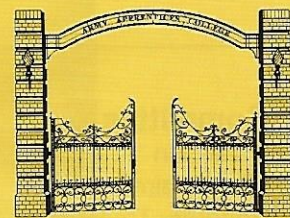


Autumn 2004

Issue 31



O B A N



Arborfield Old Boys Association News

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Committee

Your Contacts

Membership Matters

Money Matters

AOBA Webmaster

OBAN

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Cover Picture

With the Arborfield Old Boys Association Standard, carried by Trevor Guest 60A, flying in the breeze, over 300 Old Boys marched proudly past the Reviewing Officer. The parade was led and commanded by Brian Hutchins 61B. See the full report and photographs on page 16.

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EDITORIAL



From the incoming Editor - Peter Gripton (56B)

Many of you will already know me as the compiler of *'The Arborfield Apprentice'*, the best-selling book about the history of apprentices' training at Arborfield from 1939 until this very year, 2004. Hopefully, I've already 'earned my spurs' with that one, but I still feel that I have a lot to live up to after the fine efforts of previous editors. John Northam (47A), with able assistance from his good wife June, started the ball rolling after a break of many years, when OBAN Issue 1 of the new series appeared in fairly abbreviated format in Spring 1992. In no time at all, the magazine had developed into an excellent sounding board for all ex-apprentices on a worldwide basis and has been magnificently supported with a wealth of material. Brian Hornsey (54A) duly took up the editorial baton when John & June headed on down to the wilds of Taunton and more gentle pastures. Brian did a great job in taking the original format and maintaining it at such a high level for many years.

I will be the first to admit that most of the work of producing the new 'technicolour' version of OBAN now rests upon the shoulders of Ken Anderson (58A), who has taken on the responsibility for the layout and publication activities. I have been assisting Ken with matters grammatical, dotting the i's and crossing the t's so to speak, and will continue in that vein as long as my own eyes stay dotted and not crossed! Communications to 'The Editor' can now be continued in the same time-honoured fashion as that laid down by Brian Hornsey, but please use the new contact name and address below:

PETER GRIPTON
CHAPEL HOUSE
LONGMOOR ROAD

GREATHAM, GU33 6AG

Email at: pete_gripton@hotmail.com

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 and then email the articles on to me. Frank's address is: 1 West End, Northwold, Thetford, Norfolk, IP26 5LE.

OFFICERS REPORTS



CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It was a great honour to be selected as your first "new style" Chairman at the Annual General Meeting in June and I finally took over the Chairmanship from Lieutenant Colonel Andy Phillips after the ATFC final Passing Out Parade on 12th August 2004. It was some days later that I realised with some amazement that it had been ten years to the day since handing over as "ex-officio" Chairman, when I ceased to be Commandant of Princess Marina College on 12th August 1994.

The final Passing Out parade on 12th August was a most splendid occasion. The Reviewing Officer was Lieutenant General Sir Alistair Irwin KCB CBE, the Adjutant General. The Apprentices passing out were extremely well turned out and their marching and drill was of a very high standard indeed. To mark this very significant occasion, after the apprentices had marched off for the last time, a "company" of Association members accompanied by old and present members of the permanent staff marched on led by the Association standard. After being inspected by the Adjutant General this group also marched past the reviewing dais. As readers will no doubt imagine, their turn-out, drill movements and bearing were immaculate-ish.

The AOBA is now entering a new era. For the first time in 65 years there are no apprentices at Arborfield. As an Association we stand on our own. If we are fortunate we might get some small help with future reunions while Arborfield remains open as a garrison, but we must not count on it. The Executive Committee must be restructured and volunteers to serve on the committee are going to be needed. When our proposals for the future organisation are ready we shall consult the membership and look for new committee members. If any of you are interested in serving on the committee in any capacity, please inform Bill Cleasby.

During the last 12 months, we have not been particularly successful in recruiting new members. Although a number of lapsed members decided to reactivate their membership in order to attend the 2004 reunion, we have only signed up 45 new members since the 2003 reunion. Without the college-sponsored annual get together, recruiting will certainly not get any easier. If every 10 members could recruit one new member, however, things would really begin to look up. Serving members, in particular, can do a lot to encourage other serving ex-apprentices to join the Association and I urge you all to locate the ex-boys in your units and sign them up.

Now that I have taken over as Chairman, one of my first tasks is to appoint a new Membership Secretary. In fact I should have done so months ago! We have 2 volunteers for the post and I shall be speaking to them both very shortly. In the meantime, however, I shall continue to act as Membership Secretary.

Before finishing, I want to record the thanks of the entire membership for the superb support that the Association has received from the College commandants and commanding officers – and their staffs – throughout the last 10 years. Without their continuing general support over this period, and the fantastic level of practical assistance at the time of each reunion, the Association could never have achieved its current level of success. We owe the College members of the Executive Committee an immense debt of gratitude. As a very small token of that gratitude, on 20th August I presented engraved dishes to Lt Col Andy Phillips, Capt Eric Warren the Adjutant and RSM Osbourne. This was a most poignant occasion because, although the clearing up and closing down of the College will drag on for some months, 20th August was the final day for the top-management team after which the closure-party took over.

I look forward to meeting many of you again at the 2005 Reunion. Bill Cleasby has already started the planning.

Col (Retd) Peter H Gibson (PS)

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

May I start off by thanking everyone who wrote in to say how much they enjoyed the 2004 Reunion. I may be biased, but I also thought it all went very well and provided a fitting send-off to the School / College. I have written personally to all those who helped to make the weekend such a success and thanked them on your behalf. They certainly did us proud. Incidentally, before I forget, I have in my office a pair of pyjamas and short donkey jacket, which were left behind after the Reunion - would the owners please get in touch!

May I also once again thank the 49'ers for the picture of Sydney Opera House presented to me during the AGM. It was very much appreciated and it now has pride of place in my office. "Why the Sydney Opera House?" I hear you say – well Gordon Bonner liked it. Incidentally, Gordon and his wife popped in the other day and I was very pleased to see how well he looked. You can't keep a good man down.

You will be interested to hear that the last 'PoP' went off extremely well (Aug 12th) and again a fitting tribute to all those who have passed off the Arborfield square. Twenty-four members of the Association were on parade as part of a final contingent of the 'past and present', with the AOBA Standard leading the way. The last parade and AOBA march-off will be featured in the Reunion CD / DVD, along with a couple of clips from the 'Pathe News' archives. I expect to see the first rushes of the film in the next week or so and it should be ready for distribution by the end of September. I haven't done my sums yet but I expect we will be selling it for about £12.

Looking ahead to next year and beyond, as agreed at the AGM, I am still planning to hold the 2005 Reunion at Arborfield, but on the Hazebrouck site. I will shortly be speaking to the CO and RSM of the SEAE Regiment on the matter and I am sure we will come up with a package to suit everyone. The future of the College is still subject to much rumour and counter-rumour but I am quietly confident that we will be able to include part of the Rowcroft site in our celebrations - particularly the Garden of Remembrance. That's all for now - take care everyone.

God Bless, Bill Cleasby (61C)

MONEY MATTERS

Treasurer Major (Retd) Mike Davis (60B)

With immediate effect Direct Debit payments will now be collected on the 1st January 2005 and then on the 1st January each year.

Members are reminded that they should check their personal bank statements to ensure that not only are their direct debits being deducted correctly but any previous standing order payments to the Association are no longer being made. The Treasurer cannot cancel standing orders - the members themselves must do so by writing to their banks personally.

Overseas members who do not have UK bank accounts may now pay their joining fees and subscriptions with their credit cards using the PayPal system through the Internet, full details of which may be found on our Website.

Thank you to all those members who have returned the Gift Aid Tax certificates. I hope to be able to report more on this matter in the next issue of OBAN.

Finally please note that my email address has changed and is now:
mikeandbethanne@onetel.com

Mike Davis (60B)

PUBLICITY MEMBERS REPORT

Ken Anderson (58A)

The value of the Arborfield Old Boys Association Website was well proven by the number of old boys and their families who attended this year's reunion. Use of the Web to publicise that this was likely to be the last reunion on the hallowed grounds at Arborfield had members queuing up early and asking for reunion registration forms - some even offered me money to ensure their places!

I was thrilled not only to be able to attend the reunion but participate in some small parts of its organisation and execution although by the end of the weekend I was totally exhausted. It was most satisfying to meet so many of you and I appreciate the many kind words of encouragement I received for the work on the website.

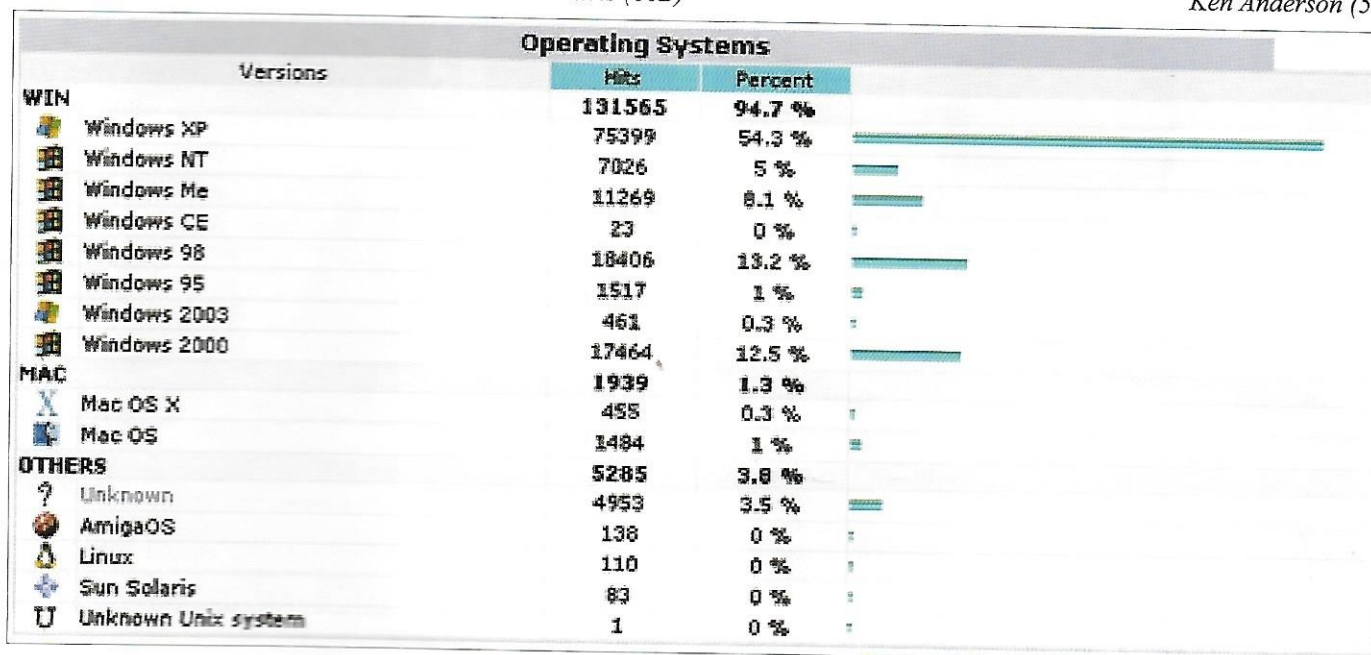
For those unable to attend the reunion I was able to quickly publish a report complete with photographs in the Reunion pages on the Internet and that appears to have been well received.

The tool used to gather statistics about the AOBA Website has recently been updated and in my opinion makes for far more interesting reading. A typical set of the available statistics is shown below. Access to these stats may be found on the Links pages or directly using the URL:-
<http://virtualnt-1.stats.ukmatrix.net/cgi-bin/awstats.pl?config=www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk>
However due to purely technical reasons the first time you access this you will need to enter a username and password which are:

Username: oldboys_stats
Password: arborfield

Finally with the winter months approaching I plan to spend some time updating the pictorial and story archives so I shall be pleased to receive what ever photographs and tales you would like to see published on the Internet.

Ken Anderson (58A)



One of the many interesting Web analysis reports



THE OUTGOING CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

It is with great sadness that I write my final foreword for the OBAN. It seems like only yesterday that I assumed command and I am still finding it difficult to believe that in only a short while the College will close its gates for the final time.

The term has been a strange one with only one intake in Camp, but I am pleased to say that the quality of the training and the spirit of the Apprentices has remained as high as ever. Everyone is very saddened by the closure but, at the same time, feels proud to be the last in a long and distinguished line. It is interesting to note that the pass-rate figures for intake 04A are higher than they have been for years, a clear indication of the determination of all the ATs to be on the Square at the very end. The place of intake 04A in the history of the College is being formally acknowledged by the Old Boys' Association, by the presentation of a small engraved silver salver to each AT, as was agreed at the



*Lt Col A W Phillips RE
The last Commanding Officer
of Apprentice Training at Arborfield*

AGM. I am sure they will become treasured items. The parade itself promises to be a memorable one and I am so pleased that we will be bringing it to a fitting end with a 'Past and Present' contingent giving the final salute.

The future of Rowcroft Barracks is still not certain, although it has now been confirmed that we will be handing over the site to the Defence School of Food Services rather than closing it, as was the original plan. Whether they move in or not will not be confirmed until next year and, even if they do so, it is unlikely to happen until 2006. In the meantime, it is possible that Vosper Thomeycroft - the contractors who have provided our technical training - may use elements of the site to train Kuwaiti soldiers. This is the current situation, but it is changing on a weekly basis.

Whilst the physical elements of the College may be closing, the spirit of the Arborfield Apprentice will live on through the Old Boys' Association. It is vitally important that we keep this heritage going and I have absolutely no worries on that score - the turnout and spirit at the last Reunion is a clear indication of just how vibrant and healthy the Association is. Our aim was to make the last Reunion at the College the biggest and the best ever, and I think there is little doubt that we succeeded. It was a fantastic weekend, blessed by good weather and thoroughly enjoyed by all. It was great to be a part of it and to meet so many of you. It was also very encouraging that you voted so overwhelmingly to keep the same format for future reunions.

It has been a real honour to be Chairman of the Arborfield Old Boys' Association and I only wish I could have served out my full tenure. However, as I hand over to Peter Gibson, I know that the Association is in good hands and will continue to flourish. Thank you for all your support and I wish you all the very best for the future.

Lt Col Andy W Phillips RE

A MESSAGE FROM THE ADJUTANT

It is an unusual move for the Adjutant of the College to be invited to make a direct contribution to the OBAN, but one I very much appreciate, as I draw near to the end of my time here. I do believe I have been one of the more lucky members of staff currently at the College. Few will have been able to see out their full postings here, as I have, and whereas previous Adjutants have only been present at two annual reunion weekends in their time here, I have been lucky enough to be present at the last three.



Capt Eric Warren, Royal Signals

As I reflect on my time at the College, I find myself with a mixed feeling of pride and sorrow. It is an honour to be the last in a distinguished line of College staff, and yet there is genuine sadness that Apprentice training will no longer continue in its present form. There is little doubt that the College sets an excellent grounding for rewarding careers in the Technical Corps, but in the same vein it has been very evident to me that the Apprentice ethos lives longer than the tenure of an individual's training or even length of service. Long may it continue to do so.

My membership on the Committee has been a genuine highlight over the past two years. I have been deeply impressed by the lifelong commitment that you have all made to the Association and to each other, the reunion weekends just seem to go from strength to strength. For all the remarkable stories, happy memories and alcohol that I have shared with you all - I thank you.

Capt Eric Warren, R Sigs.

THE REGIMENTAL SERGEANT MAJOR WO1 (RSM) NT Osborne PWRR

It is with great sadness that I write to you as the last Regimental Sergeant Major of this proud and historic College. I have only been here a year, hardly a touch on the infamous RSM McNally's fifteen, but over this period I have come to realise

how much of a special place the College is.

It was for me an immense privilege to be involved in the 2004 Reunion and, in particular, 'the Parade'. When I saw for my own eyes all the Old Boys grow a couple of inches, forget their aches and pains and march back on to the old Square, I understood the importance that this venue played in your formative years.

I wish you all the best in the future and I hope that, despite the closing of this site, you continue the strong bond you all have to each other and that the spirit of the "Arborfield Boy Soldier" never diminishes.



*WO1 (RSM) NT OSBORNE PWRR
The last Regimental Sergeant Major.*

(Thank you gentlemen for all your help and understanding. The Association is aware of the great contributions you have made for its benefit Ed.)



*Members of the Last Intake of Apprentices at Arborfield
with Mike Mullett, Ken Williams, Keith Evans, George Dixon, Andy Brown and John Dewar*

TWO STORIES FROM TODAY'S APPRENTICES

My view on the first female Platoon

By A/T Jones, 13 Platoon

"Being a female joining the Army, I knew it would be hard but didn't know what to expect. When I was placed into an all-female Platoon, I started thinking how different life would be, because I came from a mixed gender school. Having been in the Army for a few weeks, I have now realised that there are many advantages and disadvantages with being in the first female Platoon. As we were all from different backgrounds, we were all brought up in our own ways and it was sometimes difficult being told what to do from other members of the Platoon. But we soon learned each other's strengths and weaknesses.

We were also watched by the male Platoons, to see how we were performing, and, in my opinion, we are all working hard and succeeding as a Platoon. Females are known to have good organisational skills and I think it shows. Our turnout is always immaculate and there have been many comments on how well we have performed on the Square.

Many of the females have made exceptionally good friends and there have been no major problems, now that we have become used to living and working together. Our fitness levels within the Platoon are at a very similar standard. The pressure of keeping up with the males isn't there, which has proved to be a good thing. We no longer have the feeling of coming last in the PT sessions, which was common for girls in the previous mixed Platoons.

We are all here to do the same thing - pass our basic training and then work towards the Pass Off Parade as a Platoon. Being in the first female Platoon has been an excellent learning curve for my future within the Army."

(This article appeared in the December 2003 edition of 'Arborfield Informer', the in-house College magazine. Ed.)



Are they really any different to A/Ts of older times?

Friendship and Teamwork

By A/T Tootle, 5 Platoon, 'A' Company

"The article that I have chosen to write is different, as I have not focused on a particular event or landmark. The reason I have done this is that, where people have written about exercise or drill tests, they have just written about the event and not how it was accomplished, by teamwork and bonds of friendship. I have chosen to write about this, because I believe it is the root of our success.

The friendships that I have made over the last few weeks have been out of this world. I think this is amazing, considering the various places we come from, all over the United Kingdom. We only seem to ever disagree about which music is going to be played. Personally, my friendships started when I arrived late in my section, where they were having a meeting with the section commander, Cpl Swords. He showed me where I would be staying and my room. When I got there, all the other lads were already there, which made me very nervous of the new environment, as well as the lads themselves. I thought I would not get on with any of them but, to my surprise, we all got on very well and are now best mates.

The only problem with us all is our accents, as we can never understand what anyone else is saying. This can cause problems, especially when a 'Brummie' is trying to understand a 'Scouser'. There have been countless times when we have accomplished very difficult tasks and duties by working at them together. There have also been difficult times, when people have wanted to go home, but have stayed because of the comradeship. We have worked as a team on our exercises, where everyone has 'chipped in' and helped each other, on digging shell scrapes and other tasks, which would never have happened in 'civvy street'.

The night before our drill test, we were up until the early hours, making sure that the block was immaculate for inspection. No-one went to bed until everything was done, which paid off the next day at the inspection by Maj Norman and CSM Coates. This went extremely well and we passed with flying colours. Our drill test also went well, as everyone put in 100 per cent and worked hard as a Platoon. As a reward, we got to go to Reading and stock up on McDonalds, which, after six weeks, was superb! It was also one of the proudest moments of my life. When I told my Mum, she burst into tears, as she knew how nervous I had been about passing and she was very happy for me.

I hope this article has explained a small part about what it is like to be a recruit in the British Army. Although you have your bad times, you have more than enough good ones, due to the friendship and teamwork, which will last a lifetime."

(This article was written only a short while ago, during 2003. Despite the short length of the youngsters' stay at Arborfield in recent times, I think the sentiments expressed in A/T Tootle's article indicate that, for all its brevity, the effect of Arborfield on a young life is very much the same today as it has always been. It is just sad that it now seems to have, barring miracles, reached the final intake to our fine old School/College. Ed.)

The Last Apprentice Intake Passing Out Parade



Intake 04A after 28 weeks of training uphold the Arborfield tradition for the smartness of apprentice soldier tradesmen

On Thursday 12th August, they came in their thousands – literally – to attend the final Passing-out Parade ('PoP') at the Army Technical Foundation College. Friends, sweethearts, parents, brothers, sisters and whole families of all ages poured through the College gates. The rain did its utmost to dampen spirits during the early part of the day, but nothing could take away the undoubted good will that was flowing through the gathered throng. Dodging the showers, which were often accompanied by intervals of almost scorching sunshine, was the order of the morning. Within the female congregation, summer dresses were in abundance, as well as the proverbial 'shirt-sleeve order' worn by their menfolk. Umbrellas came in handy too at times! But there was also a contingent of more elderly gentlemen in view, mostly dressed in their best suits, with not a few of them proudly sporting their collections of medals.

