you've served. It is an opportunity be part of an organisation that genuinely supports Pioneer veterans. If you breach the basic rules of conduct, then your membership may be withdrawn.

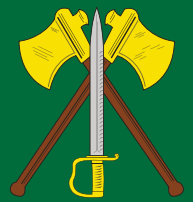
Finally, a big vote of 'Thanks' to Mr Martin Brimacombe and the Bicester Pioneer Association members who continue to assist with packing the Pioneer Newsletters or assist in setting up functions throughout the year.

Secondly, 'Thanks' to Mr Norman Brown, Lt Col (Retd) John Starling and Mr Paul Brown for the work they carry in both providing 'Historical' information for Pioneer Families and providing huge amounts of work IOT deliver a detailed and comprehensive annual Pioneer magazine.

Meeting Closed at 1938hrs



Association Shop



The Association is currently awaiting a lot of new items to come through... to get a list of new items for sale and prices please email Billy at

thepioneerhq@gmail.com

Everything from Cufflinks, Ties, Blazer Badges, Buttons, Plaques, Dickie Bows, Benny Hats, Flags, Pioneer Tops, Pioneer Books, Fighting Pioneer Canvas print and more!

Bert's journey

GOOD MORNING Norman, thank you very much indeed for your quick reply and the information you sent. I'll be sure to follow up on the links you provided as I'm jolly intrigued.

My husband has always had a keen interest in the events of WW2 and is sure to be able to explain much of Bert's journey to me. I think it's fair to say Bert came home a broken man.

He was very quiet and never spoke about his past experiences. Again many thanks Norman and a donation will follow.

Anne Bates

National Service

MANY THANKS, for publishing my letter recalling my National Service years from May 1957 to May 1959.

With any luck I hope there are still former conscripts who may remember the time we shared and yes enjoyed despite the occasional set-backs.

It would be great to hear from anyone I served with and if so my email is bernardcooke3@gmail.com.

Bernard Cooke 23393323

First Class

HI PAUL, I looked at the mag yesterday, to say I was surprised at what looks like my page is an understatement.

You have done a fantastic job on the captions they did make me laugh; the remainder of the mag is first class. Did you wish me to send some for the next mag?

Shall I send the pictures from the drinks on sat for the next mag? Regards

Tom Appleyard

Looking rough Billy

THE MAGAZINE dropped in today, I was amazed that Billy had only just taken over from Norman, and was on the front cover.

You're looking rough Billy, two months in, and you're looking that good,

Roy Sellstrom

Brought tears to my eye

THANK YOU so much for all the cards and love for our Stan. Just received the large card he will absolutely love it.

Again brought tears to my eyes. I can't thank you all enough for making Stan birthday so special.

Can't wait to see his face when I go up on Saturday for his surprise birthday Means the world to me especially being a veteran myself and hubby. I will send over lots of photos for you all to see. You are all amazing love n hugs to you all and thank you xxx

Hilary Littlewood

And another letter from Hilary...

HI EVERYONE I want to thank you all for cards and messages for our Stan for his 100th birthday. It made his day. He wore his pioneer badge with pride.

Loved the big card from the Royal Pioneer Corps Association. I hope I can still stay on this group you are all amazing.

Thank you so much xxxxx

Hilary Littlewood

Ed Note: Stanley Baxter 14373080 enlisted into the General Service Corps on 3 Dec 42 for basic training and transferred to the Pioneer Corps on 13 Jan 43 and served until 19 May 47, Including landing in Normandy!

Forces family history

MANY THANKS, for your very prompt reply to my email. Quite honestly I never expected to get a reply as I thought the address I had would be closed.

I will follow up on your information and advice and will get back to you with anything I find.

My reason for making the enquiry at such a late date, is that our grandson is applying to join the Australian army (we now live here) and I thought it would be a good idea if he knew something of his family history in the armed services.

His great grandfathers were in WW1, one in the Royal Artillery and the other in the

Machine Gun battalion (I believe).

There was also a great uncle who was killed in action 14th May 1917. I served in the RAF as a National Serviceman Dec 1954-56 in Iraq and Cyprus.

Two of our 3 sons served in the Royal Australian Navy for 11 and 9 years respectively, and are still connected to the marine industry, one being a marine surveyor and the other a training officer with a tug company. So you can see we have spread ourselves about a bit. I will follow up on your suggestions.

Thank you for your help.

Ray Owens

Thank you once again

HI NORMAN, I cannot thank you enough for your help, also so quickly! As I said in my email, my first application to the MOD archives was in March 2020!

After two and a half years, they managed to send me an email saying, that my grandfathers military details were no longer with them in Glasgow.

They had been sent years before to Kew Gardens and that I should re-apply to them.

