

Spring 2004

Issue 30

O B A N



Arborfield Old Boys Association News

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Committee

Your Contacts

OBAN Contributions The Editor
(Including articles, letters, photos for publication)
E-mail oban@arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

CONTENTS

OBAN - Issue 27

Arborfield Old Boys Association	2
From the Editor's Desk	3
Chairman's Message	4
From the Honorary Secretary	4
From the Honorary Treasurer	5
From the Outgoing Editor	5
Recruitment and Publicity Report	5
New Members	5
To Korea and Back 1955-57	6
My Boomerang - it keeps coming back	11
The September '49 Bell	16
Aren't you glad they are on our side? ..	17
The Saga of Julius Caesar	18
That other place	19
Mis-understandings	20
We know it doesn't fit	22
Letters to the Editor	27
Book Review	32

Cover Picture

Presentation of the Sept49'er Bell to the outgoing AOBA Chairman Lt Col Derek McAvoy by Gordon Bonner at the 2003 AGM. See the story on page 16.

© Published by the Arborfield Old Boys Association
Printed in Great Britain by Chandlers Printers Ltd, Saxon Mews,
Reginald Road, Bexhill-on-Sea, East Sussex, TN39 3PJ.

EDITORIAL

The views expressed herein do not necessary reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise, of the Association, therefore no responsibility for these will be accepted.

OBAN is the newsletter of the Arborfield Old Boys Association and contributions from ex-apprentices, members of the Permanent Staff or their families are keenly solicited. Please send your contributions in the form of letters, articles, or photographs, either by post to:

AOBA OBAN
The REME Museum of Technology
Isaac Newton Road, Arborfield, RG2 9NJ.

or by email to: oban@arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Any real photographs will be retained in the photographic archives of the REME Museum unless, you specifically request their return. The preferred format for electronic images is TIFF (as this gives the best hard copy reproduction on printing), but JPG & BMP will be accepted.

If you don't have access to a typewriter, word processor or computer, then manuscript articles should be sent first to Frank Fendick (45A), who has agreed to type out any articles (not letters) that have been hand-written. He will then email the articles on to the Editor. Frank's address is: 1 West End, Northwold, Thetford, Norfolk, IP26 5LE.



REME ex-boy RadarTech in the jungles of Borneo 1965



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

As expected, the final decision on the closure of the College was announced in the House of Commons on 29 January. This means that junior entry training will cease at Arborfield on 12 August 2004, and from September onwards will be carried out at the Army Foundation College at Harrogate. The future of the Rowcroft Barracks site itself has not yet been finalised, but on current planning it is scheduled to close on 1 April 2005.

I gave you my thoughts on the closure decision in the last edition of the OBAN and will not repeat them here, except to say how disappointing it is for all of us at the College. That said, I visited Harrogate for the first time recently and was extremely impressed with the facilities on offer there. There is no doubt that they put Rowcroft Barracks into the shade in many areas and the fact that the juniors will once again be doing a year long course has got to be a good thing. The real challenge, however, will be to ensure that the ethos which has been built up over many years here at Arborfield is not simply lost overnight. This will be no easy task as the current focus at Harrogate is, as you would expect, very much on the combat arms.

In the more immediate future, we are faced with the dual challenges of continuing to deliver high-quality training at the College whilst at the same time starting to plan for its closure. At Easter we will lose the senior term and will not be getting a new intake, and as a result we will reduce from three training companies down to two. Our minds are also starting to turn towards the final Pass-Out Parade on 12 August. The Adjutant General will take the salute and whilst the focus of the day must be on the Apprentices who are passing out, I think it is important that we mark the event in some way. To that end, I am hoping that we can put together a contingent from previous intakes to give the College's final salute. We will be on the look-out for volunteers in June (subject to satisfactory performance on the square, of course!)

Which leads me neatly on to the other big event for which we are planning which is, of course, the 2004 Reunion. This will be the last to be held at Rowcroft Barracks and so the plan is to make it the biggest yet. The Committee has already taken steps towards hiring a marquee and this will allow us to seat about 100 more people than has been possible in previous years. I would imagine that we will have no problem filling the extra places, so book early to avoid disappointment!

It promises to be a momentous occasion and I look forward to seeing you all there.

Lt Col A W Phillips RE

FROM THE HONORARY SECRETARY Lt Col IWJ Cleasby (61C)

With no expense spared, we have rushed this copy of OBAN out to you to give you plenty of time to complete your applications for the 2004 reunion. You will be pleased to hear that planning for the reunion is going well and it promises to be a splendid affair albeit very sad. It is confirmed that the date for the reunion weekend is the 18th, 19th and 20th June and not as published in issue 29 – many apologies. I am very pleased to report that General Mike Huntley (ex REME) has kindly agreed to be our Inspecting Officer. General Mike is currently the Director General Equipment Support (Land) / QMG and a member of the Army Board. I am also pleased to announce that the REME Band will be in attendance for both the parade and the evening function for which I am very grateful as June is always a busy time for them. As indicated in the last issue, I intend this year to have the dinner function in a marquee to cope with the many old boys who have rang in to say that they coming. Incidentally, I am still looking for a volunteer for the guest speaker slot so if anyone from the 54 intake is happy to take it on please give me a ring. A few reminiscences and the odd joke are all that is required. Failing that, for what is quite a daunting task, how about someone from the 44 intake. As the 2004 reunion will be the last one in its current format, I have arranged for a video recording to be made of all the major events during the weekend. This would be an ideal opportunity to record in all its glory an unaccompanied rendering of the Reds so please keep your voices in good trim.

On a final note, the Poperinghe Guardroom should be finished by the reunion so please come and have a look during your sojourn at Arborfield. Old Boys have already donated £1,500 to its construction but if there is anyone else who wants to give a little something and have their name recorded in the guardroom donors book, please feel free.

Start polishing those shoes for the final parade – see you all in June.

Warm Regards, Bill Cleasby (61C)

MONEY MATTERS

Treasurer Major (Retd) Mike Davis (60B)

May I remind cheque and cash paying members that subscriptions for 2004 should be with the Treasurer by 31 March 2004 at the latest. Direct Debit and Standing Order payers be should actioned by their respective paying organisations on or near the 1 April 04.

Mike Davis (60B)

FROM THE OUTGOING EDITOR

Brian Hornsey 54A

After a lot of careful thought and with very considerable regret, I feel I have no alternative but to tender my resignation as Editor of the Old Boys Association News as of 29/10/03. As it appears the membership is now in favour of going over to the new colour format as presented in OBAN 28. This is only possible using up to date hardware and software, neither of which I possess. So I must step aside. Any contributions and photos previously sent to me will be passed over to the new guy, so all is not lost!

I have been responsible for the entire production since OBAN 5 through to OBAN 28. I have greatly enjoyed the work and have always got a great kick out of my contact with all of you, particularly editing your contributions and presenting them in final form. As it appears the membership is now in favour of going over to the new colour format as presented in OBAN 28 & 29. This is only possible using up to date hardware and software, neither of which I possess. So I must step aside. Any contributions and photos previously sent to me will be passed over to the new guy, so all is not lost!

I wish the new editor all the very best and join you in looking forward to seeing future issues in due course.

Brian Hornsey 54A

PUBLICITY REPORT

Ken Anderson 58A

Over the Christmas period my wife Glenys and I emigrated to live in Spain and we are now living in a small seaside town called Peniscola on the Costa Azahur (the orange blossom coast) which is halfway between Barcelona and Valencia. We drove down through France taking our Chow dog, 'Bubbles', with us breaking the journey by staying overnight with friends firstly near Cherbourg and then at Limoges. At Limoges we stayed with David Schofield (the previous AOBA Webmaster) and his wife Sally and their 16 retriever dogs! David sends his regards to Arborfield old boys and is looking forward to attending the 2004 reunion.

Consequently my activities on the website were greatly curtailed over the Christmas and New Year period as we stayed firstly in a hotel during the Christmas week waiting for lawyers and estate agents to get their acts together, then waiting for the Spanish Telefonica to get a telephone line and broadband link installed.

We are now well settled in - but each day is full of various activities and we wonder where we found the time to go to work in the UK. There are numerous projects to be undertaken and managed with the first that of building a special garden for the orange and lemon trees just coming to completion - where did a radar mech learn the art of bricklaying?

As can be seen from this and the last two issues of OBAN we are able to incorporate colour into the magazine. Therefore we are keen to receive colour photos, sketches and drawings to accompany future articles.

The next issue of OBAN will be a bumper 48 page edition covering the 2004 June Reunion and the last days of the College. If you have any articles that are particularly significant in this last year of the College please let me have them at the Reunion.

For those of you with access to the Internet you will now find an electronic version of OBAN, E-OBAN. This version is specially compiled to make it more readable on a PC screen rather than the earlier attempts which were just facsimiles of the paper version.

Sales of 'The Arborfield Apprentice' are going extremely well. For those of you who have not yet bought a copy full details of the book can be found on the back page of this issue of OBAN. I just hope that we are still going to have sufficient copies for sale at the Reunion in June.

Bill Cleasby has asked Peter Gripton to produce a 'final chapter' as a supplement to the book to cover the final year or so of the Army Technical Foundation College as it the closure of Army Apprentice and Junior Soldier training at Arborfield now seems certain.

Peter and I have also been assisting John Dutton, a 43'er, in the preparation and publishing of his book "The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist" which recounts REME Involvement in the Korean War 1950-1953. John has provided an excellent compilation of personal accounts in this comprehensive story of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at war where the positioning of Light Aid Detachments and Field Workshops was just as important to senior commanders in their tactical planning as was the medical back-up of a Regimental Aid Post or a Field Ambulance. The support and devotion craftsmen to their colleagues is most apparent, but typical of the British soldier, these experiences are balanced with a sense of sympathy for the unfortunate Korean civilian population caught up in the conflict, and it wouldn't be a true story of the British soldier without its sprinkling of 'squaddie' humour.

I believe that this book will deservedly sit alongside The Arborfield Apprentice on the bookshelves of many ex-boys

Ken Anderson (58A)

TO KOREA AND BACK, 1955 TO 1957
My Recollections of
Commonwealth Workshops and a Good Time!
By Nick Webber (50B)

Before launching into my life and time in Korea, I would like to relate my army career leading up to my posting to Korea in 1955. In August 1953 I was posted from the AAS to 5 AA Workshop, Newark. This was quite a shock as it was effectively a civilian workshop, run by the Trade Union, which determined our day-to-day tasks - this came as something of a surprise to a young keen brand new Craftsman! However, the town of Newark was close to many other places of interest and I soon settled down. With the aid of a National Service Lieutenant, I was put on to a Class 2 Trade Test and, within two years, eventually went to Aldershot and passed my Class 1. I managed to break an arm while playing Rugby (the main sport played at that time) - so no more sport!

On Armistice Day, we led the parade through the town. Socially, we tended to stay in packs after three years at the AAS, but I became friendly with a group of National Servicemen and went pubbing and eating out at various restaurants in Newark and Nottingham. In September 1955, a list of postings arrived at HQ and I was chosen to go to Korea, which was rumored to be one hell of a posting, with no social life whatsoever!

So, in August 1955, I arrived at Poperinghe Camp (Depot REME) at Arborfield to join others going to every place you can imagine, either in groups or individually. Our group included various intakes of ex-boys and as it was not too big, we soon came to know each other before we left. We left the Depot and traveled by train to Southington docks to meet the Troopship 'Austrias', which was to be our home for the next twenty-eight days. Sailing through the Bay of Biscay was a bit rough but, as we neared Gibraltar and the Med, the going became more tranquil. We passed by Malta until we stopped with some other ships outside Port Said, waiting for a convoy to assemble and also to allow another oncoming convoy to clear the Suez Canal.

Through the Suez Canal

We cleared the port and entered the Canal. This was a somewhat weird experience - the Canal was dead straight and went on for miles, 'driving' on the right, passing many military vehicles and the odd load-carrying camel along its banks. Life on board soon took on a daily routine, training and kit inspections, and later songs with beers (*Newcastle Brown & Worthington*) breaking the monotony! Once into the Red Sea, the water became alive with dolphins - we even saw a sea snake, about fifteen feet long and brilliantly coloured. The sea was placid and suddenly we were at Aden where 'up-country' it was reported that there was some trouble, so we were warned not to wander down the side streets. My immediate memories of that town, besides the general filthiness of the streets, was the RAF swimming area on the beach enclosed by shark nets; walking down the main street past a foul smelling camel which, as I passed by, spat at me (which they say is very common). That may be so, but my KD was running with wetness and smelling vile!

We left Aden behind and followed a long haul across the Indian

Ocean. It would have been convenient to stop at Colombo in Ceylon (as it was then - now called Sri Lanka), where I could have visited the headstone raised in memory of my uncle. He had been killed on the *Ark Royal* by the Japanese off Singapore, at the outbreak of war with Japan. The next stop was Singapore; the quayside was bustling with life and we were granted shore leave. As this was all so new to us, for most of us it was wasted. However, we did get to the *Britannia Club*, which had a swimming pool especially for use by soldiers. This was situated directly opposite the *Raffles Hotel* of great fame - we were not encouraged to either go in, or hang around outside - although years later, as Independence loomed, I did manage to get in. We just stood on the *Britannia* side and gazed at it. Nearby was the cathedral, opposite the cricket pitch just like an English village green, but right in the heart of town - it seemed unreal.

Hong Kong was our next port of call, with its quayside bustling with more life than at Singapore. We were granted shore leave once again and a group of us rushed out to see the town, taking rickshaws and racing up Nathan Road. We then jumped on the *Star Ferry*, off to Hong Kong Island for drinks and cakes in an English teahouse at top of the peak. We managed to visit the famous Tiger Balm gardens (*I visited these in Singapore. Is there more than one site? - Ed*) before getting settled in a bar with *San Miguel* beer. It seemed to be getting better the further east we went! Soon we were off again, first to Japan and then eventually to Korea. My posting in Japan was to Scales Dept, nothing to do with the job for which I had been trained in boys' service. There was no telecommunications section at this base; so all faulty equipment was sent back to Hong Kong. My boss was an Australian Captain, a new breed of officer to me. I had about seven on my staff, four girl typists, three draughtsmen and a tea lady. It was just like a family - all of us went out together to eat and drink, with us men being treated according to Japanese custom at table. We all went out to restaurants on the canals and to nearby little townships - it was bliss to be spending my whole tour here. My main secretary got married during this time, her wedding to which we were all invited, but us military members had to view the actual ceremony from behind a screen. After the ceremony we were treated like guests of honour, the bride in her full kimono dress, but still serving the men in the usual Japanese manner.

And so, off to Korea

Alas, one day in April 1956, I was told that I was off to Korea, as they needed a REME Inspection Team to clear up the remaining equipment as the Commonwealth Division (Comm Div) was pulling out. As my last job in 5 AA Workshop had been with an Inspectorate, now at last I would be doing something I knew. We arrived at the military docks in February to see a small (old?) ship named the *Wosan*, which, it appeared, regularly shipped troops to Inchon. On arrival, we had some spare time prior to being sent up country to the Div Wksp. I spent four days at the rest and convalescence unit at Inchon. Here were all those in transit and the last of some of the Commonwealth units, so the NAAFI was very international. I had always been very keen to see Inchon, so I spent quite a long time wandering around the bars etc., where I found the conditions far worse than those in Japan. But again I found the local people to be very open and never felt the least apprehensive as I wandered around - maybe

my 'confidence of youth' and general stupidity screened possible situations from me, as the South Korean Army was everywhere and treated the local civilians very poorly.

As I had time to spare, I found a REME unit called the Commonwealth Zone Workshops; to me it was like a peculiar LAD. Here, I met armourers, recovery mechanics, vehicle mechanics and (unusually) an instrument mechanic, but no telecommunication mechanics. What they all did I have no idea, but within six months they had all disappeared! Going up country a few days later, I was struck by the lack of trees and general vegetation. The camp was miles away from any civilisation that I could see. The workshop was made up of metal Quonset huts and tents with vehicles employed as working areas. My area was an old '3 tonner', sitting half in a Korean cemetery. Thanks to the efforts of ex-boys Bill Mepstead and Henry Alner, a diesel fire heated our Quonset. This system was dangerous, as it drip-fed raw fuel and if any idiot enlarged the drip hole for more heat and then subsequently lit the fire, the whole thing would go up with a big explosion; our own hut was destroyed, but luckily while we were not there!

The old saying, 'wine, women and song', in our conditions became 'song, beer and women' in that order. Most evenings, one canteen song after another was ritually sung, the most common being '*Ode to Asahi Beer*'. Other beers that were available were, Nippon Beer, Melbourne Bitter, Barclays Export and Kirin Lager-Beer. The '*Ode to Asahi Beer*' went thus:

He grasped me by my slender neck,
I could not shout or scream.
He took me to his darkened hut,
Where we could not be seen.

He then tore off my flimsy wrap,
And gazed upon my form,
I felt so very cold and weak,
And he so very warm.

He pressed me to his burning lips,
Gasped and gulped and sighed,
He put me to his lips again,
With passion that could not be denied.

He made me what I am today,
That's why I'm lying here,
A broken bottle that was once,
Filled with sparkling beer.

After work, their being no official outlets, we held drinking parties in our Quonsets. Officially, these parties should not have taken place, but the senior staff left us alone and the beer consumption raged. After these sessions, we abandoned camp (illegally) to continue our party in a couple of mud huts about 100 yards outside, drinking Korean beer, the local beverage, '*Jung Jung*', and the local firewater, '*Maccally*'. Here, we could also enjoy the company of the local 'ladies'. The night would usually end with us staggering back to camp, hoping that the Duty Officer was not inspecting the Guard - it was stupid, but what the hell!

