

OBAN



ARBORFIELD OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

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Vice Presidents - Past Commandants

COMMITTEE

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Staff Sergeant N Lovelock-Jeffels REME - SEAE Representative

Mr A Hardy (65C) - SEME Representative

Mr W E N Pusey (46A) - Trust Fund Representative

Committee meetings are held 3-4 times per year. Any member wishing to put forward a motion or item to the Committee for consideration may do so by writing directly to the Honorary Secretary. Additionally, an ad hoc administration committee is convened, usually under the Chairmanship of the College Adjutant and attended by all interested parties, to deal with the details of the reunion weekend.

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Arborfield Old Boys Association News

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FROM THE EDITOR

Brian Hornsey (54A)

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Acknowledgements. Printed by Printing Dept, SEAE Arborfield

Issue 26. Hopefully, this issue will have a touch of colour on the front and back covers!

Part 2 of Joe Adey's saga is published in this issue - he has written some seven articles, three of which have appeared in OBAN and there are more to follow . .

My apologies to Nick Webber (50B) for the delay in publishing his 'Jubilee letter' which should have gone out in 2002. It should be noted that when a contribution, by nature of its content, is required to be in a specific issue, it can be 'converted' into letter form for *The Letters to the Editor* section.

The first part (of three) contributions by John Johnson (56B) is also included in this issue. This is very detailed and is a good read! The fifties intakes have beaten the forties intakes for contributions - is this a first?

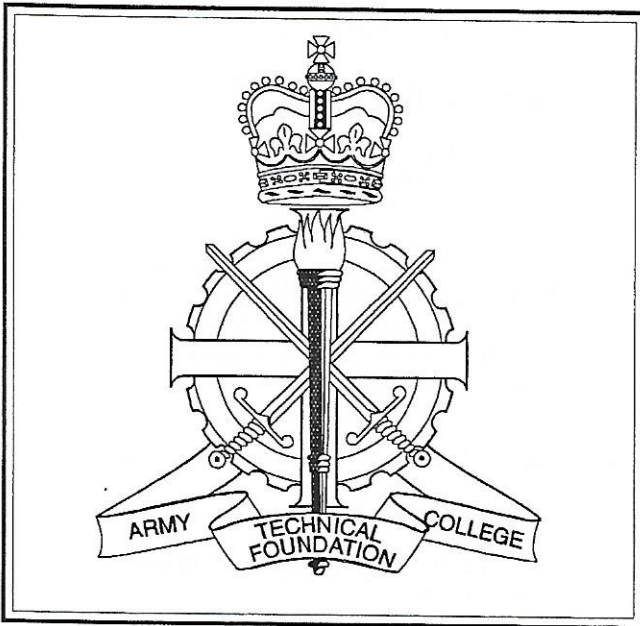
If possible, please continue to send your contributions on disk, preferably Word Perfect 5.1 (DOS version) or MS Word (DOS or Windows Word 6/95 versions). If you are using a later version of Word or whatever, it is usually possible to use the *Save As..* function to also select the type of file in an older format, hopefully Word 6/95.

Would you also, please, always include your intake number against your name when you send in your contribution. I then, no longer have to look up the membership list to find out where you fit in the membership maze!

As I now will always repeat, for those of you who don't have access to a computer, I have had a very generous offer from Frank Fendick (45A) who has agreed to type out any articles (not letters) that have been written in manuscript, then he will e-mail the articles to me. Please send those articles to: 1 West End, Northwold, Thetford, Norfolk, IP26 5LE.

As always, photos for the Pictorial Archives in the REME Museum are always gratefully received either as donations or borrowed for copying. All loaned photos are logged and would be returned to you after copying. As always, many thanks to those of you who have already contributed.

Brian Hornsey (54A)



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Welcome to another OBAN and probably my last article as the Commanding Officer of the College. My successor will be Lieutenant Colonel Andy Phillips, a Royal Engineer. I hope to see you all at the reunion and there is probably no better venue in which to hand over the College as a final gesture. I say this with sincerity, as it has been very evident to me that the Apprentice ethos lives longer than the tenure of an individual's length of service. It is this special issue and its future care that is important. The incoming Commanding Officer will realise this very quickly, and I hasten to add that he will face a daunting task of keeping the spirit alive in such a period of immense change within the training organisation.

Turning to development issues surrounding the College. I'd like to inform you all that matters have now resolved themselves and the long-term future of a technical strand is secure, but this is not the case. As I type this preface a plethora of activity surrounds the future of the College and where it will be in 5 years time. What is evident from previous decisions on the course length, and hence the shortening of the course from 2 years to 6 months, is that it has been cut too far. Please resist the temptation to shout I told you so!! It is my intent therefore to secure the future of the Apprentice College before I leave, so wish me the best of luck.

Turning to committee issues you may have had the opportunity to visit the web site and review electronic developments. Clearly building from a sound foundation the site is becoming a real repository of information and pictures for all to see. Like most points of information it is only as good as the contributions and therefore may I ask all, irrespective of electronic access, to get into the home archives and ferret out the pictures of past and present. Add as much detail as you can and send them in to the committee for inclusion in what may eventually be the most complete pictorial reference of any era.

I know this is an advanced shout from me regarding attendance at the forthcoming reunion but please get your bids in early. Based on last year's outstanding attendance you may be disappointed if you don't. I must also thank my committee for the support and continuing dedication that they provide to the AOBA. Many of them spend vast amounts of their personal time to ensure that all members receive the best of service. On the occasion that they may forget let us remember that people are fallible, including me!

Finally, the Apprentice of today. After receiving an intake of 340 this term I still stand and picture myself at the induction table some 29 years ago. It is a creepy feeling where the emotion floods back based on apprehension and excitement of the unknown waifs and strays that look for leadership and quickly find their feet as the RSM grips them in to a formed body to be marched off to the QM's stores. The rest you all know only too well. Let's just hope they all stay the distance. Farewell comrades, until another reunion.

Lt Col D A McAvoy
Chairman AOBA

FROM THE HONORARY SECRETARY

Lt Col(Retd) Bill Cleasby (61C)

May I start off by wishing everyone a very happy New Year and look forward to seeing you all at the June 2003 Reunion (20th to 22nd June 03). You will find further details of the weekend and the usual application form within the pages of this issue. I know they say that time passes quickly as you get older but it hardly seems five minutes ago that we were celebrating the last one. Anyway, I hope that Ray Jordan is now feeling better after his shocking revelations about his Apprentice love life. I have no doubt that accommodation in the Rowcroft Sergeants Mess will again be difficult so please book early to avoid disappointment and only if you really need to. You should also be aware that for those members staying for two nights in the Sergeants Mess, the total cost could be in the region of £12.00.

Incidentally, members will be sad to hear that Heidi Larcombe, the mess manageress, has moved on to pastures new. She has been a real friend of the Association and I am that you will want me to pass on your appreciation and thanks to her for all that she has done. It will not be the same without her.

This year will be the Diamond Anniversary of Intake 43 and the Golden Anniversary of Intake 53. As requested in the last issue of OBAN, I would be very grateful if a brave soul from 53 or 43 would come forward and volunteer for the after dinner speech. A few jokes, one or two reminiscences are all that is required. I have again tasked the Pictorial Archivist in the museum to come up with a suitable selection of photographs to display those treasured memories of 1943 and 1953. Could I remind all members that the Association has a pot of money

FROM THE HONORARY TREASURER

Major(Retd) Mike Davis (60B)

I would like to thank all members who have taken the time and effort to return their completed Direct Debit Instructions and Standing Order Cancellations to me – however long it may have taken (the record stands at 7 months and 5 days). There are 553 of you, who, as of 1st April 2003 will pay your subscriptions using the DD system. It had taken considerably longer to set up than first envisaged, however, it is now 95% completed. There are approximately 40 to 50 replies still awaited!!

A word of warning. All the Standing Order Cancellation forms have been submitted to the various Banks and/or Building Societies for their action. You as an individual need to check personally, that they have carried out your wishes, because I firmly believe that some may neglect to do so.

The Gift Aid declaration has not been actioned as yet but hopefully in the next 6 to 9 months the necessary paper declaration will be sent to all members for their action.

On a final note, could members who wish to pay their subscriptions by cheque or post, please forward them to me as Treasurer and NOT to the Membership Secretary. Thank you.

*Yours in Direct Debit
Mike Davis (60B) – Treasurer*

specifically for Old Boys who have fallen on hard times and need a bit of help. All requests please to the Honorary Secretary.

On a final note, I am hoping that the Poperinghe Guardroom will be rebuilt in all its splendour by the time you all arrive at Arborfield, so please come and have a look. Take care everyone and see you all in June.

Bill Cleasby (61C)

RECRUITMENT AND PUBLICITY REPORT

From Ken Anderson (58A)

As a result of notices and articles placed in the Corps magazine, The Craftsman, and in the Royal British Legion magazine, The Legion, there has been considerable interest over the last winter months in membership of the Association. These articles have publicised the AOBA Website that is now viewed regularly from sites all around the world.

Electronic OBAN

An electronic version of the last issue of OBAN was made available through the website on a trial basis and was well received. As a result of that trial many of you will be receiving this issue of OBAN through the Internet (by receiving OBAN in this manner you are contributing to savings in postage costs). If you are of those reading this in its traditional format and have access to the Internet why not have a look on our website and give it a try. Any comments you may have on the electronic version will be gladly received.

The Membership Database

Booklet copies of the Membership Database were published to members some two years ago. In a number of cases your details may now be different to those published. As the membership database is now available on the Internet to members, through the use of a username and password, it would be helpful if you would amend your details on line. If you do not wish to use the online facility then please email your up-to-date details to membership@arborfieldoldboys.co.uk.

The AOBA Forum

The AOBA Forum is an online discussion facility where various topics can be discussed. These topics or groups can be thought of as

folders in a filing cabinet with the ability to create 'threads' of discussions and members using the Forum are able to join in and post to discussion groups or initiate their own. The AOBA Forum is proving highly popular with now some 200 contributors. Many positive outcomes are coming from the AOBA Forum including the recruitment of new members to the association and the bringing to our attention the plight of some old boys and then being able to assist them. The Forum also allows old relationships to be renewed and new ones formed amongst members even though they may be on opposite sides of the globe to one another.

The Archive Gallery

One section of the website is devoted to the display of photographs covering many aspects of our times at Arborfield. This section also contains a wealth of stories and anecdotes and is fast becoming an important historical archive of the Army Apprentices School and Colleges there. The photographic section is divided into historical decades as well as portfolios for individual ex-boys. Some of the latest anecdotes include tales of that favourite Provost Sergeant – Fred Silvers and a perspective of life at AAS from a then serving member of the Permanent Staff (I wonder if I am alone in thinking that the vast majority of the permanent staff were invisible to us as apprentices).

I hope that you find all the features and facilities of the AOBA website of help and straight forward to use as considerable thought has been given to its structure. Your feedback is important and all criticisms both positive and negative are encouraged.

*Ken Anderson (58A)
AOBA Webmaster.*

MY TOUR OF THE MIDDLE EAST

Part 2

With 1 RHA at Acre

By Joe Adey (42A)

Early in 1948 the Regiment I had served with from September 1947 (*continued from Part 1 in OBAN 19*) was ordered to move from Isdud to northern Palestine in preparation for the implementation of the Partition Plan. Our new camp had previously been used as the Middle East School of Artillery and was right on the coast, just north of Acre, between Haifa and the Lebanese border.

There were two camps at our new location about one and a half miles north of Acre. Facing north on the main coast road, St Jeans Camp was located on the right side of the road. On the left side, the main Haifa to Beirut railtrack ran parallel with the main road. Opposite St Jeans a narrow track crossed the railway line and ran in a straight line for about 400yds to the gate of a camp on the beach. This camp had a number of permanent brick buildings and the first flushing toilets I had seen since leaving the UK. The Regimental HQ and the bulk of the regiment was accommodated in St. Jeans, while the Quartermaster's Stores, Technical Stores and the LAD were put into the camp on the beach which was originally the Middle East School of Artillery.

The date set by the United Nations for the partition of the territory was in June 1948 and the task of the regiment was to set up as a transit camp for the evacuation of those British troops who would be leaving by sea, through the port of Haifa. This would be in addition to their normal security duties which had increased as the situation between the Jews and Arabs hotted up. Acre was an ancient walled city port situated about 15 miles around the bay from Haifa, and occupied only by Arabs. There was also a prison staffed by British prison service officers in the same way that the Palestine Police was heavily staffed by British officers.

When we first arrived at Acre, the CO allowed us to go into Haifa at the weekends, provided we were armed and in minimum groups of four. Doug and I used to wait outside the camp church each Sunday morning with a 1 ton Bedford truck fitted up with soft seats in the back, to pick up the two Educational Corps Sergeants who were attached to the regiment. We would then draw our pistols from the armoury and head into Haifa for the day. Arriving in Haifa, we would park the truck in a guarded vehicle park and head for the NAAFI Club for a drink and some lunch. After lunch we would spend the afternoon touring some of the bars in the centre of the city and that could be quite exciting. Sometimes we would be walking along a street with the bullets flying well above our heads as police in the docks area exchanged fire with Jews up on Mount Carmel.

In the evening we would collect the truck, which I always drove, and go out to Haifa Airport where it was fairly safe to

spend a couple of hours. We used to pass the time drinking Arak, the local Arab brew, and eating from a huge dish full of potato chips, well splashed with salt and vinegar. By 9pm we would be back on the road and headed for Naharya, a German Jewish settlement which had been established since 1922. This place was seven miles up the coast from our camp and was enclosed in a perimeter fence with a guard on the gate. There were several bars/restaurants and there was a nice frontage onto the beach. I recall that in one bar just inside the gate which was usually our first call, there was a pretty black haired young barmaid by the name of Sasha, whom I used to chat up, to no avail!

As the local situation worsened the CO ordered that Haifa was 'Out of Bounds' to off duty personnel and restricted us to Naharya only. As a result we got to know the people quite well and had some pretty hectic evenings in the settlement. There was one restaurant in the centre of the settlement which was run by a little old white haired lady whom I got to know well. If we were going to do the rounds of the bars I would often remove the rounds from my pistol and leave my belt and pistol in one of the cold ovens in her kitchen and collect it at the end of the evening.

Life was pretty exciting at this time, with the Arabs attacking Jewish settlements and the Jews attacking Arab villages, usually at night. The regiment's guns were parked on the barrack square in St Jeans camp and quite often if one side or the other were being attacked at night the regiment would be ordered to intervene by dropping a few rounds close to the attacking force. An OP party would be sent out in a couple of half-tracks to act as a mobile observation post and would call down fire on the target area. I was actually over in St Jeans Sgts Mess one evening having a drink, when half the gunner NCOs jumped out through the windows and fired off 12 rounds of HE. On another occasion I was driving back from Naharya with Doug late one night, when half a dozen rounds went whistling overhead in the darkness.

Some evenings we would take a drink out on to the beach and sit and watch the exchange of small arms gunfire across the bay in Haifa. At times it could be quite spectacular, with the tracer bullets flashing up and down the face of Mount Carmel. We had a permanent patrol operating in Haifa which consisted of two 25pdr SPs plus one Cromwell tank and a couple of Halftracks. If the troops or police were subjected to persistent sniping from a particular building they would call on the patrol, which would trundle down the street and put a round of 25pdr high explosive through the front of the building.

I had a pretty hairy experience with the Arabs one day when I had to go into Haifa to collect some vehicle spare parts. My driver was a little Irish lad and he was armed with a Sten sub-machine gun while I had a .38 pistol. Our route took us through the outskirts of Acre past a large cemetery and over a small hump-backed bridge. As we reached the cemetery we were stopped at a road block by a large mob of Arabs, armed to the teeth with all sorts of weapons which they

waved around like idiots on a picnic. With a lot of shouting, they waved us through and as we did so I noticed that they were digging in a machine gun in the cemetery. I wondered what was afoot but had not been warned of any trouble, so decided to continue on to Haifa. Having got to Haifa safely and collected our stores, we were then delayed by a gun battle between British paratroopers and Jewish gunmen. We eventually got clear of Haifa by about 2pm and headed off round the bay towards Acre. Although there was never a great deal of traffic on the road, once we got out of the built-up area, we did not meet anyone coming from the direction of Acre.