That done, Kew then sent me nearly a year later, an email saying they needed my grandfathers death certificate, all of which

had been sent to Glasgow!

It's been a long wait, especially for my mother, uncle and aunt who are still alive, but in their 80's & wanted to find out about their father.

Your email together with that from Kew, has made everyone very happy and, has cleared up a number of points & misinformation

Thank you once again from the bottom of my heart, my family has asked me to pass on there thanks to you for your help.

Melvyn Robinson

Brilliant mag once again

HI ALL at RPCA have today returned all my ballot ticket stubs and have paid money direct into the account given in the note with my Magazine.

Thank you so much for a brilliant Mag once again going to enjoy reading it over the coming days with a drink. R&G forever,

Kevin Tyler

Happy 100th Birthday Stan!



■ Huge 100th Birthday Card we sent to Stan with below letter

Picture: Paul Brown

DEAR STAN. It gives me enormous pleasure to write to you today. May I, on behalf of every Pioneer Officer and Soldier of the Royal Pioneer Corps Association send their fondest 'Best Wishes' and huge 'Congratulations' on reaching the milestone of 100 years.

I hope your 100th Birthday will be surrounded by love and warmth and shared with your close friends and loved ones. You've reached 100 years and now possess a century of wisdom, and a lifetime of grace, and I hope your heart remains forever youthful.

We share a special bond in the Military and although your Service to King & Country will be appreciated by most, the

gravity of your achievements between 1942-1947 will never be fully understood by many.

However, your Family, fellow veterans and those currently still serving will be under no illusion that your bravery, sacrifice, and commitment for this country was outstanding and to serve in the British Army back then, with honour and price, both at home and abroad is hugely appreciated, respected and admired.

Happy 100th Birthday Stan, please enjoy this occasion as this 'momentous day' is 100% your day. You've earned it, so enjoy it... CONGRATULATIONS!

**B Dilkes MBE
Lt Col (Retd)**

THE PIONEER

■ **LOVELY WEEKEND** at Bicester Pioneer Reunion 2024, lovely to meet up with some great people.
Ann-Marie Taylor

■ **FABULOUS WEEKEND** Mr Dilkes, thank you to you and your team of helpers.
Stephen Saunders

■ **JUST BACK** from a fantastic weekend.
Adrian Hughes

■ **WELL THAT'S** me home in Alford, Aberdeenshire. After an amazing weekend in Bicester with 75th Pioneer Reunion Weekend Friday 21st - Sunday 23rd June 2024 Bicester fantastic company and a big thank you to Billy Dilkes for 'pulling it off'. And thank you for the accommodation. See you all next year.
Taff Teague

■ **AMAZING 75TH** Reunion Weekend - if you weren't there, where were you? You missed out! Thank you Billy Dilkes
Chris Swift

■ **CHEERS BILLY** for a good weekend got to see lads for the first time in years.
Dave Gorrige

■ **WELL BACK** home, what a weekend. Great to see so many that I haven't seen in years. Lots fun laughs. Taff Teague hope you didn't get in trouble making me park in the garrison commanders space lol. Look forward to doing it all again take care until then.
Jan Olsen

■ **CRACKING WEEKEND**, really enjoyed it, nice one
Ian Stuart Clarke

■ **AWESOME WEEKEND**
Karen N Danny Armstrong



Write in or email us...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o BGSU
St George's Barracks
ARNCOTT
Bicester OX25 1PP

or email us at:
pioneerhq@gmail.com



Fake Cover identity

WOW THANK-YOU very much for this information. Until now I knew that Berliner was sent to Quebec with the M.S. Ettrick, where he was interned for almost a year.

Thanks to your information I can close another gap!

Could you name me the source so that I can quote it?

Tragically, a misunderstanding with his Service Number (he was given the cover identity of an RAF officer for his mission) caused major problems - as revealed in the TNA files.

Many thanks for the report. Tragically, the perpetrators - one is named in the report - were never convicted in court for the murder of Berliner and over 100 other people.

Once again, thank you for your prompt help, Kind regards

Nicole-Melanie Goll

At Gold Beach

THANK YOU Norman, If only I could find the port he left UK and weather he came across to Normandy. On a general freighter, or landing craft tank. Then I could complete the picture,

I met chaps from the Durham light infantry In 2009 and showed the picture of my Dad and Uncle to them and one of the vets from the 9th DLI recognised my Dad and said he was with them at Gold Beach on the sixth, I asked him why and he said they were last minute attachments of other Corps members.

I assume that your records are more correct. I did visit Buhot in that same year. My Dad didn't like talking about the War and I think that's because the chap in the same photo as my Dad was 9th DLI and was KIA at Lingurevs on the 14 Jul 44 against The Panzer Lher.