One of the most interesting jobs was to go on to the 38th Parallel, the border between the two Koreas, to check the radios, the 88 and 31 sets, used to communicate between the observation towers. Communication was very erratic unless the sets were top rate and were more or less in 'line of sight'. Having finished, we returned to the Comm Div Wksp and were told that the complete Div was moving to the Inchon reception area; so we proceeded to clear our current workload. Div HQ, which was to hold a last farewell parade at Kohima camp, where the Cameronians were based, interrupted this. All major units were to be on parade, but we were not included, except 'to attend' - which was fine with us. The salute was to be taken by an MP from the War Office, but I forget whom.

On our return to our workshop we continued to pack everything into the various vehicles bound for Inchon. On arrival there, we stopped on a large strip of beach by the sea, our immediate accommodation to be tents.

With all the remnants of the Comm Div, it was quite a mixture and already the relationship between officers and 'squaddies' was reverting to that experienced in a training battalion back home. However, we continued our 'up-country' style of living, much to the disdain of our new officers. The 'local houses', to coin a phrase, became our haunts. As for the Yanks, we did not mix with them very much, as their lifestyle was different - and having to buy in dollars raised prices. However, they liked our lifestyle and never refused a chance to drink with us. Later on, Quonset huts superseded our tents and the camp began to take shape - we even had a NAAFI on the beach, but the atmosphere never matched that of our up-country days. Once we had settled in, the workshop was nearly sitting in the sea, with our Tels section right at the end of the beach, headed by S/Sgt Lawrence. Next to us was an American AA Battery.

Our social life was a bit better now, with some of the local villages being within bounds. These were 'shantytowns', where only dollars and pounds sterling were taken. The 'wong' (Korean) notes, or our official 'BAFs', were valueless. We soon resumed our old habits and various huts became REME territory and were second homes, so much so that one ex-boy had his girlfriend from the old Div Wksp appear with an iron bedstead - a real luxury! How she found her way from up country no one knew, but as soon as the 'brass' found out that our lad wanted to marry her, within thirty-six hours he was on a plane to Hong Kong! The huts in the little villages were not so primitive as those up country, but the sanitation and water supply was chaotic. However, we survived and life was good - as long as the Military Police stayed away.

A step up the ranks

It was around this time that my 'substantive Sergeant' rank arrived and I was now able to apply for Tels Artificer training. I was accepted for a course in May 1957 at 3 Training Battalion at Arborfield. My promotion gave me my own room in the mess lines and an old Korean batman who really kept everything neat and tidy. As I was now one of the long-term men, I was due for an R & R (rest and recuperation) break in Tokyo for fourteen days at the British rest centre at Ebisu, in the suburbs of Tokyo. This was to be one of the most amazing periods of my life. We



flew from an American air base near Seoul to Tachikawa base, from where we were trucked to Ebisu, which had once been a girls' high school. The journey through the city was spectacular - compared to Korea it was another planet. We unpacked our kit and changed into civilian clothes for the first time in a year. We went into the in-house bar and found ourselves in a surrounding which was to make those unbelievable stories we had heard, about bars, women and nightlife, come true.

I had £49 as my two weeks pay, so next day I left camp, dressed in my civilian clothes for the first time since leaving UK, to explore. Going around by myself, staying close to the Bar Ebisu, everything looked good. (I actually returned there in 1961 when I went on holiday to Japan - but that, as they say, is another story). After a few days finding my way around and settling in, I came back to the Ebisu bar, where an extraordinary series of events occurred. One night, after sitting down at the bar, and with the bar girls looking after me like a king, one of the girls called 'Kimi' asked me if I would like to be shown around Tokyo. She would look after me for the week and would give me a good time. She said it would cost me £35 and I, in what must have been a drunken state, agreed and paid up. Looking back, this could have made my leave a disaster, but it turned out to be the start of seven days of a bliss of which I could never have imagined!

Seven days of bliss!

First she took me to a small hotel nearby, booking us in for six nights. She then gave me the traditional bath to sober me up and proceeded to plan the next few days. In the morning, Kimi took me out, dressed in a grey and white kimono, complete with wooden shoes! However, after the first day, I kept to my own shoes, as it was easier on the feet! She took me to a barber's shop and paid for my haircut. Nearby was an old man who ran a street-side barbers and he invited me to visit him each morning for a free shave. My breakfasts were always brought to me in my room by Kimi, after she had fetched it from one of the many littler rice and 'Sake' shops; while for lunch, she took me to many tiny shops in many tiny alleyways. The evening meal was

the one meal I paid for, but she knew where to go for the best deals and never insisted on expensive or special foods. All other times of the day were spent walking around the centre of town, the Ginza, Royal Palace and the Zoo, where there was an overhead railway to make travel easier.

During this time my birthday arrived (on July 28th) and I was twenty-one years old! I decided to treat myself and found a very good Japanese 'royoken' (Inn) and booked a room to myself. In typical style, there were five girls to serve me with sake and sukiyaki. It was another of those nights that I can be grateful for and what was so surprising was that everything was so cheap. (Many years afterwards, I was in a Japanese restaurant in Bangkok and, when I showed the owner the bill from this Inn, she knew all about it, even down to the main dining table - such a funny thing, considering all those miles and years between!)

When I was in need of relaxation, Kimi and I would return to the hotel room and take sake, while we passed the time in bed. I noticed that on her right groin there was a wound where an Australian soldier, whom she had taken around Tokyo a few months earlier, had knifed her. Even then, she acted as if I was something special. All this attention made me feel as if I was in Paradise and caused the days to fly by. In the last days, she took me to see a Japanese film, showing old Japan and various traditional figures. Even today, this type of film still intrigues me. On the last day we were together, we went to the traditional Kabuki theatre, but I paid. When she took me back to Ebisu, she presented me with a flower and the remaining coins that she had not spent. This whole session left me completely overwhelmed, as it was all so unexpected for a twenty-one year old. I remember when we were in bed she always said to me, "You no like my heart". When I eventually arrived back into the UK and came to be wandering around the West End of London, it was so noticeable how sleazy London was compared to Tokyo. I consider myself to have been so lucky to have had that wonderful experience in my early manhood.

Feet back firmly on the ground

I was posted from Korea in November 1956 and was given one of those 'Notices of Return'. And so finished a period of my life that has left a strong impression on my outlook and I had at last grown up. It took me from a naive twenty-year-old boy to a rather cynical but more worldly-wise twenty-one year old and for that I am grateful. Nowhere else could this have happened to me. So, on 8th November, I was to fly to Singapore. I was to find myself 'in limbo' as, before I left, my posting was changed to Command Workshops, Sham Che Po, in Hong Kong. I took off from Seoul airport in an RAF *Valetta*. As we flew into Clark Field, the large American air base in the Philippines, I noticed that we seemed to fly so slow and low that rain appeared on the flight deck. In fact it turned out we were flying through monsoon rain! The overnight stop offered the chance to see the nightlife. Many of our flight went downtown to a riot of booze

and women and, from what they said, it was a luxury when compared to anything Korea had to offer - but no comparison to most places in Japan. The bars were total rip-offs compared to even the lowest of bars encountered in Japan. I only got as far as the bar close to the main gate and sampled the San Miguel beer that had been such a luxury in Korea. I saw very little of the local town, which was a pity because now, after the volcano eruption, it has been closed.

Next day we were off to Hong Kong, arriving at Kai Tek airport, skimming in to land, passing over skyscrapers, which made it a hazardous place for landing during bad weather. When I eventually reported in, I found myself 'redundant' as far as the Tels section was concerned. Instead, I was given jobs in Administration and the RAOC Scales Dept in the camp next door to the workshops - this gave me a lot of time off. As I was now living in the Mess, away from my old Korean mates, my life had become somewhat solitary. I kept mainly to myself, enjoying the town; once again wandering the streets by myself. This never frightened me, despite the many horror stories that were told. I would walk out from the main gate to the top of Natham Road (the main street), right down the docks. At the sea-front was the Peninsular Hotel, which, like Raffles in Singapore, was off-limits to us mere soldiers. The

Star Ferry was always available to get across to the island itself and, around the pier, were innumerable sampans, which were cheaper to hire and ran at all hours of the day and night. At night they would transport you with their families sleeping inside - it was their home! Despite their poverty they were always cheerful. One of my favourite spots was a little open-air bar at the top of the hill railway, where one could drink San Miguel while looking down over all of Kowloon, spread out like a scene from a film. Although this delay was inconvenient, I did enjoy my short stay and, many years later, when I returned on a visit, it brought back many happy memories. We flew down to Singapore and moved into Rowcroft Lines Sergeants Mess, to become part of District Workshops. I lived very well in the Mess when compared to life in Korea - we had a Malay man who served the large five-man room. He saw to everything as we ticked off the days. If he came across any discarded clothes, he scooped them up for washing and ironing. In fact I doubt that I have ever been so well turned out since! Even in the Tels Shop, it was all the locals, Chinese, Malays and Indians - while Tamils carried out the manual labouring. Women dropped out of my life during this period, but the beer was something I continued to enjoy, tending to wander about by myself. My father at this time was FARELF GHG RSM and my parents lived in Dempsey Road, opposite the Botanical Gardens.

Notice of Return

Issued in solemn warning this. . . . day of. . . . 19 . . .
To the friends, relatives and neighbours of.
Fill the icebox with cold beer (Abbots Lager)

Very soon the above mentioned will be once again in your midst, dehydrated and dilapidated, to take his place as a human being, with freedom and justice for all, engaged in the somewhat belated pursuit of happiness. In your joyous preparations to welcome him back into the organised society, you must make allowances for the past. In a word he may be a little lunatic suffering from Japanitis or a little too much excitement. Therefore, show no alarm if he prefers to squat on his haunches instead of sitting on a chair or has a tendency to bow when meeting someone or saying goodbye. Keep cool when he pours gravy on his dessert and mixes peaches with his mashed potatoes. Be tolerant when he takes the mattress off his bed and puts in on the floor to sleep. Don't let him shock you if when he answers the phone he says "Moshi-Moshi" instead of "Hello" and instead of "goodbye" says "sayonara". In a relatively short time he can be taught to speak English again. Never, never, never ask him why the boy down the street had a higher rank than him or make flattering remarks about the Navy or Air Force in his presence, as this is likely to cause him to relapse into Japanitis. For the first few months (until he seems housebroken) be especially watchful when he is in the company of beautiful women or any woman for that matter. After seeing handsome men wooing lovely women on the screen night after night at the local air-conditioned cinema (no heat) he has come to the conclusion that he is a master of the art. His intentions will be sincere though dishonourable. Keep in mind that beneath his tanned and rugged exterior beats a heart of gold. Treat him with kindness, tolerance and an occasional quart of beer and he will be able to rehabilitate from that which is a hollow shell of the happy man you once knew.

(His conduct assessment)

PS Send no more letters to the Postmaster C/O Hiro, Kure, Tokyo, Sasebo or any other Nipponese tribal centre.

GET THE CHILDREN OFF THE STREETS. HE'S COMING IN. DAYS.

I was able to visit them every evening and during holidays and weekends if I wished, to enjoy all the comforts of home! In fact Christmas that year was spent at home, where 'Trooper' (my dog from Austria) was with us. Just after Christmas, I did an Athletics Coaching Course at GHQ. I regret to say that, after passing it, I was never allowed to get involved in UK meetings, as it seemed to be officers only, even if they were not qualified. So I abandoned my approach to formal athletics. In May 1957, my Artificer Course posting to No.3 Training Battalion at Arborfield came through.

The long route home

At the time, the Suez Canal was closed, so the troopship had to sail the long way back, via the Cape of Good Hope and up the western coast of Africa, to the Canaries. This proved to be quite an adventure. Instead of stopping at Colombo, our first stop was at Durban in South Africa. We were given VIP treatment, as we were the first troopship to call there since the end of World War II. At the quayside, the 'Lady in White', who used to sing to the troops during the war, welcomed the ship. We disembarked to her singing and encountered a very welcoming white community, who took groups of us out to farms on the *veldt*, where we were wined and dined like heroes. As I was on deck duty, I was among the last to be granted shore leave, which was good for me because once again I could go off by myself. Very soon I came face to face with the *apartheid* controls. For all of my time in the Far East, I had mixed socially with all races and colours. But here, even if I went for a drink and it happened that I was not on the white section of the beach, I was asked to leave because the *coloureds* (as they were then known) became very uneasy with me so close. I found the hospitality of the whites unbelievable - whenever I attempted to pay my bill, I was told there was 'no charge', as the white people in the bar had paid it for me! (All this was wonderful, especially when compared to the ex-pats in the Far East, who used to treat soldiers as low life intruders. I found the locals most helpful in making sure that I did not break the rules). I returned to the ship in a rickshaw pulled by a Zulu in full feathers and tribal dress, which is something I shall never forget; the rickshaws in Hong Kong were very poor in comparison.

So, here were two societies with drastically different lifestyles. At the time I found this depressing because, after three years in the Far East, where although there was some discrimination, it had been nothing like this. Our next port of call was the Canary Islands, having bypassed Cape Town because, at the time, there was some sort of diplomatic stress evident that prohibited us calling in. At Las Palmas, there was a rush to get shore leave after the long period at sea and, once again, I was on deck duty so was late getting ashore! Already, the Spanish police and our Military Police were bringing drunk and disorderly squaddies back to the ship; the drinks were so cheap and the weather was so hot! The shore groups were made up of SAS, SWB, Infantry, Rifle Brigade, Royal Marines and others and, as can be imagined, when all these were let loose in the bars, inter-unit rivalry turned into many small riots. The Spanish police waded in with batons and arrested many soldiers. I was rather foolhardy in

attempting to help some of those that I knew, but after being hit a few times, decided to get away.

A couple of us eventually found a bar away from the dock area. As usual, we hit the cheap drinks and, for the last time in my life, I picked up a 'lady of the night'. I don't remember the details but I do remember waking up in a double bed alongside a fat girl and looking at a picture of the Virgin Mary that hung over the top of the bed! I got dressed and made my exit, taking some time to get back to the ship; everywhere there were troops, drunk out of their minds, being carried back by their mates or dumped in vehicles by the police. Shore leave had been a disaster! When the ship sailed, we spent some time sorting it all out; there was a suggestion that it would end with a War Office enquiry. Some of the Paras had climbed the ship's cranes and tried to dive into the sea, with varying degrees of success and injury. But, by the time we reached Liverpool, we were all sober and much subdued. This was the second time I had been to Liverpool, the first was in 1950, but now we were at the docks and it was different. My recollections are of a depressing and dirty area, with the surly customs officials being most unhelpful. They checked everything we carried, treating us like major criminals. Eventually we boarded a rather dirty train to London, where we split up on our various ways for disembarkation leave. I spent mine at the Union Jack Club at Waterloo, after which I reported to No.3 Training Battalion to finally start my Artificer Course.



Caption Competition

Can you provide a suitable witty caption for this photo?

MY BOOMERANG

It keeps coming back! By Brian Hornsey 54A

Once upon a time a young Corporal, 'diligently' serving his time with 12LAA Wksp, BAOR, heard a shout one morning from his CO, Corporal, how would you like to go to Australia?

Three weeks later a slightly stunned lad was on an RAF Comet II Aircraft, taking some three days to reach Adelaide in South Australia, to be subsequently stationed at RAAF Edinburgh Field, Elizabeth and later Woomera.

Having spent some 10 months on Thunderbird missile trials and fully fitted out with my Aborigine hunting equipment (a woomera, spear and a boomerang) I was returned to UK, eventually to be posted to RAF Henlow to build a set of electronic transmitter units, later to be installed into six RAF trucks and one Army vehicle.

Six months with the RAF was no preparation for the next four years to be spent with 160 Locating Battery RA and later the School of Artillery, both at Larkhill. All thoughts of Australia and boomerangs had faded long ago - at least until I arrived at Larkhill where I was to be confronted by an enthusiastic Warrant Officer II John Webb with a lorry!

Once having overcome the drastic reversion to carrying out guard duties with the Royal Artillery and unnecessary inspections and parades, I was able to concentrate on my next spell with a boomerang - it was to be the code name for this new experimental radar jammer, the transmitter of which I had built unknowingly at Henlow!

The completed trials equipment was eventually to be used all over Salisbury Plain to jam the 8Mk1 and 7Mk4 Radars, so preventing them from detecting the trajectories of Mortar bombs and thus their source. Many a frozen day was spent with pyjamas worn under our Combat Suits in those bleak winter days from 1962 through 1963. Civilian personnel from nearby Boscombe Down assisted the trials.

The Vehicle and its Power Source

The vehicle was a standard Humber 1-ton FFW (Fitted For Wireless) Truck, with only minor modifications being necessary to accommodate the equipment. WOII John Webb and myself carried out all modifications and the installation of the various units, both attached to the School of Artillery Workshop REME.

The equipment was powered externally from a 27.5KVA Meadows generator, although because it was large, cumbersome and noisy was later replaced by a 10KVA generator in September 1966 (after my time).

The Internal Equipment

This consisted of a receiver rack with its aerial, a transmitter rack with its waveguide and aerial horns, a cooling system for the transmitter and finally, a series of power supply and monitor units.

The receiver rack was used to intercept (direction find) the radar transmission. It consisted of an American Radar Set AN/APR-9B superhet receiver originally intended for use in aircraft to detect radio signals in the frequency range 1kHz to 750MHz, and a Direction Finder AN/APR-69A. The latter provided visual indication on a cathode ray tube of the true bearing of received radio and radar signals. At the same time another piece of equipment, Signal Analyser AN/APA-74, allowed direct measurement of the incoming radar signal (i.e., pulse repetition frequency, pulse width and rise times).



