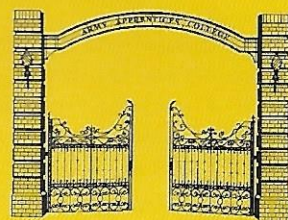


May 2008

Issue 42



O B A N



**REUNION BOOKING
FORMS ENCLOSED. RETURN
YOURS TO THE SECRETARY
WITHOUT DELAY**

**Arborfield Old Boys
Association News**

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

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Notices

Please note that the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise, of either the Editor or of the Arborfield Old Boys Association and, therefore, no responsibility for these will be accepted. All contributions and articles for inclusion in OBAN are most warmly welcomed although text in Microsoft Word format and photos/images in TIFF or high grade JPEG format are preferred. Photographs or diagrams must be of high resolution if they are to look acceptable - aim for something at least 100kb in size.

Membership of the Arborfield Old Boys Association is open to all those who served at one of the Army Apprentices' Schools or Colleges at Arborfield, between 1939 and 2004. There is a joining fee of £15.00 for life membership plus an annual subscription of £15.00. Application forms are available by post from the Membership Secretary whose name and address is shown above. Application forms are also available on the Association website www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK



The New Year saw me returning from a two-week break in a small town called Naperville, some thirty miles west of Chicago, where the weather was cold and with lots of snow. It was amazing to see how things were handled over there, the roads were cleared almost immediately – even the residential cul-de-sac where my daughter now lives. They are certainly ‘geared up’ for such cold conditions, which are obviously more prevalent than here in the southern UK. The other noticeable ‘condition’ that amazed my wife and myself was the courteous behaviour of local motorists, both to other car drivers – and to we pedestrians! It was really nice to be ‘waved across’ at road junctions – unlike our walks here at home, where we often take our lives in our hands!

It has been most encouraging recently, to have received so many contributions, in the form of both letters and articles, the majority of which seem to be from the 1939 era! The ‘pending tray’ certainly is expanding, rather than decreasing, which has led your Publications Department (the two Peters, Gibson and Gripton) to humbly beg permission from your Committee to increase the number of pages in OBANs 41 and 42 from thirty-two to forty. We do hope that you, the readers, are happy with this arrangement! OBAN certainly won’t die out due to a lack of interest, that’s for sure. And, being a 1956 latecomer, I won’t complain about the extra workload – we Jeeps were always a put-upon bunch!

This edition of OBAN is due for issue in May, in time for reunion matters to begin their annual process. For those who make it to this year’s event, I wish you all a ‘Happy Reunion’.

When I was younger, I could remember anything, whether it had happened or not; but soon I shall only remember the things that never happened.

(The above lines, written by Mark Twain, seem very fitting in my job as OBAN Editor!)

Pete Gripton, 56B

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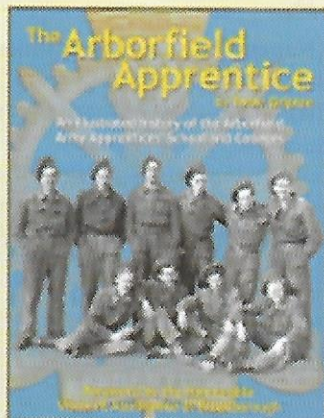
Front Cover Photograph

The Apprentice Memorial Garden at the old entrance to what is now Rowcroft Barracks, on the site of the Apprentice School Guardroom.

Back Cover Photograph

Part of the Riding School and Stables - all that is left of the original Army Remount Depot between Rowcroft Barracks and the officers’ quarters patch.

THE ARBORFIELD APPRENTICE



An illustrated history of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School and Colleges
By Peter Gripton (56B)

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, 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 with 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.

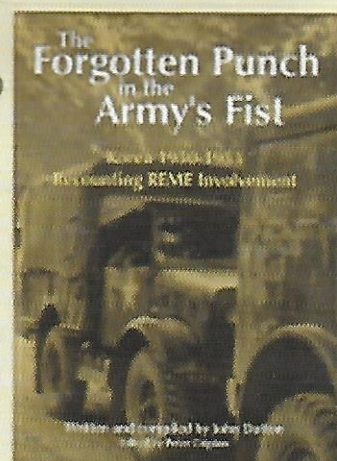
SUPPLEMENT - THE FINAL CHAPTER

A 'Final Chapter' has been written as a supplement to 'The Arborfield Apprentice' that covers the period of time encompassing the last few years of the Army Apprentice Training at Arborfield. This supplement is available free of charge to those who have already purchased the book, but we would ask for a small donation of, say, £2 or £3 to cover part of the production and postage costs.

THE FORGOTTEN PUNCH IN THE ARMY'S FIST

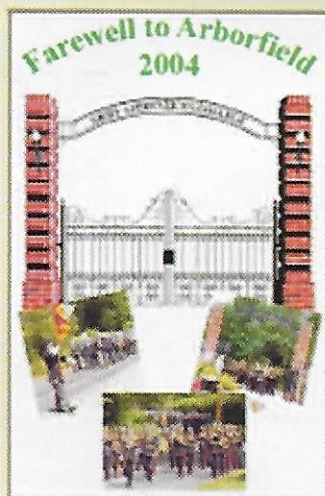
Written and compiled by John Dutton (43A) and edited by Peter Gripton (56B)

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 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.



Both of these books are available from the REME Museum Association Shop at Arborfield. Telephone: 0118 976 3223.

'The Arborfield Apprentice' is available for just £18.50 + £7.70 p&p whilst 'The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist' is £12.50 + £3.00 p&p. Cheques should be made payable to 'REME Corps Account No 2' and credit cards can be accepted for telephone orders.



FAREWELL TO ARBORFIELD 2004 VIDEO

Narrated by John Smithson

This video is a comprehensive record on film of the 2004 AOBA Reunion held at Arborfield in June 2004. It covers the Reunion from the Saturday morning to the Sunday church service. It does great justice to the last Reunion to be held on the Rowcroft Barracks site, with most of those who attended being recorded on film.

The film also includes a clip of the final Passing Out Parade on the 12th August 2004. To top and tail the movie, two black and white historic movie-tone clips of the early days of the Army Apprentices School are also included. The movie is available as a DVD or VHS video tape and can only be obtained from the Association Shop at the REME Museum of Technology in Arborfield. The cost of the DVD is £14.00 and the VHS tape is just £10.00. Please telephone the shop on 0118 976 3223 to enquire about postage charges and to place an order.

ASSOCIATION TIES

Available in the four company colours, these attractive neck ties cost just £7.50 each



LAPEL BADGE

Finally we have an attractive enamelled badge at £3.00. Please send cash and a small self-addressed padded envelope to the Arborfield Old Boys Association secretariat at Arborfield.

OFFICERS' REPORTS

Chairman's Message



The AOBA Reunion is fast approaching and is the time when we look to our Hon Sec to arrange a seamless couple of days, to meet old friends for a few pints and to swap memories. Over the years, we have been very fortunate to be guests of the Garrison, who have kindly opened their doors to us for our annual event. In particular, the WOs' and Sgts' Mess has done us proud, providing accommodation, meals (including its famous curry supper) and a much appreciated bar. We have been fortunate indeed! 'The Mess', however, is more than just a venue. Most of us recall when such Messes were our homes, as it is indeed still home to many of the serving Senior Ranks of the Garrison. Regrettably, some of our number forget this basic truth and rather let the side down, with antics that would not even be tolerated in their own homes, let alone that of one's host. The vast majority of us are most grateful to our hosts, without whom the Reunion would not work, but there is a very small minority that have not just abused this hospitality but also failed to accept they were in the wrong! This has caused our Committee to spend much time in repairing the relationship with our hosts so that this year's event could occur. We will be there to enjoy the week-end and to have a good time, but we must remember those to whom we are grateful and who deserve our respect, and through whose co-operation its happening depends. Future Reunions will be dependent on how they see us!

I look forward to seeing you in July.

Brian Hutchins

From the Honorary Secretary



Preparations are now well in hand for the 2008 reunion – meetings held, menus discussed and accommodation arrangements made. There will be a few changes this year, hopefully for the better. The main change is that the BBQ, Tea meal & AGM will be held in Bailleul Sgts' Mess. I should add that the bar will be shut, following the BBQ, to encourage members to visit the Museum, Land & Air System Branch displays and also to attend the AGM. Transport as usual will be provided for the three visits, which are strongly recommended. The other main change this year is that the annual dinner will now take place in the SEAE Regimental Restaurant. Apart from giving us much more room to spread out, it also allows a much better seating plan. I hope these changes meet with your approval - if not, please let me know post event. You will be pleased to hear that the reunion this year will be very much of a self-grown event, with the Pipe Band provided by Alec Burt and the Drum Head service being taken by Rev Cannon Bev John (66A). Hopefully the Inspecting Officer will be a past Commandant of the School (still to be confirmed). The dress code for the weekend as always is jacket and tie, particularly for the parade and Drum Head service (trainers and T-shirts are not acceptable).

I hope that many of you will be able to attend this year and make it the best reunion ever. To all of those celebrating their Golden and Diamond anniversaries - my warmest congratulations.

God Bless, Bill Cleasby, 61C

Money Matters



For a change, it has been a steady few months for me as Treasurer. The examination of our fund has been completed and was approved by the Chairman at our last management meeting. There are still a number of members who need to pay their annual subscriptions for 2008 and I would be grateful, if you are an offender, that you please send them directly to me as soon as possible. I look forward to seeing you all at this year's Reunion.

All the best to you all, Mike Davis, 60B

Web Developer's Report



As I write, we are about to move our website. Don't worry, the address is still the same – . This will always be the official website for AOBA. We now have over 1,700 photos for our enjoyment – with many more yet to add, either sent in by old boys or donated by the REME Museum.

We thus ran out of space and the current host wanted to charge too much for an increase. Then Dave Cosway (65C) introduced a contact willing to offer us sufficient space to host our website free of charge. They are offering us enough to host around 8,000 photos – more than enough for the next couple of years! On behalf of the membership, I send a big 'Thank You' to Dave - and I'll buy him a beer in July! When the site is up, a small notice at the bottom of the home page will say 'Sponsored by Host-Helix', with a link to their site. (If you need a host for your website please take a minute to check them out.)

As I am still on dial-up, moving the site will be a challenge, but I hope it will not be down for too long – the benefits far outweigh the short-term disadvantages. I am committed to a number of tasks – including the 'Roll of Honour' and 'Awards Photos', presently unachievable due to lack of space. Now I will crack on with these, hopefully before we meet in July. I'm pleased to report a number of old boys are working away in the background, obtaining lists from their years – but I am still looking for volunteers. So if you are interested in becoming a co-ordinator for your year, get in touch and I'll run through what's involved.

As ever, the Forum continues to provide a friendly environment for banter – long may it continue. My thanks go to all who use it – and if you don't – why not? I look forward to seeing as many as possible in July – and to those unable to make it, just send in the loot and we'll have a drink on you!

God Bless,

David (Tich) Schofield 65A

Recruiting and Membership



The good news is that since the last Reunion, twenty-six new members have joined the Association. Sadly, due to ill health, six members have had to resign, while in the same period, four of our members have passed away.

Best regards, Fred Mills, 51B

MORE YESTERYEAR MEMORIES

by David Howlett, 56B

Whilst serving with 94 Locating Regt RA, Workshop REME, in Celle (BAOR) in the early sixties, my 'Tiffany' came into the Radar Shop and shouted – "*Who wants a job?*" At a loose end, I piped up, "*What job's that, Staff?*" He explained, "*Wiring up the Regimental Bus with new indicators. The 'Sparks' are too busy getting all the kit on the road for a forthcoming exercise – so we've been asked to do it*". "*Yep, I'll do it*", I replied. As a young L/Cpl tradesman, I was always keen to extend and enhance my technical knowledge and, being a Radar Mechanic, later re-christened as 'Technician', there were times when there was a distinct lack of work. We were each assigned to a specific radar set, which was 'yours' for the duration – mine being a 3Mk7(F) Mortar Location Radar No.225 – so if you kept up with the routine maintenance and were quick to repair the occasional faults, then time was on your side. This is when I used to be on the look out for something else to do.

I already had the 'fruit machine contract' in the REME club, where the ASM would tell me from time to time that the club profits were down – and would I 'doctor' the machine! In those far-off days, machines used electromagnets on each individual wheel; I could thus make the necessary adjustments to the magnetic operation, to either increase or decrease the win rate. Looking back now, I could have made a packet – but the threatened wrath of the ASM put paid to that thought! Helping the Vehicle Mechanics (VMs) was always a good choice, as there was a chance you would learn something new that would come in handy when working on your own car. In 1961, mine was a yellow and white 105E Ford Anglia – you may recall the rear screen that slanted inwards, rather than the normal outward sloping one. Mind you, most of the work then was on *Champs*, those squat and sturdy jeep-like vehicles. Sadly, the large 'B' series *Rolls-Royce* engine, plus a six forward and reverse gear box, meant there was little in common with my little old banger.

A satisfying days work was always to be had with the Ancillaries and General (A&G) section, working alongside the Workshop Blacksmith, a long-service Sergeant. Work would come in – all

bent, battered and twisted; but by the end of the job it would look, after a liberal coating of olive green paint – as good as new. It was working alongside this Sergeant where I learned one of life's essentials, "*If you're not sure as to what to do, son – just ASK!*" – he would say. In other words, don't go on blindly doing what you think needs to be done. If you are 'green' on the job, the chances are that you will do it wrong and it will take hours and money to put right – a huge waste of time and resources.

Back to the story. It was an old coach, I can't even remember the make, but was of 1950 vintage powered by, from memory, an AEC engine. It could have been the AV590 9.6 litre diesel, which as a matter of interest was installed in the first London Transport 'Route-master' RM1 in 1954 – 105E eat your heart out! Big comfy, if not luxurious, passenger seats abounded in the rear of the coach, but the driver's cab, which was extremely sparse, gave the impression that he had been 'sent to Coventry' – or was suffering from some contagious disease. This is because he sat in splendid isolation, starboard side – front, adjacent to the engine.

Anyway, there was a requirement to fit new traffic indicators – commonly known then as 'blinkers' – to get the bus up to German traffic regulations. The current fit was the old-fashioned UK-style 'semaphore' indicators – do you remember them? The arm that shot 'out and up' and lit up? Then when cancelled, would drop down and slot nicely away? Well that was the theory, if you were not doing more than 40 mph into the wind! At this speed, it would definitely not recover. If turning right – no problems – stick your arm out of the cab, getting it soaked if it was raining, and flick it back down. But, if turning left, you have a bit of a problem. You don't have a long enough left arm, so you have to slow down until the indicator recovers and drops back into its housing. My Dad had the same problem with his old '49 Ford Prefect. I can just hear the chap driving behind Dad saying, "*Why does that so-and-so always slow down so much when he turns left?*"

I soon located the bus and collected the mod kit, which consisted only of the 'magic' blinker box, front and rear

indicator lamps and cab switch. The first thing to do was to position the indicators, then work out the necessary wiring loom for the fit. Then I had a bright idea. I'd better take the bus out on a road test! Not really required, but no doubt I would come up with some plausible reason if asked "*Why?*" Subsequently, with the work ticket signed up, I climbed into the cab. The first thing that struck me was there was hardly room to swing a cat and the comfort factor was zero – definitely 'downscale' to that for the passengers in the rear. From memory, there wasn't a dashboard as such – just a large speedometer and a bank of switches for this and that. But there was a very large gear-stick, and below that, I was soon to learn, was a 'crash' gearbox. Thank God I had previously driven the *Commer* Radar wagon on exercises, as well as the *Gunners' AEC Matador* when I had the chance – both also having crash gearboxes.

One thing I recall, when the engine was warmed up, and you stopped and went into neutral, the engine would turn over in a distinct pattern. There would be a mild 'rev up', followed by the revs falling away, then a cyclic repeat of the same – the periodicity being about six seconds. This action would send a vibration down the bus, probably due to the large engine flywheel. This would give the bus a rhythmic shake, which the driver could feel through the seat of his pants, and was more pronounced when the bus was empty. A throaty roar from a 9.6 litre AEC diesel engine is something special, as supporters of the old *Route-master* will tell you. Not so pronounced in the comfort of the passenger section of the coach, but very audible in the driver's cab. So much so, you couldn't hear yourself think, never mind speak!

I felt really chuffed when I pulled out of camp, to have my bus drive around Celle – all that was missing was the busman's hat! Vintage English coaches in Celle, or anywhere else in Germany come to think of it, were not a common sight in the early sixties. So my old charabanc got lots of puzzled looks, and probably a laugh or two, on its way round town. If it could have had one of those old klaxon hooters – that would have been the crown and glory. It bounced and rattled, driving down the cobbled streets – there were still many in

Celle in those days. It was soon back to camp, with the mandate to get the job done.

The big headache was making up the wiring harness. I know I had started out in life at Chepstow (*Hiss, Boo! Ed.*) as an Electrician, Vehicle and Plant (V&P) – but my apprenticeship syllabus had excluded making up coach wiring harnesses. I wonder if the RAOC Stores Section can supply me with a 40 x 10 feet ply-board to make up the same? – No? – ah well. After making up the harness, piecemeal, over the next few days, a successful ‘out of vehicle test trial’ was carried out. After a lot of drilling, fixing and – yes – lots of rude four-letter words, it was done. Looking back, I can remember the bus had a very low road silhouette, and it was pretty

damn difficult to get under certain parts of the bus. Being a mere Radar Mech, I did not have much say in using the VM’s workshop vehicle pits; good job I was still relatively slim then, as to get under the bus was a tight squeeze – it would be impossible with my portly figure now!

Another road test around town and down the main highway towards Hanover, where I could clock up some speed – which was a must! Guess what, at 60 mph you could cancel the indicator left or right and it would actually switch off! I didn’t have to slow down, or stick my arm out of the window to cancel it! The wonders of modern science eh?

p.s. Another thing that used to anger my old Dad, when driving his old *Ford Prefect*, were the windscreen wipers. These were run off the exhaust manifold

of the old type *Ford E93A* Side-valve engine, which fed a servo-brake assist vacuum cylinder. This meant that, if you were in top gear going up hill, and gradually slowing down, your windscreen wipers would slow down in sympathy and soon stop! All of a sudden you are driving blind – Jesus! OK, quickly drop a gear, but then the wipers would go into ‘take-off mode’, until you re-adjusted the wiper rate knob – oh what fun it was to drive in those ‘good old’ days?

(Can’t remember the bus Dave, but I sure do recall the old canary-yellow Anglia! I’m pretty sure that I have even mentioned it myself, during my own recollections of those early days, just after all the basic training at Arborfield. Ed.)

Please support

The REME Association Shop

The REME Association Shop is situated at the entrance to the Museum on Isaac Newton Road in Arborfield, Reading. We sell everything from Ties to Tankards, Prints to Plaques and Clothing, including uniform items. We also provide a Medal Mounting and Engraving service. For full details of our stock, please visit our website at www.rememuseum.org.uk

Opening Times
Monday - Thursday 0900 - 1630
Friday 0900 - 1600
Sunday 1100 - 1600



Orders can also be made by telephone on 0118 9763223 or by email to association.shop@rememuseum.org.uk
All major credit cards accepted except American Express. Cheques also accepted.

*** New Items ***

Socks in Corps Colours • Ladies Scarves with REME Badge
Cravats in Corps Colours • Knitted Scarves in Corps Colours - College Style

BENEVOLENCE

Please remember that the AOBA maintains a **Benevolence Fund**, for the benefit of any Old Boy who may be in distress or going through hard times. If you know of any case where the Fund can be of assistance, please contact the Honorary Secretary at the earliest possible opportunity.

Memories of my years as a Lecturer, 1969 – 1990 (Part 2)

by Chas E Pepper (43B)

(This completes Chas Pepper’s memories of his work as a Lecturer in Further Education. Ed.)

The Diesel Pump Room

For a long period, I was in charge of the Diesel pump room, mainly because no one else wanted to smell of the calibrating fluid used in the test equipment. I found the work interesting. Supporting me was a college technician, who was equally enthusiastic about Diesel engines and the pair of us attended courses in the summer holidays, at places like *CAV* or engine makers. But, for a short period in demonstrations (demos) and pump testing, he would only

do what he was asked to do - most unusual! I made some enquiries and found that the technicians were ‘working to rule’. It seemed that a certain lecturer was leaving his class in the care of a technician and going off. It was peculiar to work with someone who never spoke, but just looked at you and would not move until asked to do so. Fortunately it did not last long, but it was a strange experience.

Allied to Diesels was ‘Compressed Air Brakes’, another subject with few volunteers to teach it. We had fun lifting people, seated on a chair, using a brake actuator to demonstrate the force

generated in a 6” cylinder. All sorts of rigs were built as European Regulations kept adding bits to the systems. I tried to get it over to students that Fuel Injection Equipment, Air Brakes and Electrics all had the same principles, i.e. force, pressure and resistance, which usually resulted in a dispute comparing the three things - they could only see the physical parts.