Approaching Acre, we drove over the hump-backed bridge and started round the bend towards the cemetery when I suddenly noticed a half-track drawn up on the sand about 40yds off to our right and near the edge of the cemetery. As we got closer to the vehicle I noticed that the rear doors of the half-track, which were facing us, were hanging open and what appeared to be several bodies lying around on the sand. In the same instant I became aware that a road going off to our left towards the harbour, was packed solid with Arabs, armed as was the mob we saw in the morning. They overflowed the width of the road and were leaning over the low stone walls, just staring at us in stony silence. At the same time, I told the driver to stop while I had another look across at the half-track and realised that the crew had been shot and their weapons and equipment, even their boots, had been taken.

I dismounted from the cab of the truck and took the Sten gun from my driver and gave him my pistol. I then told him to reverse the truck down the road, while I walked backwards beside it. As I did so, a Palestine Police truck came round the bend towards us and I waved it down. I pointed out the situation to the two policemen, who showed no interest whatsoever, so I asked them if I would be able to get through Acre to our camp.

The two policemen said I should be able to get through OK and drove off towards Haifa. The mob was still absolutely silent, watching all this, so I jumped into the cab and said to the driver, "Lets go, and don't stop for anything". We drove on for a few hundred yards round the bend and suddenly we were in the middle of another great mob of Arabs but this lot were screaming and shouting and when they saw us they started firing their guns in the air. I said, "Just keep going", while I grinned and waved back to the mob. As I did so, I noticed some Arabs with a truck, towing a open-topped grey painted 1ton truck into the forecourt of a petrol station. The grey truck had been pretty badly shot up and just then I also noticed a pile of several bodies heaped on the roadside which looked as if they had been hacked to pieces. In a matter of seconds we were through the mob and belting down the road towards St Jeans camp, which we reached in a few minutes, a little shaken but all in one piece.

I reported straight to the Adjutant and told him what I had happened upon but said I was puzzled as to who the Half-track belonged to, as it had no military signs painted on it.

He said the situation was in hand, that he had a troop of guns ready to go, but was waiting for back-up from a company of the South Staffordshire Regiment, who were stationed a mile or two north of us. I learned later what had happened that day in Acre, when four gunners of our regiment lost their lives needlessly.

Apparently the Arabs had blown up the power lines north of Acre, cutting off the electricity supply to the settlements in that area. The Jews had asked the British to provide an escort for their repair crew who would have to pass through the outskirts of Acre. The repair crew consisted of five men in a 1 ton truck and the escort was composed of 1 RHA Regt personnel in a half-track and a White Scout car.

The half-track was leading as they came over the hump-back bridge and the Arabs allowed it to get to within about 40yds of the cemetery before they opened up on it with the machine gun I had seen them digging in earlier in the day. They then turned their fire onto the Jews in the repair truck and shot it to pieces but then saw that the White Scout car had British markings and allowed it to drive straight through to St Jeans. The half-track commander, a Bombadier, not expecting any trouble, was travelling with the armoured windscreen visor raised, so he and his crew had no chance as the machine gun rounds blasted through the windscreen. The vehicle just ran off the road into the sand and came to a stop where I found it.

Four of the five members of the crew were killed outright but the fifth was untouched and when the Arabs forced open the rear doors, they found the lad curled up on the floor under the bodies of a couple of his mates. The Arabs pulled him out and took him down to the railway station, for some unknown reason, and there gave him a cup of coffee. Apparently the British had failed to notify the Arabs that we were providing the escort for the repair crew and the Half-track provided by the Regt had just been repainted but they had not had time to finish it by painting the Regimental and Divisional signs onto the front and rear.

The Arabs claimed that when the half-track appeared over the bridge, newly painted olive green, they took it to be a Jewish vehicle and the 1ton truck they identified as positively Jewish, so opened fire on both vehicles. The White Scout car was obviously British, so was allowed to drive through. When the Colonel, accompanied by a troop of guns and a company of the South Staffs. went into Acre, he was taken to the railway station, where he was greeted by a very apologetic Mayor of Acre, who presented him with a bunch of flowers and one very shaken gunner. It could have been a genuine mistake on the part of the Arabs and a bloomer on the part of the Battery which provided the Half-track.

In April 1948, I took part in a 'Show the Flag' patrol (*see Part 1*) along the Lebanese border, driving the Ward le France as usual. It was an enjoyable trip with a patrol consisting of a couple of 25pdr SPs and some Half-tracks, together with some Bren Gun Carriers of the South Staffs.

We went high into the hills along the border, through a lot of small Druse villages and I was struck by how white these people were compared with those living further south. We saw some lovely views and at one high point we could see Damascus, through the binoculars.

Also in April I took part in two regimental convoy runs from Acre down to Kabrit, in the Canal Zone. We knew that after completing the evacuation of the bulk of the British forces in northern Palestine through the port of Haifa, the Regiment would depart by road down through Palestine and across the Sinai Desert to Fayid, in the Canal Zone. Accordingly the Regiment gathered together all the stores and equipment which it could do without for a few months, and sent it all down to Kabrit, where it was put in storage.

I thoroughly enjoyed these convoys because they got me out of camp for seven days at a time and I learned an awful lot about how to keep vehicles running. By this time, the British had withdrawn from all of the area south of Sarafand, except for the huge RAOC Depot at Rafah, on the Egyptian border. Many of the small Jewish settlements had been abandoned and many were now being used by the Arabs, or by their sheep and goats. It was a sad sight to see places that had been models of good husbandry and care, being reduced to hovels. The only people of ours left operating in this area was a unit of the Royal Signals, using Daimler Armoured cars to maintain the telephone communications through the area. The whole place looked like a battle zone, especially where the Arabs had stolen the underground cables, for the copper wire. To do this, they would dig a large hole to locate the cable and cut it. Then they would do the same thing about a 100yds along the road and hooking the cable up to a harness, use a team of camels to draw the cable out of the earth.

All convoys passing through this zone were warned that they must not move at night or they were liable to attack by Arab forces. If they, for any reason, found themselves in the Zone at dusk, they were supposed to report to the headman of the nearest Arab village and stay there for the night. One such group, part of 22 Para Engineers, decided to ignore this order and as a result lost six vehicles and several men when attacked by the Arabs.

I particularly liked the trip across the Sinai, from Rafah down to Kantara, on the Canal. At that time of year the daytime temperature was in the nineties (°F) but at night it dropped dramatically and got very cold. Each trip took two days travelling down, three days to unload repair and refuel and two days on the return trip. On both legs of the journey we spent one night in the desert and that was a great experience. During the day it was hot and dusty and the landscape was boring, with little change, except that now and again the sand would give way to gravel for a few miles.

The last tree between the Egyptian border and the Canal Zone, was a scrubby little thing about seven feet high, standing on its own about 200yds off the road and about a mile south of the border. Apart from that there were only

patches of scrub, thistles etc. which the wild camels seemed to live on. On two occasions we ran into a sand storm and these can be very unpleasant because the sand penetrates everywhere. In one case, we had to stop moving, put on our goggles and wait until the thing had blown over. A series of sand storms would result in the road being partially blocked and this would in itself result in an unusual sight. The Egyptians used prisoners to keep the road clear, but they were in chain gangs, chained by the ankle to each other, clearing the road with shovels.

At night the desert was an entirely different place altogether. The deep blue-black of the sky would be filled with huge stars and when there was a good moon the whole desert was bathed in the moonlight, with the high dunes and low hills casting deep shadows, while the silence was deafening in its intensity. Most of us slept in our sleeping bags thrown down on a patch of soft sand and waking in the early morning was another great experience. Due to the drop in temperature, by dawn the desert would be covered in a light mist. As the sun crept up over the horizon and the light hit the mist, it gave the desert a beautiful pink hue, before the warmth of the sun dispersed it.

These convoys were made up of about 50 vehicles of various sorts, mostly 3 ton Dodge trucks, plus several 1 ton trucks pulling water trailers, several White Scout cars, my 'fitters' wagon and Recovery vehicle, plus of course a cooks wagon. We could only carry a very limited amount of spare parts for on-the-road repairs, so we often finished up with some pretty 'Heath Robinson' rigs. For instance, if a vehicle sprang a leak from a fuel on/off tap, we would close off the tap, strap a 20 litre petrol can on the bonnet and run a pipe directly from the can into the inlet of the carburettor.

Having crossed the Canal via the Swing Bridge at Kantara and proceeded along the Canal through Ismailia and around the edge of 'The Bitter Lakes' to Kabrit, we had three days in which to check all the trucks, obtain any spare parts required, and repair all the vehicles. I spent a good deal of my time in the Armoured Workshop which was stationed there at that time, drawing out stores for our vehicle repairs, plus those required for the journey back. The journey's themselves were quite uneventful except for the return journey on the second trip.

On the way down I had left a 3 ton Dodge at the REME Station Workshops at Ismailia and had arranged to collect it on the way back. When the convoy passed through Ismailia and on across the Canal, I stopped off at the Workshop in my fitter's wagon, with one craftsman and two RHA gunners in their White Scout car. The truck being repaired was not ready, so we had to wait several hours and it was evening by the time we crossed the Canal.

We had a good meal at the workshops before we left so we were not very concerned at the time we had to make up to catch the rest of the convoy, as long as we did so before crossing the border into Palestine. Darkness soon closed in

and to start with it was quite dark, with no moon but we were making good time, with the Dodge leading, followed by my fitter's wagon and the White Scout car bringing up the rear. At some time just before midnight we passed Kilo 108, which was 108 kilometres from the Canal. At Kilo 108 there was a Royal Signals post in a bunker and a REME Recovery Post. The REME Recovery Post was manned by a REME Corporal Recovery Mechanic who lived in a small wooden hut and operated a diesel Scammell recovery truck.

About 10 miles past Kilo 108 we could see a light approaching from the opposite direction, which was unusual, as we had never ever passed any other traffic on the road before. As we got closer, it appeared to be a motor cycle with a very bright headlight but as it passed our leading truck and then my own vehicle, I realised that it was a truck with only one headlight. A few seconds later I heard a mighty bang and stopped my vehicle to see what had happened. As the unknown vehicle was passing the White Scout car, its front wheel collided with the rear wheel of the scout car and the stranger careened off into the sand for about 20yds before coming to a halt.

On investigation, we found that this vehicle was an Egyptian Army 15cwt Bedford truck, with only one headlight working on full beam. The two Egyptians in the truck were a bit shaken and bruised but otherwise seemed OK, as were the two gunners in the scout car. We found that the track rod on the Bedford was badly bent, so we removed it and straightened it by running my truck over it and they went happily on their way.

We also found that the collision had broken the rear spring hanger on the scout car and that it was not really a feasible proposition to continue with it. My craftsman and I went back in our truck to Kilo 108 to get the recovery wagon out.

The moon was now well up and I found the Corporal's hut without trouble and opened the door to enter, when I was stopped by the sound of a loud growl. I froze, and at the same time a light came on to show the Corporal lying in bed, gripping the collar of a huge Irish Wolfhound, which was lying on the floor beside the bed. The Corporal said, "OK, you can come in now, he won't touch you", much to my relief, and I explained my problem. In no time at all he was following us up the road, with his dog, in his Scammell and had soon hitched up to the scout car, which he said he would deliver to the workshops in Ismalia in the morning. We then carried on in the two remaining vehicles and managed to catch up with the rest of the convoy early the next morning, just after they had crossed the border. By the time we got in to Acre, we had been on the road for 24 hours without sleep and I had been driving for most of that time.

Sometime in early May 1948 the Jews drove all the Arabs out of Haifa, chasing them as far as Acre, where many of them took refuge, while thousands of others fled past our camp up to the Lebanese border, escorted by British Stag-hound Armoured Cars. A week or so later, because the Arabs

were still making a nuisance of themselves to the south of Acre, the Jews put in a night attack to drive the Arabs back inside the walls of the old city. They picked midnight on a Saturday, the end of the Jewish Sabbath, to start the attack and at about 9am on the Sunday morning the Mayor of Acre appealed to our CO for some small arms ammunition.

The Jews had taken possession of the high feature to the south of the city known as 'Napoleon's Mount', from where they were able to fire down into the city. Our CO refused the Arab request for ammunition but agreed to use our guns to drive the Jews off of Napoleon's Mount. Some of us climbed up onto the camp water tower to watch the action, sitting in the sunshine with first class seats. We could see the grassy green hill on the other side of the city quite clearly and when the guns laid down 12 rounds of high explosive, we could clearly see them land. The Jews promptly retired, and things returned to normal for a while.

All the while these sort of things were happening the Regiment was receiving various units, processing them through the transit camp routine, then dispatching them to Haifa docks where the ships took them off to their varied destinations. Apart from the things I have detailed I also got around quite a bit visiting other units, collecting spares and so on. I never ran into any real trouble but one of our young RHA Lieutenant's and his driver were wounded while driving a Jeep in Jerusalem. It was believed to have been a Stern Gang attack and the driver was hit by six 9mm bullets but was still able to drive his vehicle to safety and in so doing, saved the officers life as well as his own.

One night the Jews attacked the camp of 7 Regiment RHA and held the members of the guard hostage in the guardroom while they attempted to make off with some of the regiments guns. The attempt failed and the hostages were released unharmed but that really put everyone on their toes. As a result of that attack, the Regiment positioned a Cromwell tank directly in line with and a 100 yards inside of the main gate of our camp, with its gun trained straight down the approach track. In addition, we had a bunker 50 yards inside the gate, containing a anti-tank weapon and both positions were manned 24 hours a day.

To be continued in Part 3

A SERVICEMAN'S LIFE AFTER ARBORFIELD

By Tony (Ginger) Guy (43A)

One night lying in bed unable to sleep, my thoughts turned to my service life after Arborfield, from March 1946. All of April 1943 intake went off to Maidstone Barracks for military training by the Royal West Kent Regt. After this period of about 6 weeks training our Intake finally dispersed for ever.

I was one of a number of our intake that went into the RASC and we went to the Training Battalion at Farnbough. Mainly to be re-trade tested but also to be posted on to an RASC workshop elsewhere. It is from this point that I realised that I had a very hectic service life having been on the strength of some 30 units in 22 years. Also I had been to many countries that not many of my old buddies could match in scale. Therefore I now put fingers to computer to lay all out in date order the saga of 2548341 Tony Guy for the entertainment of the readers of OBAN.

1946. Arborfield to Maidstone to Farnbough. March to June. From Farnbough posted to my first working unit of 579 Car Company W/shops RASC which was on the golf course at Wentworth, Virginia Waters. Six weeks later I was sent HQ Eastern Command Hounslow to a minor w/shop that carried out mainly first aid vehicle repairs. What a great place for a young lad to be at. A short walk to a London tube station and of course, 35 Shillings a week in the pocket !! In October I was posted to 580 Car Company at St. Neots Huntingdonshire. I would like to remind old sweats how we traveled in those far off days. Full FSMO with 303 rifle. Me going by tube train to King's Cross Station with that lot to tote. Mercy !. Just before the New Year I was sent to the RASC Depot then at Thetford Norfolk. Embarkation leave was given on the 29th. December 1946 to cover Christmas and the usual 14 days leave.

1947. Returned to Thetford mid-January and drafted to the Canal Zone. 1946/47 winter was the coldest and had the most snow for about one hundred years. The Depot was an old American Air Force base. Barrack room heating one tiny iron stove in each room. We all went to bed at night fully dressed with greatcoats on. After two weeks our draft entrained for London and an overnight stay at Marylebone transit hotel. I met Boyce there who was in a REs draft. We then went to Tilbury Docks next day to board the "Highland Princess" troopship. The ship called at Gib. then to Trieste Italy, then to Port Said. Once again to a transit camp and the first of many times to live under canvas for me. I still loath tents after all these years. I met a number of 43A at the camp, the last time I was to met so many ever again. Mid February I was again on the move out of transit.