Fig 1 Boomerang - Ready to Jam

The transmitter rack transmitted along the bearing and elevation of the intercepted received radar transmission via a rotatable horn aerial. It was made up of a 'backward wave oscillator' (BWO) and the seven separate units built at RAF Henlow. The combined purpose of the transmitter was to emit a continuous X-band carrier signal of greater than 100-Watts power, modulated by wideband noise (bandwidth 10kHz to 12MHz), the amplitude of which was set by the operator.

The transmitter aerial consisted of a two horns fitted together back-to-back, mounted on a platform which could be rotated and elevated manually. The horns could be connected for either vertical or horizontal polarisation with a choice of two bandwidths, 10° horizontal, 10° vertical or 45° horizontal, 10° vertical.

A group of power supply units, invertors, large rectifiers, distribution and monitor units to power both receiver and transmitter were located inside a sound insulated compartment that ran down the left side of the cabin.

A heat exchanger, compressor and water pump to cool the backward wave oscillator and transmitter units were located in another sound insulated compartment, on the right side of the cabin, close to the entrance door. The water-cooled the BWO and the air-cooled the waveguide.

The equipment was fitted into steel frames, these being formed from lengths of angle iron welded together to form rectangular racks, which were to house the transmit and receive equipment. All inserted units were mounted on to small sprung shock

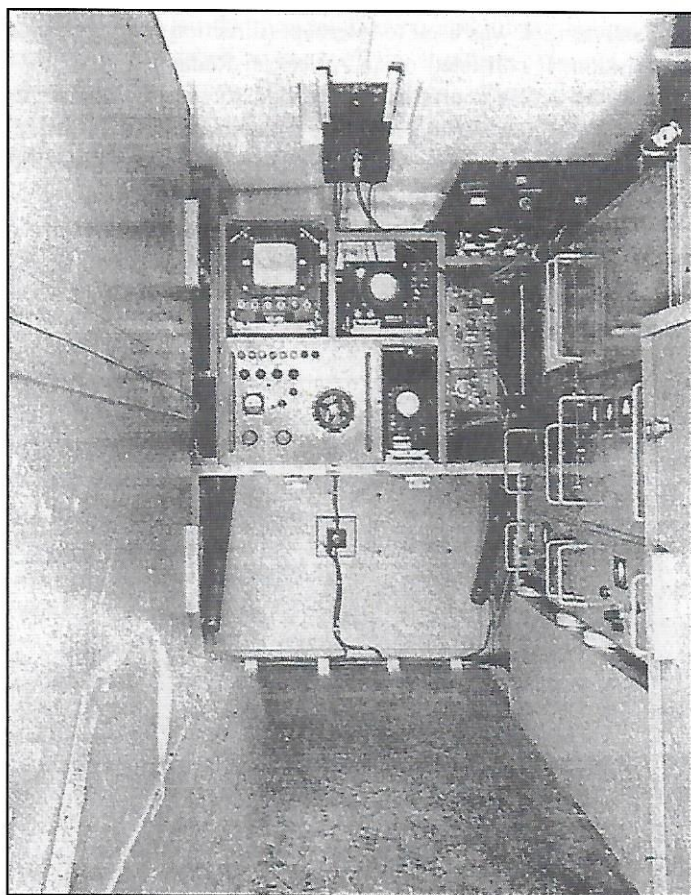


Fig 2 The Interior - as seen from the back door

absorbing feet to protect them from bumps and jars when on the move.

Operation

Before attempting to describe the electronics in detail, it might help the reader if I explain how the jammer was used. (Note that the procedures given in this article were in use on a jamming trial that took place between 9 - 20 July 1962).

The equipment was brought into action such that the vehicle was positioned with the right hand rear facing the expected search area, with the roof on a slight slope. The generator was placed up to a maximum of 75 yards away.

Depending upon the requirement, one of two horn transmitter aerials was fitted to its aerial bracket, and then connected by a flexible waveguide to the internal (permanently fixed) waveguide assembly.

The generator was then connected, vehicle flaps opened, internal supply switches checked for OFF and the generator started up. Generator revs were set to 1800 rpm and the output voltage was set to be 208V, 60 cycles (Hertz for you younger technicians).

The Trial

This involved 3 different stages of operation:

- Stage 1 - Intercept,
- Stage 2 - Jamming the target radar direct,
- Stage 3 - Indirect jamming, via a 'window' cloud.

Conditions for the 3 stages were continually altered, such as changing the radar positions, sitting with various intervening crest angles, and varying the line of sight range.

Stage 1. Boomerang was brought into action, the receiver only switched on, oriented and (initially) with its antenna rotating. The operator searched the frequency spectrum and each signal detected was accurately analysed. However, extreme difficulty was experienced in intercepting signals from the target radar with the aerial rotating because the X-band antenna had a very narrow horizontal bandwidth, which although excellent for direction finding, made the task of intercepting a signal much more difficult. The operator who sat on the roof of the cabin overcame this and using a hand held X-band detector located the direction to the target radar manually, listening through headphones. The receiving antenna was then rotated manually to the direction of maximum signal.

Stage 2. Once the received 'target' signal was centred on a panoramic display inside the cabin, the transmitter horn was selected and fitted. The man on the roof then pointed the horn in the direction of the target radar. The hand held detector had to be used again for this operation. It took about 30 seconds to switch up the transmitter. The line voltage applied to the transmitter corresponded to the transmitter frequency and so by varying the line voltage, the frequency varied. Varying the Anode voltage applied to the BWO controlled the power output. In practice this was done by turning a Variac control. Various power settings were tried from 40 Watts to 120 Watts to gauge the effect on the target radar.

The bandwidth of the transmitted signal was also varied between 5MHz and 80MHz. The antenna horns were also changed continually during the trials, either to obtain a different plane of propagation (polarisation) or to obtain a wider coverage in the horizontal plane (bandwidth). Apart from these variations, the operator merely had to ensure that the transmitter output remained correctly on frequency and that the transmitter horn stayed pointing in the right direction!

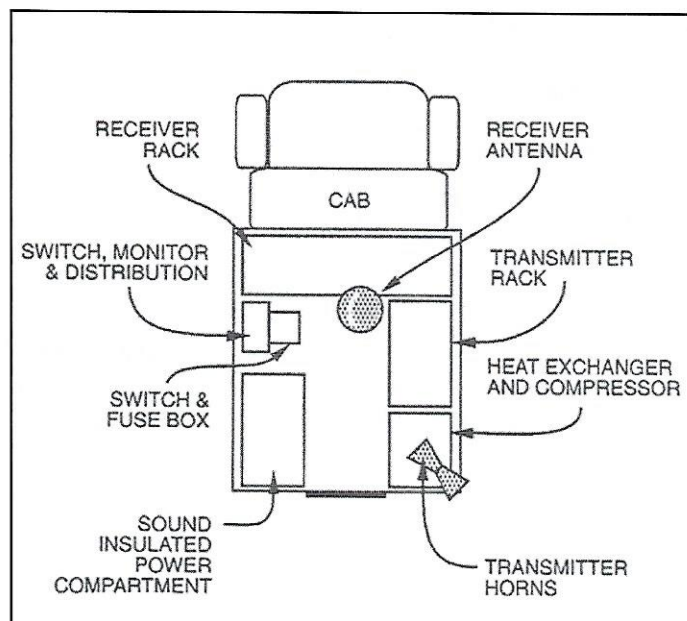


Fig 3 The Interior - plan view of the equipment

Stage 3. This final stage of operation consisted of repeating the settings used in Stage 2 above, but elevating and rotating the transmitter horn on its bracket and manually sighting the horn at a selected 'window cloud'. The window cloud was produced either from a Mortar bomb filled with window and burst at a selected point on its trajectory or, dropped as a packet, one at a time from a helicopter. Regardless of the method used, the procedure followed at Boomerang was always the same.

The spare operator positioned himself on the roof of the vehicle and holding the horn from the rear, sighted it in the general direction of the expected window drop. As soon as the drop was observed he pointed the horn accurately at it and stayed with it, following its drop visually for as long as possible. Of course the ability to do this depended upon the weather conditions with wind and cloud being the greatest hazards. Owing to the very strong spill over from the transmitted signal displayed on the panoramic display it proved impossible to see the target radar through it and the only way to confirm that you were correctly aligned was to detune the transmitter briefly so you could see the signal from the target radar.

Transmitter In Detail

The transmitter centred around the Backward Wave Oscillator CV 6056 (M Type) valve, which had three electrodes, namely a Sole, an Anode and a Cathode and of course as with all electronic valves, heaters. The valve could deliver X-band RF, at a power of greater than 100 Watts, in the frequency range of 8.5 to 10.5 GHz.

The output was frequency modulated by a variation of the potential between the Cathode and Sole. The Anode was held positive with respect to the Cathode, while the Cathode was held negative to the line which was earthed, the latter being part of the heavy copper body of the valve.

Between the Cathode (negative) and the line (earth) came the Sole. By varying the Sole to Cathode voltage, so the frequency was varied. The modulating noise signal was applied between the Sole and line, and the resultant RF output was transmitted by waveguide either to the antenna horns or to a dummy load

Power for the BWO was supplied from the Sole, Heater & Anode Supply Unit, also located in the transmitter rack. Zero to -1700Vdc was generated, varied by the Variac control on the Control Unit. The supply to the Sole electrode was between 1500 and 1800Vdc. The Anode, Sole and Heater potentials were with respect to the Heater/Cathode; the complete circuit being mounted on 12000V insulation. (I note that in the Royal Artillery user handbook, it gives a warning that the preset Sole voltage must be adjusted using an insulated screwdriver and is a REME adjustment only!)

A Noise Generator & Amplifier Unit (NGA) generated the modulating noise for the carrier. The noise source was a photo electron multiplier (PEM) illuminated by a DC lamp. The intensity of the lamp was controlled by a DC voltage and set so that the PEM was just saturating to give out maximum secondary emission. The output of the PEM was wideband noise. This was then amplified, filtered to cut off the high end of the frequency

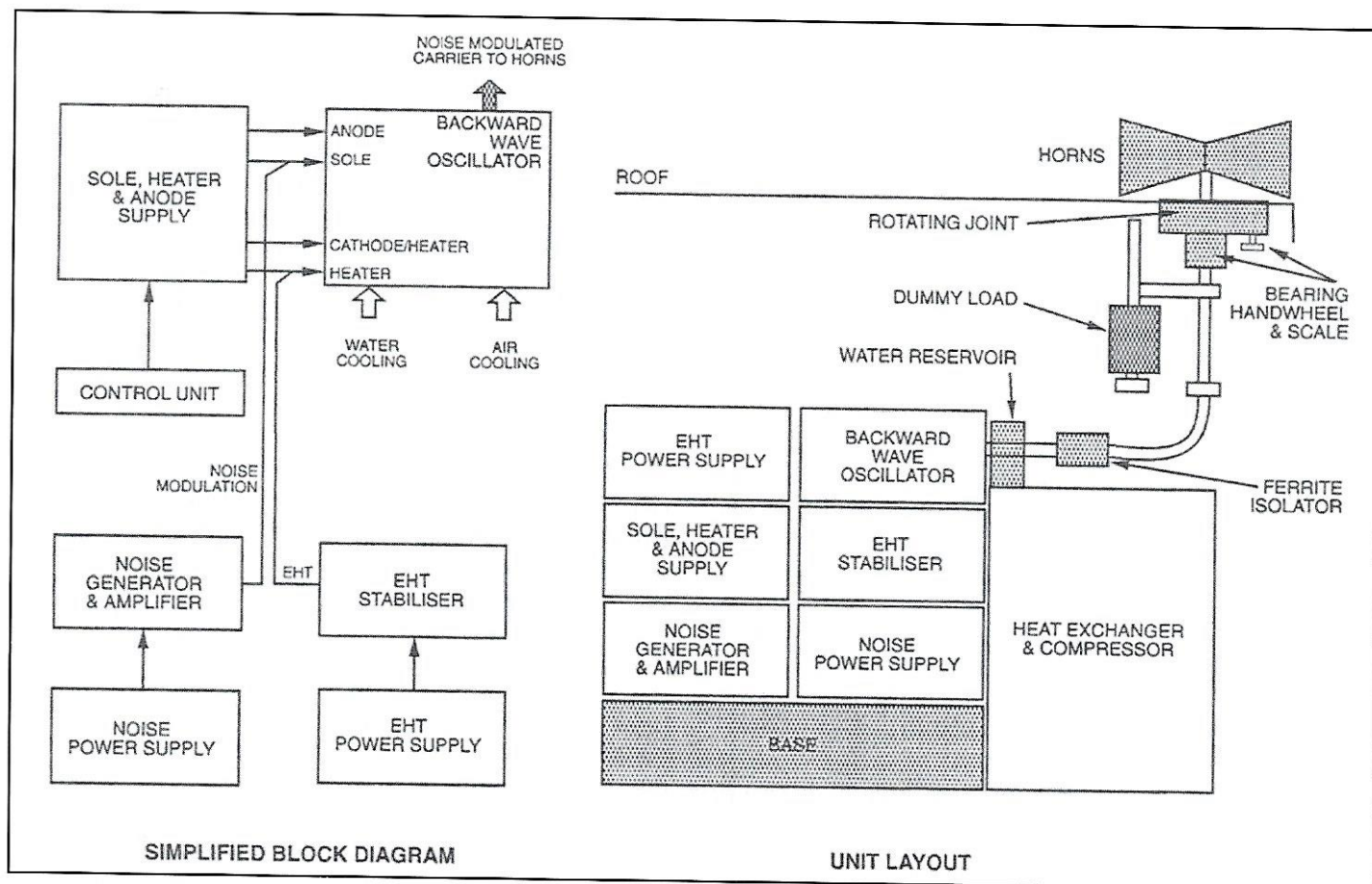


Fig 4 Block Diagram of the Transmitter

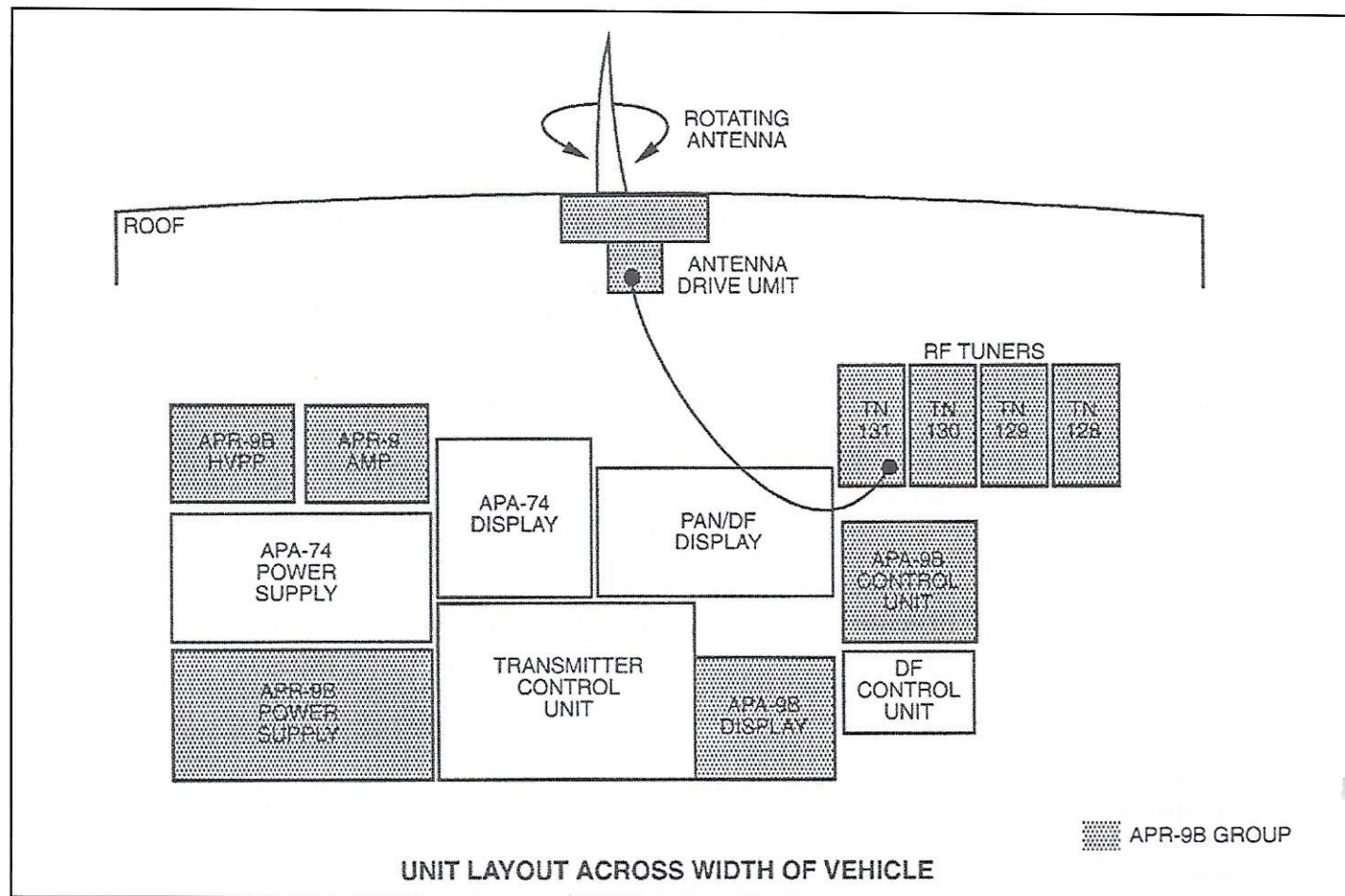


Fig 5 Block Diagram of the Receiver Group

spectrum and then applied via variable 'clip' circuits to the Sole electrode of the BWO. The clip controls allowed the modulation amplitude to be set, enabling the 'deviation of the RF carrier frequency' to be set to approximately 5MHz.