There was a class, separate from technical studies, called General Studies

(GS), which was intended to add civilising knowledge to the rude workers. Unfortunately, it was completely unstructured and whoever taught it

displayed all the 'bees in their bonnet', much to the annoyance of students. The best GS teacher I knew was a large, gentle, and elderly man, whose classes were well behaved. I asked him why so? *"Everyone loves a good story and I read tales from my library"*. It was true. When I got lumped with a GS class, I read them a story and had a little discussion afterwards and we all left in the best of moods. The time came when this old chap left and young female undergraduates took over. One bright pair put great emphasis on sex instruction (!) until the adolescent boys said that they had had enough theory, *"What about some practical?"* This was followed by roars of rage all round, *"Sexist beasts etc."*

At one time an ex-Merchant Marine engineer was given a GS class and he opened his lesson with, *"What shall we talk about?"* Naturally, the response back came - *"Sex!"* *"Right oh then, let's start with syphilis and clap"*. Unsurprisingly, interest faded quickly. It was reported to me as tutor that a young woman was having a lot of trouble with a particular class, not normally troublesome, and she asked for help. The solution was to teach her to read micrometers and vernier calipers and get her to help those students, when on Workshop Investigation, to use these instruments. It worked and there was no more trouble, as respect for her had increased. The GS problem was solved by the introduction of a Communications Certificate, taught from a syllabus.

A barrel of laughs?

There are writers who portray education as a barrel of laughs all day.

Personally I never found it so – just a wry grin occasionally as so much time seemed to be spent in preparation, often taking longer than the lesson itself. This would be followed by marking, often in one's own time, to keep things clear for the next day. What was interesting was the curious sorts of behaviour that arose. Once, while in the Staff Room, an excited person broke into my reveries, shouting that Class so-and-so (the rowdies) were in a room UNSUPERVISED! I went there, opened the door, and there they were, quietly doing private study. Quiet that is until I walked in; then heads came up and the racket started. *"OK"*, I said, *"I'll wait outside. If you need me, call me"*. Heads went down and peace reigned once more. The 'general alarm' must

have got around, because another lecturer came steaming down the corridor, swept past me and straight into the room - bang - war was declared! I crept away leaving behind me shouts of *"Shut up"*, *"Sit down"* and the like. Some time later I read a story by a great author, of how he had attended a circus in Cairo. Everything was peaceful until some figures entered the hall. An immediate scuffle broke out and these people were ejected and peace was restored. Inquiring about the cause of the upset, he was told, *"Oh, it's the police, they always cause trouble so we throw them out!"* Now I wonder if — ? Perhaps it is wiser not to think about it!

During one evening class I was writing on the blackboard, turned around and found the class paying an unusual, deep interest in what I am saying. *"Hello, what's up?"* Right at the rear of the class I saw it - a student with a car tyre around his neck and a pathetic look on his face. He threw the tyre onto the ground and I said, *"Put it back where it came from"*. The reply came that he didn't put it on his neck etc. When I asked the question, *"Who did then?"* the class looked on passively and, clearly, identification of the culprit was not going to be given. The awful thing was that I could sense that, if things were not handled properly, a serious matter could develop. So in the end I took the tyre away. I later spoke to 'the victim', who was really the butt of his harder classmates' pranks and warned him not to be too soft. His reply was that he was only nineteen, so I felt I had better leave it at that.

Slide-rules were 'all the rage' at one time and were allowed to be taken into exams. An amusing incident occurred, after the exam rules demanded that all objects that could aid the student be handed in, and this fellow called me over. He showed me his slide-rule and asked if the strange formulae on it were acceptable. He was most relieved to be told that it was Japanese writing. I could never get the hang of slide-rules and, once electronic calculators appeared on the scene, my range of work extended greatly.

Over the years, I formed the opinion that many of the boys suffered small hearing defects and, although there was a college doctor, very little help was given to them. Almost unbelievable things happened to some students: one fellow

used to trail an awful smell behind him and in time developed a dragging foot. When his boot was removed, his foot was a mass of pus and he was rushed to the hospital for treatment. Then there was the case of a boy ejected from home and living in an old car, which certainly showed in his appearance. Another boy's parents went on holiday, filled the garage with food and necessities thought applicable, locked the house against him and departed! Such events were few and far between but they certainly struck a note with me. In some classes, if questioned about a subject, they would wait until I was about to speak and then sing out, *"Wrong!"* It probably indicated the low esteem that had been learned at school. I used to listen to the boys talking amongst themselves and it struck me that, regardless of the above, they were really the 'salt of the earth'. I often meet some of them even today. Very few now work on vehicles, but use their skills in other trades.

Part of the Union

I joined the Union in my early days and became the Department's rep, with the prime intention of learning how this thing called 'Further Education' actually worked. I must admit that I back-pedaled when the aggressive stuff came up and showed enthusiasm as *'Mr Bill Sticker'*, putting up posters etc. This was the period when Unions would go on strike for no reason at all. Our idea of 'withholding labour' was on a half-day basis, so that it did not affect the days counted for pension. On one occasion, we were awarded a large pay rise – Cheers! - until we checked our pay slips. We had all gone into a higher tax bracket and were worse off by a couple of pounds! It took almost a year to get back to our original pay – dear Messrs Harold Wilson and his chancellor Dennis 'Eyebrows' Healey! Most of the active members of the Committee had political ambitions and were often seen 'on the stump' in Watford. I learned a lot from this introduction to Union activity.

Some time in the 1980s, I received what I like to think of as a 'battlefield promotion'. While passing the HOD's office, his window opened and he called me over. The Principal was also in the office, and I was asked if I would accept a Grade 2 position. Being idealistic, I said I was considering going to Garnett Training College. The Principal said something along the lines of *"A bird in the hand"* and *"Not only that, you have a*

family to think of", so I dutifully accepted. I have never heard anyone else being upgraded through an open window. There was a small amount of jealousy among the other staff, but it soon passed and we got on with the job!

Education may seem to be an unselfish process, but it is an industry whose income depends on the size and status of its rolls. Institutes can be quite predatory if their numbers fall. In our case, Hatfield Polytechnic, top of the heap, nudged Watford Tech, which then tried to take over the George Stephenson technician classes. This move failed, as it came up against our doughty HOD, who sent them off with a flea in their ear. The result was that the Tech and the Stephenson were amalgamated, spoiling the purpose of each college. The combined college was called Watford College. The staff from the old 'Tech' felt superior to us 'plebs' and contained many 'Champagne Socialists', who got a nasty shock when our sort of 'erberts began to appear in their classes. Their Principal called a meeting and told us that the job was too big for him so he was leaving. But he must have had a look at the rate for the job, then called another meeting and said he would stay on, thus leaving a queue of applicants 'spitting feathers'.

A re-organisation was underway and our HOD, Mr Turner, was eased out and

a replacement promoted from within the Department. Most of the technically minded ex-RAF bods were gone and a different type of teacher was being employed. A change of ethos was beginning. Gone was the 'rough and tumble' of the George Stephenson, everything was now being formalised. Notice was given that a Court of Discipline was now in existence. I volunteered, more out of a sense of malice aforethought than a pursuit of justice, and presented myself to the man in charge, whose response was on the lines that the Court would never sit for legal reasons - and so it proved. The first of many grand ideas to bite the dust!

Death by Committee!

'De-mock-racy' appeared, in the form of Course Committees, chaired by that course's Tutor - I was chair of two. It soon became obvious that these meetings were just chat-shops. After all, the HOD carried all the responsibilities and we, outside of our teaching, none. The outcome was that the HOD took what was useful to his duties and ignored the rest of our deliberations (as I would have done). Things went 'committee mad'. Each course was to elect a student as its Committee rep. But this soon 'died', as the meetings were to be held after classes - you'll be lucky! The usual practice at term's end was to lay out responsibilities for the next academic year, but all that

was discussed were the proposals from meetings held in the main College. Endless 'number this' and 'number that' - anyway, it caused a staff riot and we all walked out. Committees seem to be the province of those who subscribe to a certain type of political party. An adjunct to these meetings was the bestowing of 'vanity titles', which gave extra work but no extra pay. Curiously, those most energetic in Committees were sapped into it; a longing for status - or another motive perhaps,

New types of courses were introduced and the chance was taken to bring in 'Student Centred Learning'. The intention was that students did their own learning; the lecturer was just a 'resource', like a book, and must not teach unless requested to do so. Most of my work was in the old courses, sneeringly called 'Traditional', but I had to stand-in occasionally and could see what was happening - the majority of the class sat discussing 'whatever', while a conscientious few completed the exercise. Once finished, their papers were grabbed and copied. Some of the copies were so misread that they were parallels of the old '*Send reinforcements, I am going to advance*', garbled into '*Send three and fourpence, I am going to a dance*'. Students seemed to wander in and out as they pleased. The system may have worked in Universities, but it was useless with Craft students. The thing I found most disturbing was that the love of vehicle work was weakened by greater emphasis on the teaching method. Many lecturers disliked standing about doing nothing amid the conversations.

For some reason, the general standard of student declined, perhaps training schemes were taking just about anyone who applied. Anything to do with numbers, even the simplest, was a trial. Often a calculator was requested, because, as one boy said, "*I'm a modern man*", but he could not use it as he didn't even know the rules of arithmetic.

Administrative changes caused our science work to be brought back into the Auto Dept in William Street, where the lessons using magnets became utterly confused. A compass was brought in from home and it showed that all magnets had reversed polarity. Using a homemade electronic tester, we found that all metal outside of the huts was magnetised. There was a string of electricity pylons about 400 yards away

Friendship

Fame is a food that dead men eat,
I have no stomach for such meat.
In little light and narrow room,
They eat it in the silent tomb,
With no kind voice of comrade near
To bid the banquet be of cheer.

But Friendship is a nobler thing,
Of Friendship it is good to sing.
For truly, when a man shall end,
He lives in memory of his friend,
Who doth his better part recall,
And of his faults make funeral.

(The above lines were written by Henry Austin Dobson (1840 – 1921) and, to me, would provide a fitting epitaph for any ex-Arborfield boy. Ed.)

and it seemed a power line was running underground outside of the huts. Which was responsible for the magnetic field, I do not know. It was suggested that, as the huts had a ring of old-fashioned radiators, forming a loop, they may have formed a coil with its own polarity. The staff had spent years in these huts; I cannot recall any unusual illnesses, though it may have had some effect.

Time passes. Twenty years plus and my early 60s have clocked up. Students start to tell me that their Dads remember me! Wear and tear start to show. A growing dullness and increasing irritation come down onto me; I feel it is time to leave before things get worse, so I apply for 'Early Retirement', which is granted for September 1990. In many ways, I was sorry to leave, but needs must.

A time for reflection

On reflection, it would seem that all that learning and providing provisions for lessons had gradually exhausted me. The first year of my retirement was spent in taking long walks, in order to expend energy and, once seated, I would instantly fall asleep. It took me about a year to return to some form of normality. All trades have a health price attached; perhaps this is the price teachers have to pay! Well, adding my Army time to teaching time, it adds up to about 42 years of public service. Not bad really!

On the George Stephenson College crest, the motto is the advice given by George Stephenson to his son Robert, to keep him at his engineering studies.

Most staff felt the motto applied to them, not to the students. There is a great railway embankment, 1.5 miles

long, running from Watford Junction towards London. The College was built about halfway along the length, to its west, almost at its base. Railway history says that the embankment was built from the spoil from the massive Tring cutting and that the engineer in charge was the son, Robert, not George. The more sardonic staff members joked that naming the College was the first mistake of many! ahead of it, and away the loco went, much to the surprise of shoppers, through Watford.

The mighty eye of Mammon passed over the Water Lane site and, behold, 'Mr Tesco' (Jack Cohen?) did purchase it, demolishing the buildings, filling in the water trap and then building a 'Super Tesco'. Pity really, as the College did a good job for its type of student for so many years.

Personality Slot

Pete Gripton (58B) gives a brief history of life as he knew it!

Listening to some of the words in Sir Paul McCartney's wonderful *Liverpool Oratorio* gave me a little of the inspiration to pen this short career history. "Being born where you were born carries with it certain responsibilities", to quote a line in one of Paul's verses. I use his words, as he and I share a common background, in that we both attended the Liverpool Institute High School for Boys, well known to all ex-pupils simply as 'The Inny'. Another Inny old boy was George Harrison who, along with Paul, made up half of the world renowned Beatles. (Where did I go wrong?) The school motto was certainly something to live up to, written in Latin and known off by heart by every boy who ever attended – "Non nobis solum sed toti mundo nati". Liberally translated, this means "Born not only for one's self but for the whole world".

It was not a natural progression that led from the Inny to the Army Apprentices' School, more a case of being told to "go and learn a trade" (and also to move out from under my step-father's feet!). Whatever the reason, I found myself at the famous old gates one late summer afternoon in 1956, full of trepidation, as must have been felt by so many others, both before me and after me. The next few weeks went by in a blur of excitement, as I settled into the rigorous routine demanded by the boy

NCOs in charge of room J4.

(The accompanying first picture shows some of newly passed out 56B boys at 3 Batt. From left to right are Brian Mockford, Colin 'Fritz' Fry, Richard 'Ecch' Morris, Dave Howlett, Rodney 'Smudge' Smith and 'yours truly' – dig those crazy G-flogs!)



The A/T Sergeant in 'the bunk' was Edwin Fox – although not a lot of people know that! He was 'Eddie' to his peers – and 'God' to we Jeeps. Fortunately for me, he was a Scouser like myself, so perhaps I got off a little lightly as far as he was concerned. Eddie was a half-decent

footballer and played for the School. He also liked the odd night out – and made sure that we were all aware of his prowess and conquests, when he inevitably came in after 'lights out'. If Eddie was particularly upset at someone's behaviour, he would have the miscreant stood rigidly to attention in front of him and utter the famous words,

"Well, I said to myself, you PLUM!" Where that phrase came from I don't know, but it definitely stuck in the old memory bank!

The A/T Lance Jack in 'the bedspace' was the infamous Jim 'Jock' Massie. He



something about computers, as I took over responsibility for the automatic exam production and marking system, first introduced at the boys' school in the late Seventies, and later developed over most of the Army Training Organisation. The system was called 'SPEC' (Student Performance Evaluation by Computer) and survived until just about the time that I finally retired in 2000.

Most readers will know already 'what Pete did next'! I sat down and compiled the 500-page book, *'The Arborfield Apprentice'*, which details the history of apprentices' training at Arborfield, all the way through from 1939 up to the final closure of the Army Training Foundation College during the summer of 2004. In fact the book finished slightly prematurely, so I then spent a few months putting together 'the final chapter', which is available for interested readers of the book itself.

As the last of the music died away, following the final Arborfield Passing-out Parade in August 2004, I was sat alongside old mate Dave Howlett, another 56B boy. We both remarked at how sad we were that the final curtain was being pulled across the stage of the boys' school. But we also discussed at how fortunate we were, to have been able to participate, not only by attending that last parade, but also in all that had gone before over the many years of our service. It was a feeling of immense pride and satisfaction that stayed with me as I drove home after that parade.

(The second photograph shows me at a recent Reunion, sat between Jim Gardner (57A) on my right and John 'Doc' Houghton (56B) on my left. Don't we all look so serious?)

was a right little so-and-so to us all, he chased us 'from a***hole to breakfast time', if you'll pardon the phrase. I won't bore you with all the gory details, many of you will have suffered an equally rigid routine – but strangely enough, there's lots of us, including me, who'd love the chance of doing it all again! (And to be that age again of course.) Jock Massie went on to become the boy RSM who was posted before his 'PoP' – a story which hit the headlines of the national press in those far-off days.

My three years certainly flashed before my eyes – and I was destined to spend an extra eighteen months at Arborfield as, along with other 'wobbly heads', I continued some ONC training, first at 3 Batt and later at 5 Batt. Eventually of course I ended up in BAOR, shuffling between Celle and Fallingbommel – a glorious career, eh? Having been branded a 'security risk' (no, don't ask!), it was something of a relief when my nine-year point came up in 1967. Having been (or perhaps in

spite of!) working already as a military instructor at SEME Bordon since 1964, I managed to pass the entry board for a civvie instructional post.

The following thirteen years were sheer heaven, as I thoroughly enjoyed teaching and all it entailed. Being at SEME kept me in touch with the military style of life, without restricting me to its rules and regulations. I've lost count of the number of ex-boys that I met over that period, some of whom I even had the pleasure of instructing. Mostly, however, they were on the staff, amongst them such guys as Colin Drasutis, Norman Dewdney, Ted Hackett, Gerry Hincks, Wilf Hurst, Johnny Angus, Ted Beady, Bob Gregory and 'Pip' Piper – I could go on and on if time and memory permitted!

It was Colin Drasutis who put me onto the chance of a job in 'The Kremlin' (HQ SEME) and, having gained promotion, I left the teaching behind and settled down to an 'office job'. This later gave me the opportunity to learn

Pardon?

An ex-Arborfield old boy feared that his wife wasn't hearing as well as she used to and thought that she might need a hearing aid. Not quite sure how to approach her, he called the family doctor to discuss the problem. The doctor told him there was a simple informal test the husband could perform, to give the doctor a better idea about her hearing loss. "Here's what you do", said the doctor. "Stand about 40 feet away from her and, in a normal conversational speaking tone, see if she hears you. If

not, go to 30 feet, then 20 feet, and so on, until you get a response".

That evening, the old boy's wife is in the kitchen cooking dinner, while he was in the den. He thinks to himself, I'm about 40 feet away, let's see what happens. Then, in a normal tone, he asks, "Darling, what's for dinner?" There is no response. He moves closer to the kitchen, about 30 feet from his wife, and repeats, "Darling, what's for dinner?" There is still no response. So he moves into the dining room, where he

is only about 20 feet away and asks again, "Darling, what's for dinner?" But once again he gets no response.

Walking right up to the kitchen door, about 10 feet from his wife, he repeats, "Darling, please tell me what's for dinner?" When this again receives no response, he walks right up behind her and yells, "What the hell are we having for dinner?" His wife turns around to face him and says, "Ralph, for the FIFTH time, we're having CHICKEN!"

The Royal Tournament 1947 (The Toy Soldier Display)

by Bill Pusey 46A

The decision was made early in 1947 that the Army Apprentices' School, Arborfield, as it had been designated on February 1st that year, would participate in the first post-war Royal Tournament. Apprentices from 3 and 4 Divisions would fill the roles required, but those selected did not appreciate just how much work was involved. The smallest apprentices were drilled in the various movements under the eagle eye of RSM R L McNally, Scots Guards, initially on the Square and then on the football pitch between the Camp Hall and Sergeants' Mess. We were drilled on grass, so that we would become used to the feel of the tree bark that covered the floor area at Olympia. A select group was taken and given tuition, to provide a taste of the full parade in restricted areas. I recall going to the Temperance Hall (now defunct I believe) in West Street, Reading, adjacent to what was then the Co-operative Stores. Here, I performed with my colleagues on stage. On another occasion, we presented a full display at a fete in the car-park of a local town centre, which I am now fairly certain was High Wycombe. Perhaps one of the other 102 toy soldiers can remember the location more accurately?

However, the greatest adventure was the three weeks we spent in Olympia, living in partitioned rooms on the balcony of one of the lesser halls, being fed at a level we had not experienced before! We also enjoyed rising to a later *Reveille* at 0730 hours, with parades mainly consisting of rehearsals, both inside and outside of the main arena and last, but by no means least, the



Tournament pay of one shilling and ninepence a performance! On Wednesdays and Saturdays, there were matinees to be performed and, on these special days, we were given the princely sum of three shillings and sixpence. Of course, these payments went into 'credits' as usual.