1947 still and my next unit was to 286 G T Coy RASC at Sarafand in Palestine. This was a delightful unit which had only Dodge 3 tonners. So easy to work on after our old British

trucks. Six weeks later I was posted to 716 Airborne Light Company RASC part of 6th. A/B Division at Hedera, about the center of Palestine. Under canvas again including the workshops. It was at this unit I first met RASC trained apprentices, never having heard at that time that boys other than Chepstow and us had trade training.

In May I was posted to HQ 6th. A/B Div. at Haifa, high on the mountain behind the Lighthouse. This again was to a small W/S for light repairs only. Here I learnt every thing about the Willys Jeep. I was also placed in charge of the K6 Austin recovery truck, what luck I was having. The living accommodation we had was perched on Mount Carmel with wonderful views to the South along the coast with the REME Base W/S below.

1948. In June the whole of the armed forces began to leave Palestine. My unit tagged along at the back of miles and miles of vehicles heading for the Canal Zone. I was last in the K6 crossing the Suez Canal at the Swing Bridge. We took all the vehicles to Tel-el-Kebir then went to Port Said and boarded the "Empress of Canada" trooper sailed via Salonica and Malta to Liverpool. After Disembarkation leave my new unit was to be 63 Para. Coy RASC part of 16 Para Bde. 6th. A/B had been disbanded down to brigade size. 63 Coy was at Naumunster near Hamburg, commanded by the worst CO and RSM I encountered in all of my service.

1949. I applied for a posting from 63 Coy and was lucky to go to 721 Car Coy RASC at Bad Oynhausen. This was a mixed unit with ATS drivers. 721 Coy provided all the vehicles for HQ BAOR, some five hundred various cars, caravans and lorries. I had a excellent time in Bad O, there was so much to do as the town had been cleared totally of civilians and catered for military personnel only. All ranks lived in the towns private houses.

1951. I was called back to 63 Para Coy in a hurry due to being a trained para as 16 Bde, now in Aldershot, was to be rushed to the Canal Zone. In fact we went by aircraft carrier to Cyprus, landing at Farnagusta. It was about 2 months before we actually got to the C Z by air. 63 Coy was near Fayid and we were under canvas again. Several months passed and I was posted to 23 Para Field Ambulance RAMC. It was another rushed posting because the REME Cpl. in the unit had had a fight with the CO over a game of chess. Black eyes all round. This was another great unit to be in as there was only one REME man on strength.

1952. June of the year, having worked out that I had done 5 years overseas service, I applied for PYTHON and a return to UK. This was granted and I sailed to Southampton on the "Empire Trooper". From the ship we went on disembarkation leave. I reported for the very first time to REME Depot Arborfield. (I had left the RASC on phase 2.) Imagine my shock when told I was posted to 1st. Bn. Grenadier Guards at Victoria Bks, Windsor. I considered that I would not last 5 minutes with them. However it turned out that I was the first Reme Veh. Mech posted to them for up to then the VMs had

always been guardsmen. In October the Bn went to Wellington Brks to prepare for the Coronation.

1953. Had a really good time with the Guards, right in the center of London, no duties except my own job and 4 PM was finishing time. During Coronation Day, I was in charge of all the vehicles based in the barracks that took the food and tea to every soldier lining the procession route. The downside of the 2nd June 1953 was that it rained non-stop all day. Every body was soaked to the bone. During November, London was struck by the worst smog attack ever. For 4 days visibility was only yards. Every thing was covered in thick black slime.

About this time the Bn was alerted to go to Berlin, so I applied to re-join the paras. As the sun shines on the righteous so it shone on me and I was offered the job of PSI to the CREME of 44 Para Bde T A based near Sloane Square. A super job which entailed me going on the strength of 44 Para Bde. LAD TA at Feltham Middlesex. This LAD on closer inspection was a Romney hut, 6 vehicles, one officer and 12 TA men. They had failed a major vehicle inspection and I was asked to get the unit through the follow up inspection. Chance played a part in the success of passing the next inspection in that at Feltham was a REME W/S where the ASM was an ex-Chepstow boy. I told him the problem and he arranged to put through the workshops my 6 vehicles each getting repaired and also re-painted completely. We sailed through the CIV inspection thanks to the old boy network.

1954, January. I was informed that as an ASM was available, he would be posted to our tiny LAD and that I would be going to 21 SAS Regt. TA. The HQ of the Regt. was at Dukes Road Euston. I must say I had never heard of them but was quite delighted with the posting. However my place of work was at Warwick Road, Kensington just off the Kensington High St. As well as having charge of the vehicle repairs and inspections, the job of MTO was given to me. Taking over from a Royal Signals Sgt. who had been out of his depth for months, I found a terrible mess in all things to do with the admin of the office work. Several months into the job, a very large package arrived from the Command Secretary containing all the previous years' used vehicles work tickets. In those days every veh. had a W/T written out regardless of if used on the road or not that day. We had over 40 all types of vehicles. 365x40 = a lot of tickets. Pages and pages of queries were attached, what to do? Like a well trained Arborfield Boy I burnt the lot knowing I could never answer the hundreds of questions asked.

With this Regt I did all the courses such as demolition, Frogman under water course, firing the twin Vickers K machine guns etc. In March 1954 I was sent with another SAS Sgt. to Abingdon on an Assistant Parachute Jumping Instructors Course, I believe I was the first REME man to do this course. After qualifying I went all over the UK on weekend para training exercises helping the RAF instructors.

1958. REME Records post me to my first proper work-

shop. 10 Command W/S at Mill Hill, north London. Very few soldiers there as the workshop was highly civilianized. Lt.Col. Romero was commanding. After so much active service I did not fit in very well. A run-in with the RSM on the first day was a bad start. There was very little for the soldiers to do so I was pleased to find that I was to be sent on to 8 Training Bn. Taunton.

1959. At Taunton I was given classes to teach clutches to. Very easy job but very boring. Playing hockey for the unit meant we got away from the classroom often during the week days so not too bad. A few months into the posting, I had a slice of luck. Talking to the Chief Clerk in his office, he received a phone call for REME Records. They were telling him that a Sgt. awaiting an overseas posting from the Bn. was not fit to go abroad and was there another Sgt. VM available to go in his place. While holding the phone he asked me if I would like to go overseas again. Without knowing where the posting was to be, I said yes please. After confirming with records that I would be suitable, he told me the posting was to the Island of Mauritius. What blind luck, right place right time!! The unit there was the Station Workshops for the Garrison. Two companies of the 6th KAR plus the Royal Signals Empire relay station and a few other troops made up the garrison working hours were 9 am to 12 Noon.

Four months into the posting it was announced that the garrison was to close and all troops would leave. Unbeknown to me Gordon Harris who was an ex Arborfield Boy, was a Captain at HQ East Africa Nairobi, he arranged for me to be posted to 6th. KAR at Dar-es-Salaam. He had recognized my army number and did for me a great favour, one I did not find out about for some years. Gordon was in 1944 B intake. This was also a wonderful posting for me. The 6th Bn. barracks were about 4 miles north of Dar very close to the sea with our own beach area. My work crew was two African REME Vehicle Mechs who were very good tradesmen. The other REME men were Terry Foster, Sgt. Storeman and the Armourer Sgt. name forgotten.

I went on many Safaris usually driving the old K6 Austin recovery truck. This was necessary when more than 3 vehicles went out due to the great distances between towns. Taking BLR vehicles to Nairobi for replacement and to collect stores was a 3 day trip in each direction. I could wax endlessly about my time in Dar and the adventures I had. Two of the more outstanding were:

1/ 1960. The Bn. was rushed over to Zanzibar Island because the Africans were killing off the Arab rulers there. Scenes of utter chaos were every where with dead bodies strewn about the streets and up trees. Burnt buildings shops looted, the usual picture of revenge by one people upon another. While there we were living in the Aga Khans seaside house, very comfortable. I have never read much about those hectic months in the newspapers in UK. We stayed on the island until a Guards Bn. took over.

2/ 1961. Returning from Bn. exercise held at Arusha to

Dar-es-Salaam by road, on the way to Moshi, the Bedford RL I in which I was a passenger, was struck head on by an Austin Mini bus. The collision drove the RL right off the road into the ditch and on to its side and ripped the front axle off. My cab door was on the ground and hearing the fuel from the carburettor hissing on to the exhaust pipe, I was out of the cab via the gun hatch like a flash. My driver was hanging towards the gun hatch and as quickly as I could managed to drag him free away from the truck. His face was layed open by the windscreen and I was covered in his blood. He died. Going over to the mini bus, I counted 12 dead Africans spread over the road. 11 adults and one young girl.

I sat on the side of this lonely road for sometime before two Sikhs drove up in their car. Eyes popping out they did not want to get out of the car, I told them to turn round and get back to Arusha to tell the police. Some little time after this 2 of our trucks came back to see why we had not arrived at the rest camp for a meal. The 2 i/c could not believe his eyes at the carnage, he thought because of the blood all over me that I was badly hurt as well. It took many hours after the police arrived to get on our way again. There was a sequel to this accident that I will mention later on. Later in 1961 I left the 6th. Bn on posting to the Station W/Shop Nanyuki Kenya. A few months before my tour was ended I was posted to 93 MT Coy KAR LAD in Nairobi.

1962 From the Depot my next posting was to 7th. Signal Regt. at Herford BAOR. John Horwood was the AQMS in the LAD although I did not know he was an Oct 43 boy. Also the Adjutant of the Regt. was Peter Baldwin later Major

General, of 42 B intake I think. Some months after joining the LAD I was dispatched back to the Depot at Arborfield to be returned to Nairobi. As the only survivor of the road accident outside Arusha, the Tanganyika Govt. had requested my presence to give an eyewitness account at the inquest of what happened that day. I left from London airport on BAOC to Nairobi stopping at Khartoum for fuel, a very comfortable journey.

At the airport a movement control Cpl. met me and conducted me to HQ East Africa Command where I was told that a light aircraft would take me to Arusha in three days time and I would be put up in a hotel there for as long as the court hearing took. It was a week before the inquest started and the hearing took three days to complete. After the hearing I discovered that there was no plan to get me back to Nairobi. Any way I cadged a lift easily back to EAHQ. The MC. Cpl. I had already met was on duty when I went to arrange the flight back to UK. He told me that there was no chance of a trooping flight for at least four weeks due to battalions changing stations. The OC Holding Company gave me a four week pass to go where I wished so I went to Mombasa to stay with friends for two weeks. Later I hitched a ride with the RAF to Kampala for the Uganda Independence Day staying with a buddy at 4th. KAR. In all I was away for two months before re-joining 7th. Sigs.

1963. Mid year I was posted to 12 Lt. AA Regt. RA for service in Malaya. The Regt. flew out by air trooping Britannia aircraft from Blackbushe, Camberley. In those days aircraft did not fly at night, as outside Europe there was no air traffic



Our Bedford RL after collision with an Austin Minibus outside Arusha

control in general so pilots need to see the ground. Therefore our plane stopped at Istanbul one night and the next night at Bombay. On day three we landed at Kuala Lumpur in the evening, everybody exhausted, it was several hours before any one got to bed that night. The Regt. was based at Tampin south of KL. In the W/S I met John Horwood again now commissioned. It did not take me long to realize that workshop life did not suit me so I volunteered for the Gurkhas and three days later was posted to the 2/10 Bn. Gurkha Rifles at Singapore. Two days later I was in Sarawak where the Bn. was stationed at Simanggang, on the border with Indonesia. The CO of the Bn. was area commander for the Third Division. Two Craftsmen were on station when I arrived and they had, through lack of spares cannibalised from 8 other vehicles leaving the available transport very short for patrol use. In those days of 1963 there was not any back up by the RAOC stores depots in Borneo. All spares were ordered by radio to Singapore. This made life difficult as there was not at that time a REME W/S either until one was set up in Kuchin.

1964. The fighting increased in our division and the troops were often airlifted in to the jungle by RN or RAF helicopters. In the early days any Indonesian troops killed had their bodies brought back to HQ for identification. Later so many were killed that only the heads and hands were transported. Finger prints were taken and faces photographed for the record. It was very eerie to see a line of heads having their photos taken.

Mid 1964. The Bn. returned to Singapore by air except for the drivers and us few REME bods. The whole of the units transport was loaded on to a LST called Reginald Kerr. Being the senior soldier, I was placed in charge of the troops and vehicles for a very restful three days sea voyage to Singapore. Due to their age and the damaged suffered on the bad roads of Sarawak all the vehicles we brought back with us were BLRed. Some of the Landrovers were MK2 and 4s, so old.

September 1964. The Bn. was put on standby to return to Sarawak so I decided to apply for a posting out. This was granted and I was posted to 221 BVD RAOC REME W/shops at Johor Baharu. This was a good unit and I was very happy there. My job was looking after all the ancillary machinery throughout the vast depot. It meant I was my own boss and able to schedule my work load. One other job given to me was local purchase in JB and Singapore for spares and equipment. Before purchase, one had to go to FELFHQ for the paper work to be signed. On my first visit to the REME office I discovered Peter England was the WO1 in charge. I had not seen him since leaving Arborfield in 1946. One highlight during my time in JB was a trip to Hongkong on HMS Triumph. It took 4 days to sail there 8 days in harbour and 4 days back, what a great holiday.

1966 After 18 months with 221 BVD my tour ended and I

was off to UK and the Depot. I received 3 months leave prior to my last active posting to BAOR. This was to 54 Sqn. RCT LAD stationed at Minden. This unit had very old Karrier Tipper trucks donkey years out of date and the devil to work on.

In the days of crash-outs in the winter the job of starting these trucks was a miracle. The CO would nash his teeth in rage as time slipped by and we were not all on the road within the time frame. One course I went on was to SEME Bordon to do "C" vehicle training. In BAOR there was a request for Veh. Mechs to volunteer for the Assault Engineers RE trained in "C" Vehs. Every man who did volunteer was promised a step up in rank and a further 5 years of service if the "C" vehicle course was passed. It was a 3 month course in England and I had only 14 months service left so it was a chance to extend my service at a time when most men had to leave at age 40 years. I passed the course and reported back to 54 Sqn. and waited and waited and waited to be posted to the REs. The CO contacted REME after 4 months only to be told that as I would be a block to younger soldiers promotion I was not going to the REs. after all. Was he mad about that!! In October 1967 I requested to serve my last 6 months in UK.

1968, January. I joined where else but SEME Bordon. I was in the PS in the Vehicle Wing and really had time to work towards my discharge. Pre-release course set-up and spot of job hunting passed the time. Three days before my release I was interviewed by the Lt.Col. Veh. Wing, my last CO. He asked me why I was leaving the service as my record showed I had, only the year before, been on the C course at SEME. I explained to him that records had turned me down. He called in the Chief Clerk to contact records to find out what went wrong. Apparently a junior clerk there had decided without reference to anybody else and without knowing of the special reasons for my course had thought I was a promotion block and thereby did me a huge favour by turning me down.

On the 1 September 1968 I was discharged into a huge uncaring world to fend for myself and was I glad to see the back of SEME.

More later of what befell me after I left the Army (if the Editor can stand the strain of reading pages and pages more about Ginger Guy). *I'll do my best!* - Ed.

PS. I have omitted a number of units in which I served for less than 3 months.

NB. I read with interest the boasting in OBAN by a number of readers as to who was the youngest to be made a LASS. I consider that it took me 4-5 years on man service to become a passable vehicle mechanic, a craftsman who could work on many types of equipment other than his main trade and by then be able to properly supervise other people

LONGMOOR CAMP & MILITARY RAILWAY

By Pete Gripton (56B)

(This article has been extracted from a book written by Pete Gripton (56B) entitled, A History of Greatham; the village where he has lived for many years, commuting to SEME Bordon until his retirement in the year 2000. - Ed)

Longmoor Camp

Longmoor Camp has long been a close neighbour of Greatham, situated above Apple Pie Hill, but there is little permanent military presence these days. One site is now used mainly as an equipment storage area, or Engineer Park, for the Royal Engineers, whilst the main barracks and surrounding heath-land acts as a training centre, for both Regular and Territorial Army units, as well as the Army Cadet Force. It is often asked where the name 'Apple Pie' came from, used as it is for both the hill and camp area just above it. Rumour had it that following a Royal inspection many years ago, during Longmoor's early days, King George V coined the term when he remarked that 'everything is in apple-pie order'. But close inspection of an 1880's map shows that there was an 'Applepie Corner' at the meeting of some tracks on the site, so the mystery lives on.