The NGA was powered from $\pm 300V$, $-550V$ and $-1000V$; the latter for the PEM (remember, we're talking valves here!).

A compressor that forced air into the BWO valve block and then out into the transmitter rack provided air-cooling for the transmitter. A small blower motor also blew air through the waveguide section within the valve and then out into the waveguide proper. A centrifugal pump provided water-cooling. The water was kept cool by passing it through a heat exchanger.

Receiver In Detail

As this equipment was supplied ready built, detailed information was only available from the American handbooks of the time. The following description has been based on information given in the Royal Artillery trials handbook of 1962.

As previously mentioned the receiver consisted of 3 separate groups, Radar Set AN/APR-9B, Direction Finder Group AN/APR-69A and Signal Analyser Group AN/APA-74.

Radar Set AN/APR-9B. This was capable of detecting signals within the frequency range of 1MHz to 10,750MHz. 4 separate

RF Tuners, only one of which could be used at a time, covered this.

The complete receiver group comprised a Mixer Amplifier Unit, Display Unit, Control Unit, two Power Supply Units and one of 4 RF Tuners.

The signals received by the APR-9B were displayed on the cathode ray tube of the Display Unit and could also be heard through a loudspeaker or headphones. In addition two video outputs were available for connection to the direction finding and signal analysis equipment.

The frequency and type of modulation of the received signal could be accurately determined and characteristics such as pulse repetition frequency (PRF), pulse width (PW), scanning rate and warble could be estimated using the associated analysis equipment groups.

Three antennas were required to cover the complete frequency range, only one being fitted at a time. The antenna in use was fitted to the Antenna Drive Unit, located on the ceiling of the cabin. It could rotate up to a speed of 300 rpm, as controlled by the operator.

Direction Finder Group AN/APR-69A. When used with the APR-9B receiver, this provided visual indication on a cathode ray tube (CRT) of the true bearing of the received radar and radio signals within the frequency range of the receiver. The

directional indication could be converted to true bearing by a bearing scale around the outer rim of the CRT. The bearing scale could be oriented on the initial occupation of a position in the normal way.

The signal picture also afforded other information as well, including approximate PRF, relative signal amplitude, modulation characteristics and polarisation of the received signal.

Signal Analyser Group AN/APA-74. This was designed to analyse the video signal of any standard intercept receiver (in this instance the AN/APR-9B). Pulse analysis data was displayed on all 5 traces of a 5-gun CRT. Each trace had a separate calibrated time base and scales were used to directly measure PRF, pulse width and rise time.

In addition, a stopwatch could be used to enable the determination of the modulation pattern and the scanning rate of the received signal. It was possible to directly measure a PRF up to 40 kHz and pulse widths of between 0.2µs to 50µs.

The Power System

A Meadows 27KVA generator supplied 3 phase 208V at 60Hz to the vehicle and this was applied to a 3-phase transformer and rectifier to produce a regulated 28Vdc for two invertors and one rotary converter. The 28Vdc output from the 3-phase transformer & rectifier was also used to power dc circuits in

both transmitter and receiver racks, the antenna drive for the receiver and the heat exchanger. (One phase of the 208V supply was routed to service supply sockets within the vehicle to power American test equipment.)

Each inverter generated a 115V, 1600Hz single-phase AC supply at 1750VA. They were independently switched by circuit breakers from a Switch, Monitor & Distribution Unit. The outputs were voltage stabilised to 1% and frequency stabilised to 1.5% by individual electronic regulators before application to the equipment. One inverter supplied the Backward Wave Oscillator and the other provided power for the transmitter and receiver racks.

The rotary converter generated a 115V, 400Hz, 3-phase supply and was used to power blower motors for the electronic regulators. One phase was also used to power the synchros in the APR-9B receiver.

The standard cabin lights and extractor fans continued to be powered, switched and fused from the 24V vehicle batteries.

And where did this story come from?

Well, 37 years later, since these trials, working as the Pictorial Archivist in the REME Museum, I had the idea of contacting the Bradley Library at The School of Artillery, Larkhill and they dug out a copy of the old handbook.

So yes, my Boomerang had come back yet again!

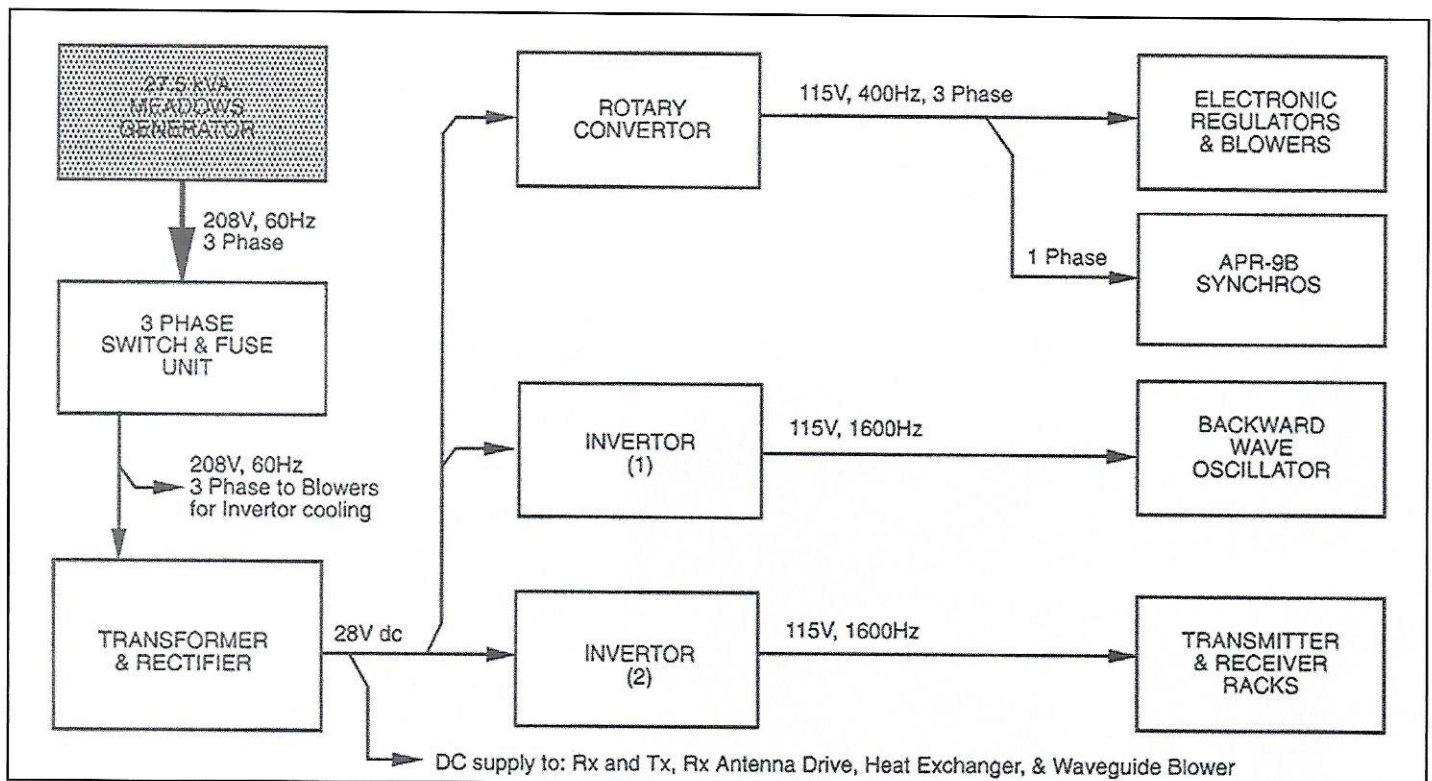


Fig 6 Block Diagram of the Power System



The old Poperinghe Barracks Guardroom

THE SEPT49'er BELL by Gordon Bonner 49B

My penultimate appointment prior to retirement was as Officer i/c Management Services, 26 Command Workshop REME, Forthside, Stirling, Central Scotland. During my tenure there, it was decided that the Regional Depot, RAOC, landlord unit for the Forthside Depot would close. The appropriate disbandment Order was issued, and over the following weeks, the "Stores" stored at the Depot became "Issues!!" and were moved out to other parts of the Ordnance World, until finally, with the Depot emptied, skips appeared to aid the great clean up. I do not know how many of you have ever been involved in closing down a unit, but it is truly amazing the vast range of artefacts that become redundant and are discarded. Well I happened to spot the bell lying in a skip. Having been brought up on the principle of, if it moves Salute it, if it is lying around pick it up, if it does not move paint it, I purloined it, and for the next 12 years it became a doorstep at home.

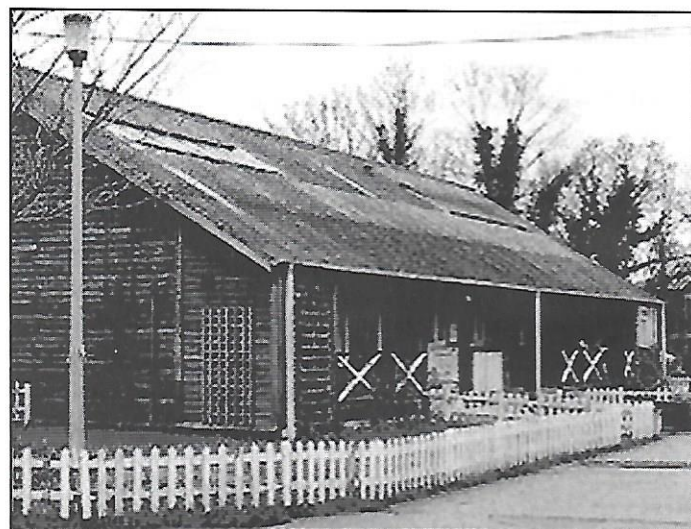
Where did the bell come from? The bell had been on the inventory of the Depot Guardroom since 1898, and was used to sound the fire alarm as necessary before the days of electric fire alarms.



Reconstruction well under way

During the 2002 reunion we were briefed by Bill Cleasby of the progress of the 1950's guardroom, which included a trawl for 1950's military equipment. I mentioned the bell to my fellow 49'ers, and we decided it would be a good idea to return the bell to it's "rightful home", so to speak.

Thus I was tasked to refurbish the bell in preparation for presentation at the 2003 reunion which was duly acted upon.



The Depot Guardroom was of a similar construction to that of the Army Apprentices School one.

The REME Museum of Technology

The Museum of Technology is seeking to preserve an element of the Arborfield Garrison's past by building a replica of the Poperinghe Barracks Guardroom, using the original fittings.

Poperinghe Barracks, named after a small town in Western Flanders, Belgium, was constructed in 1939 and originally housed units of the Royal Artillery. It became Depot REME in 1948 and as many as 100,000 REME soldiers passed through its gates prior to closure in 1977. The Guardroom itself was for a time used to house the Arborfield Newsagent and local Youth Club offices. It will and the rest of the Depot has now been demolished to make way for a housing development. The reconstructed Guardroom is to form a new entrance to the Museum. It will be complete with white picket fence, gardens, flagpole and veranda and the interior will contain a much needed tea room, a reception area and shop. Pride of place will go to an authentic guardroom display containing 1950s furniture and artefacts and a representative cell. Use will be made audio and animatronic techniques to create a realistic, educational and stimulating environment.

AREN'T YOU GLAD THEY ARE ON OUR SIDE? from Alan Gordon 52A

(I have just received this from an American ex-work colleague. I have de-Americanised it slightly, because the Americans somehow seem to think that they are the only ones out there! I hope that you all agree with me that this is quite suitable for inclusion in the OBAN magazine.)

Alan Gordon.

Aren't you glad they are on our side?

The average age of the military man is 19 years. He is a short haired, tight-muscled kid who, under normal circumstances, is considered by society as half man, half boy. Not yet dry behind the ears, not old enough to buy a beer, but old enough to die for his country. He never really cared much for work and he would rather wax his own car than wash his father's; but he has never collected unemployment benefit either. He's a recent High School graduate; he was probably an average student, pursued some form of sport activities, drives a ten-year old jalopy, and has a steady girl friend that either broke up with him when he left, or swears to be waiting when he returns from half a world away. He listens to rock-and-roll or hip-hop or rap or jazz or swing and the 155mm howitzer. He is 10 or 15 pounds lighter now than when he was at home, because he is working or fighting from before dawn to well after dusk.

He sometimes has trouble spelling, thus letter writing is a pain for him, but he can field strip a rifle in 30 seconds and reassemble it in less time in the dark. He can recite to you the nomenclature of a machine gun or grenade launcher and use either one effectively if he must. He digs foxholes and latrines and can apply first aid like a professional. He can march until he is told to stop or stop until he is told to march. He obeys orders instantly and without hesitation, but he is not without spirit or individual dignity. He is self-sufficient. He has two sets of fatigues; he washes one and wears the other. He keeps his canteens full and his feet dry. He sometimes forgets to brush his teeth, but never to clean his rifle. He can cook his own meals, mend his own clothes, and fix his own hurts. If you're thirsty, he'll share his water with you; if you are hungry, his food, his last cigarette. He'll even split his ammunition with you in the midst of battle when you run low.

He has learned to use his hands like weapons and weapons like they were his hands. He can save your life - or take it, because that is his job. He will often do twice the work of a civilian, draw half the pay and still find ironic humor in it all. He has seen

more suffering and death than he should have in his short lifetime. He has sometimes stood amongst dead bodies, having helped to create them. He has wept in public and in private, for friends who have fallen in combat and is unashamed. He feels every note of the National Anthem vibrate through his body while standing rigid to attention, tempering the burning desire to 'square-away' those around him who haven't bothered to stand, remove their hat, or even stop talking. In an odd twist, day in and day out, far from home, he defends their right to be disrespectful.

He is paying the price for our freedom just as did his Father, Grandfather and Great-grandfather. Beardless or not, he is not a boy. He is the 'British Fighting Man' that has kept this country free for nearly 1,000 years. He has asked nothing in return, except our friendship, loyalty and understanding. Remember him always, for he has earned our respect and admiration with his blood. And now, we even have women over there in danger, doing their part in this tradition of 'going to war' when our nation calls us to do so. As you go to bed tonight, picture this - a short lull, a little shade and our loved ones in their helmets. Then when you have read this, pause for a moment and offer a small prayer for all our armed forces, wherever they may be serving in the world, on land, in the air, on the sea or under the sea.

"Lord, hold our troops in your loving hands. Protect them as they protect us. Bless them and their families for the selfless acts they perform for us in our time of need. Amen."

A prayer is perhaps the best choice of all choices except for one and that is to see them all come safely to their families.

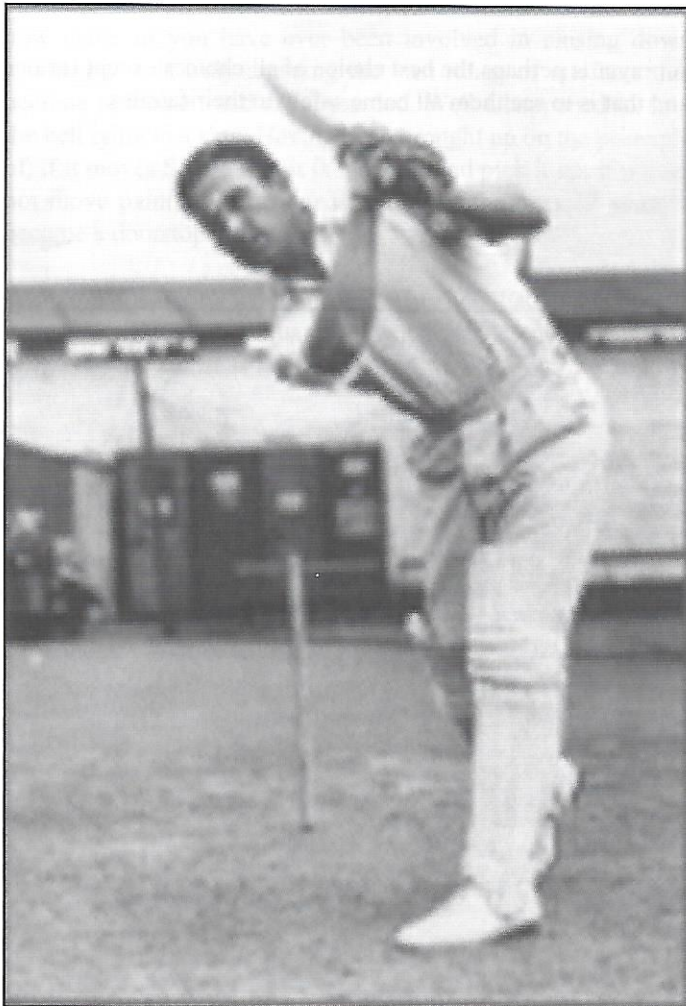


We were so young!