Again thank you, we will never forget.

Ron Cooper

Captured

THANK YOU, so much for your really useful information. I have found some additional records online and have requested is enlistment records.

I have since found out that when captured he was in a field hospital awaiting transfer home. It is sad that he didn't quite make it. Best Wishes,

Dr Helen Atherton

Why do we allow non-Pioneers?

IT WAS asked on Facebook why we allowed non-Pioneers on to our site. The following is a list of messages from one source – this is the reason why!

Hi my dad served 22 years in pioneers I have loads of photos am I ok to post on here, he was dog section

Thomas Napper

THOMAS of course you are! I did make it clear in earlier threads but then I got accused of not letting people comment when I locked the thread lol.

Please feel free and this goes for any families and relatives of Pioneers and other related units etc! Look forward to seeing your Dad's photos.

Paul Brown

Are you Taffy Nappers son?

Jed Bourne

Would your dad be Taff Napper.

Dennis Paine

Paine yes pal.

Thomas Napper

I was with him at west moors and went to the dogs with him.

Dennis Paine

lol is that near Dorset.

Thomas Napper

yes just outside of Poole, we have lots of good times.

Dennis Paine

Paine that's where I was born Poole.

Thomas Napper

We've been to the dogs there as well, lol

Thomas Napper

Where are you now as I live in Woking, Surrey.

Dennis Paine

I'm from just outside Manchester, Oldham, but from Wallasey, Wirral, travelled around with army myself.

Thomas Napper

I served with Taff Napper at Westmoors.

Colin Tiso

Always love looking at photos of the RPC.

Mis Loui

I knew your Dad very well. We used to play dominoes many times in Mariners pub in the village, West Moors.

Charlie Cummings

You might be in some of the photos I have.

Thomas Napper

What year would this be then Charlie?

Alan Burbidge

I'm guessing 80-82.

Charlie Cummings

I served with Taff at Kineton, he was my LCpl, knew his wife as well.

Russell Dixon

Was your dad from the Rhondda Valleys originally?

Nigel Alan Smith

Yes he was, all family still there.

Thomas Napper

I remember him at 187 Coy, did he settle back there?

Nigel Alan Smith

And just looking at this thread above, it is exactly why we allow family members and relatives etc on here! Gives me hope that there is some good out there and puts 2 fingers up at the few keyboard warriors that we sometimes attract.

Paul Brown

Your dad was a great guy, I served with him in Westmoors.

Dave Gilchrist

I was in Worcester with your dad in 1972-74, nice man looking forward to pics.

Patrick Bradley

I have all the dogs in their kennels with all their names. I have just been to Worcester met all my family, that's where I got all the photo albums.

Thomas Napper

I knew Taff at Westmoors.

Garth Lancaster

Thomas, very nice to see you posting on here. I knew your Dad and Mum June well. We were stationed together at Kineton and again at Worcester. We lived close together at Woodfarm Camp in the Malvern Hills. Your Dad could also provide a reliable bet on a reliable bet on a local horse as we was well in with local lads and stables in the Worcester area. We were also dog handlers at Worcester. My very best wishes.

Ivor Whittaker

I have loads to put on.