Land for Army training was first bought at both Bordon and Longmoor in 1863, seven years after the end of the Crimean War. A Douglas Fir-tree, planted in 1849 from seed introduced from North America, still proudly stands in the grounds of what is now Ladysmith House. In 1900, when the British Empire still laid claim to a quarter of the habitable globe, the War Office planned some re-deployment of troops, using Longmoor as one of the locations. Work started by 23 Field Company, Royal Engineers, in August 1900, and was completed in May 1903.

The imminent arrival of troops in the area was not universally welcome at first. This is made clear by the following extract of a letter written the Rev. Francis Bryans to his future successor, Cecil Luttrell-West, in August 1900:

"There is going to be a great change in the quiet

parish, which I fear may upset everything in a little time. We are to have a second Aldershot. We have now about 100 soldiers putting up huts on the common for 3 or 4 Battalions, which I believe measures 3,000 soldiers or thereabouts, who are to take up their permanent abode here in about 3 months. In the course of a year or two there will be, as I have said, another Aldershot. The residents in the neighbourhood are very much annoyed, as Tommy Atkins in multitudes is not a very desirable neighbour, though it is the fashion now to back him up." This does not appear to be a very Christian attitude, although more understandable in those days of stricter morals and conditions. A newspaper article of the day, in February 1901, sets the scene. Headed 'The Begging Nuisance', it reads: "At the Magistrates Clerks Office on Monday, before Mr. W.B. Edgerton, Isaac Chase, tramp, pleaded guilty to begging at Greatham on the 2nd inst. and was sentenced to 7 days hard labour."

The first units to occupy the corrugated iron huts of the camp were 1st Battalion of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and 2nd Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment. It was these two units who complained so strenuously about the apparently unhealthy, damp marshy conditions, that the War Office decided to transfer the Infantry to Bordon, leaving Longmoor as the home for a Mounted Infantry School of Training. In order to transport the necessary huts the 4 miles between the sites, two 18-inch light railway Decaville tracks, exactly parallel to each other at a distance of 22 feet apart, were laid down. The whole move took around two years, but the foundation for a railway system had now come into existence, and its presence in the area remained for more than 60 years. A derailment of one of the 72-foot long huts proved irretrievable, and it was abandoned at Whitehill, where it was later refurbished to serve many years as the local Police Station!

During World War 2, the British Army Transportation Centre was set up at Longmoor, and trained large numbers of Canadian troops for various trades, or for railway, port or water transport duties. Local residents who can recall those days remember most of them as cheerful soldiers, always ready for a laugh. Army lorries or

regular service buses used to be crammed with soldiers, singing their way back to barracks after an evening out at Petersfield.

As the war progressed, the lorries began to carry passengers of a very different background. The success of the 8th Army in the deserts of North Africa meant that thousands of prisoners-of-war were brought back to this country. The mainly Italian captives must have made a strange sight to local people, dressed in their chocolate-brown battle-dress, covered in brightly coloured patches for identification purposes. In 1965, upon the formation of the Royal Corps of Transport, Longmoor Camp became home to the Army School of Transport, and this lasted until 1977. When the School split up, one part moved up to Leconfield, North Humberside, and the other to Aldershot. Longmoor ceased to be used as a main military base for regular Army units, and in 1978 instead became HQ Longmoor Intermediate Training Area (L.I.T.A.), controlling various activities, including Longmoor Training Camp and Longmoor Firing Ranges. The unit title was amended to Longmoor District Training Area, upon reorganisation of UKLF in 1991.

An interesting footnote to the story of Longmoor Camp is illustrated by a stone Royal Engineers Crest, mounted above the main entrance to No.1 Officer's Mess, built in the late 1930's. Incorporated within the crest is the cypher of Edward VIII, who reigned for only a few short months in 1936, before abdicating over his relationship with the American divorcee, Mrs. Wallis Simpson. It is certainly a crest of some historical significance and rarity.

Military Railway

Woolmer Forest is the main site of the now-defunct Longmoor Military Railway (LMR), which came into being in 1935, although most of the track already existed, having been completed in 1903. Indeed, some of the material used in its construction had been salvaged from the Suakin-Berber military railway, built during the Sudan campaign between 1882 and 1885!

Previously known as the Woolmer Instructional

Military Railway (W.I.M.R.), it also had the nick-name 'Will It Move Railway', no doubt due to the difficult gradients encountered over the forest and heath. Although never part of the national rail system, it did provide a form of link between the main-line stations of Liss and Bentley. In December 1905, at the request of the War Office, a link-line had been completed from Bentley to Bordon, termed the Bentley & Bordon Light Railway. Bentley was on the London & South Western line, between Farnham and Alton.

During the years 1908-1910, along with the construction of a cutting at what is now Whitehill cross-roads, a standard-gauge line was laid from Bordon down to Longmoor Camp. The final extension of the system, with a line down to Liss, started in 1924 but was not completed until 1933, while its connection to Southern Railway was not established until 1942. This was at a time when there was a need for Bailey bridges and other such equipment to be transported down to the embarkation ports along the south coast, in preparation for D-Day. It is no surprise to learn that, over its lifetime, the L.M.R. had the largest number of different railway gauges in the world.

In May 1928, the L.M.R. was honoured by a Royal visit. Their Majesties King George V and Queen Mary were shown the work being carried out on the 'Liss extension'. For their journey down the railway, the Kent & East Sussex Railway Saloon, numbered 'WIMR 7', was fitted out as an impromptu Royal coach, being furnished with various cushions and carpets from Officers' quarters around the camp.

Longmoor has an interesting connection with Waterloo Bridge in London! In June 1934 the old bridge was demolished and a temporary one erected. However, work on the new bridge did not start until 1938, and was then obviously disrupted by the outbreak of war. During the next few war years, the previously temporary construction was moved to Longmoor for storage purposes. It was then transported across the Channel during the D-Day operation, and used to bridge the Rhine at Remagen after the capture of Antwerp.

During its colourful history, the railway must have

seen many events take place, but it could hardly have been expected to play the role of film-star! But it did indeed form the backdrop for many films, from the late 1930's right through until the 1970's, after the system had officially closed. The first film to be made here was 'The Lady Vanishes' in 1938, which starred Margaret Lockwood and Michael Redgrave. The last, 'Young Winston' in 1972, starring Simon Ward in the title role, used the Weaver's Down to Liss line as a make-believe South Africa, set during the Boer War.

In 1955, during the making of 'Bhowani Junction', men of the 10th Railway Squadron, having recently returned from overseas service in the Canal Zone, required no top-up from the make-up ladies for their tans, as they played extras on the set. The Hollywater loop was transformed into an Indian landscape for the duration of filming. One of the stars of the film was Hollywood legend Ava Gardner, and while in the area, she was wined and dined by members of the Bordon Officer's Mess

The railway has no doubt seen many well-known railway engines in its chequered history, perhaps the most famous of all being 'Gordon the Blue Engine', friend of 'Thomas the Tank Engine'. Both were amongst the heroes of the children's book series, written by the Rev. W.V. Awdry. The Army's blue engines were designed to pull heavy loads, and Gordon was built in 1897 at the Taff works in Cardiff. His name was given in honour of General C.G. Gordon, well known as 'Gordon of Khartoum'. Gordon was a 2-10-0 locomotive, No.600, purchased in 1943 and probably used at Longmoor from that date, although only recorded as being there from 1957 onwards. With the Bentley-Bordon line closing in 1957, and a gradual decline into disuse, official closure of all elements finally came in 1969. The last 'Public Day', held on July 5th of that year, was attended by over 12,000 spectators. Parts of the track-bed are still accessible to the public, and indeed it is possible to walk the whole loop which skirts what is now the Longmoor Military Ranges. Part of the 'Liss extension' has now been adopted as the very pleasant Riverside Walk, stretching from the Liss Forest Road right down to Liss Railway Station, and kept in good condition by the regular efforts of the Liss Conservation Volunteers. The three

wooden bridges which now form part of this linear walk, reflect the history of Longmoor, being named after three of its former senior officers – namely Rose, Nightingale and Briggs. It is now almost impossible to imagine the presence of such a railway system, although for those hardy souls that are able to ramble and explore across the range area between Greatham and Whitehill, it is still possible to come across the remnants of an old siding or railway track, and to hear in one's mind the blast of a whistle or the hiss of a mighty steam engine.

Postscript

As the editor mentions at the beginning, this article is a brief chapter from a book that I have been putting together for about a year now. It was originally intended for local interest only, but with the military connection, Brian thought it would bring back a few memories for those many ex-boys who either attended courses or served on the permanent staff of SEME, Bordon. My first contact with Bordon was during an ECE conversion course circa 1963, learning the delights of the Centurion ARV Winch control circuits. Some of you may remember Tommy Groves, who did the instruction for this, and in fact I knew him for many years afterwards when I joined SEME as a civvie instructor. Living in Greatham, just a few miles south of Bordon, I was only able to catch a few glimpses of the old railway system, when the trains used to cross the Liphook Road just outside Greatham village. I was also a passenger on the 'Bordon Bullet' (if memory serves me correctly!), which used to transport students between Martinique Camp and the SEME TTA (Technical Training Area) for a number of years. It would be interesting if any of you readers could add some substance to this particular piece of history. Finally, I would like to acknowledge the input provided to this article by the following publications:

'The Bordon Light Railway', Peter A. Harding, 1987; 'Branch lines to Longmoor', Vic Mitchell & Keith Smith, 1987; 'Some notes on the military history of Longmoor & Bordon', Lt.Col. L. Cromwell OBE, Garrison Adj. 1956-70; 'Bordon Garrison through the ages', Maj. R.G. Reed, Garrison Adj. 1970-82.

WE KNOW IT DOESN'T FIT

Part 1 of 3

By John Johnson (56B)

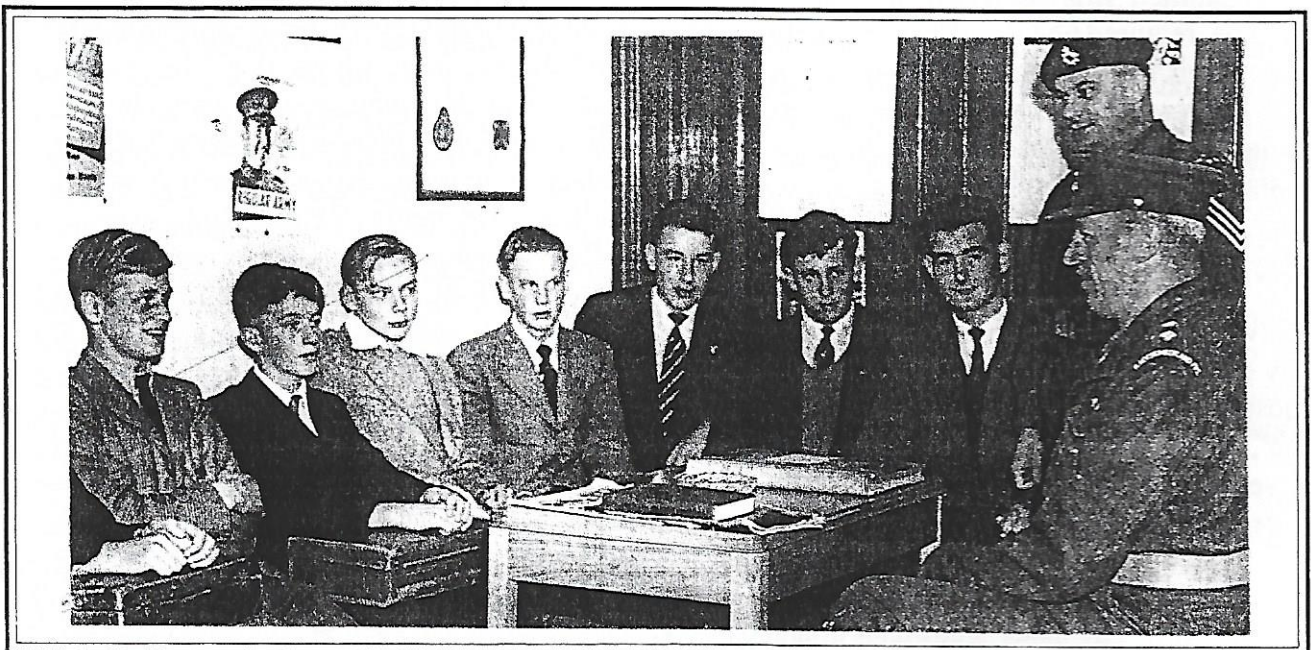
(This is the first part of the story of John Johnson's early years in the Army at the Army Apprentices School in Arborfield (now of course The Army Technical Foundation College(ATFC) and later service life - Ed).

I was three months past my fifteenth birthday and of an independent mind when on 28 August 1956, I set out with very little fear or trepidation on a lifetime adventure. It began with a train ride to Brighton, compliments of Her Majesty's Government. It was a straightforward journey, being on a direct line from Chichester, that ancient of cities. When I arrived at Brighton railway station there were three or four

change of underwear and socks plus washing kit, carefully selected by my father. It was fraudulent to give me shaving gear, I couldn't raise any more than bum-fluff and managed well into my twenties with shaving only every other day.

Leaving home was nothing new having spent some years with my grandmother, up to and after my grandfather's death, then later a couple of years at a British Army boarding school in Hamm, Germany, when my father's regiment (The Royal Sussex) was posted to Minden. The school was Windsor School, my school house was Marlborough House and my house number, M18. To me, living in similar circumstances to a boarding school held no horrors. Little did I know!

Whether we each received a train ticket to Wokingham in Berkshire or whether it was group ticket I can't remember.



August 1956. Brighton Recruiting Office. Johnson 3rd Left

other lads also waiting for the recruiting officer. We made our way to the HM Forces Movements Office on the station, as instructed in our letters.

My next clear memory is of being seated in the recruiter's office and then being duly sworn in together and signing on the dotted line. In retrospect it was somewhat foolish to expect a fifteen year old lad to really know enough of life to commit himself to a three-year apprenticeship followed by nine-years with the Colours. So in that short and meaningful ceremony, I signed away twelve years of my life to the service of my country for a starting wage of 31 shillings and sixpence per week, before deductions. An adult decision by a child.

I remember there was a photographer from the local paper and the resultant picture shows the small group of us sitting around a table in the recruiting office, all smiling as if we had won a prize. What the picture does not show is the paper carrier-bag jammed behind my back which contained one

Nonetheless, we all arrived at Wokingham on time. Of my companions, I can only remember Tiny Noble, a chap called Fry, and another called Sugget. Getting off the train in Wokingham, we met up with others who were also going to the apprentices school, amongst which were two old acquaintances from Windsor School, Ralph Wright and Klaus Pennington. I knew the former well, and his brother, Wright minor, as the Housemaster used to say at roll-call, as we were Marlborough house-mates. It is much easier being in a strange place with people you know, so it was going to be okay.

Eventually we were ordered into a typically smelly army three-ton truck that reeked of oil and damp canvas and the short four miles journey to Arborfield began. There was no time to gawk at the countryside as we struggled to keep our balance on a rock-hard seat and clutch our personal belongings. It was too noisy to talk and so we sat in silence a watched the hedgerows race away from us through the rear of the covered truck. In any case the countryside looked no

different from the countryside in Sussex, which I had left that morning. I was to get to know the road from Wokingham to Arborfield rather intimately in the next three years, from the not so comfortable seats of the local bus service as well as by Shanks' pony!