**THE SAGA OF JULIUS CAESAR
A Prehistoric Monster
& a Dinosaur of the World of Cricket
By Alex (Dandy) Cunningham (42C)**

(Note to Readers: Herewith is an unbellished account of certain events at Arborfield during my time there in 1942-45. It is not my intention to denigrate the memory of one of our greatest sportsmen, but merely to record an occurrence which may have escaped his autobiography. As an active participant in the proceedings, now approaching the age of 74, I have always remembered my brief theatrical career - AC)

In 1943, an Amateur Dramatics Club was established at the ATS(Boys) as an additional recreational activity. A number of the ATS girls from the cookhouse staff were persuaded to seek stardom by taking up the female roles and the Adjutant, a keen theatre-goer, agreed to be producer/Director. The Club's first production was a murder mystery 'whodunnit', set in a country-house drawing room. As an initial effort, this was well received by an appreciative audience in the Camp Hall. It was observed, however, that the young man who played the part of the victim, slumped in an armchair throughout the first act, had moved. Apparently, the unfortunately 'corpse' developed severe cramp through prolonged sitting. This was later dismissed as a contracture of the muscles, a natural phenomenon of rigor mortis setting in.



The Brylcreem Boy

Greatly encouraged by this initial venture, the Club opted to go ahead with a new production in the winter of 1943/44. The new show was a comedy farce entitled 'Julius and the Bront'. This was a two-act play, with a story-line about the Roman occupation of Britannia and the Emperor's wish to build a wall across the north, not only to restrict the marauding Scots but also to keep out a monster Brontosaurus, which was causing havoc in the south. Accordingly preparations commenced, with the full gambit of casting, rehearsals, scenery, costumes, make-up and lighting, etc. The whole effort gradually emerged like an episode of 'Up Pompeii', of later television fame. On the afternoon of the big night, at the final dress rehearsal, the Adjutant/Producer/Director decided that the 'three wild men from the north' were too pale skinned under the stage lighting. All three were then wholly painted with a brown stain, reputedly the material used by Armourers on the wooden components of .303 rifles. Heaven knows what a present day Health & Safety Executive would have made of that decision!

The show went on before a packed audience in the Camp Hall. The unique blend of drama and sheer absurdity was apparent, when an old open-topped car was pushed on stage with Caesar in goggles and gloves behind the wheel. This was further heightened by one of the ATS starlets dressed in what can only be described as a 'Roman Gownless Evening Strap', who took dictation from the Emperor on a portable typewriter. The 'piece de resistance' was the introduction of a tall youth who could mimic exactly the unmistakable voice of Provost Sergeant Hotchkiss. To all intents and purposes, here we had Hotchkiss on stage, dressed in toga and laurel-leafed headress, bellowing orders in his usual awe-inspiring manner. To sum up, the show proved to be, in current parlance, a 'smash hit', and the entire cast were entertained to a small (wartime) banquet as a reward.

The morning after the show, a number of apprentices were lined up in the Camp Hall, dressed in singlets and shorts, undergoing a precursory inspection by PTI Staff Sergeant Denis Compton of the Army Physical Training Corps. In the course of this inspection, this strict disciplinarian picked out three boys who had apparently seriously neglected their ablutions. In his opinion, their immediate requirement was a 'good scrub'. They were, of course, the 'three wild men from the north', enlisted as extras in non-speaking roles in the play and who had been subjected to the irremovable woodstain treatment! Despite their protests, all three were marched off to the shower room area, to be physically scrubbed by the use of a road sweeping brush and a 12-inch bar of coarse carbolic soap. Staff Compton administered this 'just retribution' personally, with apparent gusto. The humiliation was exacerbated by the cheering band of colleagues packed around the shower room to witness the event. This added to the utter misery endured by the hapless trio.

The news of this treatment of his budding thespians was eventually relayed to the Adjutant. In turn, Staff Compton was summoned to HQ to explain his decision to act as prosecutor, judge, jury and executioner, without paying proper cognizance to the pleas of the accused. The gist of this awkward interview may never be known because other more important events were rapidly developing on the premises. Under a hush-hush basis, all apprentices (to their joy) were abruptly sent on leave and then quietly dispersed to REME units at Aldershot, Ashford,

Bury and Greenford, while their accommodation was used to house elements of the massive D-Day invasion force being assembled.

In September 1944, many of the dispersed apprentices reluctantly returned to Arborfield, in order to complete their apprenticeships. RSM McNally and Sergeant Hotchkiss were there to greet them with a 'warm' welcome, but there was no sign of Staff Compton on the PT staff. The story was then circulated that Dennis had been drafted to India to play cricket for an Army Touring Select, against various Indian elevens. In the meantime, three quarters of a million other less fortunate had been drafted to France on a more mundane task. With the end of WWII, as the years rolled on, Dennis Compton's success on the cricket field became legendary. His photograph appeared in every national newspaper, not only on the sports pages but as an advertisement for a famous gent's hairdressing, 'Brylcreem'. Dennis shared his Brylcreem contract alternately with actor Richard Greene, later famous for his role as Robin Hood, in a long running television series. Dennis also became the subject on an episode of a notable TV show, 'This Is Your Life', where a group of his famous past acquaintances were brought on to pay tribute to his life. Lords cricket ground paid the ultimate accolade to DCS Compton, by naming a new grandstand/pavilion in his honour. Dennis Compton became a national hero and, in the modern vernacular, he was in every respect a class act. Sadly, the great man passed on in recent years, but his name lives on in the annals of achievement in English cricket.

Returning to that incident 57 years ago in rural Berkshire, a small question remains. Was it an honour and a privilege, if not a pleasure, for three grubby youngsters to be at the receiving end of a public scrubbing from the self same hands that were to become the scourge of Australian, New Zealand, West Indian, Indian and South African bowlers?

THAT OTHER PLACE compiled by Brian Hornsey

During an AOBBA Committee Meeting in 1999, the then Chairman Col Jim Mitchell stated that the new Lecture Theatre at the College had been named 'The Beachley Hall'. The following article was originally produced for the 75th Anniversary of the School at Beachley and I thought it might interest Arborfield members (at the risk of being hung from the flagpole) to know something more about our old rival School.

BEACHLEY - 75 YEARS History

In 1919, the War Office proposed to open a training school for 1,000 apprentice tradesmen. The course was to last 3 years, to be followed by 8 years Regular Army service and 4 years on the Reserve. Beachley was not the original choice of the Army Council but, in 1923, they found at Beachley a ready-made camp consisting of scores of huts, a cookhouse, a dining room and a large area covered by what had been a national shipbuilding yard for the construction of ships to replace those

sunk by the U-boat fleets. The area had lain idle for several years and was strewn with redundant wartime material and equipment awaiting disposal, while railway lines ran hither and thither. During World War I, the camp had also been used to house enemy prisoners.

In 1924, the War Office opened the Boys' Technical School at Beachley, under the command of the first Commandant, Lt Colonel VTR Ford - 1923 to 1927. The first occupants had to contend with less than ideal conditions but, by the end of 1924, at least the huts had been repainted in a cheery fashion - green and white inside, with red roofs. Two bath houses with showers, enough for 100 boys at a time, were soon provided, together with a Regimental Institute with a supper bar and billiards. In 1929, the school was re-named The Army Technical School (Boys) and, in 1931, the school flag was adopted - a red, green and blue horizontal tri-colour.

The Beachley Old Boys' Association was formed in 1939 and, by 1983, over 3,500 ex-boys had become members, so it would seem that their time at 'Beastly Beachley', as some called it, instilled a lasting feeling of camaraderie. In 1999 The Association had around 700 members.

In 1947, the school was re-named as The Army Apprentices School and a new badge adopted, followed in 1966 by conversion to The Army Apprentices College. A modernisation programme began in 1958, completed ten years later when the then Commandant suggested that the history of Beachley should be written. The chronicle was taken up in 1983 to mark the camp's 50th anniversary, the result being the book written by Major D Thomas.

By 1983, the College was providing a wider range of training exercises, making life more interesting for the trainees. There were all sorts of expeditions and work projects, both at home and abroad. Included was the providing of assistance to local organisations in heavy duty work, such as clearing Lydney's Norchard Colliery and Power Station site for the Dean Forest railway and installing the Foudroyant Cannon in the Caldicot Castle courtyard.

The College finally closed in 1994, when Ivor Anthony - himself an ex-boy (48A Group) became Honorary Lt Colonel in charge of getting the camp ready for its new role as the barracks for an infantry battalion.

Recollections - The following glimpses of life at Beachley in the early times and later are recollected by:

Major CT Davies, himself an ex-boy, in his book entitled 'Life in the Thirties'; Major D Thomas RAEC in his book entitled 'The Story of the Army Apprentices College, Chepstow, 1923-1983'; Captain RA Braithwaite RAEC in his book entitled 'An Apprentice in the Eighties'; and by other ex-boys.

In describing his experiences, Major Davies writes: "For me it was an experience I didn't enjoy but for which I am grateful. Most of the apprentice tradesmen of the period would tell you that the hardest soldiering they ever did was at Chepstow - and they meant it!"

New Entrants - Most successful applicants on arrival were well under 15, the normal school leaving age being 14. Starting pay was 11d a day (just over 5p), rising later to 1/5d (one shilling and five pence - just over 7p), with the addition of 'Lady Astor's sixpence', which did not allow much in the way of gracious living, especially as the boys were allowed only 1/- (5p) a week as pocket money. Things improved only slightly during the war years (1939 - 1945), when the weekly pocket money was increased to a princely 3/- (15p). The balance was paid when the boys went on leave - less, of course, barrack damages.

The huts were bare, fitted only with uncomfortable sliding section beds with 3 square mattresses, blankets, a pillow but no sheets (during the day these beds were 'made up' to look like chairs and you were courting trouble if you dared to sit on them), individual foot lockers, a wooden table top supported on two massive iron trestles, two stalwart forms and cleaning utensils. In the centre of each hut stood a brick chimney containing two fireplaces, back-to-back, each with its own mantle piece (known as the Cenotaph) and a huge iron coal bunker. These fireplaces were the only source of heating during the winter, but were only lit at the weekends due to a meagre weekly coal ration.

Reveille was a traumatic experience. The boys all slept like logs and, at the crack of dawn, a bugler came, blaring away outside. As dreadful a sound to a sleeping lad as can be imagined.

Breakfast - After reveille there followed washing and, for older boys, shaving, in cold water before being marched to breakfast. The food was universally condemned as terrible. There was a plethora of such delicacies as beans (of many varieties), rissoles and cabbage, with bread and axle-grease margarine used as a filler. One of the ever-pressing difficulties was that, as extremely fit rapidly growing lads, they were always hungry and there never seemed to be enough to eat. Some lucky lads got food parcels from home, but most had to survive on what was dished out.

After hut cleaning and inspection, the classes began. One good thing about workshop training was that the boys received a free mug of tea and a biscuit at the mid-morning break. The tea was the usual stuff, but the biscuits were unique. They were square, thick and really hard. Most boys saved them for later consumption - they responded to gnawing and many a happy hour was spent in rat-like activities.

Leisure Time - At the end of the day, which included rigorous sports, the boys' refuge was the NAAFI. This was a pretty austere place. The small amount allowed for pocket money didn't allow much in the way of indulgence, but at least the NAAFI was warm in winter and boasted several billiard tables.

Discipline - A lot of time was spent in keeping uniforms and kit in apple-pie order, to the extent that many used their meagre funds to buy duplicate kit for inspection purposes. Discipline was harsh, with fatigues and confinement to barracks being liberally imposed.

In describing a regular gang of boys who just could not keep out of trouble, Major Davies writes, "Strangely enough, these bolos, as they were called, turned out to be first class soldiers in later

life, while a lot of the A/T NCOs did not".

Leave - Everyone looked forward to leave, though in the early days free travel warrants were not provided and many of the boys could not afford the fare home three times a year. Major Davies writes again, "When we at last got home, it was marvellous to be in the company of adults who actually liked us, even if they were our own parents".

Hobbies - Evening times were allocated to hobbies and the occasional 'sweat night', when platoon members were given the task of making an already tidy room spotless.

Captain Braithwaite writes, in his *Amalgam of Trainees' Impressions*, "It was guaranteed that every apprentice was left each night with only one aim and that was to get some hard earned sleep".

MISS-UNDERSTANDINGS By West Robertson (50B)

It was all Mick Sutton's fault. He was the room NCO, a Lance Corporal I think, and slept in the room with us, the bunk being occupied by some senior figure, Ginger Pincombe, I seem to remember. It was a rare occurrence for me to be up and about before the duty bugler spat his venom into that length of copper tubing, but it happened and, dressed for breakfast, I sat on my bed. The bugler hardly had time to moisten his lips before Mick was out of bed, switched on the lights and proclaimed that he who was last to place his feet on the floor, would scrub the 'utensils'. Amused, I watched the activity, secure in my own position, and looked for a winner. It was with some amazement I discovered that, dressed or not, I was included in the competition and had won! I protested and was still protesting when the Company Commander awarded me 3 days 'Confined to Barracks'.

Even in those days, the term 'Confined to Barracks', or 'CB', puzzled me. We were all confined anyway and perhaps 'jankers' was more descriptive of the way that a supply of cheap labour, for the unwanted and unwelcome jobs about the camp, which could occur outside normal working hours, could be maintained. Now, starting my third year, this was my first but not last venture into the criminal world, and I had learned to accept instructions as they came, all mutiny now mental and private. The letter was the law and this left scope for fun. 'Jankers' was a regime designed to give ample time to ponder over the actions which landed you in this mess, but little else. On working days, the first parade at the guardroom was about 15 minutes after reveille, where an inspection took place of person and turn out, designed to catch the unwary and extend the period of confinement.

Normal duties were carried out during the day, then about half an hour after the evening meal, about 6 p.m., the working parade took place, when after inspection, jobs were allocated. These could range from work in any one of three kitchens; operating, painting, scrubbing or just plain moving bits of camp paraphernalia, coal stacking and gardening.

For about three hours, we worked wherever Fred Silvers and

his gang of social misfits sent us. Then another parade at the guardroom, before being dismissed to return, dressed as decided by that little demigod, for inspection by the Orderly Officer at Staff Parade. This took place at 2200 hrs, in a further attempt to extend our spell in the cheap labour market.

On Saturdays, there was an added interest, an hour of drill on the square under a drill instructor who objected to, or perhaps enjoyed, his time being used to discipline troops. We called this 'rodeo' and all 'janker wallahs' took part, although some participants had been awarded one or two extra drills as a punishment in itself. These were usually for lesser crimes like rape or murder, not covered by the section 'Good order and Military Discipline' or harder to define and were probably 'clean, sober and properly dressed' when they did so!

My first evening was spent in the Officers' Mess kitchen, washing pots and pans and doing any other jobs that arose. Before washing the pots, I dined royally on the scrapings and furtively eyed a roast leg of lamb, hardly touched. I bided my time. Soon I was alone, the lamb was hidden outside and I raised the alarm about some passing dog, a black labrador I think I chose, which had entered the kitchen. I did not accuse the beast of anything, just shouted about it being there. As a reward for diligence, I requested a loaf of bread and, with this and the meat, amply rewarded those in the barrack room who had so well prepared my kit for Staff Parade. The leg of lamb was never mentioned to my knowledge.

The second evening was spent in the kitchen of the main cookhouse, with less to scrape for supper from the tins when washing up and no opportunity to fill a 'doggy' bag. A case of tinned tomatoes was produced and I was told to put them into roasting tins and place them in the oven, ready for breakfast. I did! At Staff Parade, an irate full time kitchen employee, a permanent staff Lance Corporal, with more good conduct stripes that could be reasonably fitted on one sleeve, identified me as the miscreant who had potentially half-killed the entire kitchen staff by placing unopened, not even pierced, tins of tomatoes in the oven! I readily admitted doing so, but in mitigation pleaded that that was exactly what I had been told to do, adding that on my own initiative I had removed them from the cardboard carton because I thought that presented a fire hazard! The ensuing argument prevented me from being inspected, caused me to become 'persona non grata' in the kitchen and gave me a minor victory over authorities who failed to make instructions clear. One day and a 'rodeo' to go!

The 'rodeo' over, I returned for labouring duties and, being banned from the kitchens, was last in line to be detailed for work. Sergeant Silvers and obviously thought long and hard about a suitable job for a moron and looked proud of his decision. Pre-1952 visitors will remember the camp as viewed from the main road. The metal gates, with an arch supported on two brick columns, and a dense six or seven foot high hedge stretching up the roadside towards the Sgts' Mess entrance. Post-1952 visitors will have a different impression. Producing a surprising variety of ancient and dangerous looking equipment, 'dear Fred' detailed me to remove a foot from the top of the hedge; he even supplied a piece of wood, fifteen inches long, saying this was the length of the 'foot' he wanted removed. Try as I might, I could

see no immediate alternative to complying, but success arrives to those who wait.

For about an hour or so, I hacked the top growth from the dense, prickly hedge and had probably done about five yards, when two fellow chain gang members appeared, stating that they had been told to assist me. Bill Orme and Brian Balman (more commonly called 'Major') were not only friends, but we shared the same trade, division and barrack room, which of course meant that we were mentally compatible (i.e. three morons!). It was a short discussion. I had been told to remove a foot of hedge, it therefore followed that 'Bill' and 'Major' should do the same. So we did, one following the other. It should be realised that our activity, initially, was obscured by the guardroom and its associated buildings and that the regimental police staff were not blessed with our mischievous intellect. The debris I created filled the roadside ditch with minimum spillage on to the road. Bill, who came next, had less room to accommodate his trimmings, so partially blocked the highway. 'Major', you appreciate, could not help but do a complete job of obstructing passing traffic.