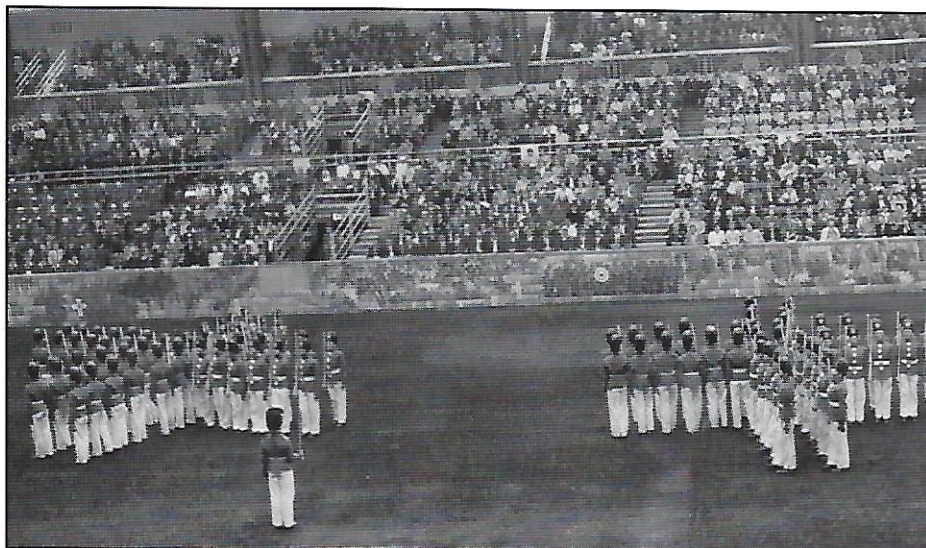
At every performance, there was always someone very distinguished in the Royal Box. When Queen Mary, accompanied by her granddaughter Princess Margaret, came, the Toy Soldiers lined the red carpet and, for the first time in my life, I saw members of the Royal Family in the flesh. Previously, like most people, I had only seen them on film, during visits to the cinema. Princess Margaret would have been sixteen years of age and appeared precisely as one of those princesses depicted in the fairy tales of story books. She had a flawless complexion, lovely

hair, a beautiful face and a perfect figure. I think she took the breath away of every member of the Guard of Honour - she certainly took mine!

I used to spend most of my time playing chess with one of the managers from the local *Lyons Teahouse*. One day, while doing so, I was told by one of the reserves that a snap rehearsal had been called and that I had been listed as absent. I immediately got into my Toy Soldier uniform and rushed to the hall, where RSM McNally was just commencing the big build up to rehearsal. I marched up to him and said, "*A/T Pusey reporting for rehearsal duty, Sir! I was playing chess and did not hear the parade call. I'm sorry, Sir!*" He fixed me with those clear blue eyes, blinked just the once, then ordered, "*Fall in!*"

I heard nothing more about the incident and have come to the conclusion that never before had the RSM received an apology from an apprentice on parade. It had left him completely nonplussed. I may be wrong, but I like to think that was the case. Anyway, it is one of several memories that I have of the Royal Tournament of 1947.

(The above article was first published in OBAN 10. It is included here as one of a series of 'archive items', for the benefit of members who have only recently joined the Association, to show a sample of the material published in our magazine over a large number of years - long may it continue! The accompanying photographs are from the archives. Ed.)



Modernising Training

by Colonel B A J Burnett, Chief of Staff, College of Electro-Mechanical Engineering

The Defence College of Electro-Mechanical Engineering (DCEME) formed in April 2004, following the Defence Training Review (DTR). It brings within one organisation most of the Phase 2 and Phase 3 electro-mechanical training across the three Services, in preparation for the transition to a Defence Training Academy, with the CIS and aeronautical streams, at St. Athan in South Wales, under a public private partnership with the *Metrix* consortium. I must add that there are a raft of assumptions in that last sentence that are not yet formally decided nor contracted for, as I write this some two months before publication! DCEME includes the three REME schools: REME Arms School, SEAE and SEME. In addition, it has the Royal Naval School of Marine Engineering (RNSME) at HMS Sultan in Gosport and No 4 School of Technical Training (4SoTT) at St Athan (the equivalent RAF school for ground engineering trades).

DTR is likely to bring tremendous change to REME training. To characterise how it is today: we have a cadre of committed and experienced instructors delivering training which, from all the feedback we get, is delivering what the front line requires today, *Vesper Thorneycroft*, as the training deliverer at Arborfield and Bordon, has greatly improved the efficiency with which that training is delivered, increasing output to a level that would otherwise have been unaffordable to the Army. But we have difficulty finding the money to invest in modern training techniques and modern training aids, in modern facilities to keep the training up to date and meeting students' expectations. The technical training accommodation and living accommodation at Arborfield and Bordon is mostly in a poor state and the priorities for Army funding cannot solve estates issues in the short term. So training is showing its age and unaffordable to modernise 'in situ'.

DTR will bring modern training facilities in a new build, much like a college campus, which will set the tone for perhaps the next 20 or 30 years. Today's regime has REME soldiers doing an intensive 14 weeks of Phase 1 training and then up to say 18 months (depending on trade) in SEAE or SEME learning their trade, being taught largely by civilians. This long period of reduced military contact does not help the inculcation of a

military ethos. Is there an alternative to such long Phase 2 training? The evidence from the DTR competition is that training can be delivered more quickly with modern computer-based techniques, tailored to individual learning styles and delivered at a pace that suits them. This will enable us to get the soldiers through their training more quickly and out to units - which both the Army and individuals want.

Whilst most of the training to meet the Operational Performance Statement (the definition of what the REME soldier has to achieve in the field) is delivered in our trade schools, there has always been an element of workplace (or 'on the job' Ed.) training in the equation. This will continue, and may increase, as we ask our NCOs and senior tradesmen to take on a more formal role in coaching junior tradesmen in units. I expect training material to be available through the Defence Intranet or Internet to support this. It will allow REME soldiers to update themselves, do revision or complete pre-course training, before going back to a trade school for a course under the DTR regime - I would like to get some material available sooner.

We have had a taste of modern training techniques. The new Engineer Tank System training solution has been installed at SEME in Building 84. This £5M project uses the most up-to-date computer simulation packages, video and emulation hardware, to deliver a ground-breaking learning package for those tradesmen attending the *Titan* and *Trojan* Maintainer Course. Other new equipments, such as *Terrier*, *Panther* and the new *MAN ERF* Support Vehicle, will all utilize e-learning products. Meanwhile at SEAE, we are preparing to deliver Levels 2 and 3 BOWMAN maintainer training, using state-of-the-art Computer Based Training (CBT) media. Further developments, including the expansion of the Defence Learning Portal (DLP), will see much of the courseware being made available via the Defence Intranet.

DCEME has two CBT learning environments, where students can access learning media outside of the formal teaching times. The 'Buzzing Hub' project at RNSME and the Open Campus at SEAE are giving students a taste of the future learning environment. Within the next year I expect the RN engineering

technician students to each be issued with a 'wireless enabled' PDA, which will give them access to all their course material and allow 2-way communication with their instructors. We did support an Army trial of a tablet-PC and PDA for recovery mechanics at SEME. Students successfully used a PDA to calculate an estimated pull and also to guide them through a Foden cab tilt procedure - the latter was new to them. It proved the principle, but raised the inevitable questions of robustness and visibility in all light conditions. We will keep pushing forward with new techniques, where they add value, across our course schedule, as a pre-cursor to DCEME's transition into the DTR solution at St. Athan.

DCEME's three funding streams are, in principle, hypothecated 'Army', 'Navy' and 'Air Force', but once we get in-year then it is no longer an issue and we have been able to use one school's facilities for the benefit of another. This is helping all three Services, but particularly REME. For example, armourers' pass rates were falling, because we were not recruiting people with good enough hand skills to achieve the required level in the time. We were able to put in place pre-course training at RNSME for them. We have also put some basic engineering training in the MSEC(L) course for REME young officers, by adding a module at RNSME.

I have focused mainly on new training techniques in this article, but of course the reality of life in a training organisation is that it is all about the people - both instructors and students. Many of you will be aware of the tremendous effort that has gone into reinforcing the system for welfare and care of trainees. All Army staff on assignment now undertake formal induction training at the ARTD School of Leadership Support. For the serving readers, please consider seriously a posting to one of the schools if offered - it can be professionally really rewarding and, whatever level you are at, you will have an impact on the next generation of REME soldiers.

(I am indebted to the Editor of Craftsman magazine - and Col Burnett - for their permission to reproduce this 'Guest Editorial' from the October 2007 edition of that esteemed publication. I hope readers of this magazine will find it of interest. Ed.)

Via Bordon and BAOR to Baghdad

by John Smithson, 46B

(This concludes the tale started by John Smithson in OBANs 36 and 38)

Eventually the day of redemption neared and our release from Chepstow became imminent. By now, we of 46B looked forwards with more than the usual degree of anticipation. A relegation period of one intake, imposed upon us after our arrival from Arborfield, had now been well and truly served and it was time to see what the real Army had to offer. And so, early in the spring of 1951, we en-trained as they say) to sample the delights of 3 Central Workshops, Bordon. The camp consisted of 'Sandhurst Block' barracks, four brick-built blocks linked by a central cookhouse, all of which are still standing today. A short march to the workshop area and our skills were soon put to work. We had left Chepstow as 'Electricians, Vehicle and Plant (V&P)' and vehicle repair was one of three central specialities. Earth-moving machinery repair was also undertaken and I know of one National Serviceman (NS) who managed to spend most of his service in putting to rights a certain piece of JCB hardware - and that seems to be the only task he had in his two years! Time passed pleasantly enough at Bordon; our skills were well used and, after only a few months time, a sympathetic Wksp WOI had made sure we sat and passed a locally-set Second Class Electrician V&P exam. "I wouldn't give it to the NS lads", he told us, "they would never pass it". Praise indeed!

The usual NAAFI, Women's Institute and Army Kinema Corporation delights were in ample supply and, with the proximity to London, *Creamline* coaches were only too willing to provide the inevitable 48-hour leave transportation facility. Long gone now is the Longmoor Military Railway (LMR) branch line, which linked Liss to Bordon. Built as a training railway and run by the Royal Engineers (REs), the line was in constant use during two World Wars for shifting supplies. There was plenty of gleaming brass to be buffed on those old steam engines, especially the pride of the fleet, 'General Gordon'. Just before the LMR closed in the late sixties, a certain kind of railway fame came to those dusty wooden platforms, in the shape of a



comedy film shot 'on location'. Starring the 'Ooh Missus' lines of Frankie Howerd, this film was 'The Great St Trinian's Train Robbery'. (Pete Gripton gave a potted history of the LMR way back in OBAN 26.)

One day, the routine at 3 Central Wksp was interrupted by the news that a few of the electrical fraternity had been selected to attend one of the early Electrician Control Equipment (ECE) courses at Arborfield. In due course, we presented ourselves at No.5 Radar Training Battalion, Hazebrouck Barracks. What a cumbersome title for what eventually became, simply, the School of Electronic Engineering (SEE). As most of you will know, the *Centurion* tank was the first to have gun stabilising equipment fitted and therefore needed a high level of maintenance. I had quite a high regard for the early sets we trained on, especially with their thermionic valve-driven amplifiers. We only had one tank at 5 Btn, which would be driven across a series of concrete ramps, in order to demonstrate the stabilising effect on the gun's position. Eventually our skills had mastered the intricacies of the equipment and so we bade farewell to Hazebrouck and took up temporary residence at neighbouring Depot REME, at Poperinghe Barracks. Now we really began to split up and, although most of the course went to BAOR, others had home postings. But from now on, my contacts with old 46B buddies became less and less, as we took up residence in

postings all around the globe. Most of us were posted to Light Aid Detachments (LADs), attached to tank regiments of various standings and fancy titles. As for myself, I never made acquaintance with any of the Royal Tank Regiments, 1 to 4, whatever they were like.

Serving in BAOR

My first posting was to 32 Armoured Wksp at Luneberg in north Germany, a pleasant and mediaeval town situated on



the edge of Luneberg Heath, an area of state protected parkland. We were constantly told to keep tank tracks to the more muddy parts of the heath. At the conclusion of WW2, Field Marshal Montgomery took the surrender of the German Armed Forces at a site on Luneberg Heath, which is now marked in suitable fashion with a plaque commemorating that moment and occasion. We found ourselves in a garrison town, with two familiar Sandhurst block type barracks and an

airfield. We had plenty to do in our work and play, with never a dull moment. We shared the accommodation with the 8th Hussars and the Royal Scots Greys, with the town centre only a short walk away, a most pleasant existence indeed. The only disturbing element would be the occasional sound of rioting Troopers, when members of either regiment would smash up the others' NAAFI! As a break from routine, a piece of 'exotic' machinery would occasionally come in for servicing. This was a pre-war Mercedes touring car, of the type that Hitler would ride in when addressing the masses. Everything about it was chromium plated, including the control



rods under the bonnet and floor. It had been confiscated from the German Army Divisional Commander at the end of the war and was now the property of the Divisional Commander, 7 Armoured Division.

Eventually all good things must come to an end and I was posted to the LAD attached to the 7th Hussars at Fallingbostal. They also were situated on the edge of Luneberg Heath, next door to another Cavalry regiment, The Queen's Bays. By now I was a full



Corporal, ECE. However, my skills were still received with a certain amount of suspicion, as the tank regiments were only just receiving *Centurions*. Most of the armament at the time still consisted of *Sherman* M10 tanks, diesel-powered



and reluctant to start on cold mornings. Thus, most of the winter mornings, up to NAAFI break at least, was spent in a mutual towing ritual, punctuated by clouds of black smoke, as another reluctant *Sherman* burst into life. All this tank effort in Germany was of course to act as a deterrent to the big 'Russian Bear', encamped not too far away, on the other side of the heath! I fear that in any conflict, we would have been badly outnumbered. Sometime later, another posting came my way, this one was within walking distance - to the next-door regiment, Queen's Bays, 2nd Dragoon Guards. There was an imbalance of control equipment



technicians (yes, *ECEs* became *CETs*!) between the regiments and Queen's Bays simply had more *Centurions*. Life improved immediately, as I received my third stripe shortly after my arrival and, as most of you will have experienced, the social life in a Cavalry Sergeants' Mess is well worth sampling!

Fifty tanks is the strength of a Tank Regiment in the field and we were soon exercising these monsters on the permitted areas of Luneberg Heath. Mostly, the gun stabilising equipment worked well, including the valve amplifiers. Constant adjustment was required to keep it all in trim and the

fitting of some twenty-odd 'trim pots' did not help. Leave seemed quite plentiful, interspersed with various dubious excursions to the *Reeperbahn* district of Hamburg, with our limited cash resources. The trick was to see just how long a bottle of madly overpriced German beer could be made to last!

Leave to the UK was determined by the allowance of three annual travel warrants. By train and ferry, these journeys were major undertakings, especially to those living in the North of England. The three ferries, namely 'Vienna', 'Empire Wansbeck' and 'Empire Parkestone', did nothing but cross the North Sea, Harwich to the Hook of Holland. I learned that ships with the prefix 'Empire' were captured German boats, while the 'Vienna' was a pre-war railway steamer. On board, the ship's Commandant would remind us all, on the Tannoy, that the port side was the left-hand side as the ship is sailing. In the morning, several regimental puffs on the mike, to ensure its working order, would preclude the announcement that it was now 6.30 and 'Reveille'. "Get up, fold your blankets neatly and leave the troop deck tidy".

Time passed pleasantly enough at 'Fally' until one day came word that the whole regiment would be posted back to the UK. It was usual for LADs to stay with their regiments and so it came to pass that we should re-appear at Halliwell Barracks, Tidworth in the near future. Eventually we de-trained at Tidworth Station and took part in a 'march in' to our new home, accompanied by the Regimental Band. Further plans unknown, we all took two weeks 'disembarkation' leave. Upon returning, we gathered in the Cookhouse to be told the news that some welcomed, but others not. The news was that the Regiment and LAD would be shipped to Aqaba in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, during the coming weeks, and that preparations would begin at once. A group of REME would constitute an advance party, leaving shortly and thereby qualifying for a further bout of 'embarkation' leave. The party would have the privilege of flying out to Fayid in the Canal Zone, pick up a collection of 'B' vehicles and accompany them to Aqaba. An enormous ordnance dump at Shandur would provide these vehicles and we would load them on to transport ships known as Landing Ship Tanks (LST), while our armoured vehicles would arrive later.

First flight

My first introduction to this great adventure was a few days stay in the Tottenham Court Road deep shelter, a disused tube station, from there we embussed to Stansted Airport - then just a collection of huts with a solitary runway, not a tourist in sight. Oddly enough, Stansted was the home of *Scottish Airways* and they ran a fleet of *Avro-Yorks* a civilian version of the *Lancaster* bomber. This was to be my very first flight of any description, so everything was novel. Eventually we filed aboard and were no sooner seated than the WRAF stewardess detailed two likely lads to assist her. We taxied to the end of the runway, where all four engines were thoroughly revved, with a great display of bone-shaking vibration. We left on a gloomy autumn day, but were soon above the cloud cover and enjoying a sunny blue sky. Every hour or so, the Captain would send round a note describing our position and progress. Occasional local landmarks like the Eiffel Tower would be mentioned, but regrettably not seen due to the cloud cover.

For the first few hours, the sun came in through the starboard windows, until some very observant passenger of a scientific bent suddenly announced, "*We are going back*". "*What do you mean?*" said we. "*Well, haven't you noticed that the sun is now coming through the port windows?*" In other words, the aircraft had made a 180-degree turn and we were flying back to whence we came. This was confirmed by the Captain shortly afterwards, by another note telling us that number three engine had lost some oil pressure and therefore we were returning - the technicality of 'feathering' was mentioned. So it was that we found ourselves back at gloomy Stansted, with a long wait before another *Avro-York* could be readied; we were very late for supper at Valletta in Malta.

Aqaba is at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, at the top of the Red Sea. When we had filled our LST, we set sail and were due to arrive one sunny day, some days later. Those of the 'Bright and Early Brigade' duly assembled on deck to watch the docking. The ship would dock bow first, where the doors gave access to the vehicle deck. A small group of us assembled, along with a ship's officer, to watch the manoeuvre. The officer was in touch with the bridge by telephone, when he suddenly said, "*I*

should hold on if I were you". Within seconds, we had hit the dockside with a resounding crash, along with some considerable denting of the access doors. It transcribed that the signalling system from the bridge to the engine room had suffered a fault at a crucial moment and communication had been lost - but too late to call on the considerable REME talent on board!

Duly disembarked with our 'B' vehicles, we began to come to terms with our new surroundings. Aqaba is Jordan's only port and shares a crowded coastline with Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Incoming flights always had to be careful not to stray into neighbouring air spaces. Our accommodation, with the exception of a few timber buildings, would be up to fifty four-man tents, pitched on concrete slabs recently completed by the REs. Electricity came from a group of diesel generators, these would run one at a time, so maintenance could be carried out. Apart from water and provisions, electricity was our most valuable asset. We had a machinery wagon, which was the centre of most of our repairs. It was also one of the few places out of the sun, which beat down really heavily every day. Many of us hadn't experienced such temperatures before and simply had to get used to it. Fortunately the age-old Army routine of 'early breakfast, cease



activity at midday and visit the beach in the afternoon' prevailed.

Some of our best engineering efforts were swatted by the supply of spare parts from the ordinance dump on the Canal Zone. Apart from the short supply, we had to contend with the fact that a box labelled '*Morris Eight Petrol Engine*' might well contain an example of high quality Egyptian rock! Between sender and recipient, the wily Arab nation had exercised its magical powers of substitution. We were, of course,

surrounded by Arab nations, with the exception of Israel - a fact of which Israel is still only too painfully aware today. Our role was never explained, but in fact contingencies of British Army and Air Force could be found all over the Middle East. Perhaps it was because King Hussein of Jordan had been to Sandhurst and quite enjoyed the social company of the Officers' Mess, Queens Bays, 2nd Dragoon Guards.

'A special excursion'

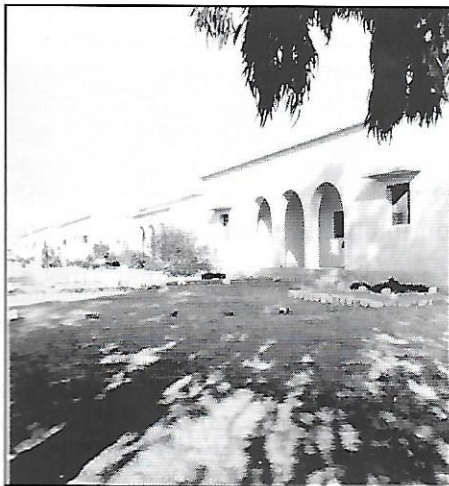
'Sun, Sea and Sand' became our daily routine, with the welfare of the *Centurion* tanks undertaken up to midday. After that, the metal became too hot to touch, although the interiors remained habitable for another few hours. One day we were told that a special excursion was about to take place. Part of 'B' Squadron would go to Baghdad, to show the Iraqi Army how good our *Centurions* were. I was attached to 'B' Sqn Fitters, as they were known, and looked forward to this latest adventure. Three tanks would go by transporter, plus a collection of 'B' vehicles, including the generator truck as back-up. Our little convoy of REME support duly arrived seven days later at RAF Habbaniyah, where the demonstrations would take place. In place since the 1920s, the camp had mature gardens, shops and a cinema. Experience of being covered in flies became a distant memory for the next few weeks.