These were some of the Arborfield 'Old Boys', who had come back to their old stamping ground to honour the latest – and last – generation of apprentices to pass out of their famous College – or School, as it had been in their day. Indeed, there were amongst their ranks several members of the original 1939A intake, who had 'came, seen and marched' on the very first 'PoP'. No doubt to them it felt like a rather sad occasion, but definitely also a very proud one. . The College has been lovingly known as 'the boys' school' for most of its sixty-five years, this despite the fact that for the last ten years (since 1994) girls have also been allowed to study as apprentices.

The crowds milled around within the College complex. There were display tents provided by the four elements of the training

system – the REME, RE, R Sigs and RLC – while the Regimental Restaurant provided refreshments and a place to shelter from the showers. The question on everyone's lips must have concerned that rain and its effect upon the forthcoming parade. Thankfully the weather gods looked down kindly and, from the moment the parade started at 10.00 hrs, only a few drops of drizzle managed to disturb the gathered spectators as the grand spectacle got under way.

What a stirring sight as the apprentices of 04A marched onto the Square. Not the original 'old Square', now sadly relegated to providing the car park, but nevertheless uplifting the spirits and musically enhanced by the presence of the Band of the Royal Irish Regiment, ably assisted by the Pipes and Corps of Drums provided by the College itself. The parade was reviewed by the Adjutant General, Lt Gen Sir Alastair Irwin KCB, CBE, who afterwards addressed the parade and presented the prizes.

As the apprentices marched off to the strains of Auld Lang Syne, there must have been many a damp eye and lumps in many a throat, but these were soon chased away by the thrilling performance of the Royal Signals 'White Helmets' Motorcycle Display Team, who entertained the crowd for around half-an-hour. Then finally, the last march-past, as a contingent of College old boys and members of the Permanent Staff bade there own fond farewell. Never have sinews been so strained – shoulders back, tummies held in and arms swinging – as the grand occasion was brought to such a nostalgic finish. After some sixty-five years of apprentices' training at Arborfield, the last 'PoP' had taken place.



The final departure from the Square

A note from Kevin 'Mitch' Mitchell 43A

As one who spent a great deal of time during Army service out from under the Corps umbrella, avoiding drill and parades like the plague, how does one begin to remark upon the School's/ College's 'Glorious 12th'? Such a momentous day to mark its demise, the old and new areas of hallowed ground awesome with evocation and nostalgia. Suffice it must be to say "grateful thanks" from us 43'ers who were afforded the privilege, along with other old boys, old sweats and Jeeps, to proudly be part of such a memorable occasion.

We old boys were most impressed at the standard of general turnout, drill and correctness of the 'PoP, even more so when one considers the relative short training period when compared to ours. Overhearing conversations, both military and civilian, whilst wandering about the excellent display area, we heard only the most complimentary of remarks.

I enclose a little 'versification' to sum up us Arborfield Old Boys' days and which will hopefully be applicable too, in later years, to the newly fledged apprentices of today.

The School

*When down the swift tide of life we are gliding,
Army days of apprenticeship left far behind,
Arborfield's fond memory raises a picture,
Calling thoughts happy and sad to mind.*

*What strikes the cord of sweet reflection?
Workshop and sports-field, the discipline rule,
Triumphs and failures, comrades so faithful,
Scenes of life's springtime at our old Army School.*

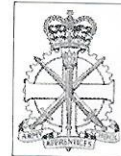
*Then when our apprentice days were o'er
And we left at last their sheltering core;
Shaping our course by worthy traditions,
Calmly good fortune and hardship we bore.*

*And, in the struggle to fame and position,
With hearts undaunted and courage e'er cool;
Playing the game, we put into practice
The training and skills we leaned at 'The School'.*

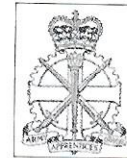
Army Technical School (Boys) 1939 to 1946



Army Apprentices School 1946 to October 1966



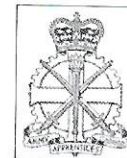
Army Apprentices College October 1966 to 1981



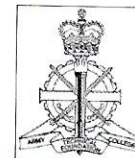
Princess Marina College 1982 to August 1995



Army Apprentices College (once again!) August 1995 to September 2000



Army Technical Foundation College September 2000 to August 2004



The contingent of Old Boys and Permanent Staff?

TALES OF LIFE IN HONG KONG 1959 - 1960

By C E Pepper (43B)

6.4.59 Kowloon, Hong Kong

I disembark from the troopship to my first posting as a brand new S/Sgt, Art Vehs. The unit was a Chinese-manned, RASC Transport Company, which had a few British permanent staff, based at Causeway Bay, Hong Kong island. I sensed an air of indifference - there were no introductions to the Adjutant or other significant people such as I had experienced in other units. The Chief Clerk was unpleasant in manner and speech. His main pastime seemed to be painting a mural in the Sgts' Mess, which was never finished as he had a rapid, mysterious posting just after I arrived.

On the REME side there was a Captain, an ASM and now me - but there were no REME tradesmen. The repairs were under the control of a youngish, Chinese foreman, with all Chinese workers. The foreman virtually had complete control, as he was the only one with the required languages. Ergo, I was superfluous and ended up doing odd jobs! Things started to 'hot up' when I was handed a book in which to enter my religion, sports, etc. For religion I put 'Protestant' and any sport that was impossible to do in the circumstances. I was hauled back into the Captain's office and told bluntly that I was trying to skive off church parades. I said I would attend any such parade providing it was not RC *. There was much ranting and I quickly became a 'C of E'. Next upset - why was I not wearing an RASC lanyard? As it happened, none had been issued to me; but such explanations were not accepted **. Soon after these unpleasanties, the ASM tells me that the CO wants to see me. Much to my surprise, the ASM marches me in to receive a voluble 'bollocking'. Major (Maj) 'V' was a bespectacled man of sallow complexion and I got the impression that he was playing to an audience - all the windows were open for all to hear. When he paused for breath I asked if I was on a charge. No, I was not. So why was the ASM an escort? His only reply was to yell at me to get out of his office ***.

I could see the way of things and took up twice-daily vehicle checks in the Workshops. Not that it made much difference - it was for defence purposes only. And it paid off, as Maj 'V' made quite a few snap visits and required to know the progress of repairs which I was able to deliver. Some weeks later, Maj 'V' was stood on the grass outside his office and he called me over to speak with him. So I stood on the road opposite him. "Come here", says he and I thought, 'I will play your game Sir'. So I explained that it was not allowed by standing orders to walk on the grass and to my amazement he gave me permission to walk on any grass in the camp and praised me for keeping a grip on the daily vehicle state. I lost all respect for the man at this point. As far as I was concerned it was a farce. Things died down but I was asked if I would have a go as the Brigadier's mechanic - "Oh, yes please". Anything to do something useful - but it never happened.

The single Sergeants' accommodation was of peculiar design, probably built before 1914, broad and squat to give ventilation and resist typhoons, with a dividing wall down the middle. One side of the wall was split into cubicles and the other side an open

plan in which Chinese orphans, supplied from a RC charity, lived when not working in the camp. The wall was about ten feet tall and I thought it unwise to look over it. Funnily enough, I never saw any of these boys at work.

While in Causeway Bay, a full Company Parade was called. The Chinese drivers were smartly dressed and their drill was impeccable but the parade was spoiled by the difference in height between the Europeans and the shorter Chinese, plus the fact that the saluting base was about shoulder height. The inspection over, then came the march past. Maj 'V' mounted the podium and we passed by, in column of route, with me at the rear. The drivers had a short pace, causing the British to reduce their pace and almost mince along! When we approached the podium, the Chinese could only eyes-right to the Major's boots and we only to his knees, while he stood looking down on us. Not even the gigantic Prussian Guard could have looked him in the face. Hysteria overcame me and I almost doubled up trying to suppress laughter. Once dismissed, I had to flee to somewhere quiet to let out the giggles. In the evenings, I used to study an 'O'-level correspondence course. A Chinese Sgt, named Tang, used to talk with me as I did it and told me how, as an orphan, he got his education by sitting on a school wall and listening to what went on inside as he could not afford the fees. I read somewhere, many years ago, that he had married a famous Hong Kong poet's daughter and had been awarded an MBE for services to the public. It makes one feel humble!

Escape of a sort

I am sent to the detachment in Kowloon. I forget the barracks' name but it was on the lower end of Canton Road with its main gate facing the Hailphong Road, close to the docks. There were several other exiles from Causeway Bay, quite happy where they were. A small open-fronted shed served as a sort of workshop, but I can't recall doing any real repair work there. Its main advantage was that it overlooked Canton Road, giving a good view of the bustling crowds. A Chinese RASC Corporal was in charge until I appeared, which probably indicates how little I would be required. I recall being obliged to give lectures - the subjects long forgotten. The beauty of Kowloon was its access to tailors, shoe makers, etc. and, within a short time, I emerged as a smart young man about town. But what a town! Life was looking up. I took up walking the spine of hills, Keu Leung, the Seven Dragons, where at certain places you could stand astride the path and could look down on both sides of the Kowloon Peninsular.

Trouble could not be avoided, as the REME Captain came over from the Island to escort me in for some complaint or other. Nothing came of it, but it seemed typical behaviour. I was given a sudden order to be Orderly Officer for the weekend at Causeway Bay, so into the Sgts' Mess and was told that I would receive no meals there as I should have booked 48 hours in advance. There was no way I would be served over the two days. I did get my meals in the end, after 'negotiations', but the atmosphere was not conducive to good digestion. Odd things had to be sorted while on these duties. The Chinese drivers had a locally popular basket ball team: the British Provost Cpl stopped one of the players going on the town in his basketball boots and required my presence. The man insisted the boots were given to him, so he could wear them all the time. It took a lot of argument

as to the purpose of the boots and the places where the soles were intended to contact the ground and thus wear out, before he went and changed into other shoes. The Cpl thanked me but I think the man got sick and tired of convoluted arguments and most likely his girl was getting impatient. Another time, a Chinese soldier in detention insisted that his rations were under weight, so by scientific use of scales and basic arithmetic, we proved that it was correct and he was not going to get any extras - all done with translations. I felt rather proud of myself.

A real learning experience occurred when, on a three-day duty spell over a public holiday, I was alone on duty. A heavy rainstorm started and floodwater began squirting OUT of the drains and flooding the streets. Part of the duty was to issue POL to the emergency services. What with the humidity, rain and all the rushing about, come the third day I was a sweaty and rain-sodden wreck. A call for fuel came for a S/Sgt in the RE. Wearing my useless groundsheet, I staggered over to get the keys and the RE bloke starts shouting and orders me to get a move on or else, etc, etc. We arrive at the pump shed and I removed my groundsheet, exposing the badges of rank, and the poor man abjectly apologised. I was so weary, I said, that he could have kicked me up the arse and I would not have felt it. It taught me not to tear into people before knowing the facts.

At last my purgatory comes to an end. I am posted to the Workshop in Sham Shui Po. Why there was such an attitude among the British members of the Company is strange. I know I am not the most amenable of men but I do not think it was just me. Perhaps the unit had started badly and the attitudes were passed on. The CO's style of management cowed people, perhaps because there were none of the usual activities that melded a unit together, such as sports or get-togethers. There was a feeling of isolation, as the Chinese seemed to run the major part of the Company. I wondered sometimes if something was expected of me that I was not told of - or was my presence a mere 'fly in the ointment', mucking up well-established routines? Whatever the reason, it was unpleasant and gave me a persistent headache, which lasted several months even after leaving there.

* Oh the contradictions of life! I married into a Catholic family and it does not seem to have done me any harm.

** This wearing of a parent unit's badges always annoyed me, it was a device following Phase 2 to fool units that had lost their tradesmen that they were still there. I felt that, as a REME man, I brought my skills for their use and who knows how long I would be with them.

*** While at HQ 1 BAOR Corps, I was listening to an RCT (ex-RASC) S/Sgt talking about the death of his baby and asking for leave from his CO, who told him in an unpleasant way that '*Duty comes first*' and was refusing it. Some sort of scuffle broke out which was covered up. It turned out to be Maj 'V' employing all his usual skills.

Command Workshop

The approach to the Workshop was a wide avenue, perhaps 100 yards long. At its entrance was Sham Shui Po police station and the convenient bus terminus. I once called into the police station and saw 'scruffy street cleaners' shuffle in, straighten up, hand in

their pistols, then fill in a report before going off duty. The far end of the avenue was fenced off, with a refugee shantytown a short distance away. The Sgts' Mess was on the left, while opposite on the other side was a guarded gate to the ORs' quarters and Workshop. The avenue used to fill with Chinese people doing exercises in the morning and evening, one of the few open spaces available to them.

I was assigned to the Control Office vehicle section, where I found many friends who were on my Artificer Course No 137. The control staff consisted of a supervising AQMS and a S/Sgt for each repair section - a good lot of characters. The head was a civilian officer, a reasonable man, but if he thought we were getting on the disrespectful side he would put three fingers of his right hand on his left shoulder indicating three pips, his equivalent rank, which made things worse when his back was turned! Next up the line was an elderly Major who, when he appeared, complained about his general health and, when necessary, would appear with his equipment in a tangle and ask us to put it together properly. The efficient boss of all this was Maj Marsden, who used a brass tubular slide-rule, which he appeared to use to solve problems as they arose. He certainly had my admiration, as I never got the hang of a flat slide-rule and gave thanks when electronic calculators appeared.

There was, in the office, an Art Guns - a cheerful Scot, who was awaiting a Court of Enquiry in respect of a 9.2" gun that been damaged in firing. Any case against him failed because, when the gun came into the Workshop, he was given the job of making a report on it and so much time had elapsed that any action against him was dropped.

In order to get better statistical information, Maj Marsden sent a directive telling us to present our reports in the form of 'histograms'. We poor souls had only been educated by the Army to 1st-Class Certificate, which had no purpose for such things. We discussed the matter and nipped into the next office where our supporting Chinese staff were and got Mr Cheng, a wizard on the abacus, to calculate the averages required - a few flicks of the finger and it was done. It was obvious to anyone who knew how to read histograms that this was weak info. Maj Marsden let the matter drop, probably it was not worth the effort to impose the graph on us. Mr Cheng was a man who had years of experience in the office behind him, but if he thought we were overstepping the mark, he would send us an admonitory note concealed in a Chinese parable. In return, we would cook-up an Anglian rehash of his letter, causing him to look at us as immature people.

In time I could predict when there would be an increase in road accidents and extra work for us. Whenever the cloud base came low over the Colony and added to the smoke from the cooking in the houses, it just required a light rain to bump up the humidity and there you were with a sense of irritation, leading to accidents. I was fascinated to watch the Chinese body repair workers rebuilding crushed vehicle cabs, making all new parts out of sheet metal. A typhoon warning was given; the black cones were raised on the Customs house and the buses had a large red plate slotted by the door to indicate its imminence. We were confined to our quarters out of the wind. A call came for volunteers to secure the Workshop sheds, which were similar to those in the UK. I went along, more out of curiosity than anything else.

The sides of the sheds had to be secured. There was a gust and the longer side rippled from one end to the other and the end bulged outwards. Things were flying about all over the place. Fortunately no one was hurt - but you had to keep your eyes open. When the wind dropped, there was no real damage other than intense rain. It makes you realise the power of nature. The refugee camp took a bashing - the water was streaming down the hill on which it was built, removing anything in its way.

Weapon training

We are taken by truck to the 600-yard rifle range outside of Kowloon. In effect, it was a field with housing beginning to encroach on it. People were taking short cuts across it even as we prepared to fire, obviously ignoring the warnings. When we debussed, a female vendor of soft drinks appeared, a youngish woman, known to the longer-serving men as Mary. The range was cleared and the butts party, including me, disappear into our hole in the ground, complemented by Mary, who knows all the butts and marking procedures well, getting stuck in with hoisting and lowering targets on command and reporting scores. Nobody seemed surprised at her presence and she did provide a source of drinks. We must have spent a long time there, as there were haversack rations. When firing finished, one crowd of Chinese rushed onto the bank to dig out the lead while another lot gathered around the truck, holding up babies and asking for any ration remnants - a most unusual range practice.

The submachine gun range was on Stone Cutters island, a remote place. A curious thing did happen: while waiting for the boat to take us back, a young, fair skinned, man sat under a tree with wide-spread branches and red blotches appeared on his face. The Chinese warden produced a tin of 'Tiger Balm' ointment and smeared it on his face and the blotches slowly vanished. Several other people sheltered under the tree but suffered no ill effects. There were no insects to be seen, what could have caused it? Tiger Balm would cure almost anything, as in those days it contained a large proportion of opium.

One bright morning, we were taken to a promontory that overlooked a small island and told that we were to see a 'Time-ex', involving a far away 9.2" gun, an out-of-sight warship's 4.7" gun and a Vickers medium machine gun, which was located just below us. The signal was given to start. A faint crump from the 9.2", a pause, sharp barks from the 4.7", another pause, the Vickers chatters with tracers and all three types of missile hit the island simultaneously - an impressive display of ballistics and planning.

The quality of the REME is in doing a job in difficult situations under the protection of, say, an infantry section. But I have noticed that when a large REME unit is expected to carry out aggressive exercises, things tend to go awry. Picture the 'riot season' in the colony, Nationalists v Communists. The Wksp is part of the plan to prevent disorder. An exercise with the police and other units is held at night and off we go on a march, to familiarise ourselves with the route. Somehow, we became separated from the main body and rejoined at the rear, after marching through the pitch-black docks. There was a rumour that HQ had us marked down on the 'Ready Board' as unreliable. Riot squads in those days had to display a banner warning the crowd that firing would take place if they did not disperse. Fable has it that the Wksp's banner

had errors in the Chinese pictograms stating that, if there was no dispersal, we would start SMOKING! Probably today, with the modern anti-smoking attitudes, that would be enough to scare them off!

Kai Tak airport was built on reclaimed land. The approach was a low flight, over densely populated housing, with a possible run into the sea after landing. There was indeed an expectation that a plane would, one day, crash into the houses, causing immense damage. Frequent practices were held to isolate and patrol streets, to aid the civil power and prevent looting. We used to line a street, which was full of busy people who walked around us as if we were not there. Their interest was only aroused when we were moving away and a soldier fell off the lorry and broke his leg. Thank God no such crash ever did occur to my knowledge; the carnage would have been indescribable.

It was reported in the local paper that Field Marshal (ret'd) Montgomery was visiting the Colony. I never heard of him visiting units, so he must have been doing something 'Diplomatic'. There had been an interview with a local paper, which resulted in a headline, "WAR" in huge letters, which did not seem a good idea to me. Reading on in little letters, it continued, "If China invades", says Monty. Phew! By chance I saw Monty board a launch on the Kowloon side and be taken over to the Island; he stood in his characteristic manner as if he owned the world. Monty once took a parade at Arborfield at the end of the war, standing on the saluting base covered in the glory of his victories in Africa and Europe. There was a pep talk, delivered in that staccato voice, as to our duties in the future. We marched off, had a good march past, looking the great man in the eye for a historical moment. An odd reflection: at about this same time, many German prisoners of war were employed in repainting the spiders. I wonder what they thought, as we paraded down the square, with the bands playing our merry tunes.

At work and play

The Workshop had a large boat, a whaler, to be used for duty and recreational journeys. It had a raised, heavy plywood sun roof, running the full length of the hull which, I felt, upset the rolling centre of the boat as it used to roll like a drunken pig in a swell. On one family trip, we tried to follow two sampans into a strait between an island and the mainland; the sampans bobbed over the swell like corks but we experienced a nasty yawing which set the children crying. Turning back side-on was quite alarming but we soon got to calmer waters, much to our relief. Sometimes fisher people could be seen, thumping the water's surface with a square board attached to the end of a pole, to attract the fish and then netting them as they rose up. There was a rule; if you see a floating corpse, inform the police but never haul it in otherwise it was yours to dispose of!

Speaking of fishing, over on the island, near the Star Ferry, hordes of people would gather to catch the sprat-like fish which awaited around the sewer outlets for whatever edible matter would be discharged into the sea. A form of recycling? A popular trip was to Stone Cutters Island as it had a beach, but it was sensible to wear shoes at all times as jelly fish were common and often their remains were on the beach and could deliver a painful sting, especially to a child. There were other hazards: once, while nosing about, a four-foot long black snake found itself sharing a

resting place in the sun with me. Fortunately we both sheered off rapidly in opposite directions.

The Workshop was situated quite close to the sea. So I would take an occasional walk along the wharf and, once past the freighters, came the smaller vessels. To my surprise they were all flying the Communist flag! As I went by, there was no sign of life aboard. Why? I would not dare to hazard a guess.