Arborfield was the home of the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the regular army corps that we would all be going to once our three year apprenticeship was successfully completed. Poperhinge Barracks, the REME Depot, was a few hundred yards up the road from the AAS. In reality Arborfield was a village around which a garrison had grown. We rounded the curve where the local watering hole was situated, swept passed the REME Depot on the right and dropped down a gentle slope to the entrance of the AAS, spelled out in full across the arched entrance. This entrance road ran straight ahead through the main part of the camp and out through the playing fields to the back entrance, adjacent to the garrison hospital. Immediately to the left of the main entrance were the guardroom and cells. Next to that, the gymnasium, behind that a playing field and then the permanent staff Sgts' Mess.

A road separated this block of buildings from the first row of roughly 'H' shaped spider blocks. There was a single row of these blocks separated into two sections which constituted A and B Company, they stretched off to the right going slightly uphill. Next came the cookhouse. Behind the cookhouse and separating A and B Coy from the other companies was the square, on which many a happy and unhappy hour was spent. The left side of the camp's main through road was occupied by administration buildings, company offices, QM's stores, NAAFI block and Band Room, School HQ, the armoury and then three more company offices, finally followed by the start of the playing fields and an athletics track.

The educational classrooms were separated from the accommodation spiders by a road running uphill. After the classrooms the workshops, large steel structures, cool in the summer and aching cold in the winter months. Thereafter the sports fields and sacred cricket pitch. In three years we were to come to know these fields intimately, as well as the QM's stores, the cookhouse and the attached boiler-room.

We were assigned to Headquarter Company where the initial training phase would take place, square bashing and other soldier-like activities necessary to ensure that one fits into the system. This phase lasted six months, after which we would be detailed off to one of the other four companies, where we would be promoted to 'Two Division' and (unofficially) able to bully the new intake. We would spend the remaining two and a half years of our apprenticeship in our appointed companies. My intake was designated 56B, indicating the year and second intake of the year, there being two intakes, January and August, January's lot were 56A. We were jealous of our intake number and as all boys do, we thought it was superior to any other.

I was a chancy bargain as far as the Army was concerned, having been selected more for my cadet experience and

record than my already stated dismal academic abilities. In addition, I was later to discover that more than one of my contemporaries in the AAS had been given an alternative by a juvenile court, 'The Army or a Borstal Boys detention centre'. So much for the touted selection process! Of what value was I?

The AAS worked on a six division system, beginning with one-division (basic training) then progressing every six months to a higher division until reaching Six Division, which was the last six months of one's apprenticeship. By then many were receiving regular army rates of pay, because of their age. Our apprentice rates were somewhat less. To the rest of the regular Army we were known as 'boy soldiers'.

We 'new boys' were shown into our barrack's spider block and put in the charge of an Apprentice Corporal. That is to say that he was an apprentice who held the rank of Cpl in the AAS structure. Anyone not holding an apprentice rank was referred to as A/T, meaning Apprentice Tradesman. The Corporal was to be our guide and mentor for the next six months. One of his first warnings was that smoking was forbidden until the age of sixteen and then only with the written permission of one or both parents. Fortunately for me, at that time I was a non-smoker.

Each recruit had an iron bedstead, a bedside mat, chair (was it a chair or a bedside locker?) and six foot clothing locker. On each bed was a mattress and bedding. Having dropped our meagre belongings on the bed, most of us stretched out on the bare mattress, wondering if we were ever going to be fed. The Corporal, a wise old man of seventeen or so, ambled into the room and surveyed us motley lot then asked 'Anyone here from the South of England?' I was from the South. I was the son of an old soldier. I knew better than to fall into the trap of answering. Of the sixteen room-mates, several raised their hands.

'Good! That means you can easily learn how to make a bed. I will demonstrate and you will all copy me and make your bed exactly as I show you'. From his voice we inferred that he was prejudiced against southerners. As it turned out he was merely parroting something he had been subjected to in his early days. And so he proceeded to show us all how an army bed was to be made up for sleeping in, and how it was to be stripped and boxed every morning. The stripping and boxing - a form of folding everything up to look neat, was done to ensure uniformity and prevent persons from going to bed during the day, or so I thought, and still do. Having successfully made the bed up, the Corporal instructed everyone to follow suit and practise this newest of marshal arts. The person who had laid a previous claim to the bed space was grinning at the thought of having his bed made to perfection by the Corporal. In this he was to be disappointed because the Corporal simply pulled the bed apart and stalked off. So for a good half an hour we made and unmade our beds until the Corporal was reasonably satisfied.

The next activity was eating. Lunch had been kept over for us until after the older hands had eaten. We trooped after the Corporal a few yards to the dining room. The ritual here was

to present a meal card, printed with little squares - three per day, which when offered for inspection by the dining room orderly, were scratched or punched out for each corresponding meal. Thus your attendance at meals was recorded and, more importantly, you couldn't go round twice, thus depriving Her Majesty of expensive victuals.

We were to discover later that should your pal be on 'ticket' duty it was very easy to do a double round, if you were particularly hungry and had the requisite constitution. Because there would be no re-issue of meal cards, it was advised that they be looked after very carefully. To this end we soon learned that the best protection was to obtain a packing voucher cover from the side of the wooden boxes that clothing and other stores were delivered in to the camp. The voucher cover was in effect a picture frame-like piece of tin, open at one end, solid at the back, into which was slipped an envelope containing the details of the shipment within the box. This served to carry and protect the information from the ravages of travel, weather and storage. Like-wise it protected our meal cards from damage otherwise inflicted by constant handling and folding, etc.

There's little to say about the meals, save that none starved or lost unnecessary weight. We had good meals and bad ones. As young men we were perpetually hungry anyway, so no matter how often they could have fed us, we would never have had enough. To supplement your daily ration there was always a trip to the NAAFI, where for a very modest sum one could acquire a simple meal like pie and chips. Pay day meant a treat at the NAAFI, if one was prepared to wait in a very long queue. NAAFI is pronounced 'naffy', not 'narfee', as pointed out by our mentor, the initials mean the Corporal assured us that it stood for 'No Ambition And F-all Interest'. Amusing, but very unfair, seeing that they provided a world-wide service which generally was appreciated and very much missed when the facility was not available.

Having been fed and watered, we were marched (shambled, is a better description) to the Quartermaster's Store where we were to receive our uniforms and other items. As to the actual clothing received, it is a dim memory now aside from the World War I pattern high-collar uniforms and three of everything relating to shirts, underwear, socks and the like. 'You gets free', says the storeman 'cause you has one on, one in the wash and one in yer locker, fer inspections!' Of the ritual that goes with the issue of equipment I do clearly remember the fact that I and one other had been given the same army number. Those experienced in these things will know that one's number is of paramount importance. The NUMBER precedes all else in seniority when it comes to filling in names and other personal details. Each of us was called by name and given a slip of paper on which was written the number we had been allocated. We were told to commit it to memory as it would be required almost every day for the next few days. And so we stood about mumbling the sequences to ourselves in a determined effort to get it off pat before we lost the piece of paper. Clutching the said piece of paper, we filed into the hallowed halls of the QM stores where were seated on a long and uncomfortable bench. We sat silently until the Storeman condescended to attend to our

needs. The apprentice corporals maintaining a superior attitude as befits wiser heads. As we sat and waited we smiled at the humorous notices pinned high above the issues counter. Of those there I remember only two, which although now known to be older than the hills, were very new to us. The first read 'We know it doesn't fit but think of the public expense!' The second read along the lines that 'Regardless of rumours to the contrary, there are only two sizes available in the Army. 2 BIG and 2 SMALL!'

A civilian working in the stores appeared from behind a ceiling high row of storage shelves and having been through this saga a hundred times, he wearily and boringly explained the issue procedure. 'I will call out a number from this list,' he tapped a clipboard on the counter-top 'you will answer 'Here!' if it matches the one in your hand. You will come forward and give me your surname and initials. Then I will issue you your kit. If you know your hat, shoe and collar sizes, tell me when I ask for it.'

And so the waiting began as one by one numbers were called and kit was issued. There were none who didn't know their shoe size but almost all had no idea of their hat size. The ancient storeman was by no means put out at this. He went through a strange ritual which involved the recruit clenching his fist and placing it knuckles down on a pair of socks between heel and toe. The heel and toe were then brought together over the back of the hand. Different size socks were tried until the toe and heel of the sock just touched. The storeman then called out a number and invariably the cap and beret produced by his sidekick, were a perfect fit. I am unable to explain why it worked, but it surely did.

Then came the time when the number uttered by the storeman matched that on the paper slip in my hand. As bidden I stood and began to move forward. Then I noticed that someone else had also stood and called out 'Here!' at the same time as I. The storeman said 'Sit down! Check your number carefully, two three four eight seven one oh five!' I looked at my numbered slip. It read 23487105, so I stood up and said 'Here!' So did the other fellow. 'Are you two idiots? One of you can't read.' or something to that effect. He demanded we come forward so that he could look at our slips. That's when we discovered that we had the same number. The other fellow was alphabetically lower down than I, JONES as opposed to me, JOHnson. In this particular and military way we were allocated our proper numbers, I retained the one in my hand. It must be noted that the storeman uttered nary a word of apology. The fact that we were both right and not 'idiots' seemed to matter for nothing.

Of course I should have known better. We were the lowest form of life in the hierarchy of the AAS and even lower than the lowliest regular army recruit. Our kind warranted no apologies or kind words of any description. Everyone senior to us, and that was the rest of the apprentice school, were entitled by tradition to supersede us in any queue. Being at or near the front of any line meant that all others in divisions Two through to Six simply took their place in front of you. They merely walked along the queue prodding persons or asking 'Division?', until the answer they got was one of their

own or one junior. There they pushed in and waited until someone senior came along and claimed his 'rightful' place in the queue. Naturally there were protests from among the 'new boys'. These were dealt with in a direct manner. Threats, menacing looks and in some cases a sympathetic laugh such as that directed at someone whose intelligence was obviously sadly lacking. The queues were the cookhouse queue, the NAAFI queue and the camp cinema queue. This system was called 'jipping'. The etymology of the word would most probably make interesting reading.

The first six weeks were devoted to foot drill and the care and maintenance of clothing and equipment. As is the Army way, no clothing was ever issued in the form in which it must be maintained. Boots were issued with plain leather soles to which we added a specified number of hobnails in a specific pattern. The large steel nails had truncated cones for heads, which added 3 or 4 mm to one's height. The purpose of the hobnails was to eliminate wear and tear on the soles of the boots. The heel of each boot being shod with a miniature horseshoe. We all knew that the hob-nails were really there to produce a crunching noise, so beloved of sergeant majors, on the gravel of the square and had thus clearly been invented by some past Regimental Sergeant Major, probably from the Guards!

The toe and heel of the boots were pimply and regarded as an anathema to the military eye, for we spent hours with a hot spoon and polish eradicating this leather pox. Once the boots were cured of this dreadful disease we spent more hours with polish, water and cotton wool bringing the treated surface to a glossy mirror-like finish. True, the finished effect was beautiful to behold and endeared one to the hierarchy, to say nothing of the envy of friends and foe alike if one achieved a perfect or almost perfect finish. This art was called 'beeing'. Each piece of kit was marked with one's number, yet no provision by way of a pre-determined place for that number was provided. The position was determined by the corporal in charge and, no doubt, by trial and error over the years by a myriad of corporals before him. The number was inked on with purple dye by means of a large adjustable rubber stamp like the adjustable date stamps used in an office. If the ink found its way onto one's fingers, it took days to remove. Boots were laboriously marked with a set of steel stamps.

Webbing, that collection of canvas belts and straps designed by an octopus for the express purpose of deviant physical thrills, was also issued in an untreated state. It was necessary to scrub it almost white and then apply several very light layers of a tinned paste called 'Blanco Buff 61'. I have no idea why it was so called, or even if Buff 60 or 62 existed in the army's inventory.

Where there is webbing, there are brasses. Brass badges, shoulder plates, buckles, brass tabs and runners. In addition, the tunics (best and working), greatcoats and caps all had brass buttons of varying sizes. These all had to be polished to a smooth bright shine. Woe betided anyone whose fingerprints marred the expected finish. A little help was forthcoming here from a device known as a button stick

(which itself was made of brass and had to be cleaned and presented for inspection!).

The parade belt was made of buckskin leather, some three or four millimetres thick. The buckle was of heavy brass, in two pieces and very large. The belt required whitening in such a manner that no cracks were visible in the finished surface. At the same time the buckle had to be brilliantly polished, no cleaning agent visible in the intricacies of the cast badge which adorned the belt buckle. The latter job meant sacrificing a toothbrush.

In all of the above cases of spit and shine, the military neglected to provide the wherewithal to do the job. This was a sacrifice made from one's own pocket. Therefore, a certain amount of expenditure was incurred from the meagre pay of the time. Having established a circle of friends, it was customary to share in certain commodities, such as the tin of Brasso, the tin of Glitter (which was a tin of tightly packed cotton wool soaked in a brass-cleaning polish) and Blanco.

Ironing was an acquired skill. One iron per barrack room (15-16 persons to a room), no thermostat, and in the charge of the room corporal. Inevitably, when the iron was needed most, the corporal was nowhere to be seen. The placement and sharpness of creases was of paramount importance. Any deviation from the norm was viewed as akin to unspeakable filth of mind and body. As indeed was being unshaven, unwashed and having a button undone when in uniform. The latter being the most heinous of crimes. In the latter case, the standard admonition was 'Are you a practising nudist?'.

Being the son of a serving soldier and having spent some years as an army cadet, I was already adept at the spit and polishing skills, having learnt from my father and honed those skills on my army-cadet equipment. I was one among a few who were never penalised in any way for dirty kit at any time during my apprenticeship. I did suffer the twisted humour of an apprentice corporal when he considered that as my clothes and webbing couldn't be faulted, decided that a sock was improperly darned and ordered me to throw my boots out of the room window onto the wet and muddy lawn outside. As an aside, the corporal when inspecting socks would pose the question 'Where has the wool gone what belongs in this 'ere 'ole?'. Whatever answer was given always failed to satisfy him. To this day I have no idea where the wool 'what belongs in this 'ere 'ole', goes to!

The normal retribution for unsavoury webbing was for the owner to mark time on the offending webbing while wearing his best boots. Bear in mind that our boots were studded with heavy-duty hobnails. The result of this measure was to add many waking hours to one's day in reparational labour.

Aside from having to press uniform with razor-sharp creases, particular attention had to be paid to the brassware that adorned the WW1 pattern uniform. The front was fitted with brass buttons, each held in place by a large split ring. Each shoulder strap was kept in place by a small brass button with each strap carried brass lettering that spelled out ARMY APPRENTICES SCHOOL. This in turn was backed with a

ladder-like brass strip and a long brass split pin, to pin the logo to the shoulder strap. Cap badges were also brass and required a great deal of attention with a toothbrush, as did all brass buttons if they were to pass muster at inspections. No dried speck of brass polish was ever to be seen. This included the back of the badge and any other brassware of which the back could be dealt with.

Anyone having been in uniform knows full well the inordinate time taken to prepare even the meanest of webbing for a close inspection. However well one applies oneself to the task, someone, somehow will find fault. Our daily-wear belt was the standard web belt with its brass two-piece buckle, two runners and two buckles on the back. To thoroughly clean these rear buckles, we devised the method of sawing through the crosspiece of the buckle, where it was normal hidden from sight by the loop of canvas which fixed it to the belt. In this manner we cleaned the whole thing without getting brass polish on the webbing, where it would stain the canvas if one was not careful, or dirty the blanched finish,

As for the dress belt of buckskin, we had to whiten this to perfection and yet not have so many layers of whitening that it cracked the moment it was lifted from the table. The method handed down over the years was to scrub it clean and apply a one or two thin coats to the front surface and top and bottom edges. This problem was solved by 'slashing' the belt. This meant cutting the stitching of the belt in such a way that the two halves of the buckle could be completely removed from the belt. When the brasses and 'slashed' belt were assembled, the belt was held together only by the runners, which if they moved outward during drill and marching, would often lead to a belt end unhooking itself, causing the belt to droop and one or both parts of the buckle and even the belt to fall to the ground. Many a buckle and the odd belt has been gleefully trodden into the parade square by a platoon of young soldiers whose sudden enthusiasm for crashing their boots resoundingly into the square, came as a surprise to the squad NCO.