We prepared our tanks, trimmed our gun stabilising equipment and duly gave our presentation before King Faisal of Iraq, cousin of King Hussein of Jordan. Not long afterwards, Faisal and other

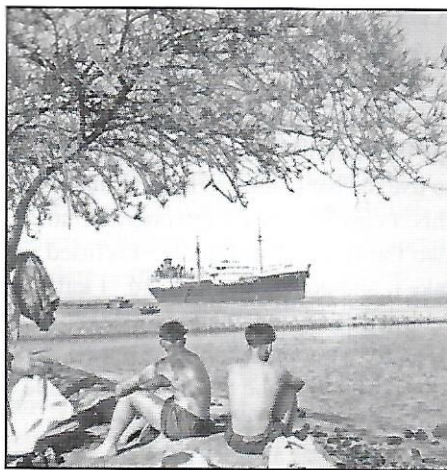


members of his family were assassinated and a dictatorship took power. From that time on, a nation in turmoil has been the sorry result. Nothing was heard about our demonstration and so it was decided that the three tanks would be left at an

Iraqi Army base near Baghdad. There would be no crews for the tanks, except for Roger Booth, Queen's Bays, Sgt John Smithson and L/Cpl Ted Anonymous. Accommodation would be provided in Baghdad, with the best digs going to the REME at the River Front Hotel, overlooking the mighty River Tigris. We also had a balcony, where afternoon tea could be served. Our daily routine began with the short trip by *Jeep*, to where our three tanks had been left in the care of the Iraqi Army. Before the tanks had left the regiment, every piece of equipment was in full working order and all tools



and spares in position. But it wasn't long before bits and pieces started disappearing. When questioned about this, those 'in charge' simply shrugged, presented upturned palms and gazed heavenward! Perhaps Allah had given permission to take advantage of the unbelievers? Our gentle maintenance routine ended at midday, our personal



Jeep took us back to the River Front Hotel, where a first-class lunch awaited. Afternoon pleasures consisted of taking our ease on the private balcony, ordering tea and taking short trips onto the teeming streets of Baghdad. (*Alas, not so teeming nowadays, even if the original streets could be found.*) Dinner was taken in order to give plenty of time to visit the cinema, where the films would keep the original English soundtrack and be sub-titled in up to three languages - sometimes obscuring up to half the lower part of the picture.

Several night clubs existed. Our favourite was the one where the trick was to make several bottles of beer survive the whole evening. After several performances by a troop of French 'dancing girls', we definitely felt we were mingling with the mighty. Later we would walk back to the hotel, to be admitted by a drowsy night porter and prepare for another demanding day with the *Centurions*. However, all good

things must come to an end, and eventually we were recalled to Aqaba, only to find the regiment in the throes of yet another posting. This would be to the Kingdom of Libya where, some fifty miles due east of Tripoli, the small town of Sabratha would play host to The Queens Bays. A few flyblown café's and some Roman ruins would be the only diversions, with an occasional visit to Tripoli for the more adventurous. Even more *Centurion* tanks would need to be serviced and repaired with our limited resources. But there was plenty of hard standing available alongside, with some good Italian-built barracks, a welcome change from being under canvas.

During this period, the Suez Canal crisis erupted, which resulted in the complete closure of the Canal while Colonel Nasser pondered on what to do next. All ships trapped on the Canal spent the next few years in solitary confinement. The regiment was put on standby and we made ready to do a 'Desert Rats' re-enactment. But the call never came and the shells were returned to their bunkers. And so ended my eight years colour service. 'Demob' started with a trip back to Blighty on the good ship '*Asturias*', long before regular air trooping took place. I now look back on those days with a mixture of pleasure at the good times and a philosophical shrug at the not-so-good times. I take much pride in the fact that I did something valuable in the service of my country; a feeling I know is shared by hundreds of others, when we meet at the annual Arborfield Old Boys' Reunion.

Some Scammell Experiences

by B A 'Eggy' Egleton, 52B

Changing over from Tels Mech to Recovery Mech made my life more bearable in the Army, but working with *Scammells* was the icing on the cake! Reading Mick Oulds' account of a *Scammell* fire (in *OBAN36*) reminded me of a similar incident, when I was with the 17th/21st Lancers LAD. We were returning from a scheme, going flat out down the autobahn, when the driver, L/Cpl McBain, shouted, "We're on fire!" I looked out of the back window and, sure enough, saw that the camouflage netting was ablaze. It had rolled back from the cab and come to rest on the exhaust pipe - stuck up, as it did, like a bleedin' chimney! Luckily, our jerrycans of petrol were in the well, near the cab.

Even before Mac could pull over, I was out of the cupola cover and kicking the cam-net over the side onto the hard shoulder, where we let it burn itself out. The only damage to the *Scammell* was some blistered paint.

On another scheme with 17/21, we had a *Daimler Dingo* seize its drive, so that all four wheels locked. Mac decided to do a 4-wheel suspended tow. We put the jib fully out, fitted an A-frame to the front of the *Dingo*, and lifted it from the middle. It made the *Scammell* a bit light on its steering, so we had to creep cross-country until we reached hard standing and made contact with the LAD, before it was put onto a lorry.

That was 1957 and a German General had been placed in charge of the NATO troops for the first time. We were out on exercise with 17/21 again - and the General came to visit us. We were designated to put on a display of barrel changing on a *Centurion*. Being a stropky little Craftsman, I pointed out that I wasn't going to salute a German - not while my Dad still had German shrapnel in him! We had a *Bedford QL* fitted out with rollers on the floor, and the 'replacement' gun barrel was resting on those. The barrel change went thus. The *Centurion* tank and *QL* parked apart, facing away from each other. We parked at right angles to them, with the jib extended. The tank reversed under the

jib, slings were fitted to the barrel, it was unlocked and we took the weight as the tank pulled forward. We lowered the barrel to the floor, the *QL* backed up and the new barrel was lifted. The *QL* pulled forward, the tank reversed. With its new barrel fitted, the tank drove off and the 'old' gun barrel was loaded onto the rollers on the *QL*. Job done, very slick and impressive and achieved in minutes.

When, still in Germany, this time with 3rd Carabiniers at Detmold in 1962, we had tanks to go into 4th Armoured Workshops for repair. Quite often (typical of workshops) they had no one available to collect the dead tank. My

ASM sent me up there with my *Scammell* to get a *Dyson* trailer and told us to move the dead tank ourselves. At the Workshops, the *Scammell* couldn't get through the front entrance, so we had to use the back door! The first time I did this, I checked the trailer, only to find two flat tyres in the middle. I refused to take it and got another instead. I left, returned to my unit, and loaded the casualty without a problem. But on the return trip, with the tank loaded, I made the mistake of heading towards a side gate. This was a bit tricky, as there were now small planes and helicopters parked all over the place.

I started weaving in and out of them when, suddenly, out of a nearby hangar, came several running men with powder-blue puffs on their heads. They were waving and shouting and seemed very agitated! They said that I couldn't get through past their aircraft. I pointed out that reversing a *Scammell* and *Centurion*-loaded trailer back through their planes may just bend a few of them! My bobbing and weaving exercise continued towards the side gate, accompanied by these excitable men running alongside, until it was 'mission achieved'. I never made that mistake again!

New Sniper Rifle

(From the pages of *Craftsman Magazine*)

Expert marksmen have been so impressed with the latest L115A3 weapon that the government is ordering nearly 600 of them for operations. The gun, made by Portsmouth based firm Accuracy International, fires a larger calibre bullet than the existing L96 7.62 rifle. It will be fully deployed on operations in the spring, after a successful trial run.

The L115A3 has a scope that can magnify the target up to 25 times, a suppressor to reduce flash and noise, a folding stock and five-round magazine. With a range of around a mile, the new rifle is being rolled out alongside the broader Sniper System Improvement programme, which is designed to give Army specialists more power, precision and stealth. The scheme will give sharp-shooters top of the line, all-weather, day and night sights, so they can operate around the clock and in arduous conditions.

MY ARMY CAREER – Part 3 of a series

by Trevor O'Callaghan, 42C

REME WORKSHOP - BOVINGTON

My first posting with REME was to the Command Workshop at Bovington, where both the OC and Sergeant Major greeted me on my first day with that old favourite, "*I don't think much of ex-apprentices*". I worked initially in the engine workshop on the overhaul of *Ford V8* petrol engines, which were used to drive water pumps for mine clearance on the seashores. The engines had to run at full power and only lasted about 24 hours at a time. It has to be remembered that many materials at that period were sub-standard. I later learned that an engine in a wheeled vehicle very rarely achieves full power under average running conditions. There was also a variety of other engines, some of which had been badly stored and required complete overhaul. After a few months, I moved

to testing the engines on the test bed. One incident I remember clearly was when I had to stamp the engines on top of the cylinder block, to show they had passed their test. I hit the punch with a hammer and a big hole appeared! The Sergeant Major was all for throwing me out of the shop, but I was saved by the fact that the cylinder block was wafer thin.

I later attended an armoured vehicle course at Arborfield and, on return to Bovington, worked in the armoured vehicle workshop. These vehicles varied from tanks, such as *Churchill*, *Cromwell*, *Comet*, *Sherman* and *Stuart*, to *Daimler* armoured cars and scout cars, and US '*Staghound*' armoured cars and half-track vehicles. I was detailed to assist in the recovery of a tank that had been in the

Tank Museum and used as a defence 'pillbox' during the war. Neither the other two Craftsmen nor myself had ever driven a *Scammell* tank transporter before. The ASM took us round the workshop block a few times and said, "*You'll do!*" His parting remark was that there was only one other vehicle to watch out for - another tank transporter. We somehow managed to recover the tank and our top speed was about 8 mph. We delivered the tank safely and it made me appreciate how hard and exhausting it must have been as a tank transporter crew in the last war.

It was at Bovington that I first encountered 'demob happy' soldiers, who were just going through the motions. Every wartime conscript soldier had a number and a date for

demob, but the slow rate was a constant source of friction. There were calendars everywhere, with 'days to demob' being ticked off. There were often arguments with officers on the slow rate of demob. The OC Wksp had to point out on several occasions that it was a political matter and that their complaints should be directed at their local MP.

The personnel employed for beach mine clearance work were known as displaced persons (DP). Today's equivalent would be refugees seeking political asylum. DP consisted of personnel from the former Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, Finland and several other European countries. In the course of my Army career, I met DP in Italy, Austria, the Middle East, Germany, and at other camps in the UK. Some DP were forced to serve in the Soviet and German Armies, where they were treated very badly. In the Soviet Army, they were kept in prison camps, with the minimum of clothing and food, then sent into action in the first wave. DP that served in tanks were often locked into their vehicle. If the tank was only disabled, the crew may not be let out for a day or more. The casualty rate amongst DP was very high. They would desert at the first opportunity, but DP were not treated any better by the Germans. Many DP said it was either volunteering for the German Army or starving - and most of them served in labour battalions. It became obvious that, hiding amongst these DP, were people wanted for war crimes. I remember one occasion when a person was arrested, because it was obvious he had never done manual work. I was told by one of the Military Police (MP) that this was a sure sign that he was not a DP.

There were other groups of people, mainly Poles, who had served in the British Army and chosen to stay in Britain. These people were also employed in clearing mines, gun ranges etc. If anyone who had served in the British services returned to countries under Communist control, they were invariably arrested; so very few went back to Poland etc. Churchill gave an undertaking that they would have a home in Britain for the rest of their lives. Several camps were set up, often known as 'little Poland'. I believe the last remaining camp is near Newton Abbot in Devon.

Whilst I was at Bovington, many Germans who had been prisoners of war

in Canada and the USA were sent to the UK to clear war damage, many of them billeted in the local area. One working party I was with had a group of Germans, who complained bitterly that they should have been returned to their Homeland. This caused trouble with several British soldiers, who had fought in the war and it ended up with the MPs being sent for. Order was restored when the MP Sgt Major threatened to hit the next prisoner who complained over the head with a shovel!

Many soldiers will remember the railway station for Bovington, at nearby Wool. At weekends, several thousand troops departed on Saturday and arrived back Sunday night. The station was built for a village, not a large military garrison. So it became a 'free-for-all', getting on the train, while getting off was sheer chaos. The platform was very short and sometimes the train had to move three times for the carriages to stop at the platform. I travelled in the guard's van on several occasions, because the carriages were full. The MPs were invariably overwhelmed, even though they used floodlights and barriers.

CENTRAL MEDITERRANEAN FORCES, ITALY

In August 1947, I was posted to the Central Mediterranean Forces (CMF). My journey started from the REME transit camp at Otterly, Yorkshire. From there I travelled to Dover and across the Channel to Calais, then by train to Villach transit camp, in Austria. The journey passed through much devastation in Europe; whole towns in Germany completely destroyed by Allied bombing raids. Nearly every rail and road bridge had been damaged but, surprisingly, canals, rivers and boats did not seem too bad. The rail bridges had been repaired with wooden trusses and, as the train passed over at a snail's pace, the bridges creaked and groaned. The journey took about two days and the weather was very hot. British Forces Radio (BFR) said that the highest temperature in Europe was at Villach. From there I went on to Treviso in Italy, then Padua, and finally to Palmernova (south of Udine), where I joined the LAD REME, 4th Royal Tank Regiment (RTR).

When I returned to Villach, it was the winter of 1947, travelling on leave to the

UK. 1947 was one of the coldest winters on record. BFR now reported the coldest place in Europe was Villach! Conditions in the transit camp were bad. The food was mainly a boiled egg, a spoonful of grated margarine, bread and a cup of tea. Most barrack rooms had no heat, due to the fact that any logs supplied were soaked in water and frozen. The organisation was chaotic, the best way of getting a seat on the train was to get on, then give your name to the Sergeant in charge. When we arrived in Dover, it was very depressing; there were food shortages, constant power cuts and labour strikes. We found it difficult to understand that in France we could get lovely white bread and butter, but in England we still had the wartime grey bread with tacky margarine. My mother was getting less meat on ration than during the war!

4th RTR was one of the regiments in 1st Armoured Division (whose badge was the charging Rhino). We operated with the USA Blue Devil Division (the dress was blue helmets, gloves etc). The British and USA still had forces in Italy and Greece. There were constant minor problems in the region and a civil war in Greece. The cause of the trouble at the time wasn't clear, but I later learned of disputes going back centuries. There was also an ideological battle with the Communists. The Soviet Union occupied the east of Austria and the 'Cold War' was beginning to cause problems. A problem that did not affect us directly was that the Albanians had mined the Strait of Otranto, between Albania and Italy, which caused casualties aboard British Naval ships.

The main problem for the British and US forces in Italy was the disputed border between Italy and Yugoslavia, dating back to the First World War. Yugoslavia claimed Trieste, the major port of the region. There were constant minor conflicts that reduced as time went on. At one time, the Yugoslavs tried to occupy Trieste. An ex-officer of the German Army (Wehrmacht), who had served in Yugoslavia, said that the partisans normally fought amongst themselves and if they did fight the Germans, then they knew there was British military presence.

There were two main problems in Italy; the Communists tried to take over by causing strikes etc., while the 'Northern League' wanted a separate

state. I must go back in history to explain the objective of the Northern League and my subsequent visits to Italy, where the objective still remains. Northern Italy was a part of the Austrian Empire and the people still considered themselves Austrian. The Northern League considered that they were far richer than southern Italy, which they had to support. In some areas, a southern Italian was not welcomed. When I re-visited the area in 1997, the main language, signs etc were still in German! Regular demonstrations take place with the same objective as when I was there in 1946.

An interesting fact emerged. The area we were in was the last stronghold of the Fascist regime in Italy and many Fascists had been arrested. As the administration had virtually collapsed in some areas, many Fascists were released from prison. I have been told that this action saved the administration and stopped a Communist take-over. This was confirmed in part by an ex-REME officer, who was the workshop officer when I went to work at Chobham. He had been a military mayor in the region, finishing up as military mayor of Villach, Austria. He confirmed that the Fascist administrators were very good at their job and, in no time at all, had got the region organised. There were some minor problems in Venice. I mention this because I stayed in Venice in 1997 and couldn't believe there was still trouble there. An armed group took over the Bell Tower in St Mark's Square, virtually 50 years to the day after a similar thing had happened in 1947.

Many soldiers in the regiment and LAD had served in the war and many had served in various places from Ethiopia, Iran, Iraq, Syria, North Africa, Sicily and Italy to north-western Europe. Nearly all personnel were 'demob happy' and nearly every week a group left for demob. I was promoted to L/Corporal and was told I was the only one available! The REME officers and senior NCOs were constantly changing and, on several occasions, I was 'in charge'. It became fairly chaotic and at one time the CO threatened to put a Regimental Officer in charge. One REME officer had been in the Army for thirty years and had experience of operating of tanks in WW1. He was only with us for a few weeks, as he was also due for demob.

Some of the soldiers in the regiment had had to burn their tanks in the desert (sometimes twice), due to lack of supplies, mainly fuel. The biggest insult you could make was to give them a box of matches! They were also very critical of the British recovery and repair organisation. We mustn't forget that it was due to this problem that REME was born! It was always said that you could tell the difference between British and German positions after a battle; the Germans recovered their equipment far quicker than the British. With the formation of REME, which got rid of the separate workshops for regiments and corps, the recovery and repair organisation then matched the Germans. A story I often heard was that, at the battle of El Alamein, the REME recovery and repair effort was 'supreme'. Of the 500 British tanks, either knocked out or disabled, REME repaired 300 tanks within days and made a major contribution to the success of the battle. Several field commanders commented that this couldn't have been achieved in previous battles.

One incident showed how some soldiers were affected by the war. I was walking with an 'old sweat' (a soldier who served, normally in the lower ranks, for his whole term of service), when an aircraft flew over. He pretended to fire a machine-gun and then burst into tears. He was due to go home and was very worried what his family would think of him, if he behaved in such an odd fashion. I had to try and reassure him that he would be all right. I felt embarrassed by the fact that I had never been in action, he was old enough to be my father - and I was trying to give him advice! There were several soldiers in the regiment similarly affected; the term used for them was 'bomb happy soldiers'. The argument used for their being in the regiment was that they would recover better in familiar surroundings, with people they were used to. I learned later that he had been in action from 1940-45 and was first wounded in Syria, fighting the French, when the British occupied Syria to stop the Germans attempting an occupation. He was also wounded in North Africa and Northern Europe and had had to burn his tank in the desert. It took him three days to walk back to his regiment.

We were ordered to salute Italian officers; this caused great resentment

amongst soldiers who had fought against them. I was working on a tank when the RSM walked past and a Trooper told the RSM what he could do with his order! This resulted in the Trooper being arrested and marched off to the Guardroom, with a passing remark, "*Good, I can now tell the CO what he can do with the order as well!*" Later in the day, it was announced that the CO would address the regiment, everyone guessed what it was about. The CO, after giving a reason why we were in Northern Italy, said it was his wish that we salute Italian officers, followed by a big cheer from the regiment. It must have been unique for a CO to say it was 'his wish' that we obeyed an order! The Trooper re-appeared next morning, with a warning not to tell the RSM what to use the paper, on which the order was printed, for!

It must be remembered that the wartime soldiers, conscript or regular, were of the opinion that Italy had changed sides when the going got tough. We were now defending them against the Communists, who were causing trouble, and British servicemen were being killed in some actions. Great resentment was felt when some politicians, on a visit, tried to defend the action of the Communists. (I will just move on to about 1952, when I was in Germany, and we were now told to salute German officers! I always thought that the cartoon drawn by Giles, the *Daily Express* cartoonist, of British troops saluting German officers, was one of his best. Even the Germans could see the funny side.)

The regiment had *Comet* and *Cromwell*, with a few *Stuart*, tanks; the armoured recovery vehicles (ARV) were based on the US *Sherman* tank chassis. The regiment also had *Daimler* scout cars and *Sherman* tank bulldozers. The 'B' vehicles (trucks) consisted mainly of British Army-specified 3 ton and 15 cwt *Chevrolets*, Canadian built. There was also an assortment of other vehicles. The US vehicles included *Jeeps* and spare vehicles. Spare equipment was known as 'buckshee', of which we had a large range! When the regiment left Italy we buried a lot of it, while the vehicles were left at the barracks to be destroyed later. The US half-track vehicles were for the transport of infantry, which accompanied the regiment to trouble spots. The wheeled recovery vehicles were a *Scammell* and a US *Ward la France*. Our

fitter's truck was a pre-war *Leyland*, of about 1930 design.