'Buggins' turn' always comes around and I become the Sgts' Mess messing member. Most of the rations were purchased locally but the meat was mainly of Australian origin, so there were frequent issues of rabbit. I tried to introduce as many variations as possible. The cooks were competent and everything went quite well until the arrival of the UK newspapers. That evening's dinner was to be rabbit and pork and the food was almost prepared. Then a deputation of four appeared, demanding that the menu be changed. It seemed there was a report in the papers that some Aussie fraudster was selling skinned cats as rabbits! Obviously it was too late to prepare something different, so the atmosphere got rather heated. It seemed to me that if every cat in 'Aussieland' was captured, it could never equal the number of rabbits available, so the chance of dining off a feline was quite remote. Anyway, when dinner was served there were no complaints and the cat scandal faded away.

Some occasion of sorts arose and a Mess Dinner was ordered - a task that was beyond the small kitchen staff, so a contractor was employed. Everything necessary would be supplied including waiters. The dinner was good in all respects, supplied out of hot-boxes, along with table linen and cutlery. The dinner progressed, a lively ambience being generated, and the Senior Member rose to his feet to make the 'Loyal Toast' when all hell broke loose! As per contract, our time was up and a crowd of skivvies appeared who grabbed all the hardware off the table and scooted out to the waiting van. Then they returned and snatched off the tablecloths, leaving us looking at bare tables and a shell-shocked Senior Member, who had got no further in the toast than, "*Gentlemen the ---*". To cap it all, one of the skivvies appeared with a box to collect tips! That was an unwise move and he was soon dealt with unceremoniously by the Senior Member. Oh, the indignity of it all; but I had to laugh, it was so unexpected.

By good fortune I made the acquaintance of John Brant, a fellow Artificer, stocky in build and adventurous by nature. We went rock climbing in the Kai Tak area. It was hardly mountaineering, I know, but for someone like me, who approaches a six-foot ladder with trepidation, it was hair raising. Once when getting halfway up a rock face, a mere thirty feet high, I froze. John, right behind me, demanded in an distinctly unkind manner that I get a move on. However, mere words could not move me; the next thing I knew is that he climbed over me, so I was supporting both him and me for a split second! There are tales of weak men becoming super strong in moments of fear - it certainly happened then! I completed the climb and enjoyed the view from the summit. There was one long climb, more of an exhausting scramble really, which we celebrated by painting our names and date on the topmost rock in gold paint.

There was a good ferry service around the surrounding islands which took us to Lan Tau, one of the largest - and virtually

undeveloped except for a popular beach. We hired a tent, changed into walking gear and set off for the summit using marked paths. It took a real effort but we made it to see the sea on both sides of the island. However, when the time came to descend, a cloud capped the summit, reducing visibility and making things dangerous, as there were some sharp drops. Luckily an old Chinaman came out of the mist and showed us the path down, which was different to the one we had taken upwards, and we ended up in a thorn thicket that was pretty painful to get out of. That was a long day, but one I am rather proud of.

The games people play

I was introduced to hockey, a game I felt at home with. As usual, I was adrift with the rules but enjoyed the game. While at Arborfield, there was plenty of sport: rugby was OK but soccer I disliked and, after a few near misses in cricket, it became a game to be avoided. During my stay at Bury in '44 (during the famous 'Dispersal') we played a lot of Soft Ball, a most enjoyable game. The Workshop's hockey team was in the Garrison League and the competition was fierce at times, but the hardest game was when a civilian team came over from Macau. They were most unusual in their appearance, consisting of many different races. Some had long black hair, which reached to the waist, but could they play! (I have noticed that in other overseas postings that a local hockey team usually exists but has little opposition and is drawn into the Garrison's league.) From that time on I continued to enjoy hockey until the end of my Service.

Macau was a Portuguese colony but, unlike Hong Kong, permitted the operation of gambling houses. So there was a steady traffic over the water by those inclined to wager (i.e. lose!) their hard-earned money. I never went, as I had better things to expend money on.

During the warmer months, I noticed that a large number of elderly men, wearing light summer clothing, went about their business with just ONE trouser leg rolled up beneath the knee. My curiosity was aroused, as it seemed to me to have some significance. There seemed to be no explanation until, one day, I was sitting in the top deck of a bus and had an overhead view of the street. Men from the crowded tenements used to lie on the raised traffic islands and, to enable them to bend their leg, they had to pull up a trouser leg which stayed in that position! What they used as pillows was intriguing, blocks of wood, tobacco tins, nothing very comfortable. I should have learned from this experience to look for the simple explanation.

While later teaching Automobile Engineering, I would often be asked why this or that and give an excessively elaborate answer. The students had an interest in 'souped-up' engines and wanted to know why 'Rootes' type' mechanical superchargers were used on stock cars. Out come the graphs, comparing air output to revs/sec; ramble, ramble, bumble on, feeling very pleased with myself. Only to discover later that the reason that they were used was because they were time-expired from aircraft cabin pressurization systems and were very cheap to buy and easy to fit! That was not the last time I was to do this.

I read in a 1930's book that if one was absent from Hong Kong for a year it would be unrecognisable when you returned - buildings being torn down and new structures appearing in

their place. It was just the same in the 60's but also, I felt, there was a transformation occurring. Coolies could still be seen with springy fore-and-aft long poles laden with heavy loads on each end. The man would move at a fast lope by getting into resonance with the vibrating pole, which carried him forward, relieving him of the load. Once, on the bus, I met two elderly ladies with incredibly small feet, they must have been the last of those girls forced to have their feet bound from birth. A recent TV program showed how the toes were bound with strips of cloth pulling them back; it must have been most uncomfortable yet these ladies walked easily.

While making my way down the Canton Road, I found a tall woman approaching me, clothed from neck to toe, so that no part of her body could be seen, even the back of her hands were covered by flaps sewn onto the sleeves. The conical straw hat had a long fringe, allowing only her face to be seen, which had a haughty expression. Long hair fell from under the hat, across the width of her back to her waist. Her appearance was so striking that I asked who or what she was. It seemed she was a 'Hakka', but I never got a definition of what that meant. When making trips around the islands, the scenery included houses and people such as you see in old Chinese paintings; there were markets where old weights were used and weighing was done on steelyards. I suppose now all that has gone and electronic gizmos have moved in.

Storytellers still used to attract large crowds of young and old and relate familiar stories, emphasising the essentials with a great clash of cymbals, wielded by an assistant. There were many different types of Chinese operas from the different language groups. The stories were basically the same - of love, betrayal and heroism etc. - but usually brilliant in colour and presentation. Alas, I could not stand the Pekinese version, with its weedy pipes and fiddles and dull sets. Most of these themes were portrayed in film by the Run Run Shaw brothers. Even if the dialogue was incomprehensible, the magnificence of the film was totally enchanting. A bit of titillation; was there ever a greater flatterer of the slender female form than the *Cham Song* dress? (*I've always thought it was Chong Sam, but then I was never in HK, just heard it from others! Ed.*)

A leftover from early settlement days was the fear of malaria. There were laws against leaving any puddles or open containers of water, which could allow mosquito larvae to mature. Stagnant pools were to be sealed with paraffin and containers covered against the insect. Fines for non-compliance were heavy but I never heard of any outbreaks of the disease. But as we were expected to wear long trousers, and shirts with long sleeves, after sunset, the possibility must have been there. Considering the crowded population, Kowloon and Hong Kong were quite clean environments, there was plenty of labour to keep it so.

Technical stuff!

One evening, while walking just outside the Workshop, I received a lesson in spark induced radio waves. It was gently drizzling and, a few miles away, lightning was playing in the Mount Davis area on the island. My umbrella had a metal shaft, which must have acted as an aerial, and I received a series of painful shocks that clamped my hand to the shaft no matter how I tried to discard the umbrella. This experience came in useful in later life when, as a

lecturer, I was teaching a night class. A sudden storm broke, with lots of thunder and lightning, which made many of the young students nervous. Seizing the opportunity, an oscilloscope was quickly set up, an aerial hung from the window, and we gathered around to watch the waveforms as the storm moved away; thus demonstrating the magnetic fields generated by the spark and reinforcing the objectives of radio suppression. I sometimes feel that I may have learned more in teaching than I taught!

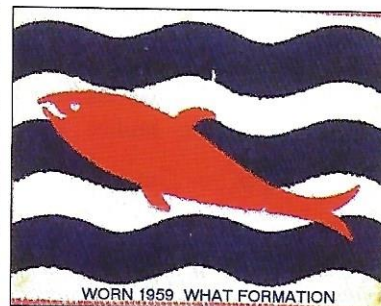
Kowloon, a comparatively small area, was saturated with bars-cum-eating places. The more pretentious had a uniformed doorman, dressed according to the establishment's title. The outstanding one I remember worked inside the 'Cossack'. The night was sweltering and there was this large man, wearing a full Cossack rig-out - fur hat, heavy coat, huge boots, all topped off with twirly moustaches and a fearsome sword. He was contained in a glass-fronted, air-conditioned anteroom to the club, looking like a prisoner from 'Star Trek' in a force-field cell! The poor man looked morose and must have dreaded a customer opening the outside door!

Well, there I was, in a job I liked, among good friends; in a place I found intriguing and full of interest; a full social life in and outside of camp - thus it was too good to last. An order came that my presence was now required in Malaya to aid in the formation of 34 Coy Gurkha ASC. Any professional soldier inwardly knows that a too 'comfy' life is not good for him, so it was off to the simple life in Malaya to straighten me out. But I look back on those days in HK with a great deal of affection, probably the most pleasant in all my service!

WHAT FORMATION? Les Cable 45B

I was 45B, B Coy, room C4. Being a collector of Army "Flashes" I would display my collection on the doors of my locker. It was soon discovered that on CO's room inspection the CO's retinue would get no further than my bedspace when they would fight WW2 all over again, cutting short our room inspection. I was then "encouraged" to move from my mid-room position to that of first inside the door. It always worked a treat and I gained a few badges after each inspection - members of staff insisting that I display their badge too. I still have RSM McNally's "Scots Guards" title. Also our OC, Capt. Pete Gardner's title of the Lothian & Border Horse, plus many others that remind me of staff at that time.

I still collect and, as ex-boys get everywhere, I am hoping that someone may be able to identify a formation badge for me. During WW2, the 2 Corps adopted the sign of a fish on blue and white wavy lines. This was chosen as an association with the name of its commander, Lt.Gen Sir Alan Brooke. In 1959 this badge, in a much larger format was being worn by a group of soldiers passing through Aldershot, and one was acquired for me. To this day, all efforts to identify it have failed. CAN YOU HELP?



DOING A BUNK

By Mick Oulds 57B, 'B' Coy.

Leaving the mundane life of a young lad in the boondocks of provincial Norfolk, during September 1957, was not at all hard. Travelling alone by rail, through the bustling wonder of London to the vast expanse of Wokingham railway station in Berkshire, was quite a new and exciting experience for a naïve fifteen-year old. However, being greeted by a green dwarf with a large black moustache, going by the name of Sergeant Silvers, quickly dispelled my romantic notions of the start to Army life at the AAS. *"If yer for Arborfield sonny, get your arse into that truck, quick"*. Little did I realise that this small man from the Rifle Brigade was to play a large – but mainly negative – role during my three-year sentence!

Entering the now famous framed iron gates of the AAS, my immediate thought was *"Give up all hope, you who enter here"*, which to a large extent was quite intuitive of me at the time. My initiation into military life, and that of others, is aptly described in a recent article by Johnny Johnson (who I knew well), of the trials and tribulations of HQ Company. *(Johnny's article appeared in OBAN 26. Ed.)* My 'story' however starts during a Saturday morning parade on the square, where our Platoon was being inspected by a khaki-clad strutter. He looked as though he still had the broom placed in the position for all Guards NCOs, and he was carrying a large swagger stick, tucked into his sweaty armpit. This was Sgt Major Brady of the Irish Guards, no less. This legend of the British Army was slowly making his way down the ranks of trembling youths, each clad in ill-fitting 'Versace'-style denims, requesting the name, number and rank of each of these scruffy urchins he encountered.

I remember his shiny peaked cap, set deeply over his bulbous red nose, and the two tiny glittering eyes that looked right through my skull as he eventually stood in front of me. *"23528020 A/T Oulds, SIR!"* I managed to stammer, as he looked down upon what he must have regarded as the last dregs of human society. *"Get those f*****g boots bulled up lad"*, he spat menacingly, and was about to walk on when he suddenly stopped, turned back and shouted directly into my face, *"No relation to Sgt Tom Oulds, Irish Guards, I hope laddie?"* came his demand. *"He's my d-d-da Sir"*, I managed to squeak my response. *"Well, see this f*****g nose, sunshine – it's your f*****g da that broke it for me during the War in Italy!"*

That is when my future Army career began to go rapidly downhill! Eventually, all of us newcomers passed our initial term and joined one of four Companies. I was dispatched to 'B' Coy, where I spent the next two years or so constantly in and out of trouble, with regular sentences of jankers, bog/cookhouse fatigues etc, which consequently affected my trade studies in a very negative manner.

My 'prison cell' was based in Room C6 in 'B' Coy lines, where I was surrounded by some great mates, such as Andy Anderson, Mick Heslop,

Johnny Tarrant, Rog Hoskins and many others. Ex-inmates of that era will no doubt have fond memories of the weekend trips to the bright lights of nearby Reading. The night life consisted of places like *'The Foresters'* club, such pubs as *'The Barley Mow'* or *'Ye Olde Boar's Head'*, and other tasteful hostelrys where one might imbibe the odd pint of cheap 'scrumpy'. All this 'enjoyment' eventually became rather boring, both to myself and room mate Andy Anderson, who I would define, in retrospect' as a 'beatnik in khaki'. We therefore decided that the time had come to request a 'sub' from our already diminished credits for the next payday, to enable a trip to the dubious delights of London – 'The Smoke'.

On that fateful day, we had the usual fight to 'book out' at the Camp gate with my (in between times) good pal, the dreaded Fred Silvers. As per normal, this debate centred upon our stepping-out garb. We finally managed to leave internment behind, dressed in a most unusual set of clothing. This consisted of drainpipe trousers, no tighter than 16" around the ankle, held up by a web belt (I think!), 'brothel-creeper' shoes, mufti jacket and tie 'with insignia' – all topped off with one of those beige shorty macs that were so popular at the time. And so, dressed to kill as they say, we set off for Wokingham to catch the London train to Waterloo.

With our unfashionable short hair and odd attire, we must have stuck out like the proverbial sore thumb. Those were the days of long greased-back hairstyles, long draped jackets with velvet collars, and slim-jim ties. We were happily oblivious to all this. Although we were undecided as to what to do, we made our way to where we'd heard were the 'fleshpots' of Soho, Piccadilly, Leicester Square and so on, as though we owned the whole of the city. Our late-afternoon watering hole was one of those *Lyons' Corner Houses*, where we treated ourselves to the outrageous delights of tea and sticky buns!

Now Andy, being (in his own mind at least) somewhat of a 'ladies' man', started up a conversation with one of the waitresses, dressed in her uniform of black frock and white apron. After telling her some of his usual bullshine, he managed to get us an invitation to



Inmates of room C6: Rear left Johnny Tarrant, centre Mick Oulds, rear right Mick Heslop, bottom left Rog Hoskins, bottom right Andy Anderson



Mick Oulds: Bog Wallah - Jankers yet again!

a bottle party, at a house somewhere in north London, where we were to meet the said young lady and a friend. I recall that we purchased a 'very expensive' bottle of VP red wine, a notorious 'plonk', and, after a few pints of fortification in a nearby pub, we wended our happy way to the 'knees up'.

The address we'd been given turned out to be an old semi-detached run-down Victorian town house. Clutching our bottle of 'starter fuel', we cautiously knocked on the front door. After an extended wait, the door was eventually opened by some horrendous looking specimen of manhood, who immediately snatched our offering and drunkenly waved us inside. It was what would be called today 'a squat', an untidy residence to a weird bunch of both male and female dossers. But they were having a great time, so it didn't take us long to join in. Needless to say, neither of the two girls we'd arranged to meet turned up, but this didn't really bother us too much. What did trouble us though was the thought of the long departed train back to internment at Arborfield!

It was at this stage, in a state of drunken euphoria, that Andy and I decided that we no longer belonged to the Army. We assured each other that we were far too good for it, we needed our freedom and would in fact – in AAS speak – do a bunk! We

finally left the party proceedings very early next morning and made our befuddled way in the direction of 'the Underground'. We made our way into 'down town' London, but with no inkling of how we'd survive, now that we were no longer soldiers of the Queen.

Having run out of fags, we stopped in a shop doorway for a packet of cheap and cheerful *Woodbines*. At that moment, the door next to the shop opened, and there stood this 'apparition', dressed in white slacks, a pink frilled shirt and a ginger 'syrup' (wig) plonked on his head, while in his arms lay a white poodle. "Hello boys", said the apparition, "bit early to be out on the streets isn't it?" Andy and I explained our position regarding the party, omitting of course that we were – or had been – in the Army. We reluctantly accepted 'Cyril's' invitation to a cuppa tea and a slice of toast and stepped into the twilight world of a North London gay icon! He made us some breakfast and offered to wash our grubby shirts – an offer that we smartly declined.

By this time we were both feeling slightly uncomfortable at our situation but Andy, being the incorrigible type, was leading Cyril up the garden path. Eventually, after mincing around the kitchen, our new-found friend still didn't get the message, and offered to show us the rest of his flat. Andy said he would "love to" and we were shown various rooms, in odd shades of pink, red and yellow, until we arrived at his bedroom. Cyril opened the door with a flourish and we dutifully poked our noses inside. To our utter horror, we were confronted by the sight of two males in what can only be described as a compromising position! The speed at which we left the flat was around Mach 2 and we found ourselves back on the streets of London, but just a little more streetwise.

After wandering aimlessly around the city, our excitement at being civilians began to diminish – along with our cash. Out of desperation, on my part I think, we decided to head for my home in Norfolk. We made our way to Liverpool Street station, only to find we had just enough money for one ticket. This we purchased and boarded the train to Thetford. During that subsequent journey, we were continually apprehensive about a meeting with a ticket inspector. Sure enough, he did eventually catch up with us. A story for this eventuality had already been planned. I was supposed to be a disabled cousin of Andy's, returning home after a consultation with a London specialist, but having unfortunately lost my ticket. To my great shame, I played the part pretty convincingly and the kind inspector let us both stay on the train.

We spent an idyllic week at my home, having invented a story about the School having a special mid-term break. We were still uneasy, feeling that we may get caught out so, after borrowing some cash from family and friends, we decided to get on our travels once more. Our destination was again London, at least this time with legally purchased tickets. We spent a couple of nights at some dodgy bed and breakfast, before Andy and I agreed to hitch-hike up north to Liverpool, where Andy had some old pals.

My memories of our trip up the A1 towards the Midlands are a bit hazy. I know that we were both in a bit of a state, dirty and smelly, having slept in a bus shelter and a barn on occasion. I was also by this time suffering from bronchitis, which made

me feel pretty miserable. I clearly remember reaching a place called Brownhills, where we both sat on the edge of the road, desperately hoping to get another lift. Suddenly, a large blue-black car pulled up alongside us, inhabited by two very large uniformed policemen. To say that this created havoc in our nether parts is an understatement!

"Hello there lads", said Dixon of Dock Green as he wound his window down, "and where are you off then?" Once again our superbly rehearsed collection of ever-ready stories was put to the test. We explained that we were out of work (well, that bit was correct!), came from 'Ackney in the East End of London, and were on our way to stay with Andy's aunt in Liverpool. The two coppers didn't bat an eyelid at this, but one of them got out of the car and asked us to "accompany them to the station for a nice cup of tea and a friendly chat". On arrival, they then proceeded to question us for about an hour, upon the suspicion of stealing a suitcase that had recently gone missing from Lincoln railway station! This was as likely a story as the one we'd told them!

To be perfectly honest, both Andy and I were just happy at this stage to be ensconced somewhere nice and comfy, warm and dry. The policemen were, after all, our friends and helpers, and actually very hospitable towards us, supplying us with a much-appreciated cuppa and a sandwich. They finally decided that we weren't master criminals after all, then gave us a lift back to where they'd found us. They even kindly gave us half-a-crown each to see us along our way. I'm sure the British Army would have thought that very decent of them.

Stemming our hunger on the rest of the way north, we resorted to stealing milk bottles from doorsteps, carrots from vegetable patches, and the odd apple or orange from the front of greengrocers' shops – what a life of freedom! I couldn't recall ever feeling so hungry, why suddenly, even the food on offer at the AAS took on the image of first-class catering!