Initially, it was just a case of a warning 'toot' on the car horn and a careful drive past, but as we progressed, the apparent obstacle became greater and greater and irritable gestures accompanied the 'toot'. Soon, less courageous drivers refused to pass and a tail back occurred. You would not believe some of the things shouted at us, but an order is an order, so we struggled on. By now, we had about twenty yards of road covered in hedge trimmings to a depth of about three feet and decided that, if nothing else, we were making good progress in spite of distractions. With much ringing of bells, a police car arrived from the Wokingham direction and two 'boys in blue' came to investigate the cause of Berkshire's probable first traffic jam. Bill was not 'The Right Honourable Maurice Egiton' for nothing and took control. We stood to attention when addressed, called the policemen 'officer' or 'sir' and were so polite and helpful it hurt. Attracted by the bells, a regimental policeman arrived. We had been without direct control for over two hours, probably due to sports being on the radio, and we knew that this was irresponsible action on behalf of the Provost staff, so decided to play on it.

To the civilian police, we explained that much as we would like to help, we were forbidden to leave camp, so could not clear the road, but that chap with the arm band could. We had realized that trimmings could fall onto the highway, had requested permission from that wee man, now rapidly approaching, to clear it, and had been denied. He said it was a council responsibility, we claimed, and if we did not get it finished quickly we would probably be put in jail again, fed only bread and water and beaten twice a day - and would the officers like to see the bruises from previous beatings?

Gradually the discussion between the now entire Provost staff and the two civilian officers reduced to shouting. The Orderly Sergeant and Officer arrived to give weight to the military side and the regimental police cleared the road and directed traffic as they did so.

We three stood like innocent bystanders, engrossed in the

activity and waited to fan any possible dying embers of our fun, thinking we were entitled to a bit more for all the nasty finger pointing towards us. "Sir", I addressed the Orderly Officer. Without waiting to hear my question, he dismissed us. I looked long and hard at him. He knew what I was thinking. "Go on, you are dismissed", he repeated. And so ended my first spell of jankers. Dismissed is dismissed. Bill and Brian also failed to attend for the remainder of their spell.

WE KNOW IT DOESN'T FIT, Part 2. By Johnny Johnson (56B)

(This is the second part of the story of Johnny Johnson's early years in the Army, both at the Army Apprentices' School in Arborfield and in later service life).



Having successfully passed out of the Army Apprentices' School, the first Regular Army unit my fellow ex-apprentices and I 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 (BAOR). Unfortunately, the newness and excitement of being outside the confines of the AAS soon wore off as we kicked our heels in the Depot for some time and gradually our numbers diminished, as postings were promulgated. Meantime we were surplus to requirement, which meant in effect that we were available as labourers to any Depot department that wanted us, as well as a good supply of personnel for guard duty. At that time, the man 'on stag' spent it either on the barrier gate or in a wire cage, directly behind the gate guard,

acting in a support role should the gate-guard be attacked. This came about because, during my apprenticeship, some IRA men had successfully attacked the Armoury of a nearby barracks and so stringent measures had been put into place. IT WAS BORING! Pacing up and down inside a small wire cage, keeping an eye on the gate-man. We tried to break up the two hours by spending an hour each on gate and in the cage. Some Guard NCOs were amenable to this and allowed us to swap frequently, sometimes every half an hour. There were some that refused point blank, seeming to take great delight in the refusal for no other reason than to be bloody minded.

During the enforced stay at the Depot, awaiting posting, we were subject to the whims of nasty little Corporals, who took great delight in tormenting ex-apprentices, deeming us lower than rat droppings. Any infringement of discipline or dress could - and usually did - lead to having to report to the Guard Commander at two-hour intervals in whatever uniform order he imposed. This meant that one could be in PT gear with polished gym shoes on a freezing day or 'Greatcoat Order' on a sweltering day. Full Service Marching Order (FSMO) was the favourite, for it meant hours of blanco-ing the multitude of straps, the belt and what seemed like a million pouches of varying sizes. No matter how well ones kit was turned out, there was always a fault, if not with the kit then with one's personal drill. And so the punishment period was extended. The only good thing about this was that, when I eventually arrived at my next unit, my webbing was immaculate. Some will say that this was the purpose of the exercise, but that's a load of rocking-horse manure! Every morning after breakfast we mustered as a group and were detailed off for a variety of tasks or fatigues. One morning, after having been sent to a variety of places on a variety of unpleasant fatigue duties, the patron Saint of Jobless Soldiers saw fit to have me selected for work in an up-market establishment. Namely to lay red polish on the newly-laid terracotta tiles of the Officers' Mess toilets. After some two weeks, my working overalls were stained red across the knees and wherever I had wiped my hands. I wasn't too pleased about this as you can imagine. Firstly because I was highly trained to be an armourer and secondly because I knew that turning up at a new unit with badly stained and grotty overalls wasn't going to endear me to the new RSM or workshop NCO, whoever it might be. There came a point where it was worrying me why some of us had yet to be posted out of the Depot. Were they running out of places to post us? Was there a daily draw, one that had begun with the plummiest postings and would finish up with a vacancy as a range caretaker on Dartmoor?

One misty morning, it being towards the end of summer, we paraded as usual to be detailed off for some onerous task or other. An old running friend of mine sidled over just before we fell in and said to put my hand up when the NCO asked who had designated tasks. When the time came, I did just that and when asked what the job was, I was dumbstruck because I had no idea. My pal piped up and said we were checking for broken windows, that morning. To this end he waved an impressive looking clipboard. At the end of the morning muster, I asked him where would we start on this window check. The reply was that there was no such job. He had filched a clipboard from the Company office and, for nearly two weeks, had conned the NCOs into believing he had been assigned tasks by the Quartermaster

(QM). I'm not too certain but I think it was a cheerful fellow called 'Oscar H' - we were to meet up again much later and I was to attend his wedding a few years after that. Oscar and I strode importantly about the Depot and we truly did note any broken windows we saw, reporting them neatly and properly to the QM's office. When asked who gave us the job, Oscar gave a very plausible answer concerning the Duty NCO. Oscar's other talent was his charming way with the ladies. Which is not to say he was a ladies man. He had a natural charm and ready smile, which the ladies liked. Soon we had at least two offices in which we were welcome for a cup of tea at the appropriate time.

So, for a number of days, we checked on broken windows, leaking taps and so forth, duly reporting our findings to a grateful QM. One day we volunteered to clear up a store for the QM. "*You sure that it will be alright?*" he asked. We assured him that the NCO said we were to help out where asked. The job entailed a counting and tidying of a rather large storage warehouse. We took our time but did a neat and tidy job. It could easily have been done in a day or so. Oscar, in his charming way, explained the difficulties of life as men waiting posting overseas, and that a long but careful job would suit us both. The QM agreed and we were now legitimately employed. "*Take your time, but do a good job*", we were told. We did both. The upshot was that, when we were informed of our departure date to our new units, the QM changed any doubtful clothing for us so that I finished up with two pair of overalls that were clean and stain free and, what's more, actually fitted my skinny frame.

When at long last my posting came through, it was to 32 Armoured Workshop, Liebenau, in Germany. The route there in 1959 was by train to Harwich, then by troopship to the Hook of Holland and finally, by train again, to various destinations in BAOR. The troopship I remember well, the *SS Vienna*, eventually travelling on it at least three times. The first time had been when my father was posted, with his Regiment, to Minden in 1953. 32 Armd Wksp was a couple of hundred metres up the road from the accommodation barracks. Whilst the workshop complex was relatively new, the living quarters were said to be an SS Officers' rest camp during the War! I do not know the truth of it, but I can vouch that a lot of the furniture was branded in out-of-sight places with the Nazi eagle and swastika. The camp was quite small and cosy, containing barrack blocks, cookhouse and dining rooms, a swimming pool, administrative block, QM's stores, a NAAFI and a few married quarters for the CO and senior staff. I was fortunate in that I spoke a limited but reasonable amount of German and struck a rapport with some of the German nationals employed by the military.

I won't go into details about the workshop or the job - you'll have heard it all before. Suffice to say that the first boss I had was good at his job and helped me a lot during those 'journeyman' years. My best pal at that time was a Danny Southcott (or Southcote?), who had passed out of Arborfield the term or so before me. Danny, Oscar and I became best friends. I met one or two others that had been in the AAS with me, Ian 'Tex' Bradley for one, a Vehicle Electrician as I recall. Liebenau was a small village with very little of interest to us, so most of our entertainment was homemade in camp. Few had vehicles of their own. Oscar eventually had a small BMW motorbike, which we rode about on. (Rather he rode and I clung on.)

Apropos of motorbikes, it was at 32 Armd Wksp that I first sat astride a motorbike. This was because when we did exercises, we armourers would be dragged into all sorts of unpleasant tasks. So when volunteers were asked for, to be trained as dispatch riders, I didn't hesitate to volunteer.

Despite now being 'men' and in the Regular Army, we were still subjected to a civilian clothes check by the RSM. His ideas were far apart from ours and so we went into the village or into the nearest town dressed like something from a bad 1940s movie. Meantime, it was common to see the lads leaving camp with small tog bags, which contained a change of clothing more in keeping with the style of the day. Actually it wasn't quite that bad, but the RSM was annoyingly pernickety when it came to socks and the width of trouser bottoms. All in all, 32 Armd Wksp was an experience I'm glad I didn't miss. There were several Warrant Officers in the unit; the RSM was the disciplinary senior NCO. He was not noted for his intellect, shall we say, although as RSMs go, I have met many worse. He certainly liked his morning muster parades, in any kind of weather except the very worst. Our parade square, if it could be called that, was a tarred hockey pitch on the other side of the road that ran outside of the camp entrance. In fact the area was supposed to be a sports field complex, but that idea never got off the ground. Each morning the RSM would bustle his portly frame onto the hockey pitch and call the unit to attention and proceed through the muster ritual, each platoon NCO reporting his platoon as present or otherwise.

This took place, as already stated, regardless of all but the worst weather. As most readers will know, Germany can produce some very bitter cold days in the winter. As autumn changed into winter, we often had a thick early morning mist which blanketed the entire hockey pitch, road and workshop complex. Despite this, the RSM had his parade. So, whilst he was completely out of sight behind a thick bank of mist, shouting parade orders, we would lounge casually about, stomping our feet at the proper time while sucking on a fag. Although our hands were firmly in our pockets and we walked quietly about to keep warm, we always sounded as though we were going through the proper drill movements for the orders called. When he shouted "*32 Armoured Workshops ... Workshops, 'Shun!*" we merely stomped one foot on the ground. Out of the mist came the muffled voice, "*Get it together, there!*" "*32 Armoured Workshop, in open order, march!*" Thump, thumpety thump, thump, went our feet, almost in unison. The RSM never caught us at it and as far as we know he never cottoned on.

It was one September and the unit was preparing to host a dance, celebrating the REME birthday. As usual, my name came out top of the list for fatigue duty and I was duly assigned, oh horrors, to the RSM. We set about decorating the gymnasium/drill hall/cinema, close to the main entrance and adjacent to the QM's stores. Part way through some task or other he ordered me to get some green paint from the QM so that parts of the wall could be touched up. "*Get the right green paint*", was the command. I knew full well that he meant me to get 'eau-de-nil', which was the standard for army walls. Having got a small pot of the stuff from the store, I returned to the gym where the RSM was waiting. "*What's the colour of that paint?*" he asked. "*Green*", I replied. I got the baleful eye and a derisory snort. "*I know it's*

green," says he, "but what's its colour?" "Green, Sir", I said again. Patiently, as though talking to an idiot, the RSM said, "I know it's green, but what f***ing colour green?" I now relented and said, "Oh! You mean shade, Sir. It's eau-de-nil." "You're f***ing thick, Johnson!" came the witty riposte. "Yes, Sir. Thank you, Sir." And so we proceeded to carry on decorating the hall. Several others had come in by now and had observed the stupidity of Johnson. Or perhaps the manner in which I had taken a rise out of that pompous little sod of an RSM!

Soon after that, we were up ladders hanging balloons and other decorations. Being 'thick', I was given the responsible duty of holding the bottom of the ladder while the RSM himself undertook the delicate and important task of arranging two balloons on a hook. "How does that look, Johnson?" I stepped away from the ladder to get a proper perspective of the RSM's handiwork. I said something about the left one being lower (or maybe higher) than the other one. The RSM looked over his shoulder and turned pale. "Don't let go of the f***ing ladder while I'm up here, you f***ing idiot!" What was I to do? From the bottom of the ladder my view was restricted to the sight of his corpulent stern. I returned to my proper place and waited while he adjusted the display. "Now how's it look?" Knowing I was going to be in the Ess Aitch One Tee, I quietly backed away from the ladder, all the way across the gym to the other side and shouted, "It looks very nice from over here, Sir." The RSM actually said "Thank you" and then, seeing where I was, followed it up with a stream of words best left said undone. My name appeared on Unit Orders the next day, scheduled for extra guard duty.

Guard duty was the worst of all. The administrative RSM had devised a system that put one on duty for a full seven days, Sunday morning until the next Sunday morning. This played havoc with one's internal clock so that, midway through the week, one's mind and stomach was never sure if it was breakfast or suppertime. Never again would I like to face that kind of arrangement. We were so tired after a duty period that we couldn't properly concentrate on the work to hand. Fortunately, the system was scrapped a few months later. The related incident wasn't the first or last time that we had occasion to have a laugh at the RSM's expense. There was the time when the Provost Corporal and I exited the dining room together. As we did so, the RSM was leaning out of his office window directly opposite the dining room entrance. "Ah, Corporal!" says he, "Your telephone in the guardroom's been ringing unanswered for some time". So the Corporal quickly scurried down there, it being only twenty or thirty metres away. Believe it or not, when he picked up the phone it was the RSM at the other end. "Come and see me in my office, straight away!" he ordered. It remains unexplained why he didn't simply call the Provost Cpl into his office when he saw him come out of the dining room!

On another occasion, we were having a local 'field exercise' for the workshop, ironing out organizational problems. Having helped lay out the internal field phone system, we were settling down to a cuppa when the line from the RSM's tent lit up. WO1 Cyril Luger answered the phone and the conversation went something like this. "Hello, Ron. What can you be done fer? Yes, yes, yes. Okay, tell you what to do. As soon as you put the phone down, undo the left wire on the handset and unravel it a

bit, then reconnect and call me back to test it. Yes, no trouble." He put a finger to his lips and we waited in anticipation for an explanation. We waited for a minute or more when the line from the RSM's tent lit up with a ring. Cyril picked up the field phone and said, "Yes. All right now? That's good, Ron. Glad to have been of help." Cyril then looked at us and said, "The first time he rang was to say the line was faint and buzzy, so I told him to unravel the left wire. (Not that it would make a bit of difference). The second time was to say he had carried out the adjustment and it seemed fine." RSM Ron S ... was a source of amusement to us all, one-way or another!

In those days, when we were paid, our money was in British Armed Forces Vouchers, known as BAFs. From the value of three pence up to five pounds, etc. everything was in notes. This meant that one's wallet was as thick as a bible on payday. A drawback was that BAFs could only be spent in the NAAFI. If one wanted some local currency it had to be ordered in advance. The trade in Deutschmarks against BAFs was very brisk, the exchange rate depending on the availability of marks. Worst of all, if like most, one wanted to buy a mid-morning snack from the only operating canteen in the workshop complex, a German one, you needed Deutschmarks. There were never enough in circulation for us. This obviously silly system, a hangover from the war, was still extant in 1959. Fortunately, within a year, the whole thing was scrapped and we were paid in marks. What a relief.

It was during this time at 32 Armd Wksp that I took up sailing as a hobby. I cannot remember who it was that made the suggestion, nor who was the sailing member that taught us the basics. Nevertheless, I began spending many a weekend at the British Forces Sailing Club based at Steinude Meer (if I've spelt it correctly after all these years). The facilities were fairly basic and we catered for ourselves for food. It was good clean fun and on the whole satisfying to pass a test and be allowed to sail solo. As I recall, we had two or three types of craft in which we sailed. One Saturday, I was crewing in a race for an expert sailor. We were a few craft back at the start but, because of the skipper's expertise, we were in front by a long way at the halfway marker. This happened because he read the wind and cats-paws and so on, and laid a different course to most. When we rounded the last but one marker, we had to goose-wing back to the start because the wind was dead astern. To do this, we had to put the foresail out to the left and the mainsail out to the right (or vice-versa?). Also, it necessitated raising the centreboard to reduce drag between water and hull. Normally, raising the centreboard requires hauling on the rope attached to it. The centreboard then pivots about an axis. By jamming the rope (properly called the 'sheet') in a spring-loaded cleat, the centreboard can be set at any height, more accurately, and any depth into the water. In this case, I hadn't noticed that the sheet was rather short, having parted close the box, in which the centreboard is located. The centreboard of this craft was solid steel, with a cast-in peg that protruded from both sides, located at a point that would not permit the centreboard to drop through the box and out of touch.

So, in endeavoring to raise the heavy centreboard with a short sheet, I put the palm of my left hand under the 'through peg' as a means to lift it and control it, as soon as I had hauled enough

on the sheet to get a good grip of the peg. This worked and I raised the centreboard enough to jam the sheet in the cleat. The problem then arose, when it was time to tack a little and thus drop the centreboard back to its normal position. When I held onto the peg again and jerked the sheet out of its jamming cleat, the weight of the centreboard was unexpected and the edge of my left palm was suddenly crushed between the box and the peg, as the centreboard crashed back to its normal place. The area of torn flesh, though small, was very painful and it bled out of all proportion to the size of the wound. Even so, it was clear that I needed a stitch or two. This meant the completion of the race and a long ride back to the nearest Army medical centre, located in Nienburg. As it was a Sunday, the Medical Officer (MO) had to be called in, which meant a further wait. At last he arrived and, after a quick scan, decided to stitch the wound. An assistant held on to the right arm and another held my left arm down onto the table. *"I'm going to give you one stitch", the MO said, "it will require two injections to deaden the area, the same number as passing the needle through both sides of the wound. The pain will be the same. Shall I go ahead and stitch?"* Not wanting to appear a softy, I foolishly agreed and did I regret it! Even so, sailing became a regular habit and yet, after leaving 32 Armd, I didn't sail again until Aden in 1965.