One day, I was witness to an argument between a Sergeant and an Officer. They had both served in the defence of the island of Crete against the Germans, and the Sergeant considered he was badly let down by the Officer, refusing to salute him. This was very awkward for me, because the Officer was threatening to put the Sergeant under arrest and I was the witness. I was beginning to take an interest in military history and I had heard several stories of the tank action in Crete. The Sergeant related a story of the action on Crete. The Germans had suffered very heavy casualties and the British and New Zealand forces were beginning to win the battle. He then found he was isolated, because the Officer had withdrawn support without the Sergeant's knowledge - and the battle was lost. The Officer maintained that the battle had already been lost. The Officer took no action, but I heard that 'Battle of Crete' argument several times. When I was with 6th RTR in 1951, the battle was still being argued over!

Crete and the Balkan conflict was of great interest to me, because it seemed to sum up many of the problems that I was to hear of, from men that had fought in many theatres of operation. These included the exhaustion of men; the loss of communications; the wear and tear of equipment in difficult terrain and a lack of supplies. Many times in my career, when talking to tank crews about wartime experiences, these factors played an important part in the outcome of the battle. I have always maintained that most military historians have no idea of the requirements and the reliability of a tank in action. The reliability of a tank is a subject that I will refer to several times, because it became an important part of my philosophy of tank design.

RECOVERY TASKS

The first job I was involved with in the LAD was the recovery of a *Comet* tank from a river. The Squadron was fording a river about three feet deep and the tank-track had jammed. We had to carry the gas bottles into the river, to cut into the track adjuster and release the track, before we could recover the tank. It brought home to me how physically demanding tank work was in the field. We were regularly involved in vehicle

recovery, often an area of disagreement with the regiment. The background to this disagreement goes back to the formation of REME. In 'Phase 1', regiments were allowed to keep some mechanics etc and often operated independent of the LAD. It was always said that regimental mechanics didn't want to change their cap-badge - in the regiment, they operated the ARVs. Unfortunately, the answer to why many regimental mechanics didn't want to transfer to REME was that they were not trained as mechanics and REME wouldn't accept them. In the early part of the war, when there was a great shortage of mechanics, regiments had to take anyone with knowledge of vehicles and re-grade them, without any formal training. Often, the battlefield was their training ground and no doubt they would know as much as the newly arrived REME Craftsmen. In 'Phase 2' of REME's set-up, all repair and maintenance came under REME control.

Many times I was involved in vehicle recovery and some recoveries took several days. There were several recovery operations I remember well; one was when a *Comet* tank on a tank transporter turned right over into a gully; the second was when a tank from another regiment slid down the mountainside and the third was when a tank nearly demolished a café. A photograph of the *Comet*, with the transporter on top, was published in several Army magazines of that period, with amusing comments. To recover the tank and trailer we used an ARV, the *Ward la France* recovery vehicle, and a borrowed *Caterpillar* D8 (similar to a large earth-moving bulldozer). Using two tanks as anchors, we recovered the tank and transporter in about a day. The officer from the Tank Transporter Regiment was an original tank driver from WW1. He had joined the Cheshire Machine Gun regiment underage and they later formed one of the first Tank Regiments, providing one of the first tank crews to go into action on the western front. When he became too old for the tanks, he transferred to the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC). He would have served at least 30 years in the Army. I know it was an 'old soldier story', but he was very interesting to listen to, he obviously knew a lot about the early tanks.

Another recovery was when a road in the mountain collapsed under the weight of a tank and the tank slid down the

mountain, without turning over or even damaging the tank. We were given a map reference to locate the tank and, as it was a long climb with tight bends, we decided to use the *Scammell* and the *Ward la France*. There would have been a problem with the steering brakes on the ARV, in getting around the bends. When we arrived at the map reference, there was no tank; it was in the valley below. The tank had slid right down the mountainside without turning over and the crew was unhurt.

It was an education, operating two types of vehicles in the mountains, the gas guzzling petrol engine and the more efficient diesel engine vehicle. We carried extra petrol for the *Ward*. The exhaust was often red hot. A noticeable feature of the large US vehicles was that petrol dripped from the inlet manifold drain - and the *Ward* was no exception. Sometimes, after engine shut down, there was a large puddle of petrol on the ground from the manifold drains. The way to reduce the problem was, when the engine speed started to reduce on say a hill, to match the throttle position so that the engine speed was just maintained and not to open the throttle fully. This reduced the fuel consumption, but most drivers weren't aware of the correct technique. I have discussed this problem with several US engineers and they considered fuel consumption was not an issue and that the carburettor was adequate for the job. The *Scammell* plodded along using far less fuel, but having a far lower top speed than the *Ward*. On the descent, the *Scammell*, with only four wheel braking, was at a disadvantage. The *Ward* could suffer from brake fade if driven fast and the brakes used continually.

An amusing recovery operation was when a *Comet* was hanging over a parapet, after going through the courtyard of a café. The story was that the driver had changed gear by a 'stick change' and pulled too hard on the steering stick, causing the tank to slew off through the courtyard - tables, chairs, the lot, ending up hanging over the parapet. I will explain a 'stick change'. When changing up, instead of double de-clutching, one of the steering sticks could be applied while the gearbox was in neutral. This reduced the effort when changing gear. It required a certain art to apply the steering stick, so that the tank didn't veer one way or the other. Returning to the incident, no one

believed the driver, least of all the café owner. He was demanding that the driver be charged with attempting to kill him and his customers! The OC settled the argument when he reminded the café owner that the whole Squadron of tanks was due to drive along the same road. The café owner soon saw the error of his ways, when he realised that several drivers had fought in the war and were not happy with being in Italy. We recovered the tank, but it was an awkward recovery because of the lack of space around the café. We certainly did not wish to damage the café any more!

I once saw an oxcart going up hill very fast, with a *Comet* tank assisting it. The gun was 'close to the animal's backside' and the cart driver had his hands clasped in prayer! We employed Italians in the cookhouse and for general duties around the camp. One day, the Sgt Major lined them up. He threatened the next person that put garlic in our food, or shrugged his shoulders when he was told to do something, would be hung from the beam they were standing under. I don't know if they believed him or not, but they looked terrified! I could quote many other incidents of this nature, and people must understand the attitude of men who had fought in the war before criticising them.

It is worth comparing the recovery vehicles we had in the regiment, because they all had certain advantages and disadvantages. I have mentioned that the *Ward* was a modern vehicle, while the *Scammell* was about 1929 vintage - fundamentally different in design. The *Ward* jib could move up, down and sideways, and had vehicle outriggers; this was a great advantage in lifting engines etc. But there was a disadvantage when lifting a *Meteor* engine out of a tank. The lift had to be made with the *Ward* sideways on, meaning the side outriggers couldn't be used. This required improvisation to keep the vehicle chassis level. The tools supplied with the *Ward* were superior to the *Scammell*, but the winch ropes were very suspect. Three times the main winch-ropes and hook failed. To operate the main winch, the operator had to sit alongside the winch and there was no protection if the winch-rope broke. On one occasion, I was operating the winch when the hook snapped, the rope came back and snaked around the vehicle. This type of failure caused a fatality in another regiment. Other ropes on the jib

etc showed sign of failure and cracks appeared in the structure. Another failure was front wheel studs shearing but, once we had new wheel studs manufactured, we had no more problems. An amusing story about front wheel studs shearing - the driver saw a wheel disappearing along the road and wondered where it had come from. He carried on, with many people trying to stop him. The balance of the *Ward* kept the vehicle upright, but when he tried to steer, he realised something was wrong!

In the desert, the *Ward* would bog down very easily, even with six-wheel drive. I have always been of the opinion that wheel diameter and width were too small and hence the tyre was too small. Double wheels in tandem are not a good idea cross-country. From my comments, it is obvious that the *Ward* was ideal in the workshops, it certainly made life easy when compared to the *Scammell*.

One item of equipment that intrigued me on the *Ward* was the rigid tow bar and attachment, called a 'whiffletree'. I tried to find out at the time 'why that name?' and it was some years later before I found out. The first clue came from watching a western film, when it was mentioned that the whiffletrees were breaking on the wagon 'horse shafts and attachments', due to the ruts in the tracks. The wheels on the wagons are as close as possible, to reduce the turning moment when one wheel drops in a rut, but the load on the shafts is still high. The shafts had to be made of the strongest wood available, hence the whiffle tree. The first tow bars for vehicles were thus made from a whiffle tree and the name continued.

The *Scammell*, as I have mentioned before, was exhausting to operate - but drivers found it very endearing. You either swore at it, or swore by it! The jib was manually operated, with no sideways movement, so lining up the vehicle for engine lift was awkward and time consuming. The winch had a pendulum control for the rope, which avoided any crushing of the rope under load by sequentially wrapping the rope across the drum. I don't recall any US manufactured winch that had this device. I was of the opinion that the failure of the winch ropes on numerous US vehicles was due to crushing of the ropes.

When there was a shortage of diesel fuel, the *Gardner* engine would run on a

mixture of kerosene and diesel fuel with no apparent problems. In the severe weather of 1947, when temperatures dropped to -20C, the *Scammell* was kept constantly running for several weeks, so we always had a vehicle for tow starting. One thing I learned was that a diesel engine had to be put under load periodically in cold weather, to avoid diesel engine 'slubber'. Slubber is caused when a diesel engine, in cold weather, starts to slow down due to low temperature of combustion. If the engine stops, it is very difficult to re-start, due to unburned fuel in the cylinder. Cold starting of engines was a problem that haunted me throughout my engine research career. The Army's insistence of starting engines at -40C/F, I considered unrealistic. In that winter of 1947, when the temperature dropped to a level where it was considered the coolant would freeze, a bugle was sounded. The tanks and some wheeled vehicles would then be started. Naturally, it was mainly at night.

An amusing incident occurred with the *Gardner* engine. The driver of the *Scammell* happened to mention that oil was coming out of the dipstick hole and, when asked how long this had occurred, he said a week or more. I was given the task of finding out what had caused this problem. I realised that the engine oil was contaminated with diesel fuel and it was caused by a pinhole in the diaphragm of the lift pump, allowing the fuel to leak into the sump. We wondered what effect this would have on the engine and it was decided to carry on running the engine. When I left the regiment, about a year later, that engine was still running satisfactorily. We found this incident amusing, because several people in the regiment knew about 'the *Scammell* dripping fuel like the *Ward*', and it was considered normal.

The ARV was based on a *Sherman* chassis and had a nine-cylinder *Wright* radial engine. The engine was at the rear, with a prop-shaft driving a delayed-action synchromesh gearbox and *Cletrac* steering at the front of the tank. The regimental fitters nominally operated the ARV, but in recovery operations we all worked together. The winch had similar problems to the *Ward* winch. For lifting engines etc, an 'A' frame was used. The A-frame was normally stowed in a horizontal position. For lifting an engine etc., the frame was lifted up by attaching short cables to the track final drive. The

tank was then driven forward, pulling the frame up. The A-frame was a simple device, but difficult to use. The advantage of a tracked recovery vehicle was that it could follow the tanks. With the wheeled recovery vehicles, we often had to winch the vehicle to the dead tank using ground anchors.

To avoid any hydraulic lock on the bottom cylinders of the engine on start up, operating instructions were to rotate the engine one revolution. This required rotating the engine crank handle sixty times. To avoid any fires on start up, two small access doors at the rear of the vehicle were opened and you stood by with a fire extinguisher. The best way of putting the fire out was to accelerate the engine - and the airflow doused the flames. What drivers used to do was switch off the magnetos and flick the starter switch. If a jarring noise occurred, he knew he had a hydraulic lock. What I did not know at the time was that, if there was a hydraulic lock, this would cause damage to the piston or bend a connecting rod. I found this out several years later at Tidworth, when I was asked to investigate why several *Wright* engines had failed. The *Stuart* tank had a seven-cylinder *Wright* radial engine and, shortly after I joined the regiment, these tanks were disposed with.

An incident occurred on the ARV, which nearly cost a soldier's life. It was the practice to ask a new driver to start the engine with just the driver's hatch open and the engine air flow flaps adjusted so that all air flow to the engine went through the hatch. It was then funny to watch the driver when he got the full blast of cold air. Unfortunately, in that 1947 winter, one driver 'passed out' due to the cold blast of air. The engine kept running and, by the time he was got out of the tank, he was suffering badly from chill factor. Fortunately, one of the Troopers knew what to do. The clothes were stripped off of him and he was wrapped in blankets and for extra warmth he was placed on a tank engine that had been running. Several other Troopers then virtually sat on him for extra warmth and he eventually recovered. It was amusing afterwards, how would it be explained? Why were several soldiers sitting on a naked soldier on top of an engine?

The *Sherman* bulldozer had a *Chrysler* multi-bank engine. This

consisted of five truck engines, mounted on a common casing, in a radial configuration. Anyone that worked on those engines will remember a plug change! Often, one engine would fail on two separate tanks so, to get one tank mobile, individual engines were swapped about. These engines were produced when the USA was very short of tank engines and showed what could be done by improvisation. The multi-bank engine was given a life of 250 miles and it was virtually a throwaway engine if it lasted that distance.

We acquired a *Diamond-T* tractor, which was normally used for tank transporting, towing a trailer. The tractor was loaded with ballast and it was excellent for towing tanks on hard surfaces. The tractor was a British specification vehicle, but built in the USA. It became the standard tank transporter tractor for several years. It had a *Hercules* diesel engine, which was prone to broken crankshafts. After the war it was re-engined with a *Rolls Royce (RR)* diesel engine. One of the reasons for broken crankshafts was the fact that the co-driver could operate the excess fuel device when he sat on the mudguard. If a *Diamond-T* was pouring black smoke from the engine when climbing a hill, invariably the co-driver was operating the excess fuel device, causing engine overload.

I was never involved directly with tank transporting, but the LAD was often asked to help on difficult roads, for example mountain roads with tight hairpin bends. On icy roads, we would use the *Scammell* winch to hold the tanks and wheeled vehicles. We had an unwritten law that a tank transporter, descending and ascending a mountain road, maintained the same speed. Many times this was at walking pace, but I have seen the tractor brake drums glowing in the dark on descents, the brakes must have been close to fade. The trailer brakes did not appear to glow and I don't recall any transporter runaway due to brake fade. Two types of trailer were used, the British *Dyson* and the US *Rogers*. The *Rogers* trailers were prone to wheel bearing failure. Often the first indication of bearing failure was when a tyre started to smoke. I was told that, in extreme cases, the tyres caught alight and it was a race to unload the tank. Later, when the regiment was in the Middle East, the *Rogers* trailers were scrapped due to unreliability.

On one occasion, when the tanks were being transported, they crossed several Bailey bridges, which were below the weight limit of tank and transporter. This was not discovered until the journey had been completed. The Royal Engineers never discovered that their bridges had been overloaded. We had been warned that ignoring bridge weight limits signs was no excuse! The Italian Army had British Bren Gun Carriers. One of their carriers had broken down, blocking a bridge; we repaired the carrier because the Italians didn't have a clue. The Italian officer considered that the Bailey bridge was a 'war winner in Italy'. When I travelled across Europe, there were many Bailey bridges and communities all knew what a Bailey bridge was, it was a lifeline. Today the 'Bailey bridge sites' on the Internet are numerous. Often, where road emergencies world wide, due to storms etc occur, the successor to the wartime Bailey bridge is used. The designer of the bridge was Sir Donald Bailey, a structural engineer at the MoD Engineering Establishment at Christchurch.

When the Humber Bridge was built, I was invited to visit with a group of engineers. It was a lovely day as we walked across and we had a very good discussion about its design and construction. But I wouldn't have liked to walk across in an easterly gale! Later, we had general discussion on bridges and a remark was made that Sir Donald Bailey was an outstanding construction and bridge engineer. It was considered that Britain did not take advantage of his work and he was ignored. After the war, Sir Donald received the same award as Sir Frank Whittle, for his contribution to the successes of the war effort. General Eisenhower considered the Bailey bridge one of the three most important developments of the war, on par with radar and the heavy bomber.

The *Diamond-T* tractor was also a good railway 'shunting engine'. When the tanks were loaded on the railway, occasionally there was no shunting engine available, so we used the tractor to move the railway wagons, much to the consternation of the Italian railway men. One had to remember that, having got the railway wagons rolling, in order to stop, the wagon brakes had to be applied. The *Diamond-T* brakes wouldn't stop the wagons so we had to hang onto the railway wagon hand brakes.

Having mentioned tanks being carried on the railways, I will describe a problem called 'brinelling' of bearings. I first heard about this problem from people who had operated tanks in the Middle East, especially REME personnel. It is a subject I became very familiar with in my career. I often investigated the failure of bearings, in many types of equipment. I will first describe what 'brinelling' is. If a steel ball is placed on a steel track, and is vibrated with no relative movement, an indentation in the track will take place over a period of time. If a ball or roller bearing is vibrated, indentations will occur in the tracks and, if a load is then applied to the bearing, the indentation can be severe, causing bearing failure. For example, tank road wheel bearings would suffer from this problem when carried on the railways, due to the vibration caused by the gaps on the railway lines. The gaps on the railway lines in the Middle East were greater than in the UK, which increased the problem. Several times when discussing tank actions, a remark was made that the road wheel bearings had failed. I assumed that it could be due to brinelling, because the failures appeared to be after delivery of the tanks. One particular incident I recall being told about, was when tanks were transported to Abyssinia from Egypt, to liberate the country from the Italians. Many of the tank road wheel bearings failed and, after repairs, there were no more failures.

A story that was often told to me was about tanks delivered by sea to Alexandria, Egypt. They were normally in a bad state after delivery and the workshop would work day and night repairing them. This story is often repeated in books on the war in the desert. The delay this caused was one reason for the shortage of tanks at critical times. REME personnel who had worked at the Base Workshop in Alexandria told me that the tanks had not been protected from the elements. The ship journey could take them across the Atlantic, along the coast of South America and round South Africa. This journey could take as long as three months. Besides repairs due to 'the elements', many of the bearings had to be replaced, due to that brinelling problem. I know, from my investigations later, that wave and traffic vibrations could cause it. I would add that, as the war proceeded, alternative materials (AM) had to be used, and subsequently the quality of many components suffered. This was

true of bearings, exhaust valves, piston rings etc. Therefore, this may have increased the problem with bearings.

TANKS FOR THE MEMORY!

The standard tank in the immediate post-war period was the *Comet*, basically a larger version of the *Cromwell*, with thicker armour. Experienced tank men considered *Comet* to be far superior in reliability than any wartime tank. It is very difficult to convey to people the unreliability of wartime tanks. Figures quoted to me for Africa and Europe was that one tank would break down on roads every one mile, two to three tanks per mile cross-country. In Burma and the islands in the Far East, these figures were higher.

The *Comet* had a *Meteor* engine with a *Merrit-Brown* gearbox and the brakes and clutch were hydraulically operated. The gearbox had a regenerative steering unit and this reduced the steering effort. This in turn reduced wear and tear on the steering brakes, and made the tank very manoeuvrable. This type of gearbox was first used on the *Churchill* tank and most tanks today use this type of gearbox in a modern form. *Comet* had *Christie* suspension, which gave good mobility across rough terrain. The gun was a 77mm and the tank had a crew of five. The turret had electrical power traverse (*Cromwell* had hydraulic power traverse). *Comet* tanks came into service just before the war ended. From conversations with crews that operated them, they were quite impressed, especially with the gun.

Comet still had a vertical front plate. I read a report later in my career (written after Dunkirk), that British tanks were inferior to German tanks in firepower, armour protection and mobility. This meant, muzzle velocity, thickness and angle of armour were essential in tank design. The *Churchill* had a vertical front plate, but it was produced at a desperate time. An excuse could be made, but the design of *Comet* was difficult to accept, when a sloping front plate was essential for improved protection. It was said that, with *Comet* being based on the *Cromwell*, the design could not be changed in the time available.

A bad design feature of *Comet* was the hydraulic pipes that went along the bottom plate. This went against all wartime experience, where British tanks could be disabled by mines. When I carried out immunity trials later in my career, I found that some on some tanks the bottom plate would deflect two inches due to mines, and this would

cause damage to any controls along the bottom plate. This was well known by tank crews. I also found that deflection of the bottom plate could damage the engine sump and certain types of bolt heads would shear off. Another problem we had was when the hydraulic pipes laid in water etc, which caused pitting corrosion and the engine had to be removed to change the pipes. Another difficult problem was when a hydraulic unit had to be replaced on the suspension. The suspension units were mounted between an inner and outer vertical plate. To replace a unit, the outer plate had to be removed. Most of the bolts were counter-sunk, Allen headed, and were often seized up. We use to weld a nut on the bolt to get a better leverage.

When I became involved with the Germans on tank design, I met one German engineer who examined captured British tanks. He considered the *Merrit-Brown* gearbox to be a very good design. He was of the opinion that it was superior to any other gearbox and steering unit he investigated during the war. He considered that adapting the *R-R Merlin* aircraft engine (renamed the *Meteor* engine, without the supercharger, for tanks) was an excellent idea. I will return to this subject later. The Germans considered British tanks had better turret control, due to the power traverse, and superior turret ring (ball ring). Some German tanks didn't have power traverse.