Upon our eventual arrival at Andy's friends' place in Liverpool, we were not exactly greeted with much enthusiasm. We certainly detected a lot of misgivings at our disheveled appearance, lack of 'the readies', and request to stay a few days. We were, however, allowed to rest our weary bones in a small attic bedroom, which suddenly looked like absolute heaven to us. We hung around Liverpool for a week or so, but finally decided that we'd worn out our welcome and decided to head back south once more.

It was becoming harder by the day to enjoy our new-found freedom and we trudged wearily south until we were probably about eighty miles from London. I remember us trudging along one winding lane, feeling pretty sorry for ourselves, when the throaty roar of a blue open-topped sports car went past us at some speed. As we went around the next bend, it was to find the car – a Triumph I think – stopped in front of us. We could just glimpse the woman driver, wearing a red silk scarf and dark sunglasses, very much in the Audrey Hepburn style. "That looks like a bit of all right, Mick", sighed Andy, as we gradually caught up with her. To our complete

surprise, the lady then shouted, "I'm going down to London. Could you two boys do with a lift?"

We were probably sat in her car before she'd finished her question! The good looking lady smiled then, with a roar, we were off to the city in some style. After some initial small talk, we discovered that our travelling companion was none other than Lita Rosa, quite a popular singer of those days. I think I'm right in saying that she sang with some of the big bands of the time, such as Joe Loss and Ted Heath. She was returning to her London home from an appearance in the Liverpool area, which is where she originally came from. Andy and I were pretty gob-smacked to be in her company and, before too long, began telling her some of the truth of our situation and previous adventures.

The most remarkable incident then occurred when she pulled in to a garage to fill up with petrol. As she got out of the car to 'powder her nose', she left the ignition key in the lock and her handbag on the driver's seat. Amongst her belongings was a fat wallet, wide open and stuffed with notes. Andy and I looked at each other in astonishment, both mesmerised by the sight of so much money. I'm sure we both had the same instant nasty thought, but couldn't bring ourselves to commit such an offence against someone who had become our benefactor. It has always intrigued me to this day – why had Lita left such temptation in our path and, if so, had there been a special reason?

During the rest of the journey she was as chatty as ever and knew basically everything about our predicament. To her great credit she advised us to think seriously about our position. She dropped us off in the middle of London, but not before handing us each a fiver (five pounds – a small fortune then) to "help us along our way", she said, before driving off into the night. In today's volatile world, it is incredible to think that a female on her own would stop to help two scruff-bags in the middle of nowhere, and then give them a lift, words of wisdom and a kind gift.

It shames me to say so, but we spent our fivers on what else but wine, women and terrible hangovers! So, within a short time, we



The Weekly dance in Gymnasium
Far left Rog Hoskins with Mick Oulds in the rear, with an imported lady from Reading! The other names have been lost in the realms of time.



**Rear: Johnny Tarrant and "Geordie" Scar
Front: Rog Hoskins and Mick Oulds**

were both broke, tired and smelly once again. But we then came to our senses and made the fateful decision to return to Arborfield and face up to whatever awaited us there. Now, don't get me wrong, this wasn't exactly confession time! Andy's plan was that we break in to the back of the School, cadge some money from our pals, collect the remainder of our belongings and set off on ventures new!

That is basically what we did, ending up in the bunk of our mate, the newly promoted Dick Emmot. To say the least, he was shocked and dismayed to see the state we were in and, of course, we had placed him in a tricky situation. He also had little money to offer, so we made our way into our own barrack room, which brought a strange feeling to our stomachs. We cautiously knocked on the rear entrance door and a startled Johnny Tarrant let us in, an open-mouthed look on his face.

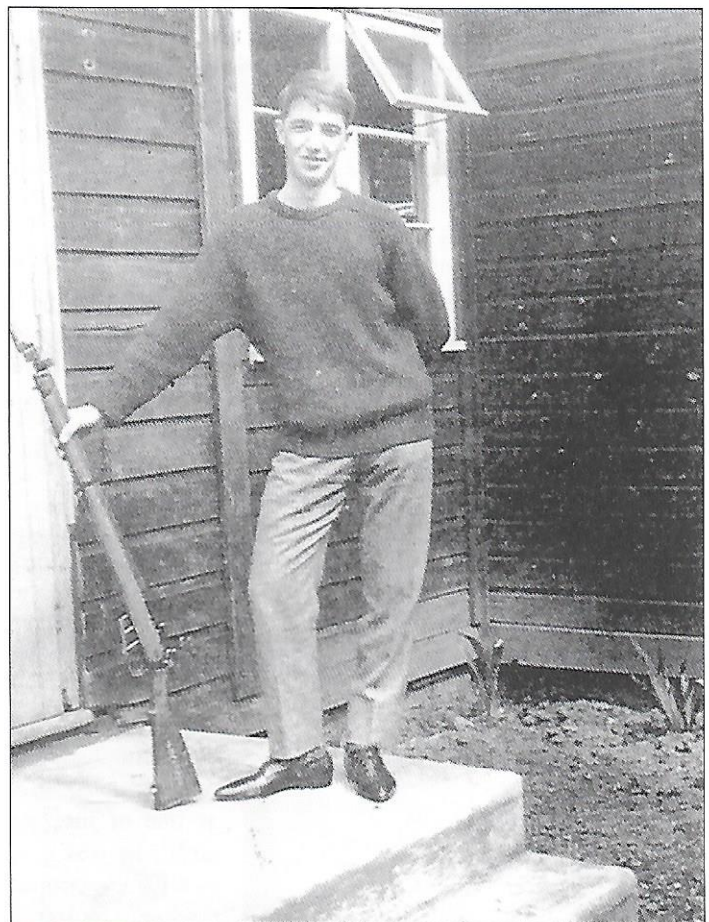
Naturally, within no time at all, everyone was awake and questioning us about where we'd been and what we'd been up to. I think they were all shocked at our appearance – we'd both lost lots of weight and I was still suffering from my bout of bronchitis, we must have looked a sorry sight. We finally finished relating our hairy story when we heard a commotion in the corridor. The door was flung open and all the light were switched on. We both scrambled to hide behind those old green lockers with pounding

hearts as in came the duty officer, none other than our own CSM, 'Daddy' Dunning.

"Right ho lads", he yelled, "where are they now? No f*****g about or else you're all in the s**t!" No-one said a word as he slowly wandered down the centre of the room towards our beds at the end, stopping only yards from our hiding places. I then heard Andy move across the room and sheepishly utter the question, "How are you Sir?" I heard Daddy cough and then he said, "Right Mick, now it's your turn". (For some unknown reason, he always called me Mick!) I too crept out of my hiding spot and joined Andy in the centre of the room. Daddy looked us both up and down and, trying to hide a grin, he remarked "Christ! You two smell f*****g horrible!" He then marched us down to the Guardroom and a nice warm cell.

Needless to say, we both got sentenced by the Commandant to three or four weeks in the nick, where we renewed our old acquaintance with Fred Silvers. As many of you will remember, he always made you more than welcome – especially if you were a guest in his exclusive bed and breakfast hotel! Here endeth the lesson!

(This story was sent to me during 2002, when I was researching the book 'The Arborfield Apprentice'. I did use a smidgen of Mick's tale in the book and promised myself to one day publish it in the OBAN. Having met up with Mick again at the 2004 Reunion, for the first time since leaving boys' school myself in 1959, it encouraged me to finally input the whole tale to the word processor! Ed.)



**Mick Oulds with weapon of mass destruction.
Don't ever give him ammo as stated by "Daddy Dunning"**

THE 2004 REUNION FIFTY YEARS ON – AND THEY DO LOOK DIFFERENT! By Howard Trill, 54A

Those of the 1954 intakes gathered for the AOBA Reunion in 2004, in the knowledge that they were celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of our joining. This year there were at least twice as many from the '54 intakes as on any previous reunion I have attended, going back some twelve years. It was this significant anniversary that brought them in and, hopefully, we shall see them all again.

Trawling through our memories, one recalled the day when the Firework factory went up, with a bigger bang than usual. That was the day that, as Duty Company, 'D' Coy supplied the Fire Picket and two A/Ts found a boot with a foot inside it. There were also memories of our PTIs, getting barrels of gunpowder out of harm's way by standing on them and rolling them down Biggs Lane with their feet, like lumberjacks on logs. (*No mean feat? Ed.*) Not the best of things to recall, neither the solitary boot, nor the dreaded PTIs – but a memory all the same. The mention of Biggs Lane, naturally, brought back memories of cross-country runs – not a pastime recalled with pleasure by many of us.

Someone recalled our old Padre, 'Jumbo' Morgan', who would insist on riding his bike through the Camp, hanging onto the handlebars for dear life just in case anyone saluted him. His fear was based upon the fact that he had his Bible under one



Howard Trill

arm and his cane under the other. If one did salute him, he usually lost control and fell in a heap on the road. Obviously, lads went out of their way to meet and greet him!

One amongst us remembered that, as one of the 'tall guys', he was used as a Parade Ground marker. This meant that he was on every parade, but



The 54er's

mostly standing still and watching. He was thus rarely inspected too closely, but of course struggled with his arms drill. I'm not too sure as to whether he was complaining or rejoicing!

Some of us made the annual visit to the 25-yard range to rediscover our name or initials, along with intake number, lovingly carved into the brickwork all those years ago. One memory of that range was the occasion of firing the .303 rifle over closed sights. One of our number at the time misunderstood – or ignored – the warning and put his back-sight up, for firing at a distance of 1000 yards. Imagine everyone's surprise – and the annoyance of the permanent staff – when a round clipped the top of the safety wall, whistled over the roof of the Tels Shop and landed Lord knows where!

Memories of the Regimental Police were rampant. There was the time when Sgt Fred Silvers ordered some geraniums to be planted at the edge of the Square, alongside the Saluting Base. Naturally, these poor geraniums ended up being planted about six inches below surface level and then covered over. A certain L/Cpl Dutton once ordered his bike to be painted – and it was! Tyres, chain, saddle and handlebar grips, as well as the frame, all ended up a lovely shade of olive drab.

The Reunion had its sadder side of course, as we accepted the inevitability of a last look at where our military life had begun, those fifty years before. Yes, we may meet up at a Reading hotel next year, with a visit to the old 5 Battalion, but it won't be the same. Even the simple action of standing side-by-side at our ablutions became a moment of nostalgia – something that the modern bathroom cannot quite match! Likewise the Barrack Rooms. Although disgustingly run down by comparison to our apprenticeship day standards, they still had a certain appeal,

invoked by the camaraderie that may soon be lost forever. Beyond that, the food was magnificent, both at lunch and at dinner. The talk? Everything any of us could have asked for. And the bar? Suffice to say that we did our best to keep it going! The parade was up to standard, as one would expect, but could it ever be repeated on some alien square? Who knows?

The one criticism was of the photographer's actions during the Drum Head service, snapping away at the bugler (trumpeter?), as he stood on a stone plinth for up to three and a half minutes after sounding the Last Post. Some may have thought he had gone to sleep, or his watch had stopped. Oh no, it was the photographer, who kept changing angle and attitude each time the poor lad attempted to get the instrument up to his lips for Reveille! Whatever would McNally have said?

So what did it all mean to us all? Rather like a time machine really. OK, older, wrinkled and crinkled – almost hairless in some cases – but no change in the characters we knew so many years ago. We were instant pals, as if it was only the day before, the laughs as natural as ever. There was a togetherness, regardless of intake, which can only be found amongst those who gave their youth away in exchange for the Queen's (or King's) Shilling. Boys' service was itself a challenge – a survival course for those determined to win, whether at sport, turnout or trade. We effortlessly swallowed those events that, in the end, made us what we are today – EX-BOYS and ARBORFIELD EX-BOYS to boot. Roll on next year!



The Bugler sounding the Last Post



The 53'ers were back again this year to enjoy a quiet drink after their brilliant drill performance on the Square?



The Membership Secretary, Treasurer & Assistant Secretary welcomed Members as they booked in

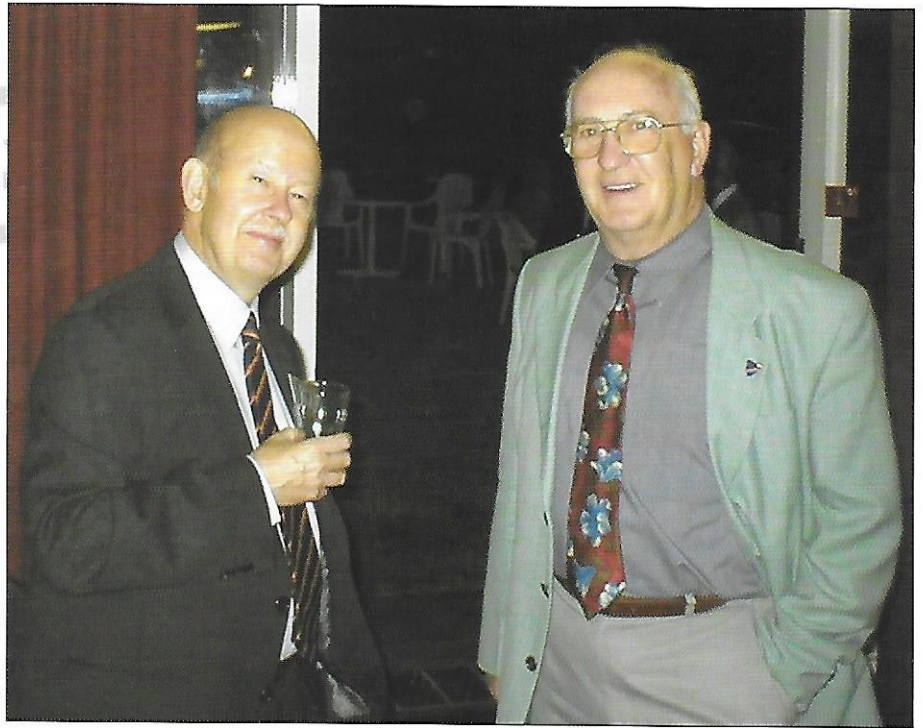


John Pewsey (45A) tells of his times here both as an A/T and later as ASM of the Electronics Wing

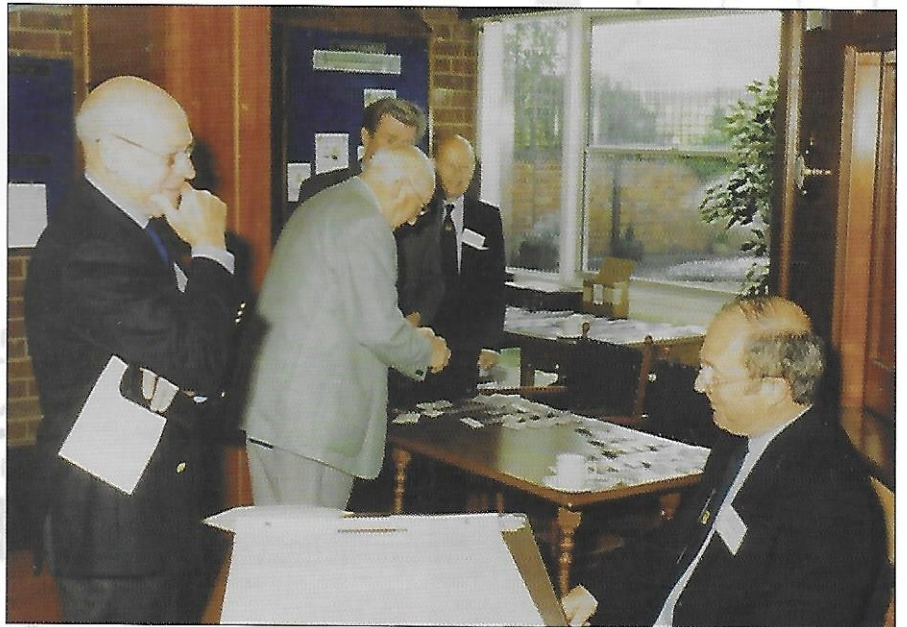




A happy Adjutant



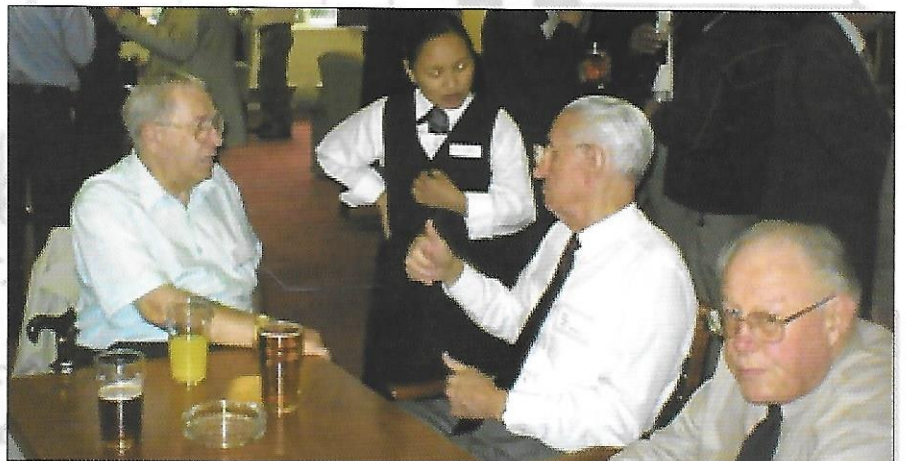
The Honorary Secretary and the Assistant Secretary Keith Evans (45A)



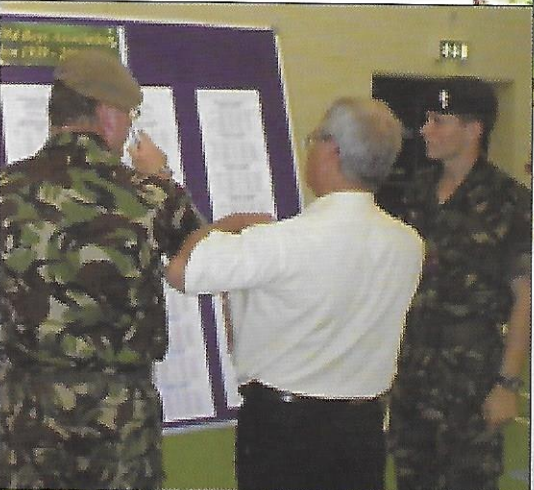
The Vice Chairman struggled with the Seating Plan for Dinner



The Treasurer tried his hardest to collect some subs!



Cor, fifty years on and he's still at it!







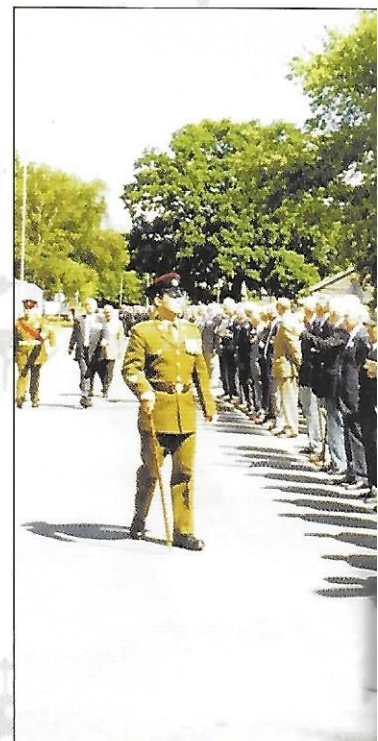
Next morning some queued early for breakfast.....



.....although there was no.....



With breakfast over some had difficulty reading the route map to the parade!



But once there the l.....



ping this year!



.....although some familiar faces always appear to be there early!



manent Staff put us though our paces.



Of course I polished them before I came on parade Staff!



The RSM shared a glass of port with some of us.



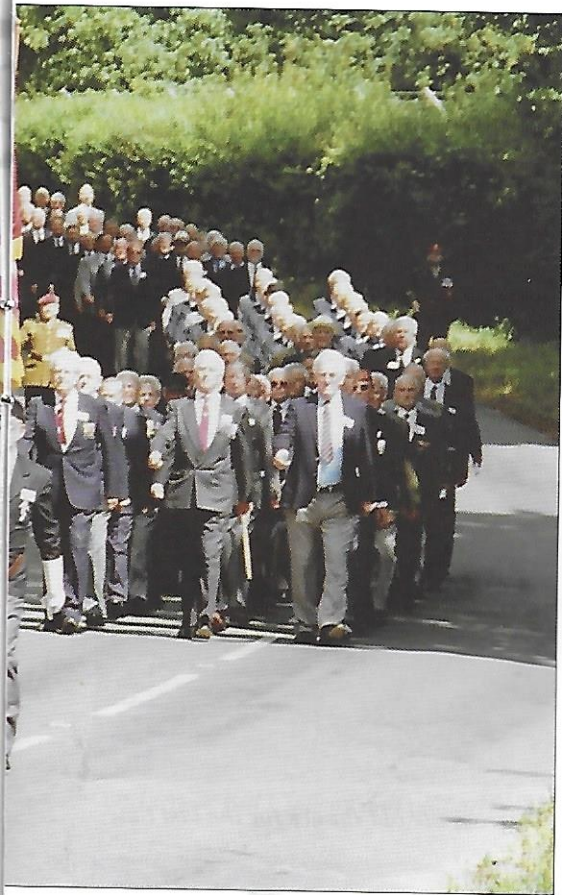
The REME Corps Band marched down the road to lead us through those famous gates.....