We learnt that IE meant 'Interior Economy', where we had to scrape the polish off of the pine-board floors with knives and old razor blades and then re-polish them. The floor was made up of three sections, all three running the length of the barrack room. The centre section comprised narrow well finished floorboards and were trodden on with care. The outer sections comprised rougher planed pine boards which were stained black with Zebo Grate Polish and then floor polish and then buffed to a deep glow. The buffing was achieved with a rectangular block of heavy steel fixed to a swivel handle. The underside of the steel block was fitted with a short haired stiff bristled brush. With this device we polished the floor, an activity called 'bumping the floor'. The bumper was pushed forward and dragged backwards over the floor until the required sheen was obtained. We did this by having a lighter person stand on the bumper's head and two others pull it about. When the hardest part was done, the person on 'duty bumper' would stoop down and grip the handle toward the lower end so that the handle passed up his side and under the arms close to the arm-pit. In this manner

he swung the bumper from side to side and induced a better shine, then the normal push-pull exercise followed by a piece of filched blanket to get a really good shine. This was very labour intensive, but it did produce the best results.

We also learnt to develop a sharpness of the eye that could detect microscopic particles of dust on radiators, windowsills and even the beams above our heads (there being no ceilings in the barrack rooms); to clean windows with spit and old newspapers (to this day probably the best method). We learnt that to be really smart and well turned out in all respects was to be, in AAS terminology, 'grovel', that the little circles made by cloth and cotton wool when beezing was called, not unnaturally, 'beezing rings'. Therefore it was with great delight that the room corporal always sent at least one new apprentice to the NAAFI with strict instructions to get a tin of 'size One beezing rings'. We honed our time and motion skills so that we could lay a-bed until the very last moment and yet be on parade neat as a pin at the desired time. This skill will ever elude the ordinary civilian. Unfortunately there were among us two or three whose ability to acquire these new skills was somehow impaired. They were mostly academically fit, for even the 'Borstal Boys' had to pass the entrance exam and physical.

Nevertheless, I recall one lad who never mastered the art of beezing or looking smart. He suffered untold agonies of rebuke from all and sundry because one man's idleness, lack of ability or simple ineptitude, let down the whole room. The youngster just mentioned was entirely uncoordinated and forever late, never properly dressed when it mattered and whose time management was off key all of the time we knew him. In the end we helped get him and his gear ready for important parades but were wise enough to let him be at other times, so that he was punished by having to do the menial tasks, like cleaning the toilet bowls, that we didn't particularly like. Yes. I know! Not very nice, was it? Yet expediency ruled the day.

The physically weak and essentially shy youngsters, of which I was one, were bullied by others who generally speaking used this method to hide (or compensate for) their academic or sporting inability. It seemed to me, that to be really good at anything posed a threat to someone in the group, in the Company or the School. As 'new boys' we were fair game for anyone senior to us. We were forced to press uniforms, bull boots and undertake other tasks under threat of a beating. By which I do not mean schoolboy whacking with a stick but a beating with fists and not from just the person wanting the task done, but from his pals as well.

We were often raided just after lights-out. Senior intakes took great delight in the game of rushing into the room and turning the beds over, waiting until the room had righted itself and doing it again an hour later. At one time, during Two Div I think, we had old fashioned short plywood clothing lockers and telescoping beds. The beds were dangerous. They were two-part frames, the foot end being able to telescope into the head end, thereby halving their length. The mattress for this bed comprises three equal pieces called biscuits. If the bed was tipped up, the bottom

half slammed home into the top half and forced the occupant into a tight bundle, the sheet and blanket mixed together with the disarrayed biscuits caused a log-jam, which could be quite painful and constricting. I awoke after one such raid to find myself clinging to the section that the bottom half should have slid into. Had it done so it would no doubt have amputated my fingers.

Later the games became more dangerous, such as being blindfolded and hanged. This entailed standing one on a bedside locker and passing a rope around the neck and over the beam. The victim was blindfolded and asked for any requests. This was done in a bullying and frightening manner. Unseen was the piece of cotton tied to the rope and to the beam. When the bedside locker was kicked from under one, the resultant puddle of fright and wet clothing was another cause for hilarity and story spreading through the AAS. My particular event was to push a shoe polish tin lid with my nose, along the length of a senior intake's room whilst they all took turns at seeing who could throw a dart closest to the tin. I shudder to think of the stupidity and danger this 'sport' engendered.

Certain persons, who cannot be named as I have unfortunately forgotten them, made the rounds of junior rooms throughout the camp a day or two before pay day (generally on a Tuesday or Wednesday) demanding money with menaces. We were forced to give up saved sweets and if a permitted to smoke, our cigarettes and our few pennies left over from pay day. Any complaints were unpleasantly dealt with. These men, for by that time they were men, collected a lot of cash to provide themselves with cigarettes and beer. Although apprentices were officially prohibited from entering public houses, this did not stop those determined to drink.

At a certain stage in our time at the AAS we were permitted to wear civvies, called Mufti, from Two Div up to and including Five Div. In the last term, that is to say when in Six Div, approved civilian clothes were permitted. In those early days it seemed to us that more than a few Senior Div found it necessary to their standing in the AAS and to their masculinity, to be seen as deliberately flouting the regulations. Sure, we all bent the rules somewhere along the line, but there is a line to be drawn. I managed to avoid much of the confrontation and bullying that took place in the early days of training. Generally speaking we were well guarded by the school system which gave extra care to First Div intake. Once we were assigned to Companies after the basic period of six months, much less visible protection was available. I think some must have hated almost every waking minute during their apprenticeship. I was one of those unfortunate types that attracted the attention of bullies and mean spirited people. It was difficult at times, but one learned to cope with it, ignore it and carry on. Somewhere in my psyche I have the scars.

But back to the basic training period, which was six weeks long and full of repeated foot drill. This and other tasks kept us fully occupied from dawn to dusk, taking their toll in terms of fatigue, as we fell asleep as soon as our heads hit our

pillows.

The initial training phase, which came as no surprise or difficulty to me, was completed without having once been bawled out or corrected for drill, dress or bearing. That alone was enough to get me noticed, not by the drill staff but by certain fellow pupils who thought it wrong that this skinny, short (5ft 4in) gawky underweight (124lbs) toad, should be better at this new game than they were. In fact anyone who had been an army cadet fared well, as can be expected, as we had the advantage of experience at foot and weapon drill.

Having chosen the trade of Armourer, the authorities were not about to let me loose among weapons until certain basic engineering skills were learned. This involved much filing of raw pieces of metal into what were at best useless end products. However, a little thought could determine that the end product if diligently done, would teach us some essential hand fitting skills. For example, the filing up of a simple rectangular plate was to teach us the use of various files and the engineering tri-square. The finishing of a cube comprising four filed-flat sides, one scraped and one hacksawn surface was to impart the skills required to file, scrape and hacksaw. Naturally none of us ever achieved perfection or even came remotely close in those early days.

And so from August 1956 until June 1959, I was at AAS Arborfield, learning the theory and practise of becoming an Armourer. At the beginning there were 23 aspiring Armourers and by the time I passed out as an Armourer 3rd Class, there were nine of us left. The remainder had been discharged as incompatible with the trade or Army life, or relegated to repeat a particular term's work, changed trade or simply had their parents purchase their discharge.

As for me, despite the threat that I was unlikely to make the grade, I finished an overall third in my class. I must admit that I took to the trade like a duck to water. I will admit struggling with the academic side of things. There were good times and bad times throughout the term of the apprenticeship. We weren't paid a lot of money, but then no one in government service ever is. To me it was money I'd never had. We were only permitted to draw so much a week. The upper limit was determined by the division in which you were in, so that when I was in 1 Division I got 3/6d from the 31/6d wage. Some being tax, some being an 'allotment' to parents and some to a Post Office Savings account. The last two were encouraged to the point of being an order. Of the remaining, you drew your 3/6d and the rest stayed in 'credits' and were paid out in full when one went on leave. This meant that there was a pocketful of money available at these times.

This method of forced saving had its downside. There were loan sharks in the AAS who charged anything up to 50% per week for a loan. It has been known for some poor sod to pay all his leave pay over to the loan shark. Repayment was heavily enforced by bullyboys. However, over a period of time we learnt to blend in with the prevailing culture at the AAS. Anyone who lived outside the 'code' was given the silent treatment or beaten up or both.

In those days we were issued with a minimum of three of everything, meaning pairs of socks, underwear, shirts, etc. This meant that on any given day there was one set in the locker, one set at the laundry and one set on your body. When I think about it I could shudder. Today we are used to changing every day. In those days we didn't because you were only allowed to send so many articles into the laundry. I think it was ten items. If you wanted to submit extra underwear, then you sacrificed something else. Ten items was the inviolable rule.

Most of us had nothing more than the clothes issued to us. We were not permitted to wear civilian clothing for the first six months and thereafter only Mufti, comprising grey flannel trousers with a minimum width of the trouser bottoms of 18 inches and with turn-ups. A navy-blue blazer with the AAS pocket badge, black shoes and 'sober' socks. All this was zealously inspected by the regular soldier guards assigned to the camp. If the socks were considered too gaudy, one was sent back to change them. The trouser bottoms were often measured to make sure that they were of the proper size. Anything smaller and you were considered of an anti-social persuasion, akin to being a teddy-boy or tearaway with no respect for authority.

When we were assigned to companies, following the necessary passing out parade after basic training and the initial six months in 1 Div, I was assigned to B Company where I remained for the rest of my apprenticeship. Our CSM was Sgt Major Dunning (Devon & Dorset Regiment), whom we referred to as 'Daddy Dunning'. Daddy wasn't given to the normal run of bad language that we were subjected to on a daily basis. This was because, as far as we could ascertain, Daddy had come to us from a stint at Sandhurst, where of course it was not on to use bad language to the young gentlemen.

Regularly throughout the term we were given progress tests, the results of which were posted on a special board situated next to the chief instructor's office door, so that individual progress could be seen. I'm pleased to say that it was a rare time when I didn't figure in the first half dozen and then often in the first four. This was due to a genuine interest in the subject more than academic ability. After all, it was a memory feat, and yet that same memory so often let me down in maths and other subjects. It paid off, because in 1990 I was appointed South Africa's theory examiner for Gunsmiths.

We progressed through rifles, pistols, submachine guns, machine guns Mortars and so on. At the time of my apprenticeship we were still taking lessons in the old .38in No2 Enfield revolver, the .303in No1 and No 4 rifles, the Vickers machine gun, the Bren light machine gun and the Sten submachine gun. The mortars were 2in and 3in models.

All very well, one would think, but the problem was that the army was changing over to newer weapons of which we saw none, to speak of.

Still the repair skills didn't go to waste as some units

remained with older equipment for some time. Meanwhile, we were still working our way through the old and tried syllabus.

I cannot remember with any accuracy all of the small arms instructors involved in my training at Arborfield. The Officer in charge of the Armourers workshop was a Major Viney, (Note: Major Viney died 22 April 2000. Obituary was in the December issue) something of a champion pistol shot. Mr Morris(Jr) was the senior instructor and his elder brother Mr Morris(Sr) taught us all about the Lee Enfield rifles. A Mr Riley had the machine gun section and apart from Sgt John Downes, I can remember no others. Sgt Downes figured later in my career as my boss. At the time of my apprenticeship he was in charge of the support weapons section and took us through the Mobat recoilless rifle, Mortars, the Vickers tripod and other items I cannot recall. John Downes became a firm friend in later years. He is retired now and living in Canberra, Australia.

One of the small pleasures during my apprenticeship was the morning tea break at 1000 hours. I still enjoy the same break at the same time seven thousand miles away, in a different country, in a different uniform. During summer months it was always tea, in the winter it was cocoa, which we fetched in a large urn, picked up at the cookhouse and hauled back on a four-wheeled trolley. This was a duty that nobody tried to wriggle out of. The reason for this was that there was invariably some uneaten fried bread left over from breakfast.

The fact of gaining good marks in one's chosen trade could lead to the unjustifiable charge of 'juicing'. This term derived from 'sucking up to teacher'. So, as can be seen, the culture of the times deemed it unmanly to be good at anything other than sports. I suppose this stems from the fact that most there were not of the highest academic standards in school and all from working class backgrounds where academic ability was considered as suspect, not quite respectable in a working class family. Of course, there were apprentices of good education and ability. One could not, for example, hope to master the requirements of an Instrument Mechanic without some mathematical skills or the syllabus of the Radar Mechanics or electronic Control Equipment Mechanics (Ecce Mechs, to us) as early electro-mechanical computer personnel were called, as they were trained to service and repair machinery such as the artillery predictors.

Trades were grouped according to the degree of academic ability required, whether mechanical, electro-mechanical or purely mathematical for electronic work. Thus the top trades were X trades, followed by A, B and C. The pay scales (once qualified) were thus different. An Armourer was an A trade and so at the very least I was considered potentially capable of mastering the necessary skills. As it turned out, I did.

Try as I might, I couldn't always divorce myself from the undercurrent of bullying and victimisation that was prevalent. I understood then as now, that at that kind of institution such things could never be entirely eradicated. At sometime during the three years of apprenticeship, every boy would be subjected to some form of bullying or intimidation.

We accepted it as the norm and it readied us for life in the regular army, as men.

My sporting life was of no great note. Having taken a dislike to contact sports during my boarding school days, I opted for solitary sports like cross-country running. Naturally there were times when one was detailed off to participate in Company activities. In these events I showed my incompetence at football, rugby and cricket. Although I liked all of the games as a spectator, I was certainly not cut out to be a player. Running as an activity, meant that I set my own pace and had time to think as I padded along. I got fairly proficient and ran as a team member for B Company. The activity in which I excelled the most was shooting. I held my own with the best. Indoor .22in target shooting was my forte. I shot for the company and in postal shoots for the school against AAS Chepstow and AAS Harrogate.

We were allowed out of the camp at weekends, though there was a curfew for all. The more senior the later the curfew. Time away from camp was valuable. Mostly it began after lunch on a Saturday as most Saturday mornings were taken up with one parade or another. To leave camp one had to conform to the dress code mentioned. Some went to Reading, a relatively large town, but a bit dearer in bus fares. It was cheaper to go to Wokingham, about four miles by bus. There were dance halls and a cinema. As I was no dancer, a good scoff at a reasonable cafe, followed by a browse around a bookshop or two and then 'pictures', followed in turn by some window shopping and girl spotting, was the general routine. Wokingham left no particular lasting impressions. Reading will always be associated with Ma Beasley's, a small quiet cafe near the centre of town. It was almost like a converted front room, and probably was, but the food was good and plentiful. For 2/6d we got two fried eggs, chips, beans, sausages, a cup of tea and two slices of buttered bread. After the hard fare of the cookhouse, this home cooking was wonderful and as I write I can taste it again.

At some time or other I was talked into joining the Arborfield Youth Club. At a small hall in the village there was a weekly dance where we could play our favourite records without adults complaining of the noise. There we met several of the village girls and made friends with one or two non-apprentices. On the whole we were well behaved and the group of us were together over a two-year period or so. Some paired off but none were of a permanent nature.

Leave was a subject close to the heart of all of us. So I believed, until I heard tales of orphans who had nothing much to look forward to in this respect. Nevertheless, great excitement could be felt as the term breaks came closer. We all estimated our pay out from credits and made many verbal plans on how best to spend it. Clothes were an important thing to us all, probably because of the restrictions to Mufti.

When the day came to be paid, usually the day before proceeding on leave, we were all warned to guard our cash carefully. Despite this someone sooner or later got robbed of all or most of his money. The 'debt collectors' would be round that evening, asking or demanding their money. To

see colleagues near to tears as they were relieved of their cash was not a pleasant sight. We were philosophical about this. We didn't borrow from the sharks, but rather amongst ourselves so we did not have to pay the exorbitant interest rates, or promise to repay at leave-time. Our attitude was that if you were stupid enough to play their game, then you must be prepared to take the consequences.