The regiment had changed completely by 1947; most of the personnel were post-war soldiers, known as National Servicemen (NS), with a few regular soldiers. By 1947, the problems in Northern Italy had decreased but the civil war in Greece had increased. The troubles between Jew and Arab had intensified in Palestine and a decision was made to send 1st Armoured Division to Palestine. A few units from Italy were sent to Greece. We left Italy, sailing from Venice in May 1947, on board the *City of Canterbury*, for Port Said in Egypt. The Navy escorted us through the Adriatic and the Straits of Otranto because of constant attacks on shipping by the Albanians.

Before I left Italy for the Middle East, I became aware of how much the English language was used, mainly due to the BBC. During the war, many people listened to the BBC in both Italy and Austria. If caught, they could be shot! In 1947, some of the published news-sheets were extracted from the BBC news, while lotteries were run using the British Football League results.

A Glee for Winter

Hence rude Winter! Crabbed old fellow,
Never merry, never mellow!
Well-a-day in rain and snow;
What will keep one's heart aglow?

Groups of kinsmen, old and young,
Oldest they old friend among;
Groups of friends, so old and true
That they seem our kinsmen too.

These all merry, all together
Charm away chill Winter weather.
What will kill this dull old fellow?
Ale that's bright and wine that's mellow!

Dear old songs forever new;
Some true love and laughter too;
Pleasant wit and harmless fun;
And a dance when day is done.

Music, friends, so true and tried;
Whispered love by warm fireside;
Mirth at all times, all together
Make sweet May of Winter weather.

(The above poem was written by Alfred Domett (1811 – 1887). As a long frosty spell kept my Hampshire home in its morning grip when I put this together, I am delighted that we now have the warmer mornings of May! Ed.)

An Invitation from Arborfield Parish Council

**Councillor Victoria Brookling
e-mailed as below:**

In a few months time, the Parish Council is proud to be presenting a scroll, which accords the title of 'Honorary Burgess of the Parish of Arborfield and Newland' on the Corps of REME. To mark this occasion, we are looking to invite the REME Band to march through the village via (hopefully, as venue is not yet confirmed) the RBL, where the presentation will be made. This year also marks the 60th Anniversary of the amalgamation of Arborfield and Newland Parish Councils; so, together with the march, we are looking to have displays on 'life in Arborfield' over the last 60 years, to make it a real day of celebration. Whilst dates and venues have yet to be confirmed (I will let you know as soon as I have more information), I thought I would drop you a quick note to let you know what was planned. We invite the **Old Boys' Association** to join us on the march and with the 60th anniversary celebrations.

The Death of Bernard Rayner, 45A

I recently attended the funeral of a special sort of gentlemen – Bernard Rayner – as representative of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School. The hearse was white and drawn by four white horses, with white plumes to their heads, with a coach driver wearing a black stovepipe hat. The coffin was made of wicker and there was a large portrait of Bernard at the back of the hearse and, at the side of the casket, was the Arborfield 'Scroll of Honour'.

The service celebrated Bernard's life and I must say that if half of mankind were as good as he had been, the world would be a much better place in which to live. The man has been an outstanding example that the good citizen that AAS Arborfield has produced year on year. I later joined family and friends at a top hotel in Grimsby, where my wife and I visited a stand, which displayed many photographs of Bernard, including, I am happy to say, quite a few from his Arborfield days. One showed him in the AAS football team of 1947/48, on which he had penned the names of players, quite a few of which I recognised.

Bernard was killed whilst riding a Honda motorbike, a replica of which headed the funeral cortege. Bernard was 78 years of age

(The above tribute was extracted from a Forum message, kindly donated by Cliff Charlesworth of 47B)

Can this be true?

Being British today is about driving one's German car to an Irish pub for a Belgian beer, then travelling home, grabbing an Indian curry or a Turkish kebab on the way, to sit on some Swedish furniture and watch American shows on a Japanese television. And the most British thing of all – the suspicion of anything foreign!

WANTED

A large Apprentice School Button with Queen's Crown to complete badge board. Will purchase and pay postage. Eggy Eggleton, 52B - Please call 01895 447017.

A Hairy Story

A driver is making his way down a country lane when, suddenly, a large tall rabbit with long ears runs out in front of his car and is knocked down. The driver, being a caring chap, as well as a long time animal lover, gets out of his car to check how the rabbit is doing. Unfortunately, it is doing nothing, it has expired, it is not breathing, it is no more.

The poor driver is heartbroken, he has always cared for the nation's flora and fauna. Just then another car comes along, pulls over and stops. Out gets this lovely looking blonde lady, who asks, "What is the matter? Can I help?" Our driver explains how this unfortunate

rabbit ran out in front of his car, with no warning and how he could not help but knock it down and that it now seems to have died.

The blonde lady soothes him – "Don't worry," she says and dashes back to her own car. She returns quickly with her handbag, from which she removes an aerosol spray, walks over to the dead rabbit and gently sprays it with the contents of the can. After just a few moments the rabbit gets gingerly to its feet, shakes its head, wriggles its ears, then hops smartly off down the lane. After a few strides it stops, turns around and gives a wave to our driver and his

blonde companion. It then hops off a few more yards, turns around and waves yet again.

This continues until the rabbit is out of sight - a few bunny hops, a turn around and a wave and then, finally, it is gone. The driver turns to the blonde lady in amazement. "Whatever is in that can?" he asks, "I've never seen anything like it". The lady just smiles, passes him the can and tells him to read the label. This he does, finding written upon it the prophetic words: "Miracle Hair Spray. Revives all types of dead hair and adds permanent wave."

Top This for a Speeding Incident

Two traffic patrol officers from North Berwick were involved in an unusual incident while checking for speeding motorists on the A1 Great North Road. One of the officers used a hand-held radar device to check the speed of a vehicle approaching over the crest of a hill. He was more than surprised when the speed was recorded at over 300 mph! Then their radar suddenly stopped working and the officers were not able to reset it. Just then, a deafening roar over the treetops revealed that the radar had in fact latched on to a NATO Tornado

fighter jet, which was engaged in a low-flying exercise over the Borders district, approaching from the North Sea. Back at police headquarters, the Chief Constable fired off a stiff letter of complaint to the RAF Liaison office. Back came the reply in true laconic RAF style:

"Thank you for your message, which allows us to complete the file on this incident. You may be interested to know that the tactical computer in the Tornado had detected the presence of, and subsequently locked onto, your

hostile radar equipment and automatically sent a jamming signal back to it.

Furthermore, an air-to-ground missile aboard the fully-armed aircraft had also automatically locked onto your equipment. Fortunately the pilot flying the Tornado recognized the situation for what it was, quickly responded to the missile systems alert status, and was able to override the automated defence system just before the missile was launched and preventing your hostile radar installation from being destroyed. Good Day ..."

1939-45 Old Boys Reunion 2008

Following the continued success of our annual reunions, this year's event will be held at Alvaston Hall, Cheshire, from 13th October. If you have not yet received details - or know of anyone else who would like to do so, please contact me:

Les Scapens
261 Down Road
Portishead
Bristol
BS20 8HY

Age is a Quality of Mind

Age is a quality of mind.

If you left your dreams behind,

If hope is cold,

If you no longer look ahead,

If your ambitious fires are dead -

Then you are old.

But if from life you take the best,

And if in life you keep the jest,

If love you hold -

No matter how the years go by,

No matter how the birthdays fly,

You are not old!

Anon

Serving at Garian

by Charles (Chaucer) Harvey, 'B' Coy, 43B/44A

It was with a distinct sense of *'déjà vu'* that I read the Brian Atkins (43A) article entitled **"To Arborfield and Beyond"** in OBAN 40. It certainly inspired me to write my own version of events – so read on! I too was in Palestine, serving as a Vehicle Mechanic with 52 Observation Regiment, who were sharing the camp with 1 Royal Horse Artillery (RHA). I can only assume that we never met, because I was RA and he was REME and, although I was aware of the existence of a LAD, they never bothered me – and I duly reciprocated!

The Regiment, not being 'teeth arm', spent its last two weeks in Palestine working as dock labourers, as the civilian work force had fled. It was a tense time, as we could only work at night. But we had an unusual protection, as trains loaded with oranges were drawn up along the quaysides, which shielded our working parties from any incoming small arms fire. Naturally, they were broken into to provide refreshment! The small arms fire was not however hostile, but friendly, and arose from a section of Royal Marines, who had been charged with discouraging looting within the harbour – and consequently fired, without discrimination, at anything that moved.

I eventually left Palestine, with a few drivers, in May 1948, bound for Tripoli with all the unit's transport, on the Tank Landing Ship (TLS) *'Humphrey Gibb'* (who was he?). It was a tedious journey, without any form of entertainment, apart from a few personal dog-eared novels. However, I can't recall any of Brian's cockroaches, possibly a reflection on the quality of the food! When we arrived at Tripoli, we unloaded the vehicles from the ship and, after joining the rest of the Regiment, drove immediately from Tripoli dockside to the Italian Barracks at Garian, where 52 Observation Regiment was to be stationed for at least a year. Was the LAD with us at the time? I certainly cannot recall that there were any REME vehicles or personnel on the ship. (In my latest *'Atlas of the World'*, Chaucer's spelling of 'Garian' seems now to have been replaced with 'Gharyan' – which I'm pretty sure is the same place, in Libya, and agrees with

that name in Brian's article in OBAN 40. Ed.)

The road up through the mountains was built to enable Italians to tour Mussolini's Italian pre-war colonial empire and was in good condition, despite the recent war. Garian was a small town on the route and even boasted a respectable hotel. It was in that hotel bar that I tasted my first – and possibly last – Gin & Lime (who drinks Gin & Lime these days?) The Commanding Officer, with an eye for comfort, appropriated and occupied a large villa in the town, possibly that of the previous Italian Commandant. The 'Troglodytes' that Brian refers to were an Arab/Jewish sect, situated several miles into the desert, who dwelt in several large holes, each with a 30 feet x 30 feet top opening, surrounded by a single strand of barbed wire. The holes were dug at least 50 feet deep and caves were cut into the sides of the hole, to provide two-storey residences extending up from the lower ground. I use the term 'residences' advisedly, as the caves were cut square, with doors and windows opening to the central courtyard, and were actually rooms with whitewashed walls and well furnished. They were reached by an entrance tunnel, large enough to accommodate a camel, which sloped down from some 100 feet away. I understood that their existence arose from a land tax, imposed by the previous Turkish government, which they ingeniously avoided by going underground.

Brian does not mention the *'Lady of Garian'*, which was a 20-foot mural, depicting a reclining naked female, whose contours followed that of the North American coast and was painted on a white wall in the vehicle workshop. It was a known landmark and tourist attraction and there were copies available as souvenir postcards. (Does anyone have a copy?) The added detail made it obvious that it had been painted by an American, possibly a serviceman who had been stationed in the barracks. After we left for the last time, I heard a (probably apocryphal) account that the Americans had removed the entire wall back to the USA!

As a consequence of a general reorganisation, the Regiment, whilst at Garian, was downgraded to an independent Battery (15 Locating) of four Troops and moved to disused Italian Ordnance Depot in Tripoli. The name 'Keren Barracks' (as quoted by Brian) sounds familiar, but where was the LAD? A Survey troop, with a junior Warrant Officer in charge, was left behind in Garian. It consisted of about twenty surveyors with ten *Jeeps* (of the vehicular type!), a cook and a Vehicle Mechanic – with a 3-Ton *Bedford QL* to provide logistic and technical support. Its brief was to survey the desert beyond the Italian road with the support of aerial photography.

This required the surveyors to establish 'Trig points', each of which then had to be made visible from the air. This was achieved through the construction of individual stone cairns. This was fortunate, as it provided me with a break, as I had to drive the *Bedford* into the desert to transport cement, sand and water to build them. I would subsequently drive round them several times on full lock, to produce a circle that would enhance their visibility from the air. It was whilst returning from one of these trips, and crossing an unsurveyed area, that I crested a high dune to observe below over a thousand Arabs, engaged in what was possibly a religious ceremony, in that they were chanting, drumming and whirling! As they appeared to surge towards me, I did not stop to make enquiries, but left with the *Bedford* flat out on the governor.

About once a week, I also drove down the mountain pass (the Ghats?) to Tripoli, to collect 150 Jerricans of petrol, plus NAAFI stores, as I also ran the detachment's canteen, using all the profits to purchase fresh eggs from the local farmers. The run down to the plain at dawn was no problem as it was mainly downhill with an empty vehicle. It was the hard haul return journey that stretched the *Bedford* to its limit. Initially, some eighty miles across the desert, through the village of El Azzizia, to which Brian alludes. There was a small café there, which provided a break, and it was on from there to the foot of

the Pass. There then followed the long climb up through the mountains, with the engine boiling and labouring in second gear for the last few miles. Fortunately, I never had a breakdown that I couldn't repair, as I rarely saw another vehicle during the journey across the desert. With the normal desert temperature in the high 30s, it would have been a long, hot and uncomfortable wait. From the crest of the pass, it was several miles down a gentle slope to the town and, in order to cool the engine, the distance was covered in neutral with the engine switched off. It could have been dangerous, as the truck had servo-assisted brakes, but there was little or no other traffic on the road.

It was during the Survey Troops tenure that Garian, the surrounding desert and the pass experienced a deep snowfall, the first in living memory. I

was actually on my way back from Tripoli when the snow fell and became trapped at the foot of the pass. I was ultimately rescued by the Grenadier Guards, who were stationed in the main Italian Barracks in Tripoli and sent forward with orders to dig the pass free. I crawled behind with the *Bedford*, as they dug their way upward. This episode resulted in the loss of my prized spring bed, which I had acquired and kept in the back of the *Bedford* for many months, to provide some 'home comfort' whenever I was stranded overnight in Tripoli. When, however, the *Bedford* became really stuck on one bend, several Guardsmen lifted the bed from on top of the Jerricans and decided that it could be used as a snow version of a sand channel - and forced it under the rear wheels. It actually proved successful - but the bed was never the same again!

We eventually reached the crest, only to find that the snow had trapped several of the survey parties out in the desert. They had however been located by some reconnaissance planes, whose crews had dropped blankets, food and a Very pistol to them, with instructions to stay put until rescued. The Troop was eventually reunited with the rest of the Battery in Tripoli, which was then embarked on a Troopship to join 40 Infantry Division in Hong Kong - and eventually served in Korea as 170 Mortar Locating Battery. That however is another story!

(Right then Chaucer, we certainly hope to read that 'other story' at some time! You weren't the 'Cpl Harvey' mentioned on page 56 of John Dutton's book, "The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist", were you? Ed.)

The Arborfield Apprentice

Following the splendid presentation of a plaque from the RAEME Association at the 2007 Reunion (see photo in OBAN40 page 11 and letter page 41), the following correspondence transpired:

'At our last AOBA Committee Meeting, the Chairman and Members decided that we should present a copy of the College History to you Jim, in New Zealand, and a copy to you Fred, in Australia. If you are both willing to receive a copy, I will go ahead and make the necessary arrangements.'

On behalf of the Committee and the AOBA, best regards to you both from Keith Evans, Asst. Sec AOBA.

The following replies were received:

'It would give me great pleasure to receive a copy of the College History from the AOBA Committee. Please can you thank the Chairman and Members for their kind offer.'

All the best to you and yours, Fred Ordynski (57B)

'I would like to thank the AOBA Chairman, and Members of the Association for their very generous decision to present to me a copy of the College History of 'The Arborfield Apprentice'. I will enjoy reading and reminiscing of those bygone days. I will also inform my Association, at our AGM in November, of this kind offer and I will pass it on to other interested members (hopefully to be returned to me forever). I look forward to receiving it in due course.'

Best regards, Jim McGuire JP (52A)

Book Review – Tee Cee's Arborfield Odes by Tony Church (55A) - ISBN 9780955675324

This is an illustrated collection of amusing, and sometimes poignant, verses, relating to the life and times of the Army Apprentices School, Arborfield. This book well deserves a place on the fireside table of anyone who served at the School, as Tony has captured in his writing so much of the trials, tribulations, humour and life of an Army Apprentice.

The book is available from 'Amazon' and all good bookshops.

Killed in action

How sad it was, to read in the March 2008 *Craftsman* magazine, of the death of Cpl Darryl Gardiner. Born only in 1982, Darryl could hardly be described as an 'old boy' and was far too young to be an 'Old Boy'. But he was certainly an 'ex-boy', having joined and trained as an Apprentice Armourer at the AAC and SEME between 2000 and 2002. He had already passed his 1st Class course by 2006 and had served on a six-month deployment on 'Op Agricola' in Kosovo. Attached to 5th Regt RA, Brigade Reconnaissance Force, in southern Afghanistan, on January 20th this year, Darryl was taking part in an operation in Helmand Province, to disrupt enemy forces and reassure the local populace. The vehicle he was travelling in struck a roadside mine and Darryl was 'killed in action'.

OBAN Articles from the Late Forties

Here, I continue the theme that I began in a recent OBAN, of looking back at all the splendid contributions published in earlier magazines. This time I am listing those articles sent in from boys who began their service during the latter years of the 1940s, after the end of World War 2.

<u>Brief title</u>	<u>Contributor</u>	<u>OBAN</u>
1996 Reunion report	Tony Head 46A	10
Personality slot	Steve Johnson 46A	9
The vicar's husband	Denis Marshall 46B	6
Korea - 8 RIDG	Roger Millard 46A	21
Toy soldier display	Bill Pusey 46A	10
My World Cup	Bill Pusey 46A	39
The Early Days	John Smithson 46B	36
The formative years	John Smithson 46B	38
Memories of boys' school	Curly Hoare 47B	20
1991 reunion report	John Northam 47A	1
Archives and memorabilia	John Northam 47A	1
Corps pictorial archives	John Northam 47A	2
1992 reunion report	John Northam 47A	2
Apprentice to Portreeve	John Northam 47A	3
Visit to New Zealand	John Northam 47A	5
Arborfield revisited	John Northam 47A	6
1997 Reunion report	John Northam/Tony Andrews 47A	12
Dick Whittington	Mike Addison 48B	9
A very fortunate life	Mike Addison 48B	36
General reminiscences	Gerry Berragan 48B	32
1998 Reunion report	Ray Derrick 48B	15
Life's rich experiences	Ray Jenkinson 48B	41
1999 Reunion report	Gordon Bonner 49B	18
The September 49er bell	Gordon Bonner 49B	30
Behind the scenes	Ted Brigham 49A	10
Reunion '99 – my impressions	Pete Henry 49B	19
Disappointment at the reunion	Mike Wells 49A	7

Once again, I must stress that the above list contains only the 'main articles' and does not include the many interesting and humorous letters that have passed backwards and forwards through the pages of OBAN during the same years! It should be noted that John Northam, who bravely took up the mantle of 'First Editor of OBAN' in 1992, had very little material to work with – hence his great efforts recorded above to fill the pages of the first few issues!

Pete Gripton 56B

A Tribute to John Maddox

'Tis often said it takes all sorts to make a world - it's true.
Some folk will go through life morose, and there are others who
Will lighten any place they enter, gloominess will cease,
This gift is given to but a few, but John was one of these.

It mattered not that skies were grey and pouring down with rain,
John always seemed able to make the sun emerge again,
The quick, dry, humourous remark, the ready, sharp retort,
The twinkling eye, mischievous smile, the cheerfulness he brought.

The concept of the older man, at least in public eye,
Can be of dour pomposity, but John, he gave the lie
To this, living life as it should be,
With truth, hope, strength and great courage to face adversity.

He gave us all so many laughs over passing years,
His memory we'll cherish, not with sad regret and tears.
He's left a gap in all our lives, yet we'll oft pause a while,
And we'll remember John. Yes, we will think of him - and smile.

*See you at the 'Great Reunion', John.
Tee Cee (Tony Church, 55A)*

John's grandson, Dan, replied: *This was a lovely tribute and I would have loved to have read it at the funeral, but sadly the funeral arrangements were taken out of our hands a bit. However, everyone has been given copies and it means so much to know how people felt about Granddad. I would like to thank you and everyone for all your kind words at such a difficult time.*

Submitted by Maurice 'Mo' Hope, 59B:

This is the poem to which I referred in OBAN 41. It's a bit lengthy I know, but well worth the read, as the words are as relevant now as when they were written. The author was a WW2 Royal Canadian Air Force veteran, A. Lawrence Vaincourt, who penned this in 1985 for a newspaper column.