..... bit there were n



.....who marched as they did in the past with heads held high, shoulders back and chests out.



*.....just hundreds of proud army apprentice soldier tradesmen
and perhaps someone representing the first Senior Company Commander!*

! buses on the road this time.....



Then in front of the Memorial Gardens they remembered their comrades through the years.



The RSMs of the past 65 years must have looked on with pride as 300 old boys marched across the old square for the last time

Grand Finale

*Last parade on hallowed ground we're told,
Its demise looms close, it's all to be sold.
Last parade on our dear old Square –
So many memories linger there.*

*"From the right – number! Make it snappy!"
"Shout louder please, I'm a deaf grandpappy!"
We're sorted out with much precision
In Platoons formed up – or was it Divisions?*

*"A good turnout lads", or so they said.
Or were they polite cos we're grey in the head?
Smartly we marched, all as good as each other,
Proudly pleased that we all took the bother.*



I'm sure that I've got suit like this!



I'm sure that I've seen you in a Civil War uniform David

*How memories surged, marching through that gate,
Spurred on by the REME Band – just great.
On the Square, medals gleamed like treasure,
Just like yesteryear and what a pleasure.*

*Come the last PoP of College fame,
Dare they let some Old Boys share the same?
Whatever happenings the future may hold,
The memories will stay, no matter what's sold!*

'Mitch' Mitchell (43A)

THE 2004 REUNION

A song by Dave Perrott 49B
to be sung to the tune of Widdecombe Fair

*As I drove along to the A.O.B.A.
All along down along Arborfield way
I was wondering what words I'd be finding to say
To Frank Weller, John Cassells, Pete Henry, Dick Wright, Old
Uncle Max Warwick and all Old Uncle Max Warwick and all.*

*'Twas the final event in the present format.
All along down along Arborfield way
It's the place for every Oldboy to be at
Said Frank Weller, John Cassells, Pete Henry, Dick Wright,
Dave Perrott, Old Uncle Max Warwick and all, Old Uncle Max
Warwick and all.*

*The A.G.M. was an important call.
All along down along Arborfield way
To discuss what the future might hold for us all
Said The Chairman, The Treasurer, The Editor, The Committee,
Old Uncle Bill Cleasby and all Old Uncle Bill Cleasby and all.*

*The R.S.M. said that the parade was just grand.
All along down along out on the square.
We were very impressed with the bugler and band.
Said Frank Weller, John Cassells, Pete Henry, Dick Wright,
Dave Perrott, Old Uncle Max Warwick and all, Old Uncle Max
Warwick and all.*

*Ten thousand years service were there to behold.
All along down along out on the square
Five thousand were jankers but nobody told.
The Officers, The R.S.M., The C.S.M's, The Adoring Viewers
and all. The Adoring viewers and all.*

*Some one was missing our mate Gordon Bonner
All along down along somewhere in Leeds
But a sizeable toast was drunk in his honour
By Frank Weller, John Cassells, Pete Henry, Dick Wright,
Dave Perrott, Old Uncle Max Warwick and all, Old Uncle Max
Warwick and all.*

*What will the future hold for us all.
All along down along Arborfield Way
Instead of a balls up an annual ball.
Said The Chairman, The Treasurer, The Editor, The Committee,
Old Uncle Bill Cleasby and all, Old Uncle Bill Cleasby and all.*

*Our thanks for a truly delightful event.
All along down along Arborfield way.
Your care and attention was 100%.
Said Frank Weller, John Cassells, Pete Henry, Dick Wright,
Dave Perrott Old Uncle Max Warwick and all the Oldboys. Old
Uncle Max Warwick and all.*

*Next year in the silence when everyone's gone.
All along down along out on the square
Will the ghosts of parades past still linger on.
Said the C.O., The R.S.M., The Committee., Old Uncle Bill
Cleasby and all the Oldboys,
Old Uncle Bill Cleasby and all.*



A tranquil scene now - but the ghosts of past parades still linger on

A SPELL IN THE TERRITORIAL ARMY

By Pete Gripton (56B)

Just why I decided to re-join the Army – well, the Territorial Army (TA) anyway – having been so happy as a civilian at SEME Bordon for about twelve years – I don't really know! I was away on a training course at Beaconsfield, up in Buckinghamshire at the time, and went for a few pints in the Sergeants' Mess one evening. Somehow, Terry Burns persuaded me that I was still young enough (at thirty-nine!) to get into the TA and earn myself some extra cash for what seemed very little actual service – a two-week summer camp each year, plus two training weekends.

Well, whether it was the beer or not, when I got back to Bordon, I went over to the TA Headquarters at Broxhead House and signed on! I was taken in at the rank of Sergeant, but the trade I settled on was Electrician – after all, I'd been teaching the subject at SEME for a number of years! My unit was 9 Field Workshop REME, what was termed a 'sponsored unit'. This differentiated it from those 'independent' units that were usually associated with the local area of whichever towns they were based in. The unit was actually a Regular Army unit, based at Bordon, but could be reinforced by part-time soldiers, as the need required. Many of the part-timers were just that, having had no previous military experience, but were good at their particular trades. Then there were a few ex-soldiers, like myself, whose experience and previous military training could hopefully be put to good use.

As it turned out, being almost 'on the doorstep' of Bordon, I was able to fix up quite a number of extra weekends of work, all paid for at the standard Army pay for my trade and rank. The 'work' consisted of assisting with the initial enrolment of men who had come to join the TA for the first time. I would usually pick up a minibus on the Saturday morning, then drive to either Farnham or Liss railway station, and pick up the new recruits as they arrived on their trains. Then it would be back to HQTA to book them in. This would be followed by medical examinations – or 'PULHEEMS' as they were known – at which I would assist with such things as measuring height and weight, eye-tests and urine tests – no, I'm not taking the piss!



Sgt Gripton checks out Hamburg's infamous Reeperbahn, just to ensure it is safe for the other lads to visit!

By the time this had been done for two or three busloads of guys, the morning would have passed by and it was time for lunch. This involved taking the new lads to the cookhouse, where we 'recruiters' would tuck in to a good meal as well! My usual mate on most of these weekends was none other than Jim Scurr, with whom I'd served as a boy-soldier back at Arborfield – we made a pretty good team together! After dinner it would be time for kit issues, so it was off to the Quartermaster's (QM's) stores, where I'd again assist, this time in making sure everyone got all their kit – hopefully of the correct size!

Then came the bit that the new recruits dreaded – the assault course! They didn't actually have to 'pass' a test as such; it was just to give them a taste of what would be expected of them when they got attached to a TA unit. Most of them were dead keen on joining, so they made a good effort at completing the course, however hard they found it. Then would come the tea meal, again in the cookhouse, by which time everyone would be chatting away as though they'd known each other for years, rather than a whole day! Finally it was time for them to return home, now carrying all their kit-bags with them of course, so a 3-tonner lorry would take them back to their respective stations.

This whole affair would be repeated on the Sunday, with another bunch of hopeful recruits. I recall one Sunday morning, sitting in the minibus outside Farnham station, awaiting the first train of the day. I was reading the paper when there was a tap on the window and a voice asked "Is this the transport for Bordon?" Replying in the affirmative, I told 'the voice' to climb in the back – then wondered where he'd come from, as there was no train yet in the station. It turned out that the guy had stayed overnight with a mate in the area and then I suddenly recognised his face! It turned out to be a guy called Valentine Bullen, who I'd known as a mate of Harry Hayes in the days when we'd knock around together about twenty years previously! And, do you know, I don't think I've ever seen him since!

Anyway, apart from those 'recruiting weekends', I also had some 'real-time' serving to do, with my first two-week camp taking place in BAOR in September 1979. The exercise was termed 'Steel Trap' and took place out on the heathland of Soltau, an area well known to me from my regular service at both Celle and Fally. The Regular Army ASM (Artificer Sergeant Major) of 9 Field was a Mick Elton – who had been a mere 'grunt' with 94 Locating Regiment at Celle when I'd been there as a technician. Over the middle weekend of the camp, as tradition demanded, there was a two-day period of 'R and R' – rest and recuperation. Most of the TA lads headed to the fleshpots of Hamburg, but I didn't really fancy that at all! Instead, I asked Mick if he fancied going back into Celle.

He jumped at the chance and we travelled down there in his own *Land Rover*, obtaining permission to stay overnight in the Sergeants' Mess. Mick was happy just to stay in the bar for a few beers and talk over old times, but I set out to track down the Godawas, a local German family with whom I'd been friendly in years gone by. I walked around to Kanonen Strasse, to the school where they had lived, only to find they had moved on, to another town (Hildesheim) not too far away, but of course impossible for me to get to with my limited time. Fortunately, the new occupants of the flat over the school had a phone number and

I was able to call through and tell Mutti that she was speaking to 'Peter-Scouse'! She was absolutely amazed of course, it had been more than 12 years since I'd left Germany and been in touch.

Mutti declared how sorry she was that we couldn't get together, but gave me the address of Ulli and his wife. Ulli (short for Ulrich) was 'the baby' of the family and still just a young boy when last I'd seen him. I returned to the Mess, had some tea, got myself washed and changed and called for a taxi. It turned out in the end that I had to guide the taxi-driver down to Ulli's place – I knew Celle better than he did! Imagine my surprise when I got there to find that Mutti and Poppa had driven down from Hildesheim to meet up with me! They had brought a photo album with them, so I was able to catch up with all their news for a couple of hours. Eventually, Ulli offered me a lift back to the Kasserne, but not before we stopped off at a bar for a couple of excellent beers!

My next TA 'camp' was in May the following year and turned into the 'trip of a lifetime'! I was over at HQTA one day, on some sort of business, when I bumped into Staff Sergeant (SSgt) Pete Breedon – who had been on a tiffy (Artificer) course under my instruction just recently. It turned out that he was now in charge of individual training with the TA, so "*where did I want to go?*" Like a flash, I told him that I'd never been overseas with the Regulars – you can't call Germany 'overseas' – so what were the chances of a visit to Cyprus? Enough said – that's where I went for a fortnight!

I think there were 12 of us in the party, three of us were senior ranks, and we were all from different units. I remember sitting on the plane from Brize Norton, just in front of Bob Monkhouse, who was going out there on 'forces' entertainment'. We flew out on a Friday and we senior ranks were shown to our individual bunks in the Sgts' Mess at RAF Akrotiri, which was also used as the base for 48 Command Workshop. That first night, one of the other sergeants, Joe Smith of the Pay Corps, asked the other two of us to join him at one of the ritzy hotels on the sea front in Limassol. Joe knew the island well from previous experience and introduced us to 'brandy sours' – served in salt-rimmed glasses and very palatable!

We were sat at the bar, when in came a couple of faces well known to me, Ginger McCleod and Derek Simpson, both still in the Regulars and serving with the Workshop. It just so happened that Derek's daughter had just been married that very day – would we like to attend the reception? That was one of those offers you can't refuse and a great time was had by one and all! We had a great meal, plenty to drink, and were entertained by a group of Greek dancers in the traditional style! We also got to meet an American chap, who invited us to join him on his yacht the following afternoon! This we did of course, enjoying a splendid cruise around Buttons Bay in the warm Mediterranean sunshine!

It all had to end and, on the Sunday, we had to don our uniforms (all 12 of us now) and join one half of the Workshop on what was termed its 'summer camp'. This took place on a sandy strip just along the coast, called Pissouri Bay. There was absolutely nothing there at that time, but I believe it has now been developed

into a tourist spot, full of hotels. Anyway, our accommodation was a little more basic – tents! The power was supplied by the usual diesel-engined generating sets, noisy old things, but they did the job! I remember having the job of connecting up all the lights around the camp area. I also strolled along the beach and over the headland with Joe Smith one evening, where we found what looked like a 'greasy spoon' café, nothing more than a beach hut really. But the mousakka (?) that was served up there was delightful!

For the next few days, we TA lads joined in with the Regular members at such activities as football, volleyball, sailing etc! I even took part in an air-sea rescue demo! Picked up by a helicopter, I had to drop into the bay from a height of some 30 – 40 feet, then float in my life-jacket until the chopper crew came back to pick me up, winch me aboard and return me to the cliff-top. We also did some map reading exercises, one at night, which was interesting, marching on a compass heading only. Came the Thursday, and we were asked if 'the TA' would like to enter a team to join in a 30-kilometre 'route march'. I jumped at the chance and, our team of three included a TA chap called Harry Henderson and a Regular SSgt known to one and all as Ziggy – he looked a bit like Charles Bronson, you know, the 'Death Wish' actor.

Anyway, we set off very early in the morning, suitably dressed in trousers, long-sleeved shirts and floppy hats – all to ward off the blazing sunshine. There was map reading involved, as well as the walking, and it proved a pretty demanding day, I can tell you! But we were very proud to finish in the second-fastest time! I recall that, when we got to the finish, it was in a small village up in the mountains, and the booking-in table was located in an orchard. Now, I'd spent the last four days at least 'banged up', if you get my drift, probably due to the change of water and routine! Sufficient to say that there is one particular tree in that orchard that got a lovely load of manure that afternoon!

When we returned to Pissouri, the OC (Officer Commanding) of the Workshop paid a visit and, when he heard that the 'TA team' had done so well, he sent us all back to Akrotiri that same evening, rather than waiting until the end of the 'camp' on the Sunday. Not only that, but he ordered a Scots lad to act as our driver, using the Workshop minibus, and to be at our disposal over the next couple of days! Needless to say, we made full use of that and acted just like tourists, visiting a Roman amphitheatre at Curium, the birthplace of Venus and the lovely resort of Paphos, at the western end of the island. We also had a good evening out at the 'Kolossi Castle' – a pub run by an English guy, just outside Akrotiri. I think we watched Notts Forest win the European Cup on TV that same night.

When Monday eventually arrived, we all thought that we'd actually have to do some work in the Workshop. But no such luck – we were left to our own devices for the rest of the week! On one of those days a few of us 'borrowed' a Land Rover and I drove us to the Army base at Episkopi to pick up some pay! On the way back, one of the tyres 'blew', just after we'd navigated a treacherous hairpin bend that first dropped alarmingly to sea level, then rose steeply upwards again, I think they called it 'Happy Valley'. The job of changing the wheel was none too easy, the jack on the vehicle must have last been used on one



Members of 9 Fld Wksp REME capture a suspect Danish pastry!

of Boudica's chariots! Fortunately, we were parked on a sandy stretch alongside the road, away from the traffic, so no danger to anyone. Then a real piece of luck – coming along the road was an 'Eager Beaver', a motorised forklift truck. The driver pulled over and simply lifted our vehicle off the road and, within the turn of a few nuts, the new wheel and tyre were re-fitted and away we went.

Another day saw us piling into the workshop minibus once more, with one of the Greek drivers taking us into the island's capital, Nicosia, still split then by the United Nations' (UN) 'green line' between the Turks in the north and Greeks in the south. We didn't stop there too long, only long enough to have a drink or two in one of the bars along 'the strip' – can't remember the proper name for it, but it was a notorious place full of sleazy bars and pick-up joints, I was none too impressed with it. After that, we were driven up into the hills of Troodos and stopped at a roadside café for a meal. It must have been the worst meal ever! It was actually 'cooked' by a UN soldier, I can't remember his nationality, who was the boyfriend of the girl who was supposed to be running the place. Anyway, he didn't have a clue and ruined whatever it was we'd ordered, so we all refused to pay and just walked out.

That was a pity really, as all the food we had on Cyprus during our two-week stint was delicious, except for that once. On the return trip, the Greek driver decided to show off his talents as he drove down the steep mountain roads at breakneck speed, hardly using his brakes at all – we all sat in the back wondering if we'd get home safely. It really was a 'white knuckle' ride - I've never been so terrified! During the rest of that week we managed to get as far as Larnaca for a few hours and, on the same trip, dropped in at Dhekelia, where 48 Command Workshop had a sort of off-shoot. At the end of it all, the Workshop threw a 'going home'

party for us and we were able to look back on a fabulous fortnight, one I'll never forget, that's for sure.

Nothing quite lived up to that 'camp' and the rest of my TA service paled by comparison. One other 'camp' actually took place at Bordon and Tidworth, but I did go back to Germany again, to a place called Heide, and managed a day-trip to Hamburg. This took the part of a sightseeing trip, mainly around the harbour and its overhead railway – memories of Liverpool – as well as being able to admire some pretty up-market shopping centres. Another trip took me to Flensburg in Denmark, where I remember driving one of the workshop lorries for a very long distance, the trip took us over some remarkable bridges, from one island to another – though I'd have to look at a map now to try and recall their names! We got quite close to Copenhagen towards the end of the first week and hoped to make a visit there for R and R – but the Officer Commanding (OC) put the mockers on that, saying that we had to stay within the

workshop accommodation.

Strangely enough, that particular OC, Major Brian Garden, had actually taught me on a computer course at Blandford just a couple of years previously, in his civilian capacity. He was a bit of a miserable sod, and that refusal to sanction a trip to Copenhagen probably decided me that I'd had enough of part-time soldiering, I was now 46 years of age so I packed it in. But it had been an interesting time in the main! I had even taken advantage of my position to arrange some HGV (Heavy Goods Vehicle) training and actually held an HGV licence for a few years. Even used it on one occasion to deliver an old computer system to Salford University! And, of course, as detailed above, I used it to do quite a bit of driving during the rest of my TA service.

Another chuckler from Ted Blowers (PS) in Canada

A squaddie was out in Iraq. After several months he received a letter from his girlfriend. In the letter she explained that she had slept with two guys while he had been gone and she wanted to break up with him. AND, she wanted pictures of herself back.

So the squaddie did what any squared-away ex-boy would do. He went around all his mates and collected as many unwanted photographs of women he could find.

He then posted off about 25 pictures and photos of women (both those with clothes on and those without) to his girlfriend along the following note:

"I don't remember which one you are. Please remove your photograph and send the rest back."

ARBORFIELD MEMORIES

By Peter Simmonds

I joined the School in February 1944 and somehow became a boy L/Cpl. It was a post I was not to keep for long, as 'Trumpy' Towler (or, to give him his correct title, Trumpet Sgt Major) of the 4th / 7th Dragoon Guards, having been left behind when the 4/7 Band left us, became CSM of 'B' Coy. I was playing for the replacement band, who also had a dance band section, and Trumpy knew I was interested in dance music. He threatened to have my stripe off me if I joined it, which I did of course, and thus lost my stripe on some pretence or another. Or was it something to do with the Company Commander (Capt Gardiner) getting red paint on his white gloves after picking up a brush? He had introduced the practice of cleaning behind the radiator and I had painted it red with the room number 'C4' in white on top, to ensure that it was not stolen. Unfortunately for the Captain, it was not dry when he picked it up to show the Commandant!

On one occasion, there was a passing-out parade for some intake leaving us and my Mother and Father came to see it. My father's brother, an ex-military man himself, came along as well. He had been a Sgt in the Scots Guards in the First World War and, as soon as he spotted RSM MacNally, he was overjoyed, as he had been the RSM's Drill Sergeant in the same period. Of course they met after the parade and all went off to the Sgt's Mess (without me of course).



Peter and his parents

Whilst still at the School, and still with one stripe, my intake was put on fatigues. Now this was usually a bit of a doddle, but this time to our horror we were put into the back of a 10-ton truck and driven to Basingstoke railway station. We then proceeded to the goods yard and were ordered to fill up the truck with coke. This pastime took up most of the day and was extremely tiring. Afterwards, we were returned to the Arborfield coal yard, where we then proceeded to unload it into a big heap, before heading off to the Cookhouse to have our tea. It was then that Ben Cook arrived, looking for who had been in charge of this operation – guess who? He bawled and shouted that he could not measure the coal as it should have been flat on the top of the heap. When he calmed down a bit he tore my stripes off of my denims, stamped on them and ordered me to go and sew them on again!

I was later posted back to the School as an instructor, having completed 68 Art Vehicle course and three years in Nigeria as a vehicle inspector. So it is now ten years later and I am just checking the intake into work at the Vehicles Shop, when I see a tractor at the end of the shop by the door and on it a civilian who bawls at me, "Simmonds, come here! Get an apprentice to get my battery off and charge it up". How he ever remembered my name after all that time I shall never know. And I still called him SIR!

(Just checking back in the history book, I note that I made mention of Peter Simmonds twice, one from 1944 and the second from 1945. For any of that era who may have the names mixed up, it was announced in OBAN27 that Peter of 45B sadly died in October 2002. Ed.)