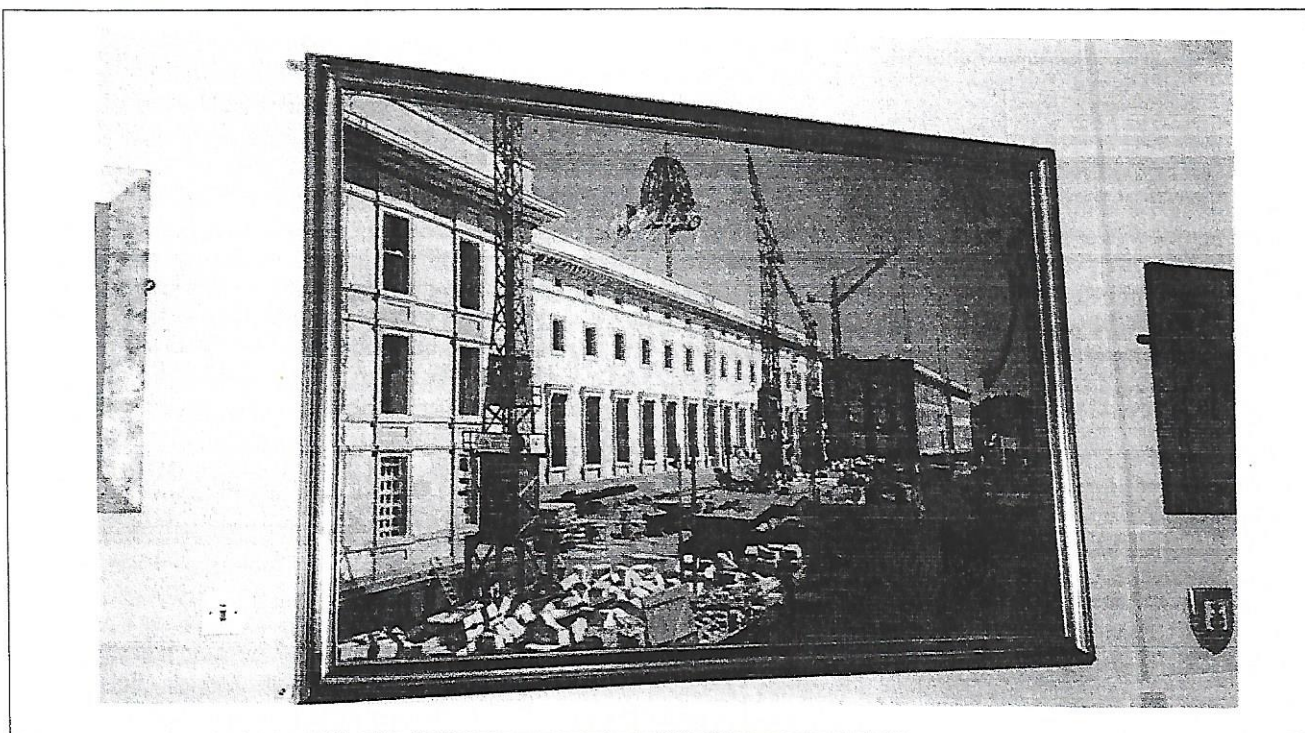
Having to travel in uniform, meant that once we were home, we put it away until the end of leave. I recall the day before the end of some leave when in two or three Div, I hauled out my uniform to press it for the return to Arborfield. We were living at the time with my grandmother, whose house was gas lit. As I normally used an electric iron, my expertise with the gas iron was limited and I burnt the sleeve of my uniform jacket. Panic set in, what was I to do? I couldn't travel with a burnt sleeve. Even worse, I would be for it once back at camp. I didn't give a thought to the fact that I might have received a sympathetic hearing from the CSM or the QM, etc. I simply panicked. Fortunately, my mother's sister was a seamstress and to hand was my father's uniforms and my uncle's, he being a WO in the TA, at the time. A shade check revealed that one of Uncle George's battle dress blouses was a very close match in shade. So using her magic, my aunt Bet removed the two sleeves and made me a new one from the sleeve of George's battle dress blouse. When finished, there was a slightly noticeable difference in the shade. For the next two years, no one ever remarked on it.

Leave was always enjoyed, but returning to camp was not. Although it was easy to slip back into the routine, a few days at home always brought back the realities of the rough and often crude conditions in which we lived when in barracks.

January 1959 saw the start of 56B's final term as apprentices. In this period I turned eighteen and was put onto regular army pay. I had best explain. There were special rates of pay for 'boy soldiers' which were applicable to us. However, on reaching the age of 17 or 18 (I forget which), you were put on Regular Army pay. Despite the pay scale a member was on, he was only allowed to draw a certain amount per week as explained earlier. Naturally it meant that one's 'credits' were quite high come leave time.

When July 1959 came round I had passed the Class III Armourers practical test and passed the theory to Class II. Not that it helped any, because some time later, in Duisburg, Germany, I had to sit the whole of the Class II test anyway, both theory and practical.

Having successfully passed out of the Army Apprentices School, the first Regular Army unit we went to was the REME Depot just up the road. The Depot was the holding place for us until we were assigned a workshop. We kept our figurative fingers crossed in the hope of a plum posting like Singapore, Hong Kong, Kenya, etc. We all knew that the chances were slim, but we hoped. In the end most of us were posted to the British Army of the Rhine. But that's another story..



Painting: The Building of the Reichstag

THE BUILDING OF THE REICHSTAG

Artist - F Mercke

By Brian Hornsey (54A)

One-time Pictorial Archivist - REME Museum

The next time you visit the REME Museum, why not come and see our pride & joy. This is a painting called The Building of the Reichstag. which originally hung in Hitler's office in the Reich Chancellory in Berlin. How did we get it? The story goes like this.

Late in 1945, Major Roberts REME 'liberated' the painting from Hitler's office in the Reich Chancellory. He gained access to the office by bribing a Russian guard, cut the painting from the frame with a jack knife and left the building with the painting stuffed up his greatcoat.

In 1951, Major Roberts presented the painting to Hazebrouck Officers' Mess, Arborfield Garrison. It was accepted by the then garrison commander Brigadier (later Major General) Leslie Tyler, but was placed in a side room because of the sensitivity caused by the swastikas.

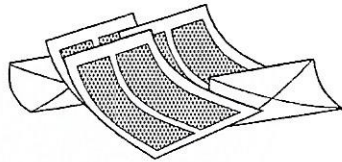
In 1953, it was decided to donate the painting to the newly opened Headquarters Officers' Mess, West Court. The new owners were not over enamoured with it so kept the frame and donated the painting to the REME Museum, where it disappeared for twenty-five years. The painting was found in 1979 by the late Captain Geoff Beere, in use as a backing board for a wooden shelf.

One question remains unanswered. Why was the painting called, *The Building of the Reichstag*, when it appears to be the building of the Reich Chancellory? Unsuccessful attempts were made to contact Major Roberts for confirmation of the painting's provenance. The curator made further investigations and contacted Brigadier Cliff Gough. Known to have entered Hitler's office at the Reich Chancellory at about the time the painting had been removed, Brigadier Gough said that he noticed that a painting had been cut out of a frame when he was there. Hitler's marble desk was on its side, pock marked with bullet holes, empty cases littered the floor and it felt very eerie. The Brigadier helped himself to a wall light fitting from Hitler's office and a 'loo' chain and handle from Hitler's private toilet, which he kept and donated the upholstered fabric of Hitler's chair to the REME Museum where it is now on display (not too far from Mussolini's boots).

After a full restoration by the local area museum service, who shared the cost, the Corps Committee decided in 1988, to return the painting to the Berlin Museum, which has other works of the artist Mercke. The MOD was approached for permission. They referred it to the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO), and they in turn referred it to the political committee of NATO. Because there was a neo-Nazi upsurge in southern Germany at that time, it was decided not to return the painting.

In 1990, the whole cycle was repeated and the timing was still deemed to be wrong. In 1991, the painting was re-framed and it now hangs in the Corps Pictorial Archives for all to view. So next time you visit, why not drop in and see it.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



 *Peter Langley (41D) writes*

The first issue of OBAN I ever saw extolled the glories of the Annual Reunion, which led me to state, in writing, that nothing would persuade me ever to attend one. Well, a couple of wild horses, Wenborn and Coultas by name, proved fairly persuasive and so there I was at this year's shindig. I only managed the Saturday lunchtime knees-up and very enjoyable it was. Fine weather, good food and heart-warming company. It was interesting to see by how much so-and-so had - or hadn't - changed. I noticed that groups of like-minded folk seemed to co-agulate quite by chance. How else were there no fewer than seven Armourers at one table? It wasn't as though we had all previously known each other.

Because I've not been to Arborfield since the mid 50s, I was stunned at the total obliteration of the School as I knew it. Except for a very forlorn looking square. Could that possibly be the spot where . . . but it's history now. Given that the whole concept of the School/College has changed so dramatically, should some thought be given to a cut-off point for Old Boys events? I doubt that our younger members can begin to imagine life as it was. (apart from reading what we wrinklies write in the magazine)

Then I read that the whole Garrison is due to disappear in the not too distant future. What then?

A bit of a puzzle, Brian. What, or whose, band was it? I expected to see an old School-type Corps of Drums, but it appeared to be something of a hotch-potch. (not intended to be derogatory) There was, I believe, an air cadet in its midst. The Drum Major was real enough: he towered over me in the Mess. I guess I should have asked him but we were each too engrossed in getting our fists round a pint and I never saw him again!

And so - next year? Who knows? It may well depend on my wife, whether she will still feel like driving me about! She enjoyed this year so we shall just wait and see.

Finally warm thanks to all who clearly spend a lot of time and energy on the reunions and who are highly dedicated to making them the success they obviously are. And let's not forget the youngsters who waited on our every need. Thank you.

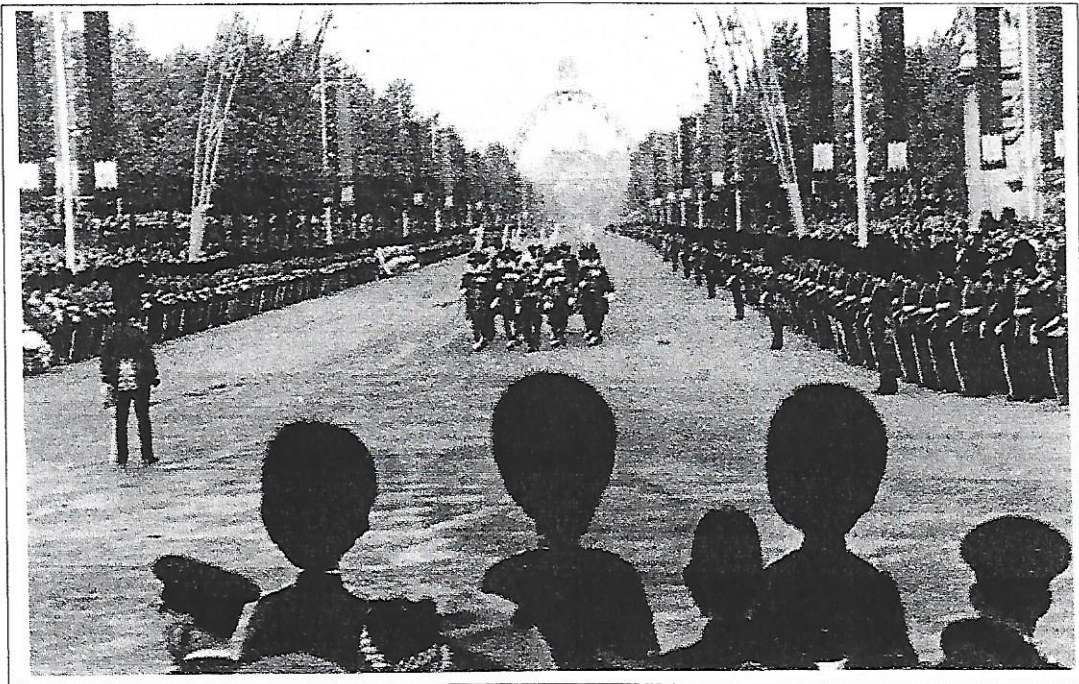
End of stuff for the mag - well no, not quite. I have asked you to ask about one Keith (?) Clements, the 'Clem' who served with 6 Fd Regt RA. I believe he is no longer a member but if anyone is in contact, I have found the newspaper cutting from a German paper about the horrendous accident involving Clem's car, a train and a level crossing. He might be interested.

 *Nick Webber (50B) writes*

Well, I thought, as 2002 is the Golden Jubilee year of the Queen's Coronation, it might be of interest to see if any other Old Boys have recollections of the Coronation in 1952, as when the TV covered the State Coach going from the Palace, down the Mall to the Abbey- the photos I have included were taken by A/T Tilly from the Victoria Memorial, 50 years ago. Does anyone else remember or indeed have record of this event? I am interested because I was there on the Victoria Memorial in front of the Palace gates at the top of the Mall in 1952 as part of a group from the Army Apprentices School.

I was, in fact, an A/Sgt in charge of a group of young Army soldiers from the Apprentice School where at 17 years old, I was just a year from finishing my training as a Tels Mech, before I joined the Regular Army in September 1953.

We left the School in the early morning, parking in the Household Cavalry Barracks, close to Buckingham Palace and marched via Birdcage walk and the Park to the top of the Mall where we were told to get onto the Victoria Memorial,



The Yeomen Warders from the Tower



The Royal Canadian Mounted Police



Ghurka Soldiers with whom I served in Malaya 1959

which in hindsight offered the best view of the procession – right in front of the Palace and looking down the Mall. The photos show, in order; the Yeoman Warders from the Tower - my father was to become one in 1958; the Royal Canadian Mounted Police; Gurka Soldiers, with whom I was later to serve in Malaya in 1959. As you can understand this Jubilee 2002 year is very nostalgic for me!

✍ Allan Tucker (39B) writes

Just how funny was it at arborfield in the early days? Paddy Corr, Royal Ulster Rifles, looked me up and down and softly said "I've shot better things than you." I'd been leaning on the verandah rail. He obviously wanted me to stand up straight, which I did with some alacrity and found I towered over him. He was short. He glared up at me, asked my name and moved on. What a first day impression.

I was later to find he was always on the look-out for anyone called Phillips. He would wait for pay day when we lined up alphabetically, and tell poor Phillips to "get down in the f----ing Fs!" A

sergeant major's sense of humour? Perhaps, but he was never to bother me again.

Platoon Corporal McCarthy, Lancashire Fusiliers, many years in India (so he played hockey which I had always thought was a girl's game) had the job as Duty NCO of opening all parcels addressed to boys. Looking for cigarettes! Harry Hawkins was the recipient of many parcels. When McCarthy wanted a favour, it was his wont to offer as a bribe, 'some biscuits out of Harry Hawkins's next parcel and a blow on Ephantima's trumpet' - she was his infant daughter at the time.

This same McCarthy found out that I was friendly with a NAAFI girl and was getting a few things on tick. I bowl into the boy NCO's mess on a Wednesday (no cash) asking for a bottle of pop and a cake only to be told my bill was way over the top. McCarthy had been putting his tea and cake on my bill. He later married the girl, but I heard he was killed at Anzio - pity, he wasn't a bad bloke, funny sense of humour though.

Corporal Bates was a 'gobo' (clarinet) player in the 14/7th Hussars band who was, along with others from the band, required to act as Duty NCO. It was his ploy, at reveille to announce his presence in a fast asleep barrack room with a lugubrious "Come on Jack, get off yer back" or "Come on Fred get out of bed" - not an inspiring start to any day.

On reflection most of the funny sayings came from the old soldiers, who were never short of words. The boys were different, their humour took the form of 'playing tricks' - and malicious ones at that.

A fairly innocent one was when we were route marched through the snow in Easter 1940, and during a break McCarthy was seen relieving himself against a tree. Several well aimed snowballs hit the target area causing great mirth in the ranks. We fell in shortly afterwards and set off again; suddenly our lot were given the command "gas!" On with respirators; - and that's how our bunch finished the route march. Oh well, you win some and lose some.

A similar reversal happened over the Colonel's civvy suit taken from the tailors one night - bloody funny - until Easter leave was cancelled unless someone owned up - not so funny then!