Just A Common Soldier

He was getting old and paunchy
And his hair was falling fast,
As he sat around the Legion
Telling stories of the past.
Of a war that he had fought in
And the deeds that he had done,
In his exploits with his buddies,
They were heroes every one

Though sometimes to his neighbours,
His tales became a joke,
All his Legion buddies listened,
For they knew whereof he spoke.
But we'll hear his tales no longer
For old Bill has passed away
And the world's a little poorer,
For a Soldier died today.

He'll not be mourned by many,
Just his children and his wife,
For he lived an ordinary,
Quiet and uneventful life.
Held a job and raised a family,
Quietly going his own way.
And the world won't note his passing,
Though a Soldier died today.

When politicians leave this earth,
Their bodies lie in state,
While thousands note their passing
And proclaim that they were great.
Papers tell their life stories,
From the time that they were young,
But the passing of a Soldier
Goes unnoticed and unsung.

Is the greatest contribution
To the welfare of our land
A guy who breaks his promises
And cons his fellow man?
Or the ordinary fellow who,
In times of war and strife,
Goes off to serve his country
And offers up his life?

A politician's stipend and the
Style in which he lives
Are sometimes disproportionate
To the service that he gives.
While the ordinary Soldier,
Who offers up his all,
Is paid off with a medal
And perhaps a pension, small

It's so easy to forget them,
For it was so long ago
That the 'Old Bills' of our country
Went to battle, but we know
It was not politicians,
With their compromise and ploys,
Who won for us the freedom
That our country now enjoys

Should you ever find yourself in danger,
With your enemies at hand,
Would you want a politician,
With his ever shifting stand?
Or would you prefer a Soldier,
Who has sworn to defend
His home, His kin, His country
And would fight until the end.

He was just a common Soldier
And his ranks are growing thin.
But his presence should remind us
We may need his like again.
For when countries are in conflict,
Then we find the Soldier's part
Is to clean up all the troubles
That the politicians start

If we cannot do him honour,
While he's here to hear the praise,
Then at least let's give him homage,
At the ending of his days
Perhaps just a simple headline
In a paper, that would say
"Our country is in mourning,
For a Soldier died today"

I am sure those sentiments will touch many old boys as much as they do me.

Notification of deaths

Mick Ashby, 58A, on 17 April 2008, following a long battle with cancer.
B R 'Bill' Bond, 58A, from leukaemia at Royal Berks Hospital, 15 Sept 2007.
Terence Michael 'Paddy' Forde, 53A, died after a long illness, 5 Feb 2008.
J I 'John' Maddox, 44B, member no.1893, suddenly, 12 Jan 2008.
Bernard Rayner, 45A, was killed 20 January 2008, in a motorbike accident.
Gordon Rickard, father of Brig Rickard - not a member, but attended the reunion on one occasion, as the oldest old boy, circa intake 38.
James Edward 'Jim' Silby (ex-Bramley 1938) in January 2008.
Eric Albert William Spick (1939 intake) in 2004 - late notification.
Robert Gray 'Tug' Wilson (1939 intake) on 14 Oct 2007 (*Craftsman* obit).

New Members since last list

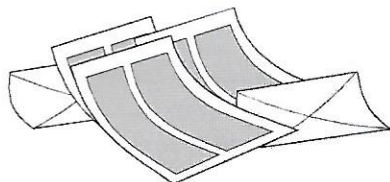
Phil Bex, 75C; Roger Brooker, 56B;
Dave Coleman, 73C; Bob Condon, 52A;
Alan Findlay, 53B; Bill Gray, 60B;
Martin Griffiths, 71C; Bob Henn, 62C;
Derek Kirkpatrick, 44B; Ian Lowe, 61C;
Jim McIntyre, 60C; Rob Milburn, 67B;
Robert Monk-Terry, 53B;
Chris Pike, 58A; Frank Rigley, 58B;
Dave Saniland, 69C; Mark Thomas, 75C;
Sid Webb, 60A; Martin Weller, 68B.

*(Good to see so many 'youngsters' joining!
Ed.)*

Missing Members – Can You Help?

Once again, several OBANs were recently returned, with members' addresses 'NOT FOUND'. If anyone has further news about them, or can shed any light upon their present whereabouts, please contact one of your Committee members.

PG COLEMAN, ex-43A, of ALCESTER, Warwickshire
GP COOPER, ex-85A, of NORTHALLERTON, North Yorks
RG CRANE, (?), of BOURNEMOUTH, Dorset
DPA DUTSON, (?), of HENGOED, Mid-Glamorgan
TR O'SULLIVAN, ex-62C, of Mudeford, CHRISTCHURCH, Dorset
DJ PILKINGTON, ex-62B, of KELVEDON, Essex
GRG WRIGHT, ex-77C, c/o Quartermaster, 3 Battalion REME, BFPO 2



Bill Eden (ex-Chepstow 62A) e-mailed this to Larry Jarvis (56B):

I currently run the BSXBA (British Services X-boys Association) here in New Zealand. I was ex-RE, but was a founding member of 'C' Vehs Wksp REME in Singapore during the late 60s. We hold an annual reunion in NZ on Remembrance weekend, this year it's in Rotarua. I have just made contact with an ex-boy from 56B Arborfield, he's a Geordie by the name of (wait for it!) - Charlie Brown. I think he was a Radio Tech or something like that - he did the full 22 and finished up as WOII. I met him at the Papakura RSA, he's into game shooting and sailing. Rattle those old brain cells and see if you remember him.

(Check the contact from Charlie himself! Ed.)



Charlie 'Carlo' Brown (56B) e-mails:

Hi Pete (*that's me folks! Ed.*), you found me - even though I've moved to a different hemisphere. Yes, we're settling in well, about 18 miles due south of Auckland, in Papakura. It's a nice town of about 40-odd thousand and some 20-25 minutes to the airport, the city and the Gun Club I'm in. It's also only 200 metres from the RSA (Returned Servicemen's Association - the Kiwi version of the British Legion) - a well-appointed club, with all the facilities - restaurant, bowling greens etc. (*And a bar? Ed.*)

I resigned from both the AOBA and the REME Association just as we left Blighty, but only last week I met a guy in the RSA, called Alan Butler - a Recy Mech - who did 12 years before emigrating here. He joined up about 1964, did his initial training in Bordon and he knows you. It also turns out that he's the president of the NZ REME Association here and he signed me up again yesterday, giving me a whole lot of *Craftsman* magazines to



Brian Atkins, 43A, writes:

I finally received my long-awaited issue of *OBAN* (No.40) and it made very good reading. Reading my own article that was kindly published, I had forgotten to mention that, during my stay in Arborfield after returning from Maidstone, I was farmed out as part of a demonstration team. This took place at London Airport - more commonly known today as 'Heathrow'. In those days, the airport was nothing more than a collection of large Nissen huts and most of the planes were *Avro Yorks* - actually *Lancaster* bombers that had been converted for passenger use.

The 'demo' in question was to show some of the work that REME was capable of. I was responsible for a *Bedford* engine, mounted in a large tank. The engine had been waterproofed and I had to demonstrate its ability to run underwater. Whilst it was running, I had to pump water into the tank, and then drain it off again before the next show. I also demonstrated the working of a

diesel injector - this had a glow-plug underneath it, so the flame produced was quite spectacular.

The really hard part of this 'break in routine' was due to where we were billeted, way out somewhere in the suburbs of West London. In their infinite wisdom, the powers-that-be placed us in Hounslow Barracks, where there just happened to be around 1,200 ATS girls in residence. I will say no more, other than a jolly good time was had by all!

(Sorry about the late OBAN delivery Brian, but you got it in the end! I can personally recall, as late as 1962, flying from London Airport to Douglas in the Isle of Man. That was to go on a week's 'luxury' honeymoon, having married my lovely wife just the day before. We still then had to walk across the tarmac to our plane - but you'll forgive me if I say that, under the circumstances, my feet weren't touching the ground at all! Happy days! Ed.)



Colin 'Fritz' Fry (56B) e-mails:

Hey Scouse, when was it we last saw each other? About 1960 at 3 Batt is my nearest guess! It would be great to get back in touch with the guys from back then. I am living in Maryland, yeah I married a Yank, but unfortunately she died about 18 months ago, she was only 49. When is the Reunion this year? I will try and get over there for it and, while I am there, I want to get a copy of your book, they wanted about 40 quid to mail it to me. Give my e-mail address to anyone who wants to contact me - I do still have a couple of photos that I will have to dig out. Good to be back in the loop!

(I'd just arrived back from a week's Easter holiday when I found the above in my Inbox - nearly fell off the chair! Fritz disappeared off the radar many years ago, everyone always wondered what had happened to him, we only knew that he originated from Bexhill-on-Sea. Amazing coincidence is that he is on the photograph in my 'Personality Slot' article, elsewhere in this OBAN! Ed.)

(Charlie, I don't know if you'll see this in print - and if you do, hope you don't mind me publishing it here in OBAN. I just thought it would be good if others of 56B know how you are getting on, especially as you were such a good supporter of the Association - and 56Bers - before you took off to the 'land of the long white cloud'. Do you still have that great dart-throwing action you used to put to such good effect around the pubs in Reading? Ed.)



Lemmy Holmes, 54A, e-mailed:

Prompted by your excellent editing of the latest OBAN, I have just completed an article, which I would like to submit for your approval for the Journal. It's a sort of life story, but concentrating on technological developments that began at AAS and how they affected me, entitled 'One Long Apprenticeship'. Are there any restrictions in the content regarding the Official Secrets Act? I wanted to include photos of radar sets, the Corporal missile, FACE computer etc, all of which were extant during the 1950's and 1960's and wouldn't want to get myself locked up! How should I proceed?

(We'll be happy to publish your tale Lemmy – I think technology has moved on a bit since we were lads! Ed.)



Maurice (Mo) Hope, 59B, e-mailed:

I got my latest edition (OBAN41) yesterday and was surprised to see that my old mate Barry Williams was not getting his copy delivered. I e-mailed him straight away (just in case something dire had happened to him!) and he can't understand why his copy was not arriving. He is going to contact someone (I suspect it will be Uncle Bill) directly to see why the mix up, as he says he has not moved house or anything.

(As long as this gets sorted – that's the important thing! Ed.)



Ray Walker, 57A, e-mailed:

I will try to dig out that photo, it was a postcard so not very good. *(This was in response to queries about the photo's date – see recent OBANs! Ed.)* By the way, someone else had the same photo card at last year's reunion, among a pile of photos (cannot remember who) - and '1959' was written on the back of his! This makes sense, as then I would have been in 5 Div, so carrying a rifle along with 6 Div, somewhere up nearer the cookhouse. My photo certainly got some response!



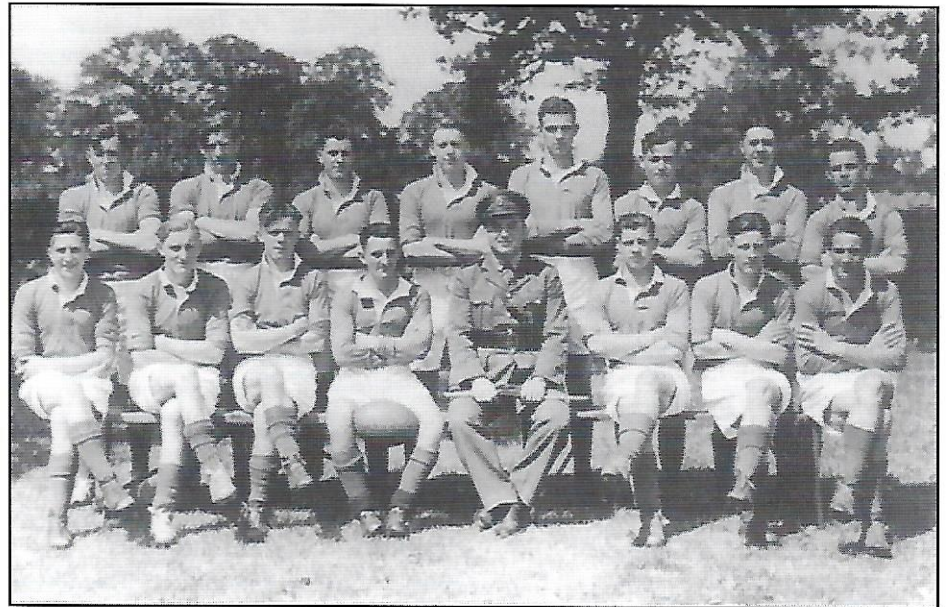
Charles 'Chaucer' Harvey (43B/44A) writes:

Recalling the sporting rivalry that always existed between the Apprentice Schools at Arborfield and Chepstow, I realised that, in my possession, I still retained a photograph of the first Arborfield XV to beat Chepstow at rugby. I cannot recall the date, but my memory suggests that it was sometime during the Spring of 1945 – and it was definitely played at Arborfield. With the photograph now being over sixty years old, I hope readers will forgive me for not remembering all the names – and I doubt very much if I ever knew any of their Christian names! The exception to that is Boyce 'Sid' Walker, possibly because it was a bit unusual.

The name I most regret being able to recall is that of the captain, he was a rugby genius with a natural body swerve, and was an inspiration to the rest of the team. Looking back, I am convinced that he was

mainly responsible for that Arborfield team's all-conquering season. I believe that the Oi/c Rugby during the period was a Captain Ball, formerly a scrum-half with Gloucestershire – but I am open to correction! Finally, and most memorably, it was at this match that, for the first time, 'The Reds' was sung by the entire School assembly. That they were all 'encouraged' to be spectators that day says much about the expectation of the result – an expectation that the team duly delivered against 'the auld enemy'.

The original of this photograph was lodged with the REME Museum for 'the archives' but, as far as I am aware, has never before been published in OBAN. On a personal note, I am hoping that other readers will at least fill in some of the gaps, with the first and surnames that I cannot remember.



Back row l/r: 'Sid' Walker (flanker); 'Chad' Isherwood (2nd row); unknown; Heywood (prop); 'Tiny' Parsons (lock); unknown; 'Taffy' Jones (full-back); 'Flob' Brock (three-quarter).

Front row l/r: Davies (scrum-half); 'Ossie' Osbourne (2nd row); unknown; Team captain (stand-off); Oi/c Rugby; Chaucer Harvey (three-quarter); 'Mitch' Mitchell (three-quarter); another unknown



Keith Tilly, 51A, e-mailed as follows:

I have been asked to send this to you. You are free to:

1. Publish it
2. Bin it
3. Wrap your fish and chips in it

But above all, please read it in a quiet moment, sipping a glass of red. It's all true and as accurate as I can remember. I could write this stuff all day, because there are thousands of similar memories. How can anyone this useless survive? It's a

question I've often asked myself, but as yet haven't had a satisfactory reply. I suppose that, if I was organised, I might have arranged the paragraphs in a different order, but my PhD is in lino laying, so I wouldn't know how! Anyway, if nothing else, you might have a laugh or two.

(Keith's e-mail accompanied a very humorous account of Keith's views on his career. I hope to publish this, in two separate parts, as time permits. Ed.)



Barney O'Shea (45B) Armourer, Vehs and Aircraft Tiffy, made the following comments through the web-site:

Dear Editor, I met you at the 2004 Reunion and a remark was made that the cover picture (of *The Arborfield Apprentice*) came from a Doug Boucher, but that you did not know the occasion for the picture. Well, Boucher was my Company and my time. The picture, when you look at it, shows apprentices all wearing those immaculate early-style berets, which I think had just been issued, as there are no cap badges. The picture

in fact is of 1945-46 apprentices, exploring the many ways of wearing our new headgear, after our grease-soaked side hats, with wherever possible, plastic buttons and plastic cap badges, when we were at the ATS(Boys). I thoroughly enjoyed your book, but naturally felt that full justice was not given to the first peacetime intake, including myself, with service in around 30 countries, plus being founder members of REME

Aviation - not many of us left. I thought that, as I was on the web-page for other things, I would just make those comments I have been thinking about since 2004!

All the best and thanks for all your literary efforts.

(Better late than never Barney! And if you'd like to 'balance the equation' on behalf of your Aviation guys - be our guest. Ed.)



Former Editor, Brian Hornsey, 54A, writes:

I recently read an interesting obituary about 'Jimmy Stewart'. No, not the Hollywood film-star, but the elder brother of racing driver Jackie Stewart. In fact, it was Jimmy who helped his younger brother to enter the world of Formula One, where Jackie subsequently won three World Championships. Jimmy was also a racing driver - and one of the biggest names in the sport during the early 1950s. But he only competed in one Formula One Grand Prix, the British one of 1953. What really caught my eye was the following statement:

"In the early 1950s, Jimmy Stewart was drafted for compulsory National Service in the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers. It turned out that his Commanding Officer was a motor racing buff, so Stewart ended up racing at weekends, while his fellow soldiers were peeling spuds."

One must take that last bit with a pinch of salt of course, but I was wondering if anyone amongst us ex-boys ever came across this character - or maybe even served at the same unit?

(Over to our discerning readership on that one Brian. Ed.)



Derek Holbeche (52B) e-mails from Canada:

Reading the last issue of *OBAN*, number 40, I note that the V1 (or 'doodle-bug' or 'buzz-bomb') was twice mentioned, firstly by Trevor O'Callaghan in *'My Apprenticeship Years, Pt 2'* and also by Chas Pepper in a letter. This got me thinking of the times that I saw my first, then second, V1. The first was when I was a young lad, at the time living in Slough, (Bucks). I was standing at the door with my Dad when we heard this 'phut-phut' noise and, out of the clouds, came this little jet. By this time, we knew what these things were and Dad said there was no danger, as the engine was still going. Later we learned that it went down in the Thames, near Maidenhead. The second sighting was when I was helping a friend doing research at the Canadian War Museum. We were in the annex of the

Museum and were given free run of the place. All the equipment there was great, but the piece that really caught my eye was a complete V1 - and it was one of the piloted ones! That's right, this was one that had a cockpit, and about 180 to 190 were made. The pilot would take the thing up, set the direction, then bail out while still over (German) friendly territory. Not surprisingly, pilots were none too happy with that situation, so in the end that mode of transport was cancelled. My own thought was that, if the explosive was taken out and wheels fitted - it would make a nice little jet-a-round! Keep up the good work with *OBAN*!

(We'll certainly try Derek - it sure helps when we get letters like this! Ed.)



Malcolm 'Mal' Tanner, 58B, writes:

I recently spoke on the phone to the Editor about submitting an article to *OBAN*. I have since made a start but the more I write, the more I remember - so the article grows! I have also got more work piling up, to do with the local REME Association Branch, as it is the end of the year and our AGM is due - as well as the Annual Report - so I am a bit behind! I have therefore knocked up a sort of career history as a stop-gap, until I can sort out a more detailed article.

I recently obtained half-a-dozen back copies of *OBAN* from the REME Museum and reading through them has jogged my memory. I have found that I have a couple of ex-Arborfield boys in

my Surrey Branch of the REME Assn. - Doug Kew (45A), who wrote in issue 39, and Doug Robertson (47A), who was also with MTS in Iran, along with Dave Roberts (57B) and myself. I took issue 40, with its article on the CAAT Team in Iran, to the last branch meeting - and Doug Robertson became so engrossed that I might just have a convert! Although Doug Kew is a member, I haven't had the pleasure of meeting him yet - perhaps I will, at the AGM.

(Good to hear from you Mal - and no doubt you will be part of the recruiting drive for 58ers in time for the next Arborfield Reunion? Ed.)



Daniel Maddox e-mailed:

I am the grandson of John Maddox (44B), who supplied photographs of last year's reunion. I am writing to sadly inform everyone that he passed away suddenly yesterday afternoon (12th Jan 2008). My granddad was very proud of his Army history and looked forward to the reunions every year, I'm so glad he made it to the last

one, despite heavy rain and floods. Would it be possible to pass on this sad news to others, as I am trying to contact as many of his friends as I can via e-mail.

(Many readers will have been aware of John's contributions to OBAN over the years, dating back to 'My first day', in

issue 8 of late 1995. Afterwards he told of his experiences as 'A young rifleman' Pt1 & 2 in OBANs 13 and 16, with his final 'My Paris caper' in issue 36. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him and who shared in his memorable tales. I hope to produce John's 'first day' as an archive article as soon as I can fit it in. Ed.)



Tony Guy (43A) e-mails, regarding Jack Causton:

Jack was in the same intake and trained as an Instrument Mech. At Arborfield, he and I were great friends, often going into Reading on Saturday afternoons, to see Reading play football. After our later military training at Maidstone, I didn't meet Jack again until 1961, this time at Dar-Es-Salaam, when he and two other REME inspectors arrived to check out the 6th Btn King's African Rifles' equipment. We enjoyed several nights out 'on the town' before the boys went back to Nairobi. It was to be another ten years before we met up again, this time in the Seychelles. My wife and I had gone for a holiday, from Hong Kong via ship, to stay for six weeks. I say 'by ship' as, in 1971 the airport was not built and sea-passage the only transport method. Meeting Jack there

required more than just a touch of sheer luck!