SOME STORIES OF PROVOST AND OTHER PERMANENT STAFF

By BA 'Eggy' Eggleton, 52B

(Firstly, 'Eggy' would like it to be known that his surname is as above - not Eggleton, Eagleton or even Egglestone, as published in OBAN 30! Ed.) (Whoops Eggy - apologies from the typesetter!)

When intake 52B arrived at Arborfield in September 1952, Provost Sergeant Fred Silvers was 'off sick'. We were informed that he had been stabbed by one of his Provost NCOs. At the Camp Hall cinema shows on Saturdays and Sundays, we always had 'Tom and Jerry' cartoons and, on the list of credits the name of Fred Quimby would appear. At this, a shout of "Good old Fred" would ring out.

Being an 'OD' (other denomination), I did not attend the C of E Church services on a Sunday, but I was told that, at one such service, the Padre announced, "There was a death in the Garrison yesterday. Mr Silvers was run over and killed". At this, such a large cheer went up that the very flustered Padre had to hastily add, "It was Sgt Silvers' brother". This was followed by an equally large groan!

Once I was either on jankers or fire picket and detailed to stoke the boiler behind the Guardroom. I pulled out the damper and shoveled like a madman. The furnace was full to the brim and going like a steam train, roaring away with the needle on the gauge way up. I had just pushed the damper in when Fred arrived

to find out why I was taking so long. He looked at the gauge and went *bolo!* He screamed, "*You will blow us all up!*" He dragged one of his RPs round and they opened the boiler door. The furnace was full of white-hot coke, which they raked out until the level was only to the bottom of the door. I was told "*You're a f*****g idiot, go away*" - or words to that effect - and I was never let near the boiler room again. Years later, one of my British Legion companions said that he'd been in the KRRC and had known Fred. Apparently he had always behaved in such a manner.

When I was an 'A' Coy NCO, attached back to HQ Coy, I still had to read 'A' Coy orders at the Company Office, down by the Guardroom, and 'Retreat' was always played there. One evening as 'Retreat' was played we all stood attention as required. Except for one PS Infantry Private, who carried on walking. Fred was on the Guardroom verandah and started jumping up and down, yelling "*Stand still!*" The Private just pointed to his shoulder flash and carried on walking. It turned out that he was in the Duke of Wellington's Regiment - and they ignore 'Retreat'!

There was one particular foul-mouthed 'Jock' Corporal in the Guardroom, whose name escapes me. My father used to collect me on a 'Free Sunday' and, on one occasion, this Jock fellow upset him. My Dad then 'put him in his place' and threatened to 'deck' him! Being an ex-wartime Para Sergeant (D-Day and Rhine crossing etc), my Dad did not take kindly to jumped up loud-mouthed RP Corporals!

I've already mentioned being an 'OD' - and this also allowed me to miss the Wednesday parades. Along with some fellow ODs, I used to hide in one of the spiders, away from the RSM and the CSMs. Our purpose was to watch the PS, as this was the morning when they would have their drill period. They were normally split into three squads, namely Senior NCOs, Junior NCOs - and 'Men'. What the present-day reader must understand is that, when we were at the School in those days, there were over forty different Regiments and Corps represented. (I remember that in the Guardroom was a glass-fronted display cabinet, which contained a badge for each unit represented at the School.)

It was hilarious! The Education Corps, all Sergeants, while waiting to come to 'attention', would stand with one leg in the air like dogs at a tree! The Light Infantry lads kept standing at ease after each movement, as was their custom. And when the squads marched, they all did so at different speeds. In those days of the .303, we normally had to 'slope arms' before marching off. But of course the Light Infantry and Rifle Corps never sloped arms - they trailed them. The Cavalry and Tankies never had rifles anyway, so found it totally bemusing! Needless to say, the RSM used to get very excited on those PS drill mornings.

I may have mentioned this before, but when I joined 'A' Coy, the CSM was a man we called 'Bull' Weston, of the Grenadier Guards. He was later replaced by a Light Infantry chap. (*Would that have been 'Bonner'? Ed.*) On his first muster parade, the RSM shouted his normal command, "*March off, 'A' Company*". We were stood at ease at the time, and the new CSM merely told us to "*Right Turn*". Some of us came to attention, others simply turned right, some didn't move at all - it was an utter shambles! You can imagine, correctly, that RSM McNally 'did his nut'!

THE BASKETBALL COURT By West Robertson (50B) 'C' Company

God doesn't give us days like that now or, if He does, then 'Free Sundays' have been abandoned as a major pleasure! It must have been in July 1953, because I had become legally allowed to drink - in law that is, if not by regulations. Having exercised my newfound right, I was now experiencing the not so newly found consequences. 6 Div 'C' Coy had already gained some notoriety as they climbed the seniority ladder, as a particularly willing and helpful bunch, with a strong sense of discipline, *esprit de corps* and military history. Most of it we were prepared to modify as the occasion demanded, for the good of all you understand, but especially ourselves!

The sun, as it always did when we were young, streamed through the windows, filtered by the accumulated dust but not obscured by curtains. However, it lost the battle to penetrate the odiferous air, created by the twenty-odd souls who re-circulated the sulphurous fumes through tar-stained lungs. Added to this toxicant were liberal quantities of methane gas, some slipped in surreptitiously but most with erupting glory.

For reasons best known to himself, CSM 'Taffy' Hill, Welsh Guardian of we, the lost sheep, had managed to get us accommodated in the abandoned 'spider' at the top of the Square. That there were advantages to this, there was no doubt! He could deny our existence to inspecting officers, which he did on more than one occasion, using Permanent Staff NCOs to keep us quiet when visitors were close. And if the odd door or window fell in well, it didn't matter - he would soon be rid of us! I think he must have had a 'little earner' going, conducting tours of potential missionaries to show them the ultimate in squalor that could be produced by degenerates, without the guiding light of bumper and scrubbing brush.

I don't really think that at all, I just put it in to discredit the CSM in sweet revenge. One day, you see, I was walking down the Camp Road, working hard to avoid any legal or productive activity, when I saw the diminutive figure of Provost Sgt Fred Silvers approaching. He had to be close, as you couldn't see him from any distance, he was so small! So I ducked for cover into the Company Stores, thinking of new socks or, even cheaper, a single collar-dog. Now, there was a connecting door between the store and the OC/CSM's sanctuary and, through the opening I could see the huge Welsh gentleman, sitting at his table six-foot GS.

He beckoned me forward. He had his normal fatherly, compassionate look about his face, his eyebrows raised in questioning manner. Without even knowing what they were, I said "*I have come for my cards, Sir*", a phrase I had somewhere bandied about. His expression changed and I was sorry, for I knew I had hurt his feelings. I decided I would let him talk me out of whatever it was that I had requested. Without so much as even a bow or a curtsy, he walked past the OC, who was deeply engrossed in either the *Dandy* or *Hotspur*, and definitely prepared to take no part in what was about to happen.

The CSM opened the door that led out onto the verandah. He then returned, placed a massive hand on the back of my neck and

propelled me towards the open doorway. With extra boost from the sole of his boot, he then ejected me with so much force that I cleared the verandah rail and landed in the rose bed, Sgt Herbie Payne's pride and joy. I was indignant! He could have either thrown or kicked me – surely there was no need for both!

Other apprentices were forbidden from approaching our hut – not that many wanted to. And so it was there, lonely and abandoned, that we diligently studied into the wee small hours, to equip ourselves to become a credit to the School, The Corps and the Army. Such piety in ones so young! Abandoned perhaps, but not quite lost! There was at least one person who knew where we were hidden and knew where to turn, when help was needed to attempt the difficult and the dangerous. Even today I can admire the courage of that man. Driven by ambition, he was even prepared to face the wrath of RSM McNally on his chariot of fire. But, more than that, he ventured into our room at nine o'clock in the morning – on a 'Free Sunday'. And his name? Maj John Biddulph, the second-in-command of the School.

It was not for nothing that we all called him 'Mad John'. He had been an Olympic hurdler, or some such minor God, in another life and, apparently lacking a real job, was liable to appear almost anywhere, at any time, usually inappropriate. But he seldom took any obvious action in response to the multitude of lies proffered in explanation for whatever misdemeanour we had been caught committing. It got to the stage where we would think up an implausible excuse and go out and deliberately caught. But he was a lovely man, who genuinely liked us, and I am no doubt doing him a disservice. So it was that, carrying two pickaxes, 'Mad John' entered our lair.

You will remember a barrack-room layout. Just inside the door, in this case to the left, was the bunk where the room NCO usually lived. Well, we used ours as a motorcycle repair centre, while the room NCO, one 'Sniffer' Stevens, made do with a bed-space, accompanied by a partition that extended halfway across the room, thus shielding his bashfulness from prying eyes. My bed-head was against this partition, the rest extending in two rows down the length of the room against the walls. It was a trite unfortunate that an unsuspecting visitor, at nine o'clock on a 'Free Sunday' morning, should first meet the likes of me, in my most helpful of moods!

"I wonder if you, and perhaps a friend or two, could help me dig a hole in the Square?" came the gentle request. He did not need to repeat it, I knew what I had heard and I didn't need any second invitation or change to that plan! If Maj Hall, RTR, unhappy incumbent of 6 Div 'C' Company had seen the speed and competence with which I mustered my troops, he may well have regretted appointing Pete Harrison as the A/CSM. (*In fact he never even considered me as an A/LCpl.*) With scant regard for personal resources, I quickly dressed; some objects of my apparel had seen only two weeks since last laundry – so almost new; I even doubled up on drawers cellular by mistake!

Mike Rose and Tam Lennox went in search of a petrol-driven pneumatic drill, which they seemed to remember lying idle near some ongoing road works. Marauders were sent to pillage adjoining fire points for picks and shovels. Bernie 'Slug' Gauntlett was dispatched to recruit labour, while Ron Hague and

myself distracted Mad John with numerous questions as to details. It appeared that he wanted two holes dug, in which to place posts that would form the two ends of a basketball court. Perhaps regretting our past treatment of Mad John, now we wanted more for the man. Two holes indeed. What about sloping stands for spectators? ; slit trenches for defence? ; goal posts for football and hockey, badminton and tennis nets? ; maypole, barbecue pit, gibbet and stocks, rock garden, paddling pool and many others? Overwhelmed by our generosity and obviously deeply touched, Mad John sadly refused the offers. But my instructions were already spreading like St Elmo's fire around a ship's rigging.

I knew where my hole should be dug – and so did a dozen others, while those without specific holes just practiced. Once penetrated, the surface was easily lifted and few had any idea of how big a hole was required to house a basketball post. The obvious thing was to err on the large side! Those merely practicing had no such limitations, so they did what they found most difficult – and did it often.

A monster had been created and starting had been the easy part. With great admiration, I watched the determination with which work progressed. My pick was being used by Don Walker, who should really have known better, since his father was Garrison RSM at Bulford. Alec 'Brad' Bradley, an Inst Mech (but somehow in 'B' Coy) and A/Sgt to boot, used his authority to commandeer a tool from some jeep and attempted to spread the activity towards his own Company lines.

They were digging towards victory. There should have been a gentle roll of drums introducing some orchestral piece of music, something very quiet like 'Pomp and Circumstance'. This would have elevated my mood to a higher plane but, in truth, it was hardly missed. I watched the activity with pride, the sacrifice of a morning in bed had not been easily made, but so many were prepared to do just that. There they were, Dave Penny, Bill Orme, Pat Hennessy, Ivy Brown and many others, contributing to that historic day. It was a day that I shall always remember, after all it was me that started it! The others may well have forgotten it, or will remember only the fury of the RSM on the following morning.

Possibly I have given roles to people which differ slightly from actual events but, at this late date, all participants can claim some glory. It was all over in about half an hour, when the mass destruction of the Square was spotted by several occupants of the Sgts' Mess. Even 6 Div 'C' Coy could not pretend that they hadn't heard the bellowing of these experts. And the basketball court? You're right, it never did get built!

BENEVOLENCE

Please remember that the Arborfield Old Boys Association is a registered charity with monies in a Benevolence Fund account. If you are aware of any ex-apprentices or past members of the Permanent Staff who are in distress and could benefit from assistance then please contact the Honorary Secretary, Lt Col (Retd) Bill Cleasby at the earliest opportunity.

A FEW MEMORIES OF THE SIXTIES

By John Swarbrick, 62A

RSM J Stewart, Irish Guards

My only real memory of this gentleman was the occasion of the 'PoP' of either spring or summer 1962. I cannot remember if I was in 1 or 2 Div at the time, but the intake passing out would have been either 59B or C, but I'll assume it was 59B. In those days, it had become customary for the intake passing out to carry out some 'daring feat', to leave their name for posterity. Things that had been done in the past included the hoisting of various items of feminine attire from flagpoles, the dumping of objects in static water tanks etc etc, but 59B opted to adorn the Cookhouse roof with their intake number in white paint.

On the day of the 'PoP', the School was duly marched onto the Square to start the parade. RSM Stewart marched out to his position in front of the parade, smart as a button-stick as always, his green Irish Guards hat standing out above everything else. With pace-stick firmly tucked under his left arm, he slowly surveyed the parade, first to the left and then to the right. The parade waited expectantly for the order to be called to attention, but instead the RSM barked out, *"The sun is shining and the birds are singing for you today but, before you leave, the words '59B' will be removed from the cookhouse roof! Parade, paraaaaade"*

RSM H Simpson, Coldstream Guards

This newly-arrived (early 1963) RSM tried to change the school tradition of 'gypping'. I can remember him standing by the Cookhouse entrance, between Nuffield Road and the Square. As usual, apprentices were all in a line waiting to enter the Cookhouse and, of course, in strict intake order. Some senior A/Ts arrived and, as usual, 'gypped' all the lower Divs to get in the correct pecking order. The RSM saw this and exploded. With pace-stick waving and pointing, he delivered a lengthy tirade to the offending A/Ts, and ordered them to the back of the queue, much to their disgust, but much to the amusement of the Jeeps (juniors) in front. This was fine, until the queue shortened and the offending A/Ts entered the Cookhouse, by which time they were out of sight of the RSM and the correct order of priority was quickly restored!

The PTI

Remember those PT sessions in the Camp Hall? Two memories spring to mind. The first taught me to listen and the second to realise that one man's fun may be at the expense of another's embarrassment. We were all lined up in several ranks, having completed some exercises, when the PTI announced, *"When I say GO, I want to see the last person to reach the top of the wall bars MOVE"*. The Hall was filled with A/Ts rushing in all directions to climb the walls. A whistle blew and the PTI screamed, *"Get back in line, I didn't say GO, I said MOVE now GO!"*

Again, the floor of the Hall was filled with A/Ts all in neat lines. The PTI, who was on the stage, instructed us all to sit cross-legged on the floor. *"I want you to imagine that there is a wild cat sitting in your lap,"* he said, *"and the only way to kill it is to stab it with the knife that you are holding in your right hand."*

Hold up the knife now stab, stab, stab". By the time the penny dropped it was too late. I don't know how many of us there were, but the sight of that number of youths pumping their fist up and down in their laps, must have been something to behold. It certainly brought a smile to the faces of the PTI's!

The food strike

In 1962, or possibly early in 1963, a 'food strike' was organised, in protest at the standard of catering. I cannot remember precisely when it was, but I do recollect being in the lower Divs of 'A' Coy. On reflection, I must have eaten countless meals in that Cookhouse during the three years I was there, but I cannot remember if the food was good, bad or indifferent – probably all three! Anyway, word was circulated by the organisers that meals were to be boycotted. Our permanent staff (PS) got wind of the plot and we were told not to participate. In modern parlance, the phrase *"between a rock and a hard place"* comes to mind. And so, after much discussion between ourselves, it was decided we would comply with both instructions. *"You can lead a horse to water"* etc. We did go to the Cookhouse, and we did collect our meals, but walked straight out and dumped them in the swill bins!

Talking of swill bins. During the 60's, there was a civilian employee who used to empty these bins. He looked something like 'old man Steptoe', but was known affectionately to all apprentices as 'Evil'. Now this person really was something else. He used to lurk (a good word to describe his actions) around the bins, and I once saw him pick out a roast potato and eat it after it had been scraped from someone's plate! An apprentice once called him 'Evil', which he heard, and only managed to shake him off once he had run half way up the Square!

Pace-sticks

Being in 'A' Coy, we were lucky in our CSMs, as this post was filled from the Light Infantry regiments and not the Guards. We all had sympathy therefore for our neighbours in 'B' Coy, who during the early 60's had CSM 'The Beast' Roberts, Scots Guards. He used to put fear into all of us, never mind his own Company. Every morning, we could hear him coming down James Watt Road from the Sergeants' Mess, pace-stick open to the regulation 30 inches. Tick, tick, tick it went, and this, combined with the sound of heel plates and studs on the road from his mirror-like boots, was a sure signal to keep your head down.

The Drill Sergeant for 62A, A Squad, was Sgt 'Spike' Healey, RA. A small man, but nevertheless prone to bouts of fury on the Drill Square. For the rest of my Army career, I always felt uncomfortable when in the company of Gunners. Anyway, during one particular drill session, one of our number, by the name of Mick Bonnick, couldn't get something right, no matter how he tried. This wound Spike up so much that we thought he would have a fit (he used to get white froth forming at the corners of his mouth). Mick was in the front rank and, after getting it wrong yet again, Spike finally snapped. His pace-stick came down the rank like an arrow and hit poor Mick. Being the 1960's, and as young and naïve as we were, we all thought this was just part of life's rich pattern, but Spike must suddenly have realised the enormity of what he had done. He approached Mick and asked him if he was all right. Then, as the drill period was nearly over, dismissed him and told him to go to his room. It was only later that we

found out that Spike had given Mick 10/- (shillings) to keep his mouth shut. This was a small fortune in those days, as we were only permitted to draw that amount in pay each week.

Regimental scrubbing

Remember the 'Bath Book'? Each A/T was supposed to sign each week to verify that they had taken a bath. In truth, most just signed, as personal hygiene in those days was probably not considered as important as it might be today. However, one A/T in A Squad, 62A, who shall remain anonymous, did stretch it a bit far and was duly picked out by the A/T NCOs as being particularly 'gungy'. The poor lad was given the choice; take a scrubbing from his peers, or go onto the Square with fire bucket and scrubbing brush, strip to the waist and take a self-imposed scrubbing. I'm not sure that I could have done it, but that is exactly what he did. In the freezing weather, he carried said items onto the Square below the 'J' Coy block, and with the whole intake watching from the windows, proceeded with his ablutions.

The amazing thing is that he was passed by senior A/T NCOs and PS alike, all of whom ignored him, probably in the knowledge that such an episode, and the message it would convey, would be more effective than any other means. It did, and I have every respect for the lad, as it must have taken some inner personal courage to do it.

Parades

The Saturday morning parade was always a pain. Boots highly polished (bulled), uniform pressed, buff belt whitened, brasses gleaming and, of course, hat duly brushed. There was quite a fashion in hats. Some would brush the top straight from front to back (correctly), others in a circular way and some would 'quarter' them, by brushing in four directions. Others brave enough would try anything to make it look like a German officer's cap. The peak would be 'slashed', the front at the top would be pushed up and back, then the sides pulled down.

In the winter of 63/64, a rumour spread around the Camp on a Friday night that, due to the cold weather, there might be a chance that the parade would be cancelled if the Square was considered too dangerous due to ice. Company NCOs then duly organised juniors, armed with fire buckets, to douse the Square with water! Halfway through, the instruction filtered through that we were only to use hot water – apparently it froze quicker than cold water! The mind boggles! (*I've heard that it's a scientific fact – any comments, dear readers? Ed.*)

Parades could be dangerous too. I saw many an A/T faint, (*"keep the circulation going, waggle those toes"*), but a lucky escape for a boy called Dave Hurren. It would be during our 9 Div and I think it was either our 'PoP' or one of the many rehearsals for it. We were all on parade as 'S' Coy, with rifles and bayonets fixed. It was during the lengthy inspection phase, and all I remember was the clatter as both Dave and his rifle went down. There then followed a more than usual commotion as gaggles of PS rushed about. When he went down, Dave's bayonet stabbed him a glancing blow to the side of his right eyebrow! Dave went on to be commissioned, but that could have been the end of his career.