Thomas Napper

Good old Taff, a man who would keep the moral up with all at Westmoors

John Stenton

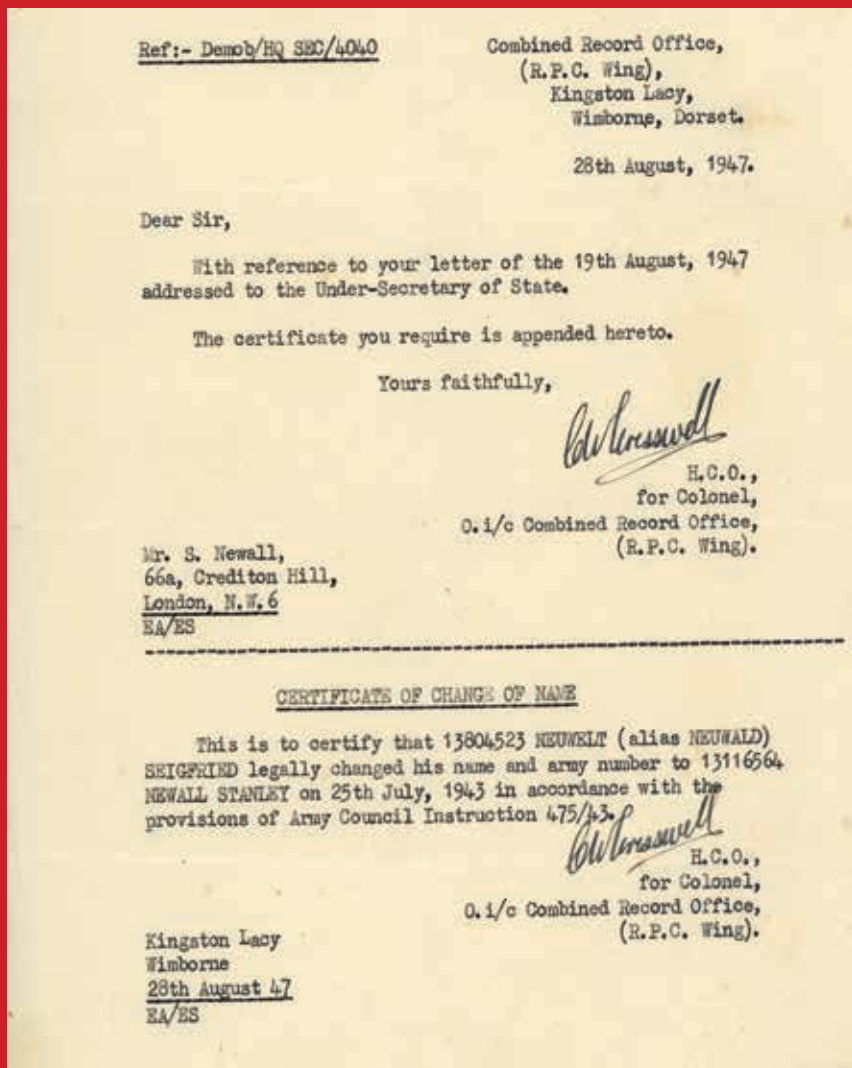
Knew your Dad in CAD Kineton. Followed any team that John Toshack played for, he was his hero.

John Kear

I was with Taff in Cyprus. Your Dad had part ownership of a race horse.

Keith Burrows

Change of name



■ Service number changed from an 'Alien' number to normal number

Picture: RPCA Archives

DEAR NORMAN. Thank you so much, that's certainly his date of birth, see below and I've just filled out the form as you suggested.

I had sent a second email with some additional information which may be helpful, in particular the change of his

service number from 13804523 to 13116564 as below. I also have an exemption from internment form below, although I do believe that he may have been interned initially.

I very much appreciate your time to assist me in this matter. Kind regards
David Levinger

We are rubbish at that kind of thing!

NORMAN, WOW! That is fantastically quick, totally agree ref the RN, we are rubbish at that kind of thing!

I had one of my postings embedded in 1 Regt Army Air Corps at Gutersloh in BFG, was very impressed with the armies appreciation and loyalty to all those that

served before them.

Since then I did various other jobs with REME and am still an engineer on the Apache aircraft but joined industry last year.

Much appreciated - I'll read carefully later and will order book / donate.

Barry Trapnell

THE PIONEER

■ HELLO TO my great Pioneer Jolly family. After such a brilliant write up in the Pioneer magazine, I would like to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a prosperous and healthy 2024. I look forward to seeing you all in May, I do hope you can make it.

Peter Wegg

■ HI EVERYONE I want to thank you all for cards and messages for our Stan for his 100th birthday. It made his day. He wore his pioneer badge with pride. Loved the big card from the Royal Pioneer Corps Association. I hope I can still stay on this group you are all amazing. Thank you so much xxxx

■ THANK YOU you for your reply. That is tremendous information, thank you very much for your help, it is much appreciated. I have tried so much to get information about this, but no one knew where he served. You've made me a very happy man.

Yours sincerely
Garry McLean

■ HI NORMAN Thank you so much for this insight. It is really helpful and I will definitely seek out a copy of the book you reference. I would love to make a donation. Thanks again for your time and efforts.

Matt Roche

■ NORMAN, that is fantastic information, thank you. I shall arrange for a donation to be sent to the RPC as noted below. Thank you kindly for your help. This has certainly helped me understand my Great Grandfathers role in WW2 All the best.

Dan Tritton

■ MANY THANKS for your reply. This is very helpful to me really appreciate it. It's more information I never knew. Thank you so much

Tony Byrne



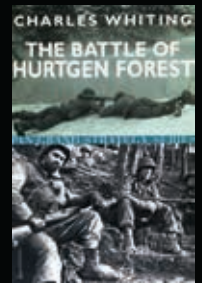
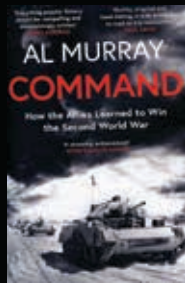
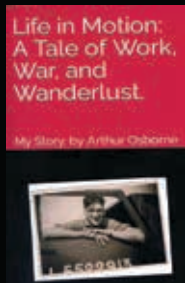
Write in or email us...