We were staying in the only good hotel available, and were told by the manager that the dining room was holding the Seychelles 'Miss World' competition that very day. We went along to watch the show and I noticed the MC, who was very loud and forceful, ordering the girls about. I thought there was something familiar about him, but it took me some time to see through the grey hair and wrinkles, and realize it was Jack! I waited until the show was over before speaking to him - and then it took him some time to recognize me. Well, I mean, one does not expect to meet an old buddy on a small island in the Indian Ocean every day! Meeting up made for a much better holiday, as Jack took us to



places we would never have otherwise seen. We were in the Seychelles again last July, and managed to contact Jack's wife, who told us the sad news that he had died on 1st July 2006 at his home, there in the Seychelles.

(Jack is the young lad in the centre of accompanying photograph)



Tony Domoney (56B) e-mails from Australia:

I have now joined the 'Bionic Body Club', sporting a new stainless steel/polyethylene sealed left-knee assembly! It will take about six weeks before the swelling goes and the healing is complete. I spent ten days in hospital, being nicely 'nursed' by delightful nurses, all female, in a private room en suite, with excellent food and continuous 'service' throughout. The pain for the first three days was beyond comprehension. I had to flex the knee from day one, to get a minimum of 90 degrees flexibility, before I could leave hospital. Being on high-powered painkillers certainly helped, but the pain was intense. I'd never had morphine before, so for most of the first week I was on 'Cloud 9'!

Anyway, all went to plan and I am glad that it is over.

Whilst in hospital, I gained the following information and thought it worth passing on, on the subject of 'Blood Clots' and 'Stroke'. Remember the first three letters - S, T, R. A nurse friend encouraged me to post it and spread the word. I agreed, as if everyone can remember something this simple, we could save some lives - seriously.

During a BBQ, a lady stumbled and took a little fall. She assured everyone that she was fine, saying she had just tripped over a brick because of her new shoes. They got her cleaned up and got her a new plate of food. While she appeared a

bit shaken up, she went about enjoying herself the rest of the evening. Her husband called later, telling everyone that his wife had been taken to the hospital and, that evening, she had passed away, having suffered a stroke at the BBQ. Had they known how to identify the signs of a stroke, perhaps she would be with us today. Some don't die, they end up in a helpless, hopeless condition instead.

It only takes a minute to read this...

A neurologist says that if he can get to a stroke victim in time, he can totally reverse the effects of a stroke. He said the trick was getting a stroke recognized, diagnosed, and then

getting the patient medically cared for, within 3 hours, which is tough.

RECOGNIZING A STROKE:

Have the sense to remember the 3 steps – S, T, R. Read and learn! Sometimes symptoms of a stroke are difficult to identify. Unfortunately, the lack of awareness spells disaster. The stroke victim may suffer severe brain damage when people nearby fail to recognize the symptoms.

Now, doctors say a bystander can recognize a stroke by asking three simple questions:

- S * Ask the individual to SMILE
- T * Ask the person to TALK and SPEAK A SIMPLE SENTENCE (Coherently) i.e. It is sunny out today)
- R * Ask him or her to RAISE

BOTH ARMS

If he or she has trouble with ANY ONE of these tasks, call 999 immediately and describe the symptoms to the help-line. (Another sign is gained by asking the person to 'stick out' his/her tongue. If the tongue is 'crooked', i.e. it goes to one side or the other, it is also an indication of a stroke.)



John Pewsey, 45A, e-mailed from foreign parts:

I loved OBAN 41 (mainly because I got mentioned!), but now for a minor bit of nit-picking. That other bloody 'Pusey' wasn't in 45A - he was in 46B. Why do I know? Because, after many glorious trouble-free months, all of our mail, laundry, boots, etc kept ending up with the wrong Pusey/Pewsey! And besides, much later in my not too auspicious career, I went up to RHQ for my annual interview with the Brig, to see if I was suitable officer material? No - but he did congratulate me on all the good work I was doing for Corps football! I had to explain that it was not I, but - guess who? (Side note - the Brig was one 'R.F. Shields' - what a glorious name for an 'FIEE' engineer!)

But enough of Pusey himself! I was very intrigued/impressed by his 'Brief History of SPEC' article. It might be of some interest to note that, in 1969, my last posting before demob was to the Electronics Wing of the AAC. I had come from Radar Branch, Malvern, so, in the interests of instructing Electronics Apprentices, I liberated as many useful items as I could from the Malvern 'Component Recovery' shed as I could load into a Land-Rover and brought it to Arborfield. These went to make a Polar Diagram Plotter. Later, I liberated (permitted) an AA 3Mk7 Tracking Radar

from Old Dalby - which became a download device of maps from Weather-tracking Satellites. (My colleague in a lot of these activities was one, Ken Anderson, one-time webmaster of AOB, now resident in Southern España.)

Getting to the point of all this waffle, in relation to SPEC, the other project we completed was a 'Feedback Classroom' in the Electronics Wing. Looking back, it was the last gasp of Electro-mechanical apparatus, before the advent of the purely digital - which Ken, very rightly, would have preferred. But I didn't think we had the materials to implement the project. So it was a '4-choice' push-button selection device at each student desk, which initiated an Early-English Perpendicular (architecturally) typewriter to record the students' answers

At which point, I left HM's employment and left it to others to develop more realistic methods of recording student performance - culminating, I suspect, in SPEC? Sorry to bore anyone - but you know us Oldies!

(John - at SEME Bordon we had a 'feedback classroom', where the push-button device activated coloured lamps on the instructor's desk! Simple, but effective. Ed.)



John Swarbrick (62A) writes:

"Magic Moment" - If only . . .

With reference to Pete Gripton's "Magic Moment" in OBAN 40, when he had the pleasure of meeting and talking to HRH Prince Philip during a visit to SEME. It reminded me of a story told to me during the 70s, whilst serving with the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers and, by all accounts, a true one. Apparently, not long after HRH took on the role of REME Colonel-in-Chief, he undertook a tour of REME facilities in BAOR, and found himself being presented to REME representatives from units in and around Fallingbommel. One such individual was a Craftsman from the 16th/5th, standing at ease in line and smartly turned out - well, you all know the script for such occasions! "This is Cfn Smith (real name not known) from the 16th/5th Lancers LAD", said the accompanying officer. Turning to our hapless Craftsman, HRH said, "Ah! 16th/5th Lancers, isn't that my daughter's regiment?" Looking somewhat confused, our hero simply replied, "Naah, it belongs to your missus!" If only someone had taken the picture! Now, that would have been a 'magic moment'. I never did find out what became of Cfn Smith!

(Nice one John! Ed.)



Greg Peck (53B) e-mailed from Australia:

In response to certain Centurion anecdotes that I put forth at the behest of Keith Evans, I am quite happy to allow them to be used in OBAN if so wished. Along with 'Peat' Moss and a couple of others, we placed our contributions into the thread on 'Centurions', which I opened up in the 'REME Past and Present' web-site. 'Peat' and I, along with others of like mind, are very keen to encourage the

lads to come forward with their anecdotes and hopefully see them placed in some sort of archive for future reference. We are starting to attract attention from the academic world already, as witness the very recent York University approach made to Trevor Stubberfield, in his capacity as Curator of the 'Arborfield September 49ers' archival web-site. They may just be yarns and lantern swinging to us, but in

point of fact, most of it is living history and, as such, something that should be recorded for posterity, whether posterity is ready for it or not!

(I now have the anecdotes as mentioned and hope to publish them soon in a future OBAN, which I'm sure can be considered as an 'archive'! Ed.)



Brian Atkins, 43A, e-mails from Australia:

For those people back in UK that don't know him, Major General Peter Cosgrove is an 'Australian Treasure'. He commanded the troops in East Timor. He was recently interviewed on ABC Radio. You'll love his reply to the female who interviewed him, concerning guns and children. Regardless of how you feel about gun laws, you should find this amusing. General Cosgrove was about to sponsor a Boy Scout Troop visiting his Military Headquarters.

FEMALE INTERVIEWER: So, General Cosgrove, what things are you going to teach these young boys when they visit your base?

GENERAL: We're going to teach them climbing, canoeing, archery and shooting

INTERVIEWER: Shooting! That's a bit irresponsible, isn't it?

GENERAL: I don't see why, they'll be properly supervised on the rifle range

INTERVIEWER: Don't you admit that this is a terribly dangerous activity to be teaching children?

GENERAL: I don't see how. We will be teaching them proper rifle discipline before they even touch a firearm

INTERVIEWER: But you're equipping them to become violent killers

GENERAL: Well, Madam, you're equipped to be a prostitute, but you're not one are you?

The radio then went silent and the interview ended. This actually happened and was loved by those who heard it.



Chas Pepper (43B) writes ... and writes ... and writes:

In OBAN40, Trevor O'Callaghan's reference to AA guns, sited in Portsmouth, jogged my own wartime memory. During night raids in 'The Blitz' period, we, in our communal air-raid shelter at West Cowes, I of W, could plot the course of bombers by the different sounds of the various AA guns. There was a battery of 3.7" guns, which greeted an incoming group of bombers. When they fired, we knew the planes were overhead. When we heard the 'Pom Poms' (automatic guns that made that 'pom-pom' noise), we knew the enemy were over Portsmouth, quite far away from us. After a pause, if the Pom Poms started up again, this meant the

enemy were on their homeward leg. In Cowes, we could only sit tight and hope that their bomb-bays were already empty. The 3.7s would again start up, encouraging the enemy away, but showering the town with shell splinters. Once the 3.7s ceased firing, Fritz was on his way home – and that would be it for the night,

The locals had their own names for the AA guns. The 3.7" were the 'big guns' and the Pom Poms were as already described. But there were also some rapid-firing guns, which appeared on West Cowes promenade around D-Day, and got the name of 'the electric guns',

because of the large numbers of generators that surrounded them. The public was barred from getting too near them, so I cannot describe them. But I did see one firing at night – sending a stream of red, green and white lights (tracer?) skywards, a beautiful sight. Is it possible that any of our 'Gun Clan' can solve the mystery of what these guns were?

(I must add here that Chas also sent another of his famous 'grist to the mill' tales, along with what I have published as 'a letter'. More power to your elbow Chas, you make some telling contributions! Ed.)



Wally Footner, Oct 39, writes as follows:

I must apologise that the accompanying article is in 'longhand' but, over the years, I have never bothered to update my method of correspondence. I didn't think it necessary at the time and now I'm too old (83) to change! So I do hope you can read my writing and able to translate it into the modern version. Once again, I am looking forward to the reunion in July, although at one time I didn't think I'd make it, following heart surgery etc. The 39ers are gradually getting less – only 7/8 last year!

(Wally's letter introduced an article that I hope to publish in due course. It is great to receive such good copy from all these venerable gentlemen! Ed.)



Ron Ward, 56A 'C' Coy e-mailed as below:

Subject: Parade 1958-59 (on back of OBAN40) and letters in OBAN41, page 32

Yes, the old photographs do stir up a good discussion! Having now read Doc

Houghton's reply many times, it now reads okay, it's just the way it has been written. During that era, 1958-59, I seem to recall 'D' Company as Champion Company. I would like to get hold of the original photo, negative or image, to see if I could enhance it sufficiently to recognise some of those in the near side. Like Doc, I would say that

RCM Sallis, dressed in Blues, is the one saluting (front foreground left). As I recall, at just over five and a half foot-ish, he (and many others!) towered above me - and he did not have middle age spread!

(I spoke on the phone with Ron and he said that the last time we had spoken was at SEME in 1971 – when I reminded him that the pair of us had been Room NCOs in HQ Coy together! Ray Walker of 57A provided the photograph and I am currently trying to get back in touch with him. Ed.)



Fred Ordynski (57B) e-mailed from West Australia:

'The Arborfield Apprentice' and supplement, plus the last 'PoP' Programme arrived just before Christmas, in good order. I have presented them to our RAEME Association President, Jan Klein, for placing in our library for all ex-boys and any interested RAEME type to borrow. I shall be sending a photo of me presenting the book etc., after our next meeting in February. I would like to personally thank the OBA Executive for their kind present to us distant brothers. Many memories and discussions will flow on from this. I hope you are now all dried out, as we are still in drought, with water restrictions. The Eastern States - Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria - went from drought to flood in a matter of days. Hope we don't change so dramatically!

All the best to all of you



Les Whiffen, 39A, wrote as follows:

I am sending two articles that I wrote for the New Zealand branch of the REME Association last year – hopefully you may be able to find a place for them in OBAN? Received my copy of OBAN 41 (Feb 2008) today – as usual, it was great to read all the stories and letters, I enjoyed them very much.

(Thank you Les – I'll certainly try to include the articles – see my comments about Wally Footner's letter! Ed.)

It is with deep sadness that I report the death of Terence Michael Forde, known to all his mates as 'Paddy'. Paddy came to Arborfield from the City of Cork, County Cork, as part of intake 53A and trained as a vehicle mechanic. He was transferred to 'A' Coy and it was then that I first met him. I was 53B myself, but also 'A' Coy and a trainee vehicle mechanic. Paddy was a keen footballer and a fan in later years of Chelsea FC. As I am an Arsenal fan, he often threatened to send 'the bhoys' around to introduce me to hospital food! In Ireland, County Cork is known as the 'Rebel County'. However, Paddy could never be described as a rebel, but more of a



Colin 'Fritz' Fry (56B) e-mails:

Hey Scouse, when was it we last saw each other? About 1960 at 3 Batt is my nearest guess! It would be great to get back in touch with the guys from back then. I am living in Maryland, yeah I married a Yank, but unfortunately she died about 18 months ago, she was only 49. When is the Reunion this year? I will try and get over there for it and, while I am there, I want to get a copy of your book, they wanted about 40 quid to mail it to me. Give my e-mail address to anyone who wants to contact me - I do still have a

couple of photos that I will have to dig out. Good to be back in the loop!

(I'd just arrived back from a week's Easter holiday when I found the above in my Inbox – nearly fell off the chair! Fritz disappeared off the radar many years ago, everyone always wondered what had happened to him, we only knew that he originated from Bexhill-on-Sea. Amazing coincidence is that he is on the photograph in my 'Personality Slot' article, elsewhere in this OBAN! Ed.)

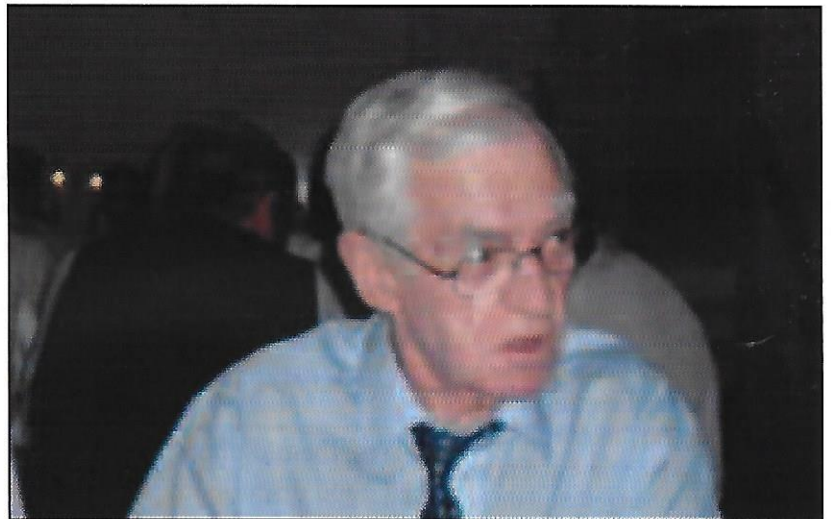


Chas Pepper (43B) replies to a query:

In OBAN41, Jim Purdy asked me about 51 Brigade in Cyprus. Yes, Jim, you are correct when you say that Jack Elam was the ASM at that time, a real gentleman. The Art Vehs was S/Sgt Jock Hargreaves, who seemed a really dour Scot but, in reality, was a kindly man. It was a sight to see when surrounding units brought in small repairs for the workshop. The sliding hatch would fly up and Jock would appear, with his grimmest face. Stuff

would scatter everywhere, with roars of, "Fill the form in properly". It was all an act – and very cleverly done. You and I must have had a fair amount of contact around the camp and at work, as we were almost isolated in camp during 'the Emergency', except for duty jaunts out. Almost fifty years has passed since those days and I hope you will forgive me for not recalling the young man you certainly must have been then!

Dennis Elshaw (53B) Reports the Death of Paddy Forde



loveable rogue. His impish grin, infectious laugh and wicked sense of humour could soon charm the birds off the trees. The last time we served together was as instructors at SEME Bordon, I was teaching vehicle repair techniques whilst Paddy sorted out the cryptic clues in the Daily Express crossword! The last time we actually met was at the 2006 reunion dinner. He kept his illnesses secret from all but his wife Val and daughter Rebecca. He finally lost his battle against lung cancer on Tuesday February 5th. His sister Noreen, and brothers Jack and Declan, were only informed about two weeks before he died. That was typical of Paddy, not wanting to be a concern to anyone. I'll miss him, may God rest his gentle soul.

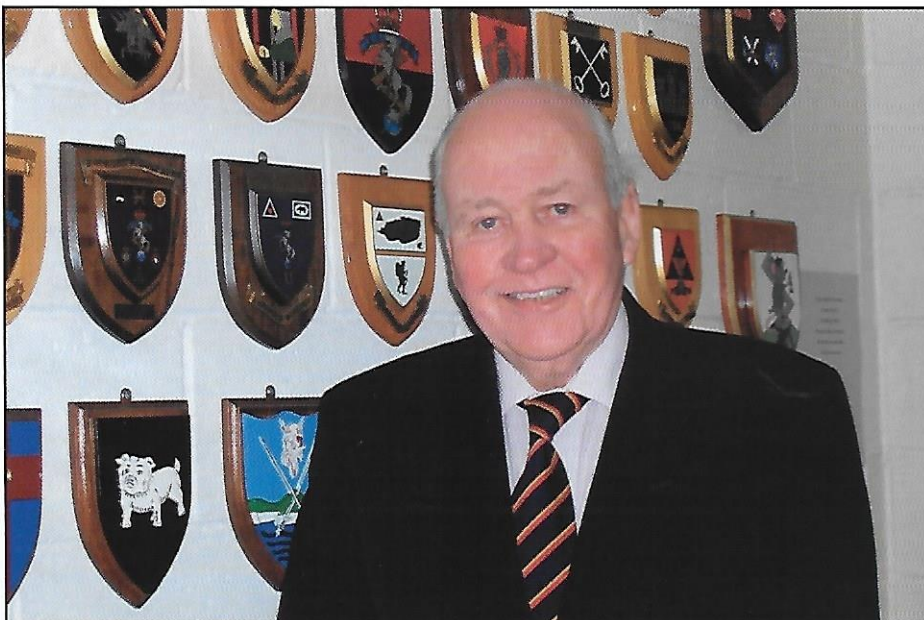
The REME Bell Tower



Visitors to the REME Museum in recent months would not have failed to notice the sight of a bell tower, standing proudly at the entrance to the site. The Toll Bell and its accompanying Tower were both presented to the Corps in 1966, by Technical Group REME, upon the unit's move from the Royal Dockyards at Woolwich. There is no indication on the Woolwich Bell of its age, or foundry of casting, but it could well have been ringing during the time of King Henry the Eighth. All Royal Dockyards had a toll bell, which was rung at the commencement and finish of work – the forerunner of the time clock. The tower is not the original one, as it has had to withstand many moves in its time, most of which have occurred within Arborfield Garrison. The tower was last rebuilt in the mid-eighties by the Army Apprentices College, Chepstow - and recently refurbished by 24 Training Support Squadron, based at 1 RSME Chatham. The photograph shows the RE team responsible for the refurbishment, together with the Regimental Colonel, Chief of Staff DEME (A) and the Museum Director, our very own Bill Cleasby. Missing from the photograph are Cpl Allen and Cfn Amos of the Minley RSME Workshop, who carried out the difficult task of lifting and fixing the copper-clad canopy at the top of the tower.

(Reproduced from 'Craftsman' magazine, with kind permission from the Editor. Naturally, the Bell Tower also features largely in 'The Arborfield Apprentice' history! Ed.)

Derek Gilliam - Corps Archivist 1989-2007



Many ex-boys, particularly those who have visited the REME Museum, will be aware of Derek Gilliam, who has 'called it a day' after some 62 years service with the Corps. He retired at the end of 2007, after eighteen years as the Corps Archivist in the Museum. Indeed, Derek was the last Corps employee to have been both a founder member of the Corps and also a WW2 veteran. My own personal thanks go to Derek, who was greatly helpful in providing me with a lot of material that went into the writing of 'The Arborfield Apprentice'.

Pete Gripton