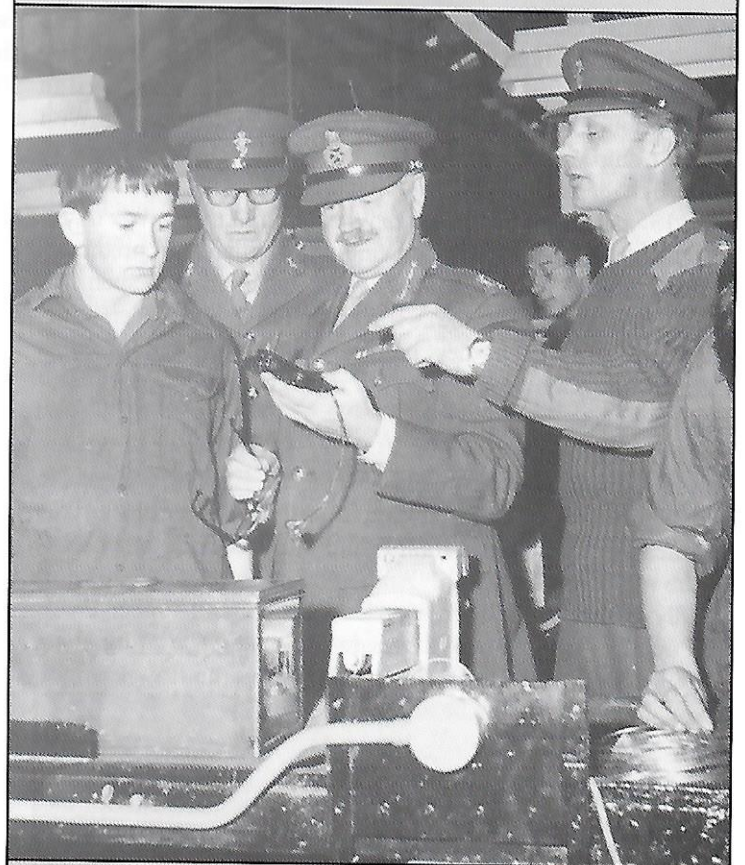
The QM's fire

I was *hors de combat* at the time, having been bedded down in the MRS with a particularly large boil on my lower lip. (Incidentally, it burst on the inside whilst eating a meal and I didn't notice. I thought the gravy tasted better than usual!) Anyway, once I returned to the fray a few days after the fire, my pals brought me up to speed on the events. It was alleged, unsubstantiated I hasten to add, that either the QM or one of his staff was seen throwing their ledgers back into the flames after someone had rescued them. Dodgy stuff this!

The Padre

The Padre during 1962 was the Rev P W R Kennedy. I remember him as a tall officer who wore glasses but, as with most Padres, he was more interested in doing God's work and looking after his flock, than adhering to rigorous military discipline and procedures. During any term day, the Camp was a hive of activity. But there were quiet spells, when all apprentices would be under instruction. Of course, apprentices would salute all officers, so imagine being passed by hundreds of boys as they marched in every direction to get to the next lesson. The returning of complements in these circumstances must have been a test. This Padre however, had a solution. He would simply raise his right hand to his peaked cap in the usual way but, instead of repeating the process over and over again, he would simply waggle his fingers whilst saying, "*Morning boys . . . morning boys*".

THIS ISSUE'S CAPTION COMPETITION



Can you provide a suitable and witty caption?

LIFE BEFORE AAS ARBORFIELD

by Ken Anderson, 58A

Having moved to live in Ryde on the Isle of Wight with my parents, I then spent the latter half of my secondary school education at Sandown Grammar School. I had moved away from a boys-only school in Southport to a mixed school and the distraction of the opposite sex in the classroom didn't help my educational progress at all. Still wearing my previous school's red and grey vertical striped blazer, in an environment where grey blazers was the norm, made me stand out like a sore thumb. My Lancastrian accent did not endear me to the teachers - in fact school there was not a particularly a happy period in my life. However, one thing I excelled at was 'Woodwork'. The teacher was Mr Dick Mabey, who perhaps saw something in me that others didn't - he certainly took me under his wing. He was also the CO of the school's Army Cadet Force (ACF) and it wasn't long before I had joined the detachment, which was affiliated to a Territorial Army (TA) Heavy Anti-Aircraft (HAA) battery of the Royal Artillery (RA).

In the summer of 1957, I was promoted to Lance Bombardier (dizzy heights eh?) and was fortunate enough to start spending drill evenings and weekends with 'P' Battery of 457 HAA Regiment RA. Here I first met up with the 3.7" HAA Gun and then the 3Mk7 Fire Control Radar and No.11 Predictor. Sometime later I even entered the technical wonder world of the 4Mk7 Radar. One particular memory I have of those evenings is of the cables connecting the radar, predictor and gun being highly boot-polished and laid out like liquorice in a sweet shop.

As an Army Cadet, I was fortunate enough to spend a Camp with TA. The whole battery moved from the Isle of Wight, by car ferry across the Solent to the mainland. Then it moved in convoy, joining up with two batteries from Portsmouth, to West Down Camp on the Larkhill ranges (an area I was to come to know like the back of my hand in later life). What a thrill it was for a 15-year old to travel in a regimental military convoy of 10- and 16-ton *Matador* trucks, towing guns, radars and predictors (I guess that there was also an LAD detachment, but such was unknown to me at that time). Travelling through towns en route, the Don R's (dispatch riders on motor bikes) would halt civilian traffic to allow the convoy to motor through - I guess that doesn't happen nowadays!

It was a great time for a young 15-year old - seeing the guns in action (anti-tank mode for those who might wonder what a HAA regiment was doing at Larkhill) and also watching other units of the real Army in action. Another memory that still remains vividly is that of, at dusk, watching batteries of limber-towed 25-Pounders with, convoy lights twinkling, disappearing along a road out of West Down Camp onto the Larkhill gun ranges.

WANTED

Although the archives contain much information on apprentices and military permanent staff there is little information recorded on the many civilian instructors who taught us. Therefore we are keen to receive any recollections, stories and perhaps photographs of any you may recall.

Not many years later, the School of Artillery at Larkhill was to become my first adult posting, but that is well worthy of another story. For now it's worth mentioning my introduction to British ale at the '*Bustard Inn*'. What a splendid place to locate a pub - a few hundred yards from the firing point.

At the beginning of 1958, my Headmaster suggested that it might be a good idea if I left at Easter rather than continuing until the summer, as jobs could then be hard to find! So off I went to sit my Army Entrance exam in the Old Town Hall in Newport, which I obviously passed. The congratulations I received from all the ACF officers, the TA BSM and Dick Mabey, far exceeded anything from any of the other School Staff! So, just a couple of days after my 16th birthday, I waved goodbye to my parents, took the ferry from Ryde to Portsmouth Harbour, where I was to meet up with three or four others to take the train, first to Guildford and then on to Wokingham.

Thereafter, my story is similar to many others - save it to say that I was an Apprentice Radar Mechanic raring to get my teeth into the 3Mk7 under Bob Coe's fine instruction. So a very big thank you Dick Mabey, and to the many similar teachers who had the compassion and wisdom to help other young lads find a useful vocation in life and not get flung onto the scrap heap before their 16th birthday.

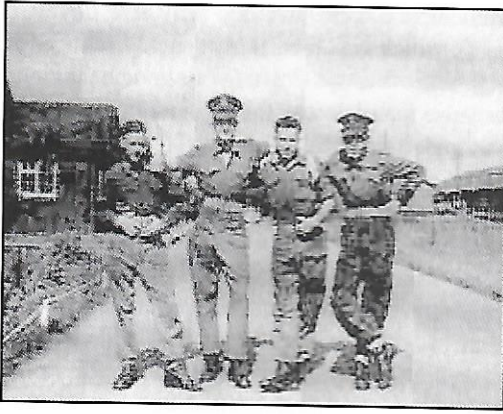
NAUGHTY BOYS!

By Johnny Stewart (56B) 'D' Company

It must have been during late autumn in 1957 that a few of us went AWOL and had a totally miserable, but adventurous, few weeks away from 'boys' school', spending most of the time in various places around the South Coast. We had previously been tipped out of bed every night - or so it seemed - by 5 Div lads and decided to even the score. We raided their barrack room, armed with broom-handles, and gave them a thorough 'toothpasting'. Then we up-ended their beds and beat a hasty retreat back to our own room to await the inevitable retribution. However, things took a more formal and serious turn when their room NCO announced that he was charging us instead!

We were subsequently marched in front of the Company Commander, Maj Martin, the next morning and were awarded '14 days CB'. Now we had - or at least 'some of us' had - already decided that we would 'do a bunk' if we were given jankers and we even had our bags packed up in readiness. My fellow 'bunkers' were 'Tex' Gunnel, 'Piggy' Cass, Frank Suggett and 'Jonah' Jones. Off we went, to London first of all, hoping to purloin the key of Tex's parents' caravan, which was located on the Isle of Sheppey in the north of Kent. His Mum and Dad soon 'sussed out' that their son was not at home legitimately, especially not for the reason he gave! He told them that he was in London for a boxing tournament (Tex was actually a good boxer) - but he also said that was my reason for being there. I imagine that my long pointed beak gave the game away - no one could look less like a boxer than I did!

Anyway, we beat a hasty retreat from Tex's house and eventually ended up in the Maidstone area, where we hoped to maybe find some casual work on one of the local farms. However,



the season was virtually over, so no luck on that score. We found a reasonably dry – and mostly occupied – cowshed and attempted to bed down for the night. But just before that we had picked

a load of what we thought were small plums, which must in fact have been sloes. Now having found our sleeping place and realising our hunger, we'd eaten quite a lot of the fruit and the effect was pretty devastating! We all had the 'gripes' which, combined with the continual disturbance of our sleeping partners – the calving cows – gave us a most uncomfortable and windy night, if you get my drift!

We finally baled out next morning, with red-rimmed eyes and covered in bits of straw, we must have been a sight. We were all totally skint, apart from the fact that I had with me my 'POSB' (Post Office Savings Bank) book, which was of course overdrawn! We found a small local post office and tried to convince the little old lady behind the counter that it was normal practice to pay out, even when the book showed no credit entries! She eventually relented, paying out the princely sum of ten shillings but retaining the book to be sent away for checking. We bought ourselves a pint of milk each, along with some cheese, and had a feast – no food has ever tasted better. After that we made our way down to the Isle of Sheppey, arriving there in the late evening dusk. It was a long and perilous walk along the cliff-tops and I managed to fall down to the beach at one stage. I wasn't seriously hurt, but I had ripped open my brand-new 15"-bottom drainpipes and gashed my leg, so I was none too pleased! We waited for nightfall, then Tex and Piggy sneaked away to try and get into the caravan. This was soon followed by an almighty crash and lights started to go on everywhere. Evidently, Piggy had tried to open the caravan roof fanlight and fallen through! Now Piggy wasn't a small lad, so why Tex had sent him up there, I'll never know.

At that stage we gave up on the caravan idea and legged it away from the caravan site. It was late autumn and getting cold at night, so we broke into a fisherman's hut along the shore. We managed to find loads of cork floats and some tar-coated wood, which we set fire to in the middle of the hut. It made a great fire and burned away merrily but, about fifteen minutes later, we were all outside the hut, gasping for air! Having tried unsuccessfully to put out the blaze, we once again moved on rapidly, to try to seek shelter. We eventually found a telephone kiosk and huddled inside, shivering and watching the first glimpses of dawn breaking. We didn't have a brass farthing between us and, by this time, we were all cold and very hungry. We set off on a brisk walk to get the circulation going again and were delighted to spot a large tree with the remnants of an apple crop still hanging from its branches. It was situated in the garden of a large house, so we climbed up onto the wall and began helping ourselves to a tasty, if somewhat unconventional, breakfast. We were still in the middle of our feast when a couple of toffs came out of the house.

But they weren't at all unpleasant and actually invited us in for a cup of tea. We must have looked a sorry bunch, me with my ripped trousers and all of us with smoke-blackened faces from the previous night. We were kindly offered the biscuit barrel to accompany the tea and it was empty in pretty short time.

The friendly couple then asked us what we were up to and Piggy told them we were a group of Boy Scouts on an initiative test! They sort of smiled, with their faces showing an expression of 'Oh yes, and my Aunt Fanny is the Queen of Sheba' magnitude and, noticing the looks on the rest of our faces, Piggy decided to stop waffling, thank goodness! We managed to extract ourselves from the house, bowing and scraping, before making our way to a place called Minster, on the north of the Isle, where we spent the next night freezing in a seafront cubicle. With hunger once again gnashing at us, we broke into one of those little ice-cream stalls and were delighted to find a whole box of Mars Bars and a bottle of undiluted fruit squash.

Apart from that the stall was empty, due to the season being over, so we decided we'd try to sell cups of diluted squash along the seafront the next day, to provide some income. Next problem? No cups! My memory is a bit hazy here, but I think we managed to nick a stack of paper cups from a fish'n'chip shop, perhaps it was me that engaged to proprietor in conversation while the cups took a walk! Our business venture was none too successful, as I can remember being chased along the prom by some angry 'customers'. By now we were thoroughly fed up with hypothermic nights and starvation rations, as well as the rasping of our navels against our backbones. A cunning plan was needed.

By now, Piggy had gone off on his own and we were down to just four and the most sensible thing would have been to go back to Camp. However, we decided to book into two separate bed and breakfast places, get a good night's sleep, then nip out early next morning without paying. Tex and Frank found their spot, while Jonah and I found a suitable looking place. We were awakened next morning by the sound of grit being thrown up at our window by the other pair. We had slept fully clothed for a fast getaway and we crept out onto the landing. At the top of the stairs was a large pot containing a huge aspidistra, which Jonah – aptly named – managed to knock with his bag. It rocked backwards and forwards then broke apart as it bounced off every step on its journey down the stairs! We nipped smartly back into the bedroom and under the covers, pretending to be asleep.

Our landlady and her husband entered and suggested that we accompany them downstairs, while the sound of small stones could still be heard, rattling against the window! The curtains were pulled apart and it must have then been blindingly obvious to our 'hosts' just what was going on. The husband swiftly descended the stairs and invited Tex and Frank to join us inside. These people were great! We came clean about our evil intentions and in fact explained everything, from start to finish. We parted on good terms, having been given a hearty breakfast and some money to see us along our way. For our part, we promised to eventually send on our rent money by post, along with enough to cover the broken pot and ruined plant. The thing is, I can't remember if we ever did.

Having spent another freezing and sleepless night in a pleasure garden and finding ourselves covered in white frost, we then decided to try and hitch-hike to Hastings, which was Frank's home territory. After a while, a lorry pulled over and the driver yelled "One of you can get in the cab, but the rest will have to use the back". So three of us then sat for what seemed endless hours on a lorry-load of bricks. Already cold from the previous night, with the wind whistling around us, it is amazing that we didn't get hypothermia on that perilous journey. We were so stiff that we had to be helped down from the back of the lorry when it finally dropped us off.

Frank then located a young woman in just about the grottiest flat you'd ever wish to find, it was up a flight of stairs that was covered in dog-muck and everywhere stank. I can't remember just how long we stayed there – but we weren't allowed to go there until well after dark! On one of the days I met a really attractive girl at a local fairground in Hastings and I asked her about the possibility of a job on one of the attractions. She asked me to meet her next day and said she'd take me to her home to meet her parents. But when she added "You'll like my Dad, he's the RSM of the Black Watch", I decided that discretion was the better part of valour! Pretty soon we decided to split up and I was left with Jonah for company. We headed for Brighton, while Frank and Tex had had enough and went back to Arborfield. One memory of Brighton is indelibly etched on my memory bank. We found one of those old Victorian seaside shelters in the evening and stretched out on the slatted benches for some shut-eye. It wasn't long before we were joined by a couple of noisy drunks, followed by two odd-looking characters who must have thought we looked like 'nice boys'! Scared stiff by this episode, we decided to call it a day and give ourselves up at the local nick, where we had visions of warm comfy cells and mugs of steaming hot chocolate.

Walking into the police station, we approached the constable on desk duty. We explained that we were AWOL and that we were 'generously' giving ourselves up into the safe arms of the law. "Well, you scruffy pair of nurks can **** off," came the terse reply, "if you think I'm going to let you two flea-bags into my nice clean cells, you've got another think coming". We both protested, "But you've got to arrest us, we're deserters. We've got no money, so how can we get back to Camp?" "Same way as you left it sunshine", he replied, "now like I said before, **** off!" The thought crossed my mind that we'd be better off chucking a brick through the station window, perhaps that would persuade him. But the way our luck had been running, he'd have probably given us a good hiding and still chucked us back on the street.

So it turned out that we had to endure another cold night of utter despondency and depression, before finally agreeing to go further along the coast to my own home in Portsmouth. It was the final straw, as I'd always lived in trepidation of my father's belt. But on finally reaching home, both my parents welcomed us with open arms, they were overjoyed to find us safe and (almost!) well. A big hot meal was accompanied by lots of fussing, before Dad said he'd take us back to Arborfield. Even our return there wasn't as bad as feared – why, dear old Fred Silvers, the Provost Sergeant, even let us sleep in his nice warm Guardroom – known as 'Fred's Hotel'!

To our utter amazement, we were awarded only five days CB (confined to barracks), which was then fairly quickly reduced to three. Now I'd like to think this was down to our good behaviour, but in fact it was because the nick was full to bursting! Some of the lads at Camp had raided the local fireworks factory – and had hidden their booty under the altar in the RC Chapel! This must have added blasphemy to the original crime of stealing, so the offenders were being dragged down to the Guardroom for their sins. Jonah and I were brought before the Commandant, Colonel Cole, and he told us that we'd better "pull our socks up and keep our noses clean" in the future. I've often wondered why these two activities are linked together, but this we tried to do, of course, but Fred Silvers had us in his sights and we were 'marked men' for the rest of our apprenticeship!

Results of the OBAN 30 Caption Competition



"A big differential between ranks"

The winning entry and submitted by Eddie Cooper 52A

We also had from Keith (Percy) Thrower 60c

"Captain Blackadder, I see you responded to my order to get Baldrick smartened up!"

and then from Fred Wilson 56B

"Is this the first time that you have done a M.O.T. test?"

whilst Chas Pepper 43B suggested two other captions:

1. "Boy - Don't blame me, I didn't put it there"
2. "Officer - No, it isn't tea-break, get on with it"

Now have a look at the competition in this issue on Page 39

IN THE NICK OF TIME.

By Arthur Ward, 50B.

On route to Arborfield via Wokingham Station, to serve the King and his Queen, was not unusual for those of us who had the adventure bug and first day's pay plus rail warrant to glory - or who had just been chucked out to grow up fast! There was an interval of freedom at this quiet station, which seemed to belong to a slightly bored Corporal. While waiting for his own personal chauffeur-driven three tonner to return, he granted these four brand-new 'out of the box' Jeeps an extra half-hour to view the exotic life style of this sleepy town. It was but a short walk into this space for country folk that would reveal a lone teashop. Upon entering, we were served the standard teapot, accompanied by a plate of six cakes. This being a 'pay for what you eat' system, we agreed to each give some of our meagre unearned four bob. The conversation from this newly formed group of signatories to 'His Heirs and successors' was only halted by the realisation that our time was up and that we should return to our cases and the Corporal.

At the half-way mark of our return, we were overtaken at speed by the said power-seeking person, who then gave his best impression of a learner's emergency stop and only then leaving his privileged front seat to inquire politely if we all had travel instructions for the Camp. Our answer being to affirm this, the Corporal's colour, along with his manner, changed according to the volume of his voice, which we assumed he had last used when addressing a distant enemy. Each believing that he was addressing one of the others, we all found ourselves within the rear of and clutching the upper parts of the now mobile 'screaming gearbox in search of a BLR Certificate', as it zigzagged its way into the countryside.

Not wishing to crush our mothers' lovingly packed cases and not yet fully understanding the complexities of the truck's folding seats, we remained standing to observe the passing barbed wire fencing, both on your 'Army left' and 'Army right'. The colour of September that year was 'grey' - trees, buildings and people all blended into it. We were soon to find out that the only colour change would appear as part of the verbal instructions given by the welcoming uniformed delegates and our future instructors.

The truck was now slowing down. Being nearest the back, I was nominated to find out where we would stop. *'Never volunteer'*

- who said that? Having turned in through the gate, the shuddering four-wheel frame came to a halt, causing me to put both hands on the tailboard, while at the same time swinging in most directions. It was at this time that I became dimly aware of the colourful instructions arising from below my clinging gaze, inviting me to descend and to view the surrounds.

The tailboard dropped to the accompaniment of *"Get down ere you!"* Agreeing to do so, I was soon to give that stentorian voice, now at six inches nose-to-nose, my full attention. It wore three black stripes on each arm. An important feature to note - it had a cross for a cap badge and seemed to be very cross by nature.