The Royal Pioneer Corps Association

c/o BGSU
St George's Barracks
ARNCOTT
Bicester OX25 1PP

or email us at:
thepioneerhq@gmail.com





Churchill's Spaniards

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

VERY little, if anything at all, has been told about the service of over one thousand Spanish Republicans who volunteered to join the British Army during the Second World War. Churchill's Spaniards remedies this and tells their story, men who were 'continuing the fight' against fascism from 1939 to 1946.

Churchill's Spaniards is not the story of the Spanish Civil War, not the equally well-known one of the International Brigades. It

is the story – against the backdrop of Churchill's efforts to keep Spain out of the war – of the recruitment, training and deployment of often battle-hardened Spanish Republicans into the service of the United Kingdom.

These fighting men served widely across British Armed Forces: as members of the elite SAS and Commandos, in the ranks of the Infantry and of the Pioneer Corps and as members of the Special Operations Executive.

Further Spaniards fought in almost all of the battles and campaigns in the West from the Fall of France and the evacuation of

Dunkirk in 1940, to the campaigns in North Africa and Italy, as well as those in North-West Europe.

Using a wide range of material from Britain, France and Spain as well as previously unpublished eyewitness and official accounts along with groundbreaking new research, Sean Scullion finally tells the story of these previously overlooked men.

CHURCHILL'S SPANIARDS – CONTINUING THE FIGHT IN THE BRITISH ARMY 1939-1946
AUTHOR: SEAN F SCULLION
ISBN: 978-1-804515-33-4

A tale of Work, War and Wanderlust

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

ARTHUR was conscripted into the RASC following basic training at a Primary Training Centre. He spend most of his wartime service with an Artillery Regiment as a driver – although not a Pioneer I still found the book interesting.

Arthur Osborne led an extraordinary life, and one that he recounts in such details from the most modest of beginnings, through loves, losses, successes and failures.

His memories are full of eloquent wisdom that can only have been achieved through a life well and full led. It is a thought provoking, honest recount of history and you truly feel as if you are living through the decades with him.

Arthur was born in 1921, in Kilburn, London, to a father who was a professional soldier who had won the Military Medal in WW1, and mother who spent her formative years in Havering Workhouse and in Service.

LIFE IN MOTION: A TALE OF WORK, WAR AND WANDERLUST
AUTHOR: ARTHUR OSBORNE
ISBN: 9798872842538

Command - how the Allies learned to win

WW2

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

MOST readers will remember Al Murray As one of the most successful comedians in the UK with his alter-ego "The Pub Landlord.

His enthusiasm for military history parallels his comedy, brought to the fore with several acclaimed and award winning television shows and the success of his podcast. Command showcases his passion for this pivotal period in the Twentieth Century, as he writes an engaging, entertaining and sharp analysis of the key allied military leaders in the conflict, their victories and defeats.

COMMAND – HOW THE ALLIES LEARNED TO WIN THE SECOND WORLD WAR
AUTHOR: AL MURRAY
ISBN: 978-1-4722-8463-1

Souls left behind

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

A YOUNG Chinese man forced into an arranged marriage leaves his bride on his wedding night and leaves the area and later enlisted into the Chinese Labour Corps.

Some 140,000 left China to serve in the British Army in France in 1917. This novel tells the story of his movement to France via Canada and Britain in crowded conditions. They were promised that they would not be employed on the front line but often found themselves there.

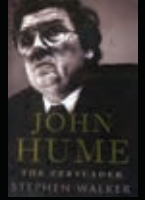
The young man eventually met a French woman and after the war married her and remained in France. During the war they were employed on various tasks, road repairs, trench digging and repairs and the usual movement of stores.

They were later employed on the removal and burying of the many casualties, both German and allies.

As an 85 year old he decides to visit his old war-time locations and pay his respects to the many comrades who had made the ultimate sacrifice.

SOULS LEFT BEHIND
AUTHOR: FAN WU
ISBN: 978-1-83890-597-2

The Persuader



Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

It may appear strange to review a book on a politician, however over 3,000 RPC personnel served in Northern Ireland in addition a large number of RLC Pioneers also served in the Province during "The Troubles". Most personnel may have heard of the Good Friday Agreement but not many will know of the build-up to this agreement, this book tells that story.

Politician, peacemaker, persuader: John Hume was a titan of Irish history – a

tireless architect of the Good Friday Agreement who received the Nobel Peace Prize for his part in ending decades of conflict in Northern Ireland.

But who was the real John Hume? What motivated the former history teacher to reach beyond political lines? What sustained him during the bloodiest years of violence?

How did he impel the IRA to end its long-running campaign?

How did he convince presidents and prime ministers to take risks and back his vision for Northern Ireland? How should he

be remembered?