From 32 Armd Wksp I was posted to the 8th Royal Tank Regiment (8 RTR) based in Fallingbostal. Fallingbostal contained three or four barracks adjacent to each other, one of which was called the NATO camp, as it was occupied on a temporary basis by various NATO armies for the express purpose of exercises in the local exercise area, Luneburg Heide (heath). In my time there, if memory serves me correctly, the NATO camp saw German, Dutch, French and American units in occupation. 8 RTR were at the far end of the garrison and next us was 5 RTR. My immediate boss, the unit Armourer Sgt, was a pleasant chap called Henry Whitehead and, lo and behold, his 'number two' was my old mate Danny Southcott, now a Lance Corporal, who had left 32 Armd Wksp sometime previously. My time at 8 RTR was short but interesting, as they were in the throes of amalgamating with the 5th. This didn't happen overnight, of course. The work was as usual, preparing weapons to be returned to the main Ordnance Depot. This meant that they were returned as good as we could make them, given the time and spares available. The 8th prided itself on its high standard of turnout for guard duties, etc. The best turned out soldier was appointed 'stick man', which in effect meant that he didn't do a guard but was officially the Orderly Officer's 'go-fer' and reserve, should a man on duty should be taken ill. As he never did 'go-fer' anything and rarely did a man on duty fall sick, it meant a duty logged but not done. Naturally it was a thing to work hard for and so we ironed razor sharp creases into our uniforms and spent hours getting the highest gloss possible onto our boots. I'm pleased to say I was 'stick man' on more than one occasion.

In those days, the National Service system was still in full swing and so I met a number of people of whom I can recall very little. However, I do remember sharing a room with 'Jakes', who was a movie cameraman in civvy-street. He and a friend (Kevin Brownlow?) later made a film about the imagined occupation of Britain by the Germans in WWII. The film was called *'It Happened Here'*. I also became a good friend of Dave Rushton,

whom I believe was a photographer for *Private Eye* magazine. Dave, as I recall, had spent many years in hospital as a young man. Determined not to be disadvantaged by this, he took up the study of photography and was successful enough to gain a Kodak Scholarship, something very few are good enough for. I'm sure he has done very well for himself.

Little by little, the day came when those few remaining non-National Servicemen remaining with 8 RTR were moved over to new Squadrons and Troops in 5 RTR. Henry was posted away and Danny and I joined the 5th's 'technical support detachment', though not working from the detachment's workshop. As armourers, we were part and parcel of the QM's staff, whose department was located on the ground floor of what was originally a barrack block. To my chagrin I cannot remember the Armourer Sgt's name. I can remember that we all got on well and had some good times. I also remember that his father was a Yeoman Warder at the Tower of London. I visited his father on one occasion and was royally treated.

I have few fond memories of the 5th of which I shall relate. Not necessarily in chronological order, as time has taken its toll of my memory.

Recollection the first. At some time or other, I was asked to take part in a cross-country race, representing HQ Squadron, to which I was attached. This came about because someone had noted from my records that I had done this in my apprentice years. I could hardly refuse, but was surprised when I found out the race was in two days time. Of course there was no time to prepare, so I resigned myself to putting up a decent performance, but nothing staggering. As it turned out, I came in second, to everyone's surprise, mine included. As I staggered across the finish line, I promptly 'threw up' over the track and was quite ill for some minutes.

Recollection the second. At one time, I had entered my name in a draw for Christmas leave and with it a place on the troop train and troopship to UK. Unfortunately, I had no luck and so had resigned myself to spending the Christmas period mooching about camp, with the other unfortunates also remaining behind. Out of the blue came a summons to the Squadron Sgt Major's office. On arrival, I was told that a last minute cancellation had given me a place. I was to collect a leave pass and go through the booking out routine ASAP. There was however, a snag! I was to accompany the Provost Sgt as escort and deliver a prisoner to Colchester Military Prison. The Provo Sgt was known to all as 'Trigger' McGee. The nickname arose out of an incident in the desert, either during or shortly after WWII. I got the story from Trigger himself and, as it does not agree with the story told about the Regiment, I must keep it to myself. Trigger McGee, as I was to discover, was more bark than bite. (A good bark is the very least one expects from the Senior Regimental Policeman.)

Let me digress a little. I was detailed off one year to do duty on Cambrai Day, a day held holy in the Tank Corps. On this day, the guard was made up of attached personnel, REME, Pay Corps and anyone else not a member of the Regiment. On this day, as we stood on the Guard Mounting parade, Trigger McGee had taken it upon himself, along with the assigned Guard Commander, to inspect us. He reached one unfortunate who was not wearing

regulation boots. In fact they were 'officers' issue' items, known as 'Chukka' boots. There was a roar of horror from Trigger. "Why are you wearing them things, and not issue boots?" "Bad feet, Sergeant, excused boots", said the offending body. "The MO said I had to wear these bootees". "Bootees! Boo-f***ing-tees! Not on my parade!" The next thing we saw, from the corner of our eyes, was Trigger leading the 'bootee man' off the parade ground, with one arm about the soldier's shoulders. We saw them leave the square and Trigger left the man at the sentry box, which controlled the vehicle barrier. After the parade, we discovered that, as Trigger walked 'bootees' over to the sentry box, he had been most solicitous of the man's health and family, etc. When they got to the sentry box he had said, "As your poor tootsies are so poorly, I'll let you sit down on duty. You can be the f***ing boom operator for the next four hours!"

To return to my unexpected leave; having done the necessary booking out and received my leave pass, I reported to Trigger at the guardroom the following morning. He gave me a personal inspection and pronounced me smart enough to be the prisoner's escort. It was on the train journey to the Hook of Holland, where we transferred to a troopship for Harwich, that Trigger told me of how he got his nickname. All in all, it was a fairly good journey. As prisoner and escort, we ate separately from the rest, which meant first shift and that meant there was clean linen on the table, before the main body made their usual mess.

We also got off the train first, along with some other prisoners and their escorts, to go through boarding procedures before the rest of the passengers. It was as we were disembarking from

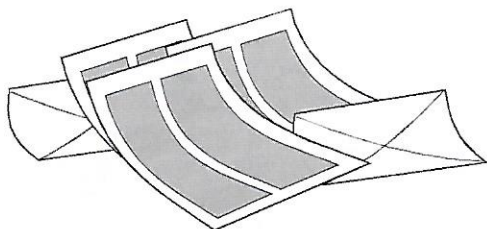
the train in the station, at the Hook of Holland dockyard, that a MP Warrant Officer came to us and said that he had orders that all passengers originating from Fallingbommel were to be strip-searched and their belongings searched too. Trigger was most indignant, reminding the MP Sgt Major that he was the Provo Sgt, etc, etc. Also he wanted to know the purpose of the search. It turned out that, on the night before we left Fallingbommel, a person or persons unknown had 'turned over' the regimental PRI. In consequence, the Garrison authority had ordered the search. Whether or not the guilty party or parties were ever caught, I do not recall. But Trigger was upset for the rest of the trip.

From the Hook of Holland, we sailed to Harwich on the SS Vienna, a flat-bottomed vessel that, to put it mildly, rolled like a bitch in any sea above calm. I now counted my second trip on her and my fourth on a troopship. From Harwich we went by train to London and there we changed trains for Colchester. All of this time I was handcuffed to the prisoner and felt embarrassed by it. As we tramped through whatever large station it was that we had to change trains in, I put a raincoat over the cuffs. All went well until two old ladies saw us and one remarked to the other how things were in a bad way when soldiers walked about hand-in-hand. The raincoat was quickly removed and yours truly couldn't care less which one people thought the prisoner was! Having escorted the miscreant to Colchester military prison, I was then free to proceed on leave, which I was only too happy to do. The period of escort duty was not counted as part of the leave and thus I had two extra days added for my troubles.



Who remembers Charlie the Barber?

OBAN LETTERS



John Northam (47A) writes

It is not often that I feel the need to write, but the latest OBAN, Issue 28, persuades me to do so for three particular reasons. Firstly, I think the introduction of colour and the changes to the format are a great success. Congratulations to all concerned. Secondly, I was somewhat dismayed to read that Col Peter was resigning as Membership Secretary before this year's AGM. His contribution to the Association has been tremendous, particularly with the establishment of the membership database and publication of the membership register. It is also true to say that, had it not been for his enthusiasm and encouragement, the present series of OBAN might never have been. As Commandant at the time, he ensured that those early copies received all the support necessary to ensure publication, thus creating the foundation for a series, which I feel will be around for as long as there remains an Arborfield OBA. And he wasn't even an ex-apprentice! Thank you, Peter, for all you've achieved for the Association and long may you retain, as you say, your active connections with the AOBA.

Thirdly, having recently received my copy of Peter Gripton's "*The Arborfield Apprentice*", I would like to say what a marvellous achievement I think it is – a well-balanced mix of historical fact, anecdotes and statistics. Only one crib – was it really necessary, Peter, to include the bearded countenance of our erstwhile editor on Page 470? Enough to damage recruiting figures for years to come! (He probably won't publish this now!) Anyway, congratulations, Peter. How you persevered I can't imagine, but you have done a great service to the AOBA.

Keith (Percy) Thrower (60C) writes

Just received my copy of the latest OBAN. The new format in colour is really good and I recommend we continue with this for future issues. There are a couple of comments I must make on some of the articles, just for the record you understand.

David Howlett (56B), page 7: He mentions 'Ammo Boots with thousands of studs in.' I must question David's memory. We all had two pairs of ammo boots, one 'working' and one 'best'. These were issued within the first few days after arrival in 'J' Company. They came new without any studs, just the plain leather. Each A/T had to stud his two pairs. The CQMS provided an ammunition box full of studs, together with an 8 ounce ball pane hammer and a cobbler's last, fitted to the foot of what may be the 'wooden leg' referred to in your letter on page 29 of OBAN 28!

Anyway, back to the ammo boots. It was at this time that I had my first introduction to the term 'Twos Up'. Namely, 'twos up

on the studs' (me next), immediately followed by 'threes up', 'fours up', and so on. We were given very specific instructions on how to stud our boots; in our case from our Platoon sergeant, Sgt Elliott of the Devon and Dorset's. "Each sole will have 15 studs", we were told, "three rows of four and one row at the toe end, of three. The heel will have three studs, no more, no less! Any questions? Right, get on with it!" So, thousands of studs David? No, just 18 in each boot, no more, no less.

The sad thing about all of this is why do I remember all of these facts forty years latter? Maybe Peter Gripton (56B) got it right in his book, "*The Arborfield Apprentice*", page 222. Perhaps I am still, 'a bit of a swot'!

Bill Wenborn (March 41) sadly writes

Sad to say, I attended the funeral service for Peter Langley on Friday the 10th October 2003. Peter and I, with 98 others, arrived through the Arborfield gates on the 18th March 1941, with the ambition of becoming armourers. Peter gave a good account of some of our experiences a little while back in OBAN Issue 24; he mentioned my name along with others of our intake. He then wrote to me and sent me a copy; it was a case of renewing an old boys' service friendship. Unfortunately we had never bumped into each other since leaving Arborfield on the 28th February 1944. Vince Caultas and I managed to get Peter to come to last year's Reunion, where we all met up after fifty-eight years. He and his wife Ruth were very pleased they came, and both said they would come again, but misfortune struck and he was too unwell to travel to attend this year. My wife and I were, however, able to meet with them close to their home on a couple of occasions this year, (my daughter lives in Swindon, so I would ring and arrange to meet when visiting her).

We came down late in September; I rang them, hoping to arrange a meeting, but he was in hospital having had a couple of strokes. Then Ruth rang me and informed me that he had died on Tuesday 30th September. Having had to go home, we returned to attend his funeral service in the beautiful village of Chalford, about five miles from Stroud. It became very obvious, by the packed church and the tributes to him during the Service, that Peter and Ruth, having lived in the village for twenty years, were highly respected and were very active members of their community.

My wife and I are so sorry we had not had enough time to get to know him better, but what I can remember from being boys together (and sixty years needs a good memory!), he would always 'muck in' and play his part, had a great sense of humour and would always sooner help than hinder. These were some of the many qualities that stayed with him to the end. R.I.P. Peter

Eggy Egglestone (52B) writes

Happy Recovery Days: One of the best jobs I had in the Army was cleaning up Salisbury Plain, while I was attached to the 3rd Carabineers and stationed in Tidworth. We were called the Strategic Reserve (along with other regiments). The regiment was split with a Sabre Squadron and an HQ Squadron at Tidworth, a Sabre Squadron at the School of Infantry in Warminster and a Sabre Squadron in Little Aden, half way up

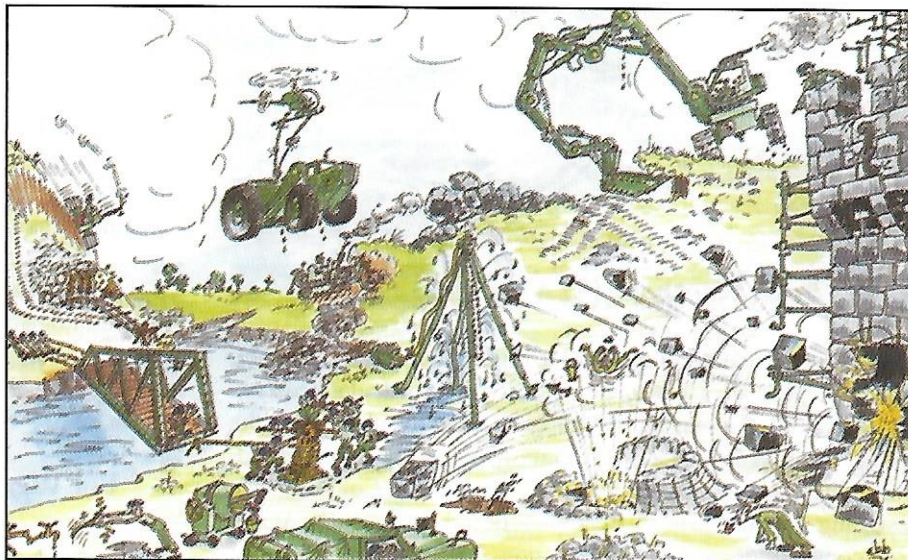
the Gulf in tank landing craft. Somebody on high decided that there were too many target tanks on the Plain, so three ARVs (Centurions Mk2) would be deployed, to tow all the unwanted target tanks (those without a white cross painted on them) across the Plain to a lay by, where a civilian scrap metal dealer would cut them up and remove them. One ARV came from 27 Command Workshop, one from the Warminster Squadron Fitters' Troop and mine from Tamworth.

First, we had to drive cross-country to Warminster, which was to be the base of operations. With Ken Standon (ex-Chepstow - later a Major) as driver and me as Commander. The remainder of the crew, Barrie Dady, an ex-boy Armourer, Jock Patterson, an ex-REME boy from the REME Depot (a clerk who later re-badged and became RQMS of the Carabineers) and Bob Smallbones, a driver/operator, all travelled by road. Ken and I set off from Tidworth without a map or compass, just a scrap of paper with a sketched out route thereon. It was an exciting journey. We eventually found Warminster via an RAF camp - that left them somewhat surprised - and then trundled along the grass verge of a main road, which caused much excitement to the passing open-mouthed motorists.

After the first briefing, there were no officers or senior ranks involved, just a full corporal commanding each ARV. It was bliss but hard work. We started at 8 am each day, with haversack rations, and did not return until it was time for the evening meal, barring accidents. The target tanks were in various states of decline, from just hulls with no tracks or road wheels to almost complete tanks. We carried cutting gear because we anticipated that some tracks and other bits would have to be removed. Among the tanks were Churchills, Shermans, Cromwells, and Comets and some others we could not identify. Towing them was quite exciting and a challenge, as the Plain is not flat and there are some very steep valleys. We used towropes, as it was impossible to fit an A-frame to most of them.

One day, during our lunch break, we found some unmarked Comets nestling in a copse. All were complete, but each gun barrel had been reversed and rammed inwards (obviously the 'white cross' men had missed these). We towed them out and put fuel in one and got it running, the rest we pushed with skidding. Oh boy, did they motor downhill! We also had some excitement with our own ARV - the clutch broke down, so the workshop's ARV had to tow us back using an A-frame. The workshop ARV was travelling quite fast in the rain, on the tarmac road that drops steeply into Warminster, when he jacked-knifed and one arm of the A-frame broke. Luckily, our brakes worked and we managed to stop without further mishap. Had we failed to stop, we would have pushed him over the edge of the drop taking us with him. The other ARV was behind us, so he was able to tow us back up-hill where we fitted another A-frame.

We were on the Plain for about four weeks in all and, when the job was completed, we drove back across the Plain to Tidworth.



This David E Barrett cartoon seems appropriate for Eggy's letter

On one part of the route we were given a time limit by which to complete it and then had to drive with hatches down along a gully, because the Royal Artillery were firing nearby. Once clear of this, it was hatches open and flat out for Tidworth! At one point, as we motored across the Plain, we almost ran over a guardsman who was lying camouflaged on the ground, missing him by a couple of feet. He did not react, so we swung back and went for an even closer look and shouted, "You alright?" He still did not move but replied, "Drive off" - which we did. This was one lucky man - he had not realised how close he was to being squashed. (I had not been informed of any Infantry movements on the Plain). Then it was back to the regiment and reality - good times always end and it seems you always have to make the best of them.