Alexander, the recipient of much cash and many parcels from a doting mother was perplexed by the disappearance of goodies from his locker - he just didn't believe in sharing - so he procured the very latest in padlocks. Room mates stood around gazing aimlessly into space as Alexander went to his locker, undid the expensive padlock and horror- shock- horror, half the apple pie was gone! It really was a job to keep a straight face. He eventually asked for a move and was re-billeted with some of the senior Bramley and Didcot intakes where to ingratiate himself, he offered his new room mates a tin of treacle, which they promptly spread over his genitals. Alexander was never to find out that an ex-Dukie, had made a pin punch to remove the hinge pins from his lockers hinges.

One story passed on from another Company concerned a visit from the Sutton and Cheam

Repertory Company presenting the Greek Dramas. The judge struck blind is declaiming, "Light, Light, My world for light" onto the stage comes a box of matches, the show stops with the gym ringing with laughter and Provo Sgt Hodgkiss marching the culprit off to the guard-room,

Sunday afternoon was 'in bed or out of barracks' with nowhere to go the majority of our room opted for the former. Armed with a threepenny Duncan bar of chocolate and a bottle of pop (a third of our weekly 20p wage gone) we would spend the afternoon, sometimes kipping, sometimes listening to PG Chambers who would, with details supplied by our fertile minds, regale us with the most vivid and imaginative stories.

Silly tricks were the order of the day to relieve boredom, biscuits (square mattresses) were piled high in the centre of the room and using the bottom end of our folding beds as a spring-board; it was a contest to see who got over the most. That was until one chap nearly took the top of his head off on the roof support beam.

I suppose it was inevitable that something dramatic would happen but I doubt if anyone was prepared for somebody to die, but that's what happened. Issued with rifles when standing too to ward off an expected invasion, a bullet with 90% of the cordite removed did not dribble out of the barrel as expected. It sped down the room and in its passage fatally wounded a boy soldier.

At the annual reunion of ex Arborfield boys, most of what I have written is remembered, the lamp is swung and one is transported back to those far off days. Last year I could remember the name of the match thrower, this year I can't - so I'm putting on paper what I can remember.

 *Mike Cheeseman (62C) writes*

I write in response to 'Eggy' Eggleton's comments in his review of the 2002 reunion (issue 25) concerning the band being 'a collection of odds and Sods from everywhere' I would like to put matters straight to all those unaware of who the 'band' was and where the musicians came

from to provide the music for the parade.

The Corps of Drums leading the parade that day were all members of the Corps of Drums Society, which was formed in 1977 to preserve Bugle, Drum, Flute, and Fife music. The Society was formed to help preserve this form of music due to the rapidly declining number of corps of drums within the British Army. The society members are made up of the Regular and Territorial Army, Army and Air Force cadets, Scouts & Guides, Police and Fire Service corps of drums, plus many other individual members and civilian corps of drums and flute bands. We have our own school of music to encourage youngsters to progress with their learning of our music, and work closely with the Regular Army 'Drums School', now located at Pirbright

It was about March time that our esteemed Hon Sec contacted me knowing I was again banging a drum, (having been a member of the Arborfield Corps of Drums from '62-'65) with a request for a corps of drums for the reunion parade, and so it was that members from the society turned up bright and early on the 22nd June at Rowcroft Barracks for a quick rehearsal, having come from far and wide, (some travelling up to 130 miles). They were lead by Society Drum Major, Geoff Fairfax MBE (formerly Queens Regt) and comprised of personnel from, Fleet & District, City of London, and Hastings Corps of Drums, Warlingham Flute band, The Wessex Band Drums, Sudbury and Stowmarket Air Cadet Corps (Suffolk), plus individual members formally from the Coldstream Guards, and your lone bugler was formerly a member of the Royal Hampshire Regiment.

I would not totally disagree with 'Eggy' that the 'band' was made up of 'odds and sods', but these boys and girls did give up their time, free of charge (travelling expenses excepted) to provide the music for the parade, and I think for a first go at doing the parade they were not at all bad, even if I say so myself. They had worked hard to learn 'Lilliburlero' for the march past, (not in the current repertoire) and would all be pleased to return another day if invited.

A massed corps (around 100 members) from the

society takes part each year in the Lord Mayor's Show through the City of London in November, and individual and massed corps are in regular demand all over the country for various events throughout the year. More information about the society can be found on our web site at www.soft.net.uk/corpsfordrums/ where you can read about the Society's performance at the last Royal Tournament in July 1999, and our 2002 Patriot's Day Tour to the United States, together with details of current activities and details of how to join. For those not able to access the web site and wanting further information please feel free to contact me.

 *Jack McCabe (59C) writes*

Having only recently realized the error of my ways and been reunited with Arborfield and the Old Boys Association by becoming a member, I read OBAN 24 (which came through the mail with my membership details) and OBAN 25 with great nostalgia. The memories came flooding back of the people I met and remembered. I really must try to attend the next reunion (that is, if I can get back to Britain at the right time). The electronic version of OBAN 25 appears to be a great idea; certainly, the savings in postal charges would be considerable. Mind you, please keep the hard copy for us where the Internet is not so sophisticated for various reasons and the speed of transfer is much slower than in Britain.

Reading the accounts of the ex-boys and their times at the School in the 30's and 40's shows how far we have advanced - or have we? Maybe as we get that much older we do look at the past through rose-coloured spectacles. However, somehow life appeared less complicated, the weather always seemed better, the people more willing to let live and just get on with life in general.

I know it is the Old Boys Association, but I'm sure that there are many of us who made it through our service careers only with the help of those unsung heroines - our wives. I met my future wife at Clacton while on holiday at Butlin's Holiday Camp. Eight of us Arborfield ap-

prentices made it there for a week during our second summer at the school. I think only one or two of us who had actually booked the holiday the previous Easter made it, the remainder changing their names at the reception desk to suit those who had originally booked!

Luckily, my future wife lived in Slough, just up the road from Arborfield, so every weekend during the final year at the school was fully occupied with either one or other of us travelling to Reading or Slough on the train. The food never really seemed to improve at the school - it was my future mother-in-law's toast and scrambled eggs that kept me going through the rest of the week!

There was no easy access to public telephones in those days and letter writing was the only way we kept in contact during the week. Even today, when we are apart it is still letters that keep us in touch. From the very start, being restricted to weekends only to leave the school, my future wife became attuned to the military way of life. We never expected or managed to see each other every day, as would have been the norm in civilian life. When I was posted to SEE for my second-class course, at least we were together for most of the Saturdays and Sundays.

I was posted to Germany directly from SEE so we had further periods of separation. We married in 1964 and luckily didn't have to wait too long for a married quarter. For the next 19 years she accompanied me wherever I was posted, through the good and bad times she stood by, helped and supported me. I really cannot speak highly enough of her and of all the other wives who stayed, travelled the world and helped their husbands through their service - God bless them all!

✍ *Brain Adams (Oct42) writes*

It is with dismay that I read of a possible name change for the AOBA in the interests of 'moving on' and equality. I thought that our member's interests to remember the common experiences and friendships of the Arborfield past. It is surely that which brings us together and not some

vague concept of correctness and wishing to 'move on'. The number of females currently passing through the college is unsubstantial compared with the pool of many thousands of ex-boys that have passed through the gates over the past 63 years. I suggest that when females are a significant minority of numbers and they raise the question of title, then that would be the time for discussion. If female s desire to join a predominantly male organisation, would they really fail to join we 'Old Boys' because of the name?

Without a workshop in sight, the proposal for Arborfield Apprentice Association doesn't seem appropriate to me and when the very existence of the College at Arborfield is in question, it is hardly the time to think about terminating our long established and meaningful title of AOBA.

✍ *Kevin (Mitch) Mitchell (43A) writes*

It was great to receive the OBAN and thanks for including my few thoughts and odd odes. Pleasing too, to see an increase of letter input, comments andanother rhymers!

My grateful thanks to Frank fendick who will relieve, to some extent, the pressure on the editor to open the floodgates of the 'stored' reminiscences. Here's to looking forward to thicker OBANs.

It was interesting to read of the 'German Biggles' flying his 'pretty plane' over our camp - try as I might I cannot remember that, although if Charles Pepper does I must have been there. I do recall some of his agricultural tales - don't we all!

FFI's remembered too with a wry smile and what of the MO's dog?

Makers of Korean films, thought provoking - all cameramen have a 'poetic licence button', and produce what they want us to see. It doesn't always gel though as the over-zealous photographer stalking the piper at the Drumhead Service proved!

A film making incident comes to mind from 1967 at 65 Squadron RCT at Blackdown – the BBC making an episode of a fictitious oil company saga (Mogul, I think). A Victorian barracks area transformed into a South American look-alike village with canvas, plywood and paint. Even a three tiered bowl-type working fountain, courtesy of REME workshops, in the ‘plaza’. Woodland scenes with trees and leaves painted the correct shade of green!

The sergeant’s mess was taken over by the actors and film crew (excellent for mess profit). I’m surprised that the film ever got made! Yet it appeared on the small screen depicting action in deepest Venezuelan Blackdown. All complete with resident soldier and artist trademarks to which the BBC were oblivious – or appeared to be!

Do crazed restless spirits wander the hallowed ground – surely there must be School ghosts that rove at Halloween? Most certainly, a poltergeist in B Company in my first year – who else could have tipped us out of our beds and rearranged our kit layouts? The permanent staff were blessed with supernatural powers, able to materialize at the most inappropriate occasions – for me, name in book!

Dave Perret’s feelings on his return to Arborfield are I’m sure, of us all and some with awful realization of things in our formative years surfacing at reunion resuscitation, his poem summarising events nicely.

Eggy Eggleton’s informative missive must be commented on, mainly true, but we all have had far worse facilities, I’m sure, so we take the rough with the smooth for reunion’s sake.

The band? In football parlance “they done good.” Volunteers all, no doubt. Young and old, experience and enthusiasm allowing us AOBs to smartly swagger. In fact, the band and parade looked and sounded fine on film, without that button – Well Done!! And finally,

THE GEMS

A very special year two thousand and 3,
Mixed memories of apprentices, intake 43,

In later years stressed life was iffy,
Labours reward – thanks, god bless you Tiffy.

Pace-stick of life reviewed, take the chance,
Whilst still in that upright stance,
Come you 43ers in abundance throng,
To celebrate our diamond – come along.

✉ *Alan Morton (51B) e-mails*

Belated Season’s Greetings to you all. I had a nice surprise last Sunday when my old buddy Fred Mills rang from his home in Peterborough. He reminded me of a conversation we had at the breakfast table in the cookhouse (oops! restaurant!) at the 2002 Reunion in Arborfield. Fred suggested then that as the reunion had gone so well and we all had a great time, how about having a 2nd reunion sometime in Sunny Malta where he has good links with a Maltese Hotel. I and a couple of other guys thought it a terrific idea.

Well Fred is true to his word, done his homework in Malta and has come up with a package deal for November 2003 as follows. The hotel can take up to 175 guests and could do a week’s holiday for us ex-boys and our partners for £250 per head. This would include the return air flight and a Gala Dinner Night (black tie job) during the week. Fred assures me that it is a 4 Star Hotel and he is on one of their committees. They could do this deal in November as it is normally a quiet period for them. Fred has asked me to publicize this excellent suggestion throughout the ex-boy fraternity hence this email to you all. Perhaps Bill Cleasby could feed it into the AOBA Committee.

This is an opening shot to see if people like the idea and if serious about it, respond to me or write to Fred (address in AOBA Directory) or both !! I know only too well how pre-occupied we are at this time of the year but do give it some thought and please let me know your initial feelings. No specific date in November 03 is mentioned as that will depend on people’s availability.

BRITISH SERVICES X BOYS ASSOCIATION

As a result of Ted Rigden moving to sunny Queensland to be with his family, he has moved into a retirement village only to find that the president of the residents committee is another ex-boy from Arborfield. For anyone who might know him, he is Mike Coppen of 50B intake. For some of our more mature members you may even have known his father who was CRÈME for Hereford in, we believe, the late 1940s and before some smart Alec make any comment, yes there are a lot of us still around from the 40s, even if the obits do get longed We also had an e-mail from Moscow, from Steve Jones of 67C Carlisle, also a REME man some of you may have come across im during your service. We mention him here as the Carlisle Association is now part of the AOBA. Steve, now a Kiwi, is working in Russia for the Immigration Dept. The following e-mail addresses could be of interest to you: jskljone@rol.ru and coppen_mike@hotmail.com

DONATIONS

Donations received from 13 May 02 to 31 December 02

Member No.	Name	Donation
1808	DE Hayter	£5.00
1083	RG Woodfield	£36.50
1950	S Gustin	£10.00
1912	D Richards	£5.00
1903	KJ Barren	£5.00
0775	AR Sisson	£15.00
2206	RM Callister	£2.00

DECEASED

It is with deep regret that the Association reports the deaths of the following since OBAN 25: When members contact the Membership Secretary to notify him of the death of other members, they are requested to make the contact in writing.

Name	Intake	Member No	Date of Death
I D M (Ian) Hume	49A	0104	21 June 2002
Peter Caine	44A(Ex Dukey)		8 January 2003
Herbie Hebden	56A	Non member	2003

REUNION: 2 OCTOBER 2003 - Search For Intake 50 REs

Tommy Tucker is trying to contact members of 50A & 50B who went into the Royal Engineers after completing training with No1 or No2 ex Boys party at Cove in 1953. He is holding a 50 year reunion dinner on 2 October 2003. Please contact Robin Scutt on: Telephone 02920 702188 or E-Mail: betanden@pierheadview.fsnet.co.uk.

ASSOCIATION ITEMS FOR SALE.

Video Cassette: entitled, 'Army Apprentice' - running time 54 minutes - contents: *Reunion Parade 1997 + Old Boys Reminiscences + 'Soldier Apprentice' 1951 + 'Apprenticed to Adventure' 1962.*

Contact John Smithson (46B) on Tel. No: 01494 534971.

By post to members:	£11.50
By post to non-members:	£14.00

AOBA ties: including the new yellow (D Company ?) colour, are available from the REME Association at the REME Museum (or the Hon. Sec.) (Tel. No: 0118 9763223 for ordering information).

CD: of the REDS School song, recorded during Reunion 2001 is now available.

A 24 page history of the Princess Marina College/Army Apprentices College is available from the Membership Secretary, as are back numbers of the OBAN.

History: No charge, but 50p postage & packing to UK and BFPO addresses and £1.00 for overseas.

OBANs: Back numbers are available at £1.00 each including postage & packing. 5 Issues for £4.00 including postage & packing. (Orders from members overseas attract considerably higher postage charges - overall cost will be £2.50 per issue).

For a copy of the History, UK based members should send postage stamps. Payment for a single copy of OBAN may be made with postage stamps (5 x 20p). Requests for more than one copy should be accompanied by a cheque.

Cheques for ALL the above items should be made payable to: **Arborfield Old Boys Association.**

Army Apprentices School Blazer Badges: The Membership Secretary was told of the availability of these during the Reunion 98, not officially available from the AOBA, but from Badges of Pride, PO Box 94, Sarisbury Green, Southampton, SO31 1ZE. Tel No. 01489 885389.

Cartoon Sheets: Copies of the cartoon shown in OBAN 17 (or any others drawn for articles by David Barrett) can be ordered from 74 Cedar Road, Hythe, Southampton, SO4 53PZ. They are in black & white on original size on 80gsm paper, each individually signed in red (to avoid any accidental copying). Where smaller cartoons on sheets of different sizes and paper/card thickness are required, the price will differ. For each sheet sold, £1.00 will be donated to the AOBA. Copies in colour could also be produced to special order. (*Since the original advert, David and his wife have emigrated to Malaya, but before leaving he produced a second cartoon which will be published - Ed*)

THE CRAFTSMAN

Subscription Rates:	Single Copy:	80p.
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	Overseas Subscription:	£19.20 surface post paid.
	Air Mail Rates:	On application.

Cheques should be made payable to REME Corps Account No. 2 and crossed. All correspondence should be sent to :

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