In John Hume The Persuader, the author draws on over 100 interviews with family members, colleagues and critics across the political spectrum, as well as never before published interviews with Hume himself, to present a probing, balanced and immensely readable portrait of one of the most significant political figures in Northern Ireland and the world.

JOHN HUME – THE PERSUADER
AUTHOR: STEPHEN WALKER
ISBN: 978-0-7171-9608-1

Escape Artist The Battle of Hurtgen Forest

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

In April 1944, Nineteen-year-old Rudolk Vrba and fellow inmate Fred Wetzler become two of the first Jews to successfully escape Auschwitz.

Evading thousands of SS men hunting them. They both made the perilous journey on foot across Nazi-occupied Poland.

Their mission was to reveal to

the world the truth of the Holocaust.

Vrba's testimony would save some 200,000 lives.

But he kept running – from his past, from his home country, his adopted country, even from his own name.

Now at last, his heroism can be known.

THE ESCAPE ARTIST
AUTHOR: JONATHAN FREEDLAND
ISBN: 978-1-529-36906-9

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

ALTHOUGH published over 20 years ago I found this book very interesting and highly recommend it.

Thirty thousand American GIs were killed or wounded in the longest battle ever fought by the US Army – a battle that has been ignored and that should never have been fought.

From Sep 44 to Feb 45, eight US infantry and two US armoured divisions were thrown into the 'green hell of Hurtgen' – fifty square miles of thick, rugged, hilly woods on the Belgium/German border, full of German soldiers in a deadly network of concrete bunkers.

The butcher's bill was high, casualty rates ran to 50 percent and more for most rifle companies.

The High Command, from the relative comfort and security of their headquarters, miles away from the forest, refused to admit there had been a mistake. Careers, and the pride of the army, were at stake.

So more troops were poured in and the slaughter continued – to capture an objective that had long since lost any real purpose.

THE BATTLE OF HURTGEN FOREST
AUTHOR: CHARLES WHITING
ISBN: 0-330-42051-8



Turkish Front

Report: Norman Brown
Picture: Supplied

A COMPLETE history of the struggle waged against the Turks during the First World War, presented in a single volume.

Whereas most of the books about this pivotal campaign address the fighting at Gallipoli, very few cover at the same time the course of events in Palestine and Mesopotamia.

A historically important campaign, Britain's final victory in 1918 brought with it the destruction of the Ottoman Empire and led indirectly to the political turmoil of the Middle East with which we are living today.

With extracts from the letters,

diaries and papers of those involved, the story is a moving and hard-hitting one.

Casualties were high, both in action and from disease.

There was great courage and endurance, as well as instances when these qualities were significantly lacking. Heights of incompetence were seen at Suvla Bay, and on more than one occasion in Mesopotamia.

The personal testimonies contained in this book, all drawn from the collections of the National Army Museum, provide a stark reminder of what the soldiers endured.

TURKISH FRONT
1914-1918
AUTHOR: FIELD MARSHALL LORD CARVER
ISBN: 0-330-49108-3

The Last Post

Since the last newsletter it is with great sadness to report the following deaths

MURRAY JOSEPH TAYLOR 23966749 EX CPL 30 DEC 23 (AGED 77)
Served 1964 – 1973 (Aden Vet)

BURLING MICHAEL 24378204 EX PTE 21 JAN 24 (AGED 67)
Served 1975 – 1982

NARETIVE MARIE LUX 13906174 17 JAN 24 (AGED 100)
Served from 1 Aug 41 in 1507 (later 2035) Mauritian Coy

TIMMINS DAVID 24006112 EX LCPL 4 JUN 22 (AGED 75)
Served 1964 – 1973



COOK CHRIS EX PTE 8 APR 24 (AGED 49)
ex 187 Sqn



DOBSON GEORGE ALAN 24026679 EX WO1 15 APR 24 (AGED 76)
Served as a clerk from 1966 – 1988



HOPPER NS (STEVE) 24116083 EX CPL 11 MAR 24 (AGED 72)
Served 1969 – 1985

WILLIAMS ROBERT A 24519659 EX PTE 27 FEB 24 (AGED 61)
Served 1984 – 1987

OSBOURNE MARK S 24500361 EX PTE 24 MAR 24 (AGED 63)
Served 1979 – 1985

UPFIELD JAMES PATRICK JOHN (BEAKY) EX PTE 2 MAY 24 (AGED 54)
Served 1991 – 1997



BARLOW JOHN CHRISTOPHER 24434484 EX LCPL 5 APR 24 (AGED 70)
Served 1974 – 1988



ROBERTSON JE (JOHN) 23971601 EX SGT (CLERK) 29 SEP 24 (AGED 78)
Served Feb 64 – Oct 91



RICHARDS JEFFREY (JEFF) 24745369 EX PTE 8 APR 24
Served 1985 – 1989 in 8 Regt and 187 Coy

MORGAN JOHN BART 23641134 EX LCPL 30 APR 24 (AGED 85)
Served 1959 – 1961 in 405 Coy RPC

SPEARS COLIN DESMOND 491904 MAJ (RETD) 30 JAN 24 (AGED 73)
Served 1959 – 1991. On completion of service was appointed Corps Secretary and editor of The Pioneer. Pictured on right.