Gerald Johnson (39A) writes

Sir, I have just received the autumn issue of OBAN and was very upset about the Reunion attendance notice. On the Friday evening check-in, I was identified as a member of the 56 group intake. At the suggestion of Colonel(Retd) Peter Gibson, I hand wrote a new name tag, showing my true intake of 39A. Thinking that would set the record straight, I accepted your apologies, even though I was later seated with the 56'ers for dinner, feeling very much out of place and out of touch with reality, that I can assure you.

To add insult to injury (to coin a phrase), you also listed me in the roll call as a 56'er. Is it possible that a correction could be made in the next issue of OBAN? Due to the great cost to get to Arborfield (over £1,000.00) and taking my age into consideration, I doubt that I shall be able to make it again and would like to set the record straight just to satisfy my ego. I would, however, like to thank all those who made that weekend a dream come true for me, considering that I left Arborfield in June of 1942 and this has been my only trip back since to meet old comrades of 1939.

(Gerald, Thank you for your letter. I can make no excuse, and once again, I am very sorry that we keep getting it wrong - Bill Cleasby.)

 Chas Pepper (43B) writes

I noticed a few references to the harshness of the regime at the School, in some of the articles published in OBAN. In my time, from 1944 to 1946, there were many after hours clubs formed which provided diversions. A friend invited me to become a member of the Camera Club, which was held in the instrument workshop. My only experience at that time was using a box camera and Boots printing service. Alas, my brain was already befuddled with all the technical and military knowledge to be learned during the day, it seemed so complicated, so I declined to join - a pity really as it would have been useful later. A Staff Sergeant in the RAOC, whose name I have forgotten, started a scout troop. The meetings were held in the sports pavilion, which I noticed was still there at the last reunion. The evening meetings were the usual subjects but, best of all, were trips out of camp to places like Finchampstead Ridges for the day - what we did there is now forgotten, but they were pleasant times.

Once the invasion of Europe got under way, our hard-bitten RAEC regular Sergeant teachers vanished to join the fighting armies and were replaced by unworldly young Sergeant teachers, who became the butt of every schoolboy joke there has ever been. The male MO suffered the same fate and was replaced by a young female MO, causing much embarrassment at FFIS, but I digress. A classical music club was set up, I believe by one of these young Sergeants; thinking, no doubt, that it would bring culture to our souls. Classical music was an unknown world to me, so I joined up. The meetings were held in a classroom, where a gramophone and various records were available. I made a conscious effort to listen to the music above the chatter - at that time it meant little to me. Unfortunately, the word got around that the meeting was unsupervised and more and more smokers began to attend; smoking being a crime at that time and it became impossible to even see the gramophone, let alone hear it, with all the smoke and racket - talk about passive smoking! It was obvious things could not go on like this, so the club was shut down. Probably all that those attending got out of it was a bad smokers cough.

There were many other clubs running, perhaps known to other members of the AOBA. Towards the end of my time at Arborfield, the senior boys were offered a typing course by the RAEC, held in Reading. Transport was provided, so quite a few of us went. To me, typing was a failure - I seemed to have bananas for fingers, but I struggled on. I noticed that, after half an hour or so, there was just me and a few servicemen, who were preparing for demob, left in the room. I regret to say that I soon joined the skivers in Reading, being like most young men, not appreciating the value of what was being offered.

Time passes and now, in my early seventies, I am faced again with a keyboard, computers and word processors, still with banana fingers but, unlike unforgiving typewriters, it is easy to correct my many mistakes, thank goodness!

 Kevin Mitchel (43B) was sent to Coventry!

Better Late Than Never! The weekend of 29th August to 1st September saw a select gathering of the Arborfield Old Boys of 1943 intake, some 33 Old Sweats celebrating their

60th (Diamond) Anniversary. The venue, so ably planned and executed with military precision, was held at the Royal Court Hotel in Coventry. Here we were treated with courtesy, consideration and understanding in most pleasant and comfortable surroundings.

The 1943 intakes (330) must surely be one of the largest in the School's History, but lack of attendance numbers was more than made up for by the 'Quality' of the attendees. To say that this special Reunion was an immense success would be an understatement in the extreme and was such a great opportunity to meet old and long lost friends, but why have we left it so late? Still, better late than never! To those of our ilk who could not attend, suffice to say you missed a wonderful opportunity to experience the roll back of time and relive our youth and to enjoy a wealth of stories of yesteryear.

The expertise and elegance of the many on the dance floor (music well organised) was amazing, bolstered without doubt by high calorie Hotel cuisine and liquid energy. One 'Old Boy' was certainly galvanised into the land of the living on purchasing a G&T!

How nice to see members from afar, Taiwan to Ohio in the USA, the latter a good cabaret turn in his own right. A special vote of thanks must be extended to John Dutton for all his efforts and hard work, enabling us all to have such a splendid time; without him none of this would have taken place. Such dedication is very much appreciated Thank you John.

We must not forget the understanding and supportive wives, who tactfully kept their exuberant spouses in check (the odd sore shin under the table maybe!), listened and laughed in the right places to the stories and jokes - and even kept awake during the historical videos. Dare we hope for another Reunion in the not too distant future, before we become too old? We must work at it, directed by John we hope, and anticipate many more 43'ers will join the throng. Those attending were as follows: Gordon Lakes, John Copley, Robert Aird, Bob Spiller, Martin Smith, Les Scapens, Maurice Hutchins, Kevin Mitchell, Anthony Oldham (from Ohio), Fred Roberts, Stan Bates, Jim Morgan, Norman Dunnithorne, Tony Guy, Ken Reed, John Shaw, John Horwood, Walter Jobber, Bob Jones, David Hayter, Douglas Boucher, 'Eggy' Easter, John Dutton, Gerald Peck, Gordon Boyce (from Taiwan), Michael Grantham, Ivan Gulliford, Raoul Lloyd, and Darrell Thomas. Perhaps the 43'ers will spread the word around and find some more candidates, addresses, telephone numbers and e-mail detail, then we can swing.

(The 'Penny Port' raised £100.00 for the Arborfield Old Boys Benevolent Fund.)

 Ron Savage (39A) writes

It is some time since I bothered your eyes with a contribution but, since the receipt of OBAN 26 (Winter 03 before Spring/Summer 03? - this global warming has a lot to answer for!), I have been meaning to contact you reference the contribution from Tony (Ginger) Guy (43A). He was attached to the 6th Battalion FAR some 10 years after I left on transfer to 3rd Battalion at Nanyuki, Kenya. Hi Tony, just wanted to know whether the 6th was still

using the Bedford 15-cwt trucks I was responsible for? Prior to them, we were using old Ford WOT6 V8s. I hated them, with their distributors right at the bottom, picking up all the puddle water that was around and brutes to get at for whatever was needed. In those days, the battalion was quartered across the creek in the old German barracks. The two messes were relics of those days; built in the old German colonial style, huge archways allowing sea breezes to percolate were ever they felt like wandering. The MT lines were to the right of the road, running south out of Dar, quite a walk from there to the mess for lunch. We, the WOs and Sgts, had individual huts, which would just take a bed either way; I suppose that would have made them 6 feet square. Being the only European troops in the country, we were honorary members of the clubs, Officers in the Dar-es-salaam club and WOs and Joes in the Gymkhana club. The British Legion club in the centre of the town was another popular place, with its concrete dance floor out back under the makuti roof (palm fronds to the younger squaddies). I met my future wife in Dar. She Came out on the 'Llandovery Castle', to take up an appointment as Legislative Council Hansard reporter. She was one of a crowd of girls and crew members who came to the mess for a football match.

In those days, there were no docks (now built on the sites of the two messes), so ships stood off-shore and were off-loaded by lighters, usually a three to four day job. We always entertained the ship's crew whenever they were in Dar, otherwise there was little for them to do. My wife came to the mess to support the crew's team and she and I got chatting and that was my lot! I used to take a 4-gallon 'dhebi' (the old petrol-can still used then for paraffin) made into a 'bucket', into the local ice factory and fill it with ice; then back to the mess, pack two bottles of water and one each of orange and lemon squash and then out in a 15-cwt, bashing to Oyster Bay - now a swanky suburb of Dar I understand, where we spent the afternoon swimming and swigging squash. Despite the heat, I never acquired a taste for beer, sticking to squash. I put down this 'tipple' as the reason I never got Malaria in over 50 years spent in East and Central Africa. Citrus oil being a preventative externally, I exuded 'citrus perspiration', which effectively kept the mosquitoes at bay!

We used to keep 1 Company (rotated annually) up at Moshi on the slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. The OC of the relieving Company had a Ford V8 open tourer, which he wanted up there but, as he had to travel with the troops, he left it for me to take up for him. In those days there was no through rail link from Dar to Moshi. We had to go by rail to Morogoro, then 160 miles by road to Korogwe, then by rail to Moshi. It was for those 160 miles of road travel that I was brought in. The rail part, of course, was paid for anyway. The Askaris were ferried from Morogoro to Korogwe by contracted transport and I took the car, together with my two Askari mechanics. As it was only about a 3-hour journey, even on the dirt roads of those (and these?) days, I let the hoi-polloi get away ahead of me. Oh dear! Approximately halfway through the journey, the engine got more than a bit warm. The radiator top hose had burst and had a 4-inch slit in it. All I could do was wait for something to come along and hope for the best. Eventually, a Sikh came from the direction I had hoped to be going and, as is the way in East Africa, he stopped to see if he could be of assistance. I was in luck. He managed

a timber-cutting concern, some 20 miles along and 30 miles off the road, and kept a very well stocked workshop. We went back to his workshop, sorted out what I needed, which I paid for of course, and he resumed his journey, dropping me off at the car as he went on his way.

In less time than it takes to tell, I had replaced the damaged hose and asked one of the Askaris to get a can of water from a nearby river. A simple request? Not on your nelly! They requested to be excused the chore, on the grounds that there were crocodiles in the river - not that they were from the area, they just knew there would be! So, white man's burden - do it yourself man! I fetched the water, without seeing a single croc. Naturally, I rubbed it in that they were just scared old women and off we set. In those days, bear in mind that the road was a sandy track with dry grass on either side. By this time, of course, it was getting a bit late and the sun sets early in the tropics. I switched on the headlights and continued on my way. More trouble! The lights got dimmer and dimmer - the generator could not cope with the extra load and consequently I was running on the battery - but not generating any juice. I had to conserve what I had, so I switched off all lights. The moon had not yet risen and I had to carry on as best I could, keeping to the road only by virtue of sensing when I had left the sand and was ploughing through the grass. By now, it was well past the time the train was due to depart Korogwe, but all I could do was press on regardless, as the phrase has it.

Eventually, I reached the station to find the train still waiting for me - oh, how I blessed the 'bado kidigo' attitude. I quickly drove onto the 'flat', which was awaiting me and staggered up to the carriage. After a short rest, I decided to have a wash and brush up before dinner; BUT, my small pack was still in the boot of the car, so I had to make do with drying off with my handkerchief!

When we got to Moshi, the Major reimbursed me for the hose and I inspected the transport prior to its hand-over to the incoming Company. I had a week left before the next return trip, so had a holiday for my trouble. Whenever I hear the tune 'Buttons & Bows', it takes me back to that week. That was the only record in the mess and it was played incessantly! I went for a swim in the small pool above Moshi, but only once. I dived into the small pool and quickly came out the other side, waiting for about 10 minutes to get my breath back. The 'pool' was also the water supply for the town and was fed direct from the 'snows of Kilimanjaro'. I had tried to swim in what I swear was liquid ice! The return trip was an uneventful two nights and a day (by native bus), jammed in between passengers who did not believe in wasting water on washing. Was that trip the same in your day, Tony? Kwaheri mate (ouch).



Kevin Mitchel (43B) writes

All the graft and pain has paid off, congratulations on the 'New Look' OBAN - well presented, compiled and with excellent photograph reproductions - in colour too! Members easily recognizable - previously near silhouettes. It is hoped that the OBAN will continue in its new garb, to keep us ancient

Britons informed of news and views in general, as not all of us have graduated beyond a toaster to 'the Web'. To Eggy Eggleton's letter of Issue 28, "me 'umble apologies". I stand reprimanded, despite Pete Langley's mitigations, with appropriate fine submitted to Poperinghe Guardroom coffer.

As a slightly older OAP, I echo Eggy's creature comfort comments and remark on such, whilst on the Rants Wild Life Trust fatigue party, then am consoled with thoughts of John Dutton's 'Stories of Korea'. Yes, I recall dress for attached personnel whilst with the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. It was suggested that we wore their large blue corbeen/beret, surmounted by red hackle with red triangular flash behind our REME badge. Rebel, I did, for in bare-buff I looked like a blue cross match in flame mode - so it was back to beret, oily and hat, jungle monkey. Charles Pepper's missives, interesting as always - there's a man who looked beyond the bier kellers whilst in foreign parts. His tales of Bury dredging up all sorts of memories--yes, an odd camp. Vague memory of REME coloured sign with letters SEL - School of Electric Light? or maybe School of Easy Living! I had forgotten Bury's old Victorian Baths - just as well maybe. Pleasing to see an influx of letters and articles across the board but mind you, if the tellers of tales at the Arborfield and Coventry Reunions put pen to paper the 43'ers would fill a whole OBAN.

*Bands by other name might play as sweet
Jumbled uniforms of odds and ends,
Music's balm to Old Boys feet
The spirit of Reunion transcends.*

*The weekend's gone, folk disperse,
Memories sifted some beyond recall.
Letters to OBAN not meant to be terse
Only commendable to one and all.*

Peter Wenborn Pepper (42C) writes

I received a copy of OBAN when I visited the Museum recently. Re 'Nobby' (Clarke), I can confirm that he lost a leg in an argument with a tank when the School was dispersed in 1944. I think it happened at Bury. (I was at Chilwell). Nobby did indeed retrain as a watch repairer; we met again, I think it

was 1947/8, at Tidworth. At that time he had to release a catch on the artificial leg in order to sit down; his phrase for this was, 'Clarke de-clutches'. Nobby was a year senior to me. While writing, on page 20, CE Pepper mentions, 'a sergeant in the South Wales Borderers'. This would almost certainly have been 'Taffy' Evans, who became 'B' Company Sergeant when the school reformed after D-Day, a past master in the Art of Rollockings. He is in one of the photos I have offered to the Museum, depicting life at the School during my sojourn there. Hope this helps.

West Robertson (50B) writes

First of all may I say how much I have enjoyed reading 'The Arborfield Apprentice' and will continue to get great pleasure from it in the days to come. I have always been grateful to the mystic hand that guided me from my chosen route to Cranwell, to where I had already passed the entrance exam. But some conflict between my school and the RAF led me to an Army recruiter and the die was cast.

Arborfield gave me the confidence to meet the world and accept each challenge; to stand proud when the occasion demanded but be humble without humility; gave me comrades and friends who have endured through trials and time; and a warming glow of memories to see me through those colder days.

Ted Blowers (PS) snowbound in Canada Sent this chuckler...

Hung Chow calls into work and says, "Hey boss, I not come work today, I really sick. I got headache, stomach ache and my legs hurt. I not come to work."

The boss says, "You know Hung Chow, I really need you today. When I feel like this I go to my wife and tell her give me sex. That makes everything better and I go to work. You try that!"

Two hours later Hung Chow calls again: "Boss, I do what you say and I feel great. I be at work soon. You got nice house!"

Keep in touch with Corps activities by subscribing to

THE CRAFTSMAN

Subscription Rates:	Single Copy	80p
	Annual Subscription	£15.60 surface post paid
	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:
The Editor

The Craftsman
Isaac Newton Road
Arborfield, Reading
Berkshire, RG2 9NJ.

BOOK REVIEW

The Arborfield Apprentice – an illustrated history of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School and Colleges by Peter Gripton (ISBN 0-9545142-0-3) with a foreword by the Honourable Viscount Alanbrooke of Brookborough was published in September 2003. With over 500 pages and 200 photographs the book chronicles junior soldier tradesman training over a period of 60 years. Starting with the Army Technical School in 1939 and culminating with the Army Technical Foundation College today the book is an important archive for all those who served an Army Apprenticeship or served at Arborfield.

The Arborfield Apprentice

by Peter Gripton

An illustrated history of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School and Colleges



Foreword by the Honourable
Viscount Alanbrooke of Brookborough

Peter Gripton has done a great service to all Arborfield Apprentices and staff members in writing the history and he certainly deserves the accolades of the many Old Boys who will welcome this rendering of their story. His light and readable style gives all the appearance that he enjoyed writing this history. But, bearing in mind the dictum, 'that which is written without pain will be read without pleasure' – there is ample evidence that Peter took great pains to ensure that his readers will enjoy his book. Many of his readers will have actually made the history that he has so faithfully recorded.

The author has been punctilious in awarding an equal balance to each period of time. The Army Apprentice system has been an outstanding success from its foundation. It is excellent that this chapter of a great tradition has now been recorded for posterity. The published recommended selling price (RSP) for the book is £29.50. However you can purchase the book from the REME Association Shop in the REME Museum of Technology for just £18.50. The Association Shop is able to accept cash, cheques and major credit cards.

A CD containing a musical rendering of the Reds recorded at the 2001 Annual Reunion is also available for just £1 when purchased with the book.

Please note that the recommended selling price for the book is £29.50 and this is the price you would expect to

pay from High Street bookshops. However the book is available to members of the Association, their families and friends from the Association Shop in the REME Museum of Technology Arborfield for just £18.50.

Mail Order Prices

UK £18.50 + £6.50 post & packing
Overseas £18.50 + £9.50 post and packing

Association Shop
The REME Museum of Technology
Isaac Newton Road
Arborfield, RG2 9NJ.
Tel: 01189-763223