"What's your name boy, 'coz I need it for your gravestone? Are you trying to commit suicide by falling off a truck before you've earned your first day's pay?" Every single movement of this day was now becoming a lesson in survival and therefore one should not take the opportunity, at this stage, to return an answer / excuse to a Sergeant, without incurring his further wrath. I had been put forward as the 'sacrificial lamb', to cause the greatest impression upon the remaining contents of the truck. The mere directional wave of his arm found me escorted on the grand tour of one part of the Guardroom facilities. Climbing those wooden steps for the first time, I was ushered into a room without a view. (Later expressions come to mind i.e. *'You can't do this to me'.* *'Clang'.* *'Watch your fingers!'*) The door slammed behind me leaving only the astonished thought of, *'I didn't join for this!'*

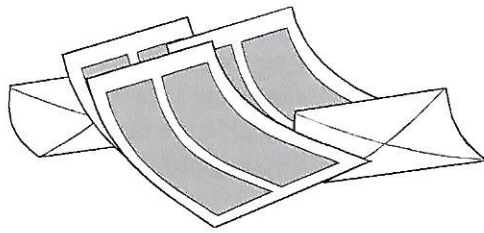
The memory of that room, although now faded and jaded, returns to mind, first its length, akin to putting me off playing darts for some time, then high up on the far wall the window of no escape. The remaining walls were bare save for the two colours. Later I would learn that these were used throughout the Camp as the 'Reveille instant colour chart awake test' - called cream and green. The door, of which I had only limited experience, appeared not to be self-operating from my side. It had one small hole, which enabled the outside guards not to see eye-to-eye with those on my side. Low to the floor was a thick flat wooden board, having at one end a wooden pillow block. This suggested the means for a bed, should one decide to stay overnight. I cannot remember a bucket.

Part of the wooden floor appeared to have an irregular stain of a darker colour close to the entrance. From tales told later in time, I was assured that it was all the result of an inebriated Cook stabbing a duty Provo and that the floor mark was blood! (Check the archives or Guardroom visitors' book!) Having exhausted my powers of observation, and there being no escape committee at hand, I listened to the external sounds of the truck moving away, followed by the noise of 'boots on wood', together with 'the voice which made people disappear'. At last it was returning to open the door.

My thoughts at this point were that I should be happy to volunteer to be thrown back out through the gate, but this was not to be. As far as I could translate, I was now being encouraged to take up instant athletics (at the double) and to go deeper into this 'timber town' to rejoin the others at the HQ Company Store. My first Reunion, that of the A.N.B.A. (Arborfield New Boys' Association). They were at that time engaged in the first of many manoeuvres, by walking backwards carrying 'blankets various', sheets, denims, eating irons and a mug full of buttons, before entering the swing doors of 'F' Block and the future. I have often since wondered that if by entering the Camp one minute and being 'in the Nick' at the next this may well be a record!



OBAN LETTERS



Lou Myers (41B) writes

The 2004 AOBA Reunion was the first time that I had been back to Arborfield in over 60 years. My first impression when entering the camp, that this wasn't where I served. However early on the Saturday morning, at about 0530 hours joined a gaggle of ex-Jeeps at the original Gates and then the memories came flooding back. I was a little shocked to find that the old Guardroom was now a Garden of Remembrance, someone must have had a weird sense of humour on that one.

On finding the actual Parade Ground, I suddenly felt as if I was back home after all those years. I saw the Spiders and the Cookhouse. I saw young men on parade on the Hallowed Ground, boy were we something else? We could and did give any Guards Battalion a run for their money!

My abiding memory though, and a rather moving for me was when we paraded on the Saturday. I marched onto the old parade ground and I felt an enormous sense of pride and well being. For a moment I was a young 14/15 year old.

The reunion was in parts hilarious, like in the Barrack Room, (I'm sure our accommodation was much better all those years ago), on being woken up several times by loud snoring, one body talking and singing in his sleep and of course the Phantom Farther. The Sgts Mess Bar, either £1 a pint or completely free - I drank more on the Saturday night that I have done in many, many years. At 2am the Piper piping the bar closed??.

I actually got to meet a two old pals from my 41 times.

I would like to say a great big thanks to the members of 39, A,B and C, you made me very much at home and a couple of you were so very funny, it would be my pleasure to join you any time.

The end result was a very happy and contented AOB. So a sincere thanks to the organising committee and all the helpers.

Peter Gripton (56B) writes

Please add my congratulations to all those who worked so hard at providing such a magnificent Old Boys' Reunion this year. Sadly to be the last on the site of Rowcroft Barracks, it was memorable in so many ways. To everyone involved, it was a great effort and a resounding success - measured by the large number of ex-apprentices that gathered together for this nostalgic occasion.

On a purely personal basis, it was great to meet up with a good selection of lads from my own era, whether they were from 56B or not, many of them attending a reunion for the very first time. Far too many names to mention here, but they will know who they are! And of course, to those of you from different eras, who I have come to know through regular attendance, it was good to

meet up with you all again.

I turned up on the Friday this year, expecting to find just a few stragglers from far distances, just requiring a bed for the night before the main event of the following day. How wrong I was! The Sergeants' Mess was absolutely packed all evening, there was just a little (?) drinking going on, and the curry supper laid on hit all the right notes - especially when I lay my head down later and listened to the farts chorus!

It is sad that things have to change, not always for the best, but the spirit and comradeship shown by all that weekend will live long in my memory - thank you all, those who did all the hard work and those who came and merely enjoyed yourselves.

And now I look forward to a weekend in Norfolk, where a few of us ex-56B boys - and also a few of 'our girls' - will be gathering together once more, as we have been doing rather successfully for the past few years. Old soldiers never die - they simply get together and swap tales of old! Cheers!

Robert (Sandy) Powell (Nov '39) writes

It was fascinating - and a jog to the memory - to read in the latest OBAN (No.30) the letter written to Mrs Moss in 1955. This, along with the published prospectus, brought back many memories. However, for the life of me, I cannot remember the system by which our laundry was processed. I'm sure that Mrs Moss, having picked up after her son during his early years, would also wonder. How, for instance, is he guaranteed to have returned the same handkerchiefs, cricket shirts etc that Mrs Moss was asked to provide?

(The proffered question should encourage a few of our readers to tell us how they got their correct laundry back in their own eras! Ed.)

Cyril Luger (42B Chepstow) writes

Being a Chepstow 'brat', I do not normally read the OBAN, as it is a banned publication as far as we are concerned! *(All together now - booooo! Ed.)* However, my attention was drawn to an article (OBAN 30) by one of your contributors i.e. Johnny Johnson (56B). In it he took my name in vain on page 24 and I must take him to task for it. Although he elevated me to a WO1 (I was an AQMS at the time), he also got the name of the CSM (not RSM) wrong. It should have been CSM Walt C Smith, formerly of the Hampshire Regt.

The main content of the stories was correct, about 32 Armd Wksps in Liebenau. I could add many more about the aforesaid CSM, but one that still brings a smile to me goes as follows:

For my sins, as an ECE, the OC (Maj Roach) appointed me to oversee any electronic entertainment such as the cinema and any parade music that the regimental staff required. I was a keen audio recorder in those days and I was asked to pick a good marching tune to bring the lads on parade. I chose a rousing piece played by a German military band and belted out 250 watts *(Was that rms or rsm? Ed.)* across the parade ground (as well as the workshops and nearby village), which afterwards brought me an

accolade from the CSM. The Germans who had been listening to it in amazement finished up laughing at my twisted humour in that I had played *'We are marching against England'*, a good old German Army tune, circa 1940!

Finally, another story the CSM related to me was that he had gone on leave to a Butlin's camp. As he obviously stood out as a leader, he was appointed as a 'Blue Coat'. His duty, which he took very seriously, was to make sure all campers were in their huts by a certain time, before lights out. After that time, he went around and took names - especially of those who were 'snogging' behind the billets. This he did on several occasions and reported the names to the camp HQ next day! He maintained that they offered him a job as a 'Red Coat' when he left the Army. I am glad that the CSM in the story was neither an Arborfield nor a Chepstow boy!

Dave Perrott (49B) writes

Please let me thank each and who helped to organize and attend to my every need over the re-union weekend. It was appropriate that the final gathering should be so well attended and successful. As it is the result that brings pleasure to those who work so hard on these occasions, you should be extremely satisfied. A truly memorable event.

Frank McKenna (66C) thro' the Web

A special thank you to all the organisers and staff from all the 66 intakes for making the Reunion weekend so memorable. It was great to see Egon at the bar and to be reacquainted with old mates. John (Herbie) Cole and Andy Dixon deserve special award for their enthusiasm towards the association and its members.

Glenys Anderson with a Wife's perspective

Many years ago, as a young wife and mother, I moved into married quarters in Arborfield with my husband, for him to complete his Artificer training. We spent 2½ years there and then a further 2½ years in a hiring in Reading, as he was posted to the permanent staff of the Army Apprentices' College.

Last week I was there again, in a somewhat different guise. Still a wife and mother, but now also a grandmother, with my return being to accompany my husband to what could be the final Old Boys' Reunion at Arborfield.

We joined many other Old Boys, some with their wives, sons and daughters, others not, on a lovely summer day bright with sunshine (the odd shower or two came at appropriate times, but did not spoil the day).

The Old Boys marched proudly through the old College Gates to pause in front of the Memorial Gardens for a Drum Head service, conducted by the ATFC Padre. Then, with the Association Standard flying, they marched on parade, to the music of the REME Band – do any of you remember them playing on the Light Programme's 'Music While You Work'?

Onto the Square, heads up and shoulders back – not a missed

step between them, they marched to form up for the Review, to my eye, all young boys again. Proud and strong, with 10,000 years of service between them, they brought tears to my eyes.

After the parade we retired to the Sgt's Mess for drinks and a BBQ Lunch – what a superb feast had been prepared for us. It gave me an opportunity to meet some of the 'boys'. A few I'd heard of during my married life, one or two I'd even met. There was much telling of tales and even more photographs taken, all in an ideal setting.

On Sunday, we attended a very moving service at the Saint Eligius Garrison Church, which reminded my husband of the services that he had attended, with our children, in the now long demolished Camp Hall. It was a lovely finish to a wonderful weekend. I regretted not having attended previous reunions and my pleasure at being there with so many Old Boys is immeasurable.

Congratulations to all the young A/T's, men and women, who gave up part of their leave period to take care of us all. It is a tough act to follow. My thanks for a wonderful time that I shall always remember.

Peter McGuiggan (57B) thro' the Web

A thank you enormously for the work and dedication put into making the re-union week-end such an outstanding success. The organisation was professional in implementation and we all know that it was only this way because of the amazing efforts of the committee members. I was very impressed by the friendliness of all the organisers under such extreme pressure. Thank you once more. If only I could express similar sentiments about my time (57-60) at the AAS!

C E (Chas) Pepper (43B) writes

I thank the Association members who organised this year's Reunion, it was a splendid send-off! The moment, during the Drum Head service, when the Piper, still playing, turned and stepped off away from the service, causing the sound to recede, was extremely affecting and so appropriate. While listening to the Padre after the dinner, a memory came to me of 43B's last night in Arborfield, before going off to start our 'Man Service'. We had a little 'farewell party', I believe it was in a side room of the NAAFI. All those 'of influence' were there to wish us luck, but one speech sticks out in my mind. It came from the Padre of the day, who started discussing 'verbosity' and illustrated his subject with the following words and actions: "*A speech is like the horns of a steer.*" Then, extending his right hand, he said, "*A point here*". He then extended his left hand and said, "*A point there*". And then came the clincher – "*And a hell of a lot of bull in between!*" This had us all roaring with laughter and is something that I have never forgotten.

Bob Bradley (April 42) writes

This year is the 60th anniversary of the deaths of 52 men of the (Guards) Tank Brigade Workshop – was it the 6th or the 7th? -

records differ – when a flying bomb hit their living quarters at Ashford, Kent, on the 24th June 1944. After the Guards' Chapel incident, that was the highest number of military casualties resulting from the fling bomb onslaught.

Visiting Ashford on business recently, I had the cemetery at Lenham photographed. The pictures show the Memorial Gates manufactured by REME, the commemorative plaques and headstones of the 46 men buried there in a communal grave.

Unfortunately, the atrocious weather and lack of time prevented me from noting their names, but they certainly must have included some ex-boys. If you would like to publish the photographs in the magazine, perhaps one of the local ex-boys could obtain the names.

(As the newly installed editor, I have recently spoken with Bob and he confirms that he passed on the relevant disc of photographs to Ken Anderson at the last reunion. So we plan to include an article and photographs in the next Issue of OBAN. Watch this space, as they say! Ed.)

Mitch Mitchell (43A) writes

The sea of nostalgia's whirlpool of activity has calmed, with routine restored at the College, but still the ripples of pleasure lap upon memory's shore. A superb reunion – tributes in plenty were made during the weekend whilst adrenaline was high but, nonetheless, further accolades would not go amiss. Such dedication, sheer hard work and organisation (and the weather too!) is so very much appreciated, especially by the stalwart band of 43ers.

From start to finish, affairs ran efficiently, which must have been a great relief to the hard-working unseen – and of the seen, that smartly efficient, extremely polite and helpful assembly of young lads and lasses. Such a credit to their parents, mentors and their generation is to be applauded by us 'old sweats'. I do hope that we ex-boys, certainly we 43ers, left behind an equally good impression and are likewise a good example of our own eras.

Sunday's church service saw a goodly turnout to give thanks for the reunion and to hear such a thought-provoking sermon. The 'Grand Finale', the forthcoming last PoP at Arborfield, with just a few 'Victor Meldrews' maybe, is something to look forward to and should be a 'Glorious Twelfth', without a single grouse! The video – what a splendid idea – will no doubt rival sales of 'that book'.



The Memorial gates at Lenham Cemetary

Ah, the reunion! A resounding success and opportunity to meet old comrades and remember those things we had forgotten. A time to visit Ben Cook's last posting and pay our respects. Then on to California, with memories of diving and swimming – and losing one's PT shorts!

Arthur Ward (50B) writes

To the 'Committee of Excellence', 2004 AOBA Reunion. Thank you all for such a good time throughout that special gathering. The organisation, programme and companions were all excellent. The 'Tara' had the bar timings just right. The Band couldn't have been better and no one wanted to shoot the Cook. While many a yarn helped prop up the arm. I wonder if this tale is worth your considered attention? It's all true!

Wattie Walker (69C) thro' the Web

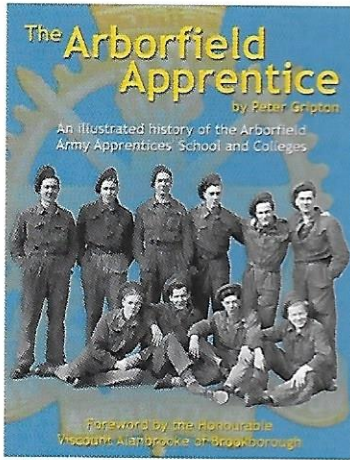
A special thank you to the cookhouse and Sgts Mess Staff who were confronted with hundreds of pissed -up jeeps at the 2004 Reunion. An admirable performance.

Tony Head (46A) writes

At our 2004 reunion, which I though was marvellous, I noticed a number of old boys wearing assorted airborne ties. I managed to speak to several, but many more escaped my clutches before I had time to corner them. The reason for my enthusiasm is that I have joined the recently formed Airborne REME Old Comrades Association and this year attended the inaugural reunion at Colchester. The AROCA is open to all serving and past REME members of the airborne forces. The current annual membership fee is a modest £4. A distinctive tie and blazer badge are available. If anyone would like further information then please contact me at The Bungalow, Kimbolton Road, St Neotts, PE19 5LB or email me at tony@stenic.dircon.co.uk.

BOOK REVIEWS

The Arborfield Apprentice - an illustrated history of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School and Colleges
By Peter Gripton 56B
ISBN 0954514203



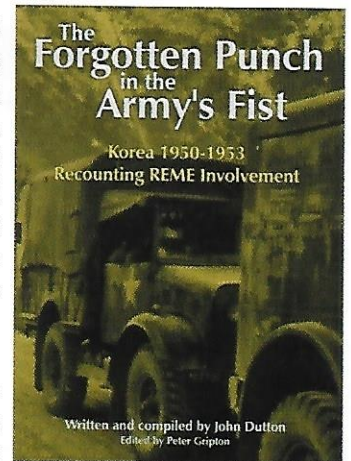
This important historical record written by ex-boy Peter Gripton was published in September 2003. With an introductory foreword by the Honourable Viscount Alanbrooke of Brookborough the book chronicles junior soldier tradesman training over a period of 60 years. Starting with the Army Technical School 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 book is published in hard back form and contains over 500 pages and more than 200 photographs

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 Arborfield Apprentice is available for just £18.50 Association Shop in the REME Museum of Technology Arborfield.

The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist
Written and compiled by John Dutton 43A
Edited by Peter Gripton 56B
ISBN 0954621816

The story of the War in Korea and of the part played by the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, REME, from 1950 to 1953 as told by various individuals of that Corps, makes fascinating reading. The support and devotion 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. John Dutton 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.



Please note that the recommended selling price for the book is £18.50 and this is the price you would expect to pay from High Street bookshops. However the book is available for just for just £12.50 to members of the Arborfield Old Boys Association, members of the British Korean Veterans Association, their families and friends when purchased from the Association Shop in the REME Museum of Technology Arborfield or from local branches of the BKVA.

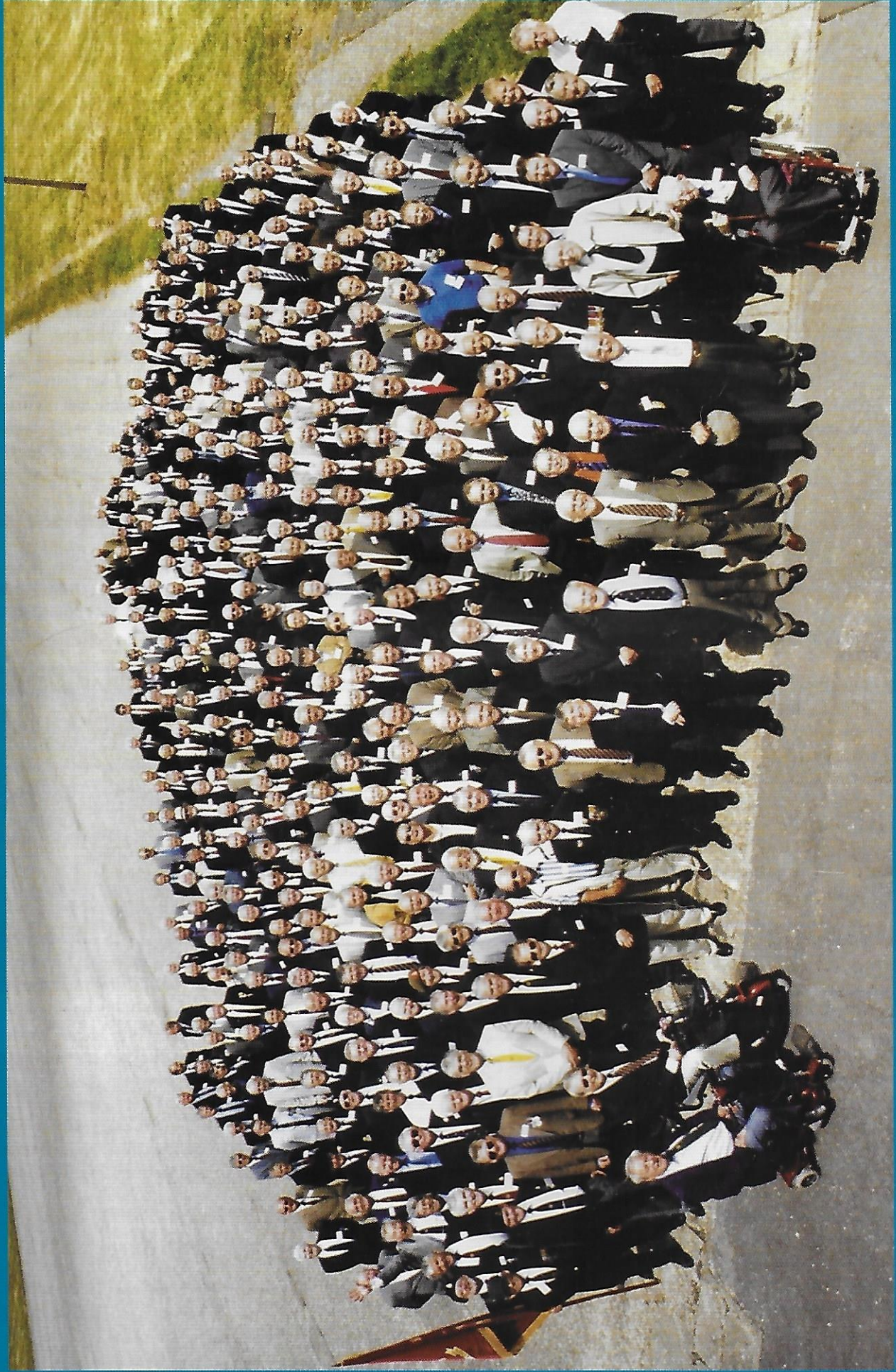
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AOBA 2004 REUNION - GROUP PHOTOGRAPH