WILKES ALAN PATRICK 24046797 EX LCPL 25 APR 24 (AGED 75)
Served 1966 – 1972

DAY MICHAEL CLIVE (MICKY) 24598131 EX CPL (AGED 61)
Served 1981 – 1989 (Ex 187 Coy)



DONALDSON PAUL DE 24611881 EX PTE 2 JUL 24 (AGED 60)
Served 1982 – 1988



Picture: A Pioneer Soldier in Northern Ireland on duty

BARRY PHIL E (24176357) EX CPL 17 NOV 24 (AGED 72)

Passed out with Burma 25 Sep 70 and was best PT



KANE TONY (AGED 60) 9 SEP 24

HADDEN ROBERT (OZZIE) 23920340 EX CPL 31 AUG 24 (AGED 76)

Served 1962 – 1984

DAY MC (MICKY) 24598131 EX CPL 28 SEP 24 (AGED 61)

Served 1981 – 1989

STEVENS STUART SCOTT (459493 AND 23446187) EX LT 18 NOV 24 (AGED 88)

Served 1958 - 1975

MULLANE COLIN D (SCOUSE) 24229551 EX SGT 30 JAN 24 (AGED 67)

Served 1972 – 1994



BURNETT SHAUN 24370096 EX PTE 13 MAY 24 (AGED 69)

Served 1975 – 1979



JONES TONY A 23661834 EX CPL 4 MAR 24 (AGED 84)

Served 1958 - 1961



COOMBES VICTOR 24584444 5 MAY 23 EX PTE (AGED 61)

Served 1980 – 1987

HERRINGTON GRAHAM BEM 24116710 EX CPL 22 JUN 24 (AGED 73)

Served 1968 – 1990. Awarded BEM in 1982, the following is his citation:

Train Driver Crew Leader – Operation CORPORATE

The logistic support and issues of ammunition were essential elements in the success of mounting the Task Force for the Falklands Operation. Central Ammunition Depot Kineton was the primary depot and issued in excess of 6,700 tons of ammunition during Operation CORPORATE.

The Pioneers of 522 Company, Royal Pioneer Corps played an important role in providing labour support, equipment operators and specialist train crews. The rapid movement of ammunition from the rail served areas of the depot against tight deadlines imposed great pressures on the depot as a whole and the rail system in particular, consequently for a period of eight weeks Royal Pioneer Corps train crews were constantly on call to reinforce the civilian crews.

Corporal Herrington was a key figure amongst the military operatives. As the senior train driver he worked long hours, forewent time off and being a single soldier allowed his married colleagues, and crewmen, preference when scarce time off and stand-down was possible. He was called to duty at all hours and frequently so

at short notice. He cheerfully carried out his duties as a train driver and crew leader. He always placed his colleagues and crewmen before himself and no matter what the prevailing conditions performed his duties in the highest traditions of the Corps. His spirit, leadership, strength of character and sense of humour sustained the train crews throughout a difficult operation. Without Corporal Herrington's special qualities the vital train service would have not been the success it was.

LE MASURIER MICHAEL 465795 LT COL (RETD) 16 OCT 24 (AGED 83).

He was promoted LT Col in Jun 84 and took over as Commandant RPC Trg Centre in Sep 84. He was posted as Comd Lab Res HQ (1) BR Corps in Feb 87 and in Oct 88 attended a long language course before being posted to Sudan.

He was then posted as SO1 (IR) HQ BAOR in Sep 90 and in Spring 91 was involved in the Gulf War at HQ FMA. On completion of hostilities he returned to BAOR at HQ BAOR (RCZ) and then in 93 at Lab Res HQ Rhine Garrison as the draw down in BAOR was taking place.



KONIGSBERGER HANS (13807309) NAME AND NUMBER LATER CHANGED TO KINGSHILL PETER (13106718) EX PTE 15 OCT 24 (AGED 94).

He later changed his name again to Heinz-Peter King.

His obituary can be read here <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/oct/16/heinz-peter-king-obituary>





And finally...

Report: Norman Brown / Paul Brown
Pictures: Norman Brown / Paul Brown

NOT MANY people have heard of Blacksod Lighthouse. It is famous for more than one reason! It is unique in Ireland as it is the only one with a square shape!

Of course this is not the only thing it is famous for!

In the early 1940's a young Kerry lady called Maureen Flavin, later married to Ted Sweeney, planned to go to the US but changed her plans when she applied for a job as a post office assistant in Blacksod. It took her nearly 3 days to get there but she was happy as she loved the sea. One of her duties

was taking weather observations and relaying them to the Met Office in Dublin. This was an important job as Belmullet is the first landfall in Europe for weather systems coming across the Atlantic and these systems impact on the weather in the British Isles and northern France. Due to this impact, weather information from various stations on the west coast of Ireland was shared with the Met Office in Dunstable in England.

On the 3rd June 1944, as plans for the invasion of Europe known as Operation Overlord were coming to fruition, a worrying weather depression was being reported from Blacksod.

This depression would lead to stormy weather in the English Channel on the 5th June, the original date planned for the D-Day landings.

Calm weather was required for the landings otherwise they would fail at the cost of tens of thousands of lives and the continued occupation of Europe by Nazi Germany. Oblivious to their importance, Maureen received two calls from a woman with an English accent asking for confirmation of her weather reports.

Her confirmation of an accurate forecast resulted in the postponing of the landings. The following day the depression lifted and the weather improved resulting in the green light for the lands to take place on the 6th June 1944." ■



"The Men are complaining about the tea, Sir."
"Oh, well, put a carrot in it and call it soup!"



Blacksod Lighthouse, Pioneer D-Day helmet, dodgy flags, camo pants, one ***** sausage and much more!

MORE THAN than 75 years after D-Day, the landscape of Normandy still bears remains of the World War II battle and the soldiers that changed the course of history, such as this corroded British Pioneer Corps helmet.

Look closely and it still has a painted red and green flash of the Pioneer Corps painted on it's side! ■



FOLLOWING ON from the article in this issue, called 'Why buy cheap Tat?' I noticed that many people are flying flags with some dreadful Tat 2nd Royal Pioneer Corps badges.

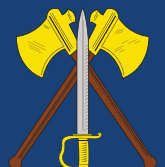
This one is from the Cenotaph Parade in London last November.

As explained on earlier pages this one has wrong axes, wrong colours, wrong sword, wrong crown etc, etc.



Coming up in the next newsletter ...

- News ■ Forthcoming events ■ Your stories ■ Your Letters
- Pioneer Reunion ■ Blast from the Past ■ Digging through the Archives
- Photo Gallery ■ Book Reviews ■ Collectors Corner ■ And much more!

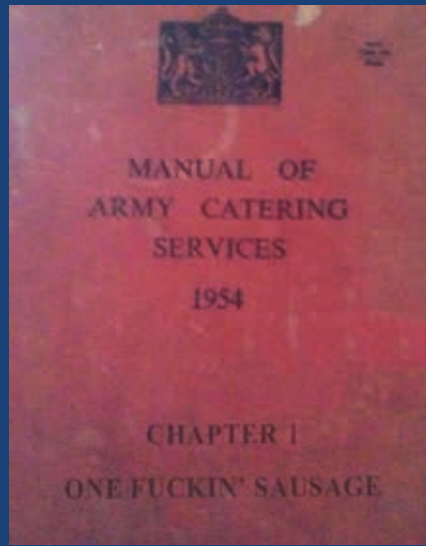




Can you spot the mouse?



NEXT WE have Glenn Lath at this year's Reunion Weekend. The badge on this flag looks to be very similar if not the same as one on the other flag.
Another dreadful copy of that cap badge.



■ Did you know that the Manual of Army Catering Services 1954 as a chapter called 'One Fuckin' Sausage'! Picture: Paul Brown



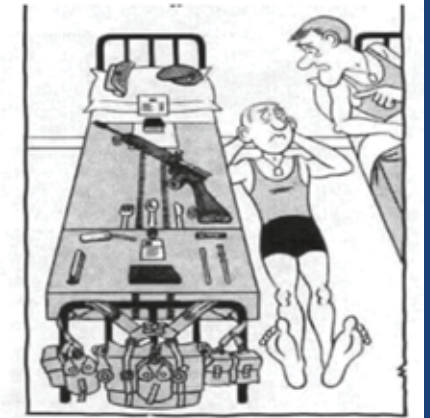
This is a level of tired most people will never understand.



NEXT WE a very smart Tony Chunk Walls on Remembrance Day 2024. Not so smart is the dreadful reproduction of the cap badge on his lawn ;)



Only another old soldier will understand this ☺



DOES ANYONE else wear camo pants? If so is one type of camo better than the other?

These are being worn of course by 'The Camp Idiot', aka Steve Bone.

Pictured at Cenotaph Parade 2024 at Civil Service Club.





LABOR OMNIA VINCIT