

**Sept
2013**



**Issue
56**

Reunion Edition



Arborfield Old Boys Association

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

ARBORFIELD OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

President

To be confirmed

Vice Presidents

All Past Commandants

Chairman

Colonel Brian G J Hutchins Bsc(Eng), CEng, FIRT, sq(w), gw (61C)

Vice Chairman

Lt Col Bill Cleasby, MBE, IEng, FIET, sq(w), (61C)

Honorary Secretary

David (Tich) Schofield (65A)

7, St Marks House, St Marks Avenue, Salisbury, SP1 3DL

Tel:01722239174 E-mail tich@arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Registrar

Alec Powell (64C)

30, Pyrton Lane, Watlington, Oxfordshire. OX49 5LX

Tel: 01491 614142 E-Mail alecreme38@gmail.com

Honorary Treasurer

Maj Mike J Davis MBE (60B)

Rosebank, New Buildings, Sandford, Crediton, EX17 4PP

Tel: 01363 84382 E-mail mjdavis@btinternet.com

OBAN Editor

Ray Stevens (64C)

4, Golden Grove, Southampton, Hampshire. SO14 1PT

Tel: 02380 491570 E-mail raystevens599@live.co.uk

Webmaster

John (Herbie) Coles (66B)

20, Upper Cairncastle Road, Larne, County Antrim. BT40 2DT

Tel: 02828 272740 E-mail johncoles51@btinternet.com

Recruitment Officer

Barrie Parker (65C)

31B, Hawthorns Lane, Keynsham, Bath & N E Somerset. BS31 1BY

Tel: 01173 298380 E-mail barrie.j.parker2@btinternet.com

AOBA Chairman's Report



I'm sure that you will agree that the committee and particularly David Schofield deserve our gratitude for the success of the reunion week-end. The transition away from

Arborfield, now in its second year, was never going to be easy but the familiar format has admirably made the jump in venue. True, it is more expensive, and cost of drinks anywhere can never compete with those from a sergeants' mess, however the breakdown of activities allows for those who have to watch their budgets still to take part. The format at the National Memorial Arboretum remains much the same as was, the only significant

difference being lunch is no longer a barbecue! The AGM is still well attended and the evening dinner enhanced by the presence of ladies - even if it did require an amendment to the constitution! As explained at the AGM, planning for such a large number and finding a suitable venue is not simple, there being few establishments with the capacity, so early planning and booking is essential. Once again, many thanks to our committee for their sterling work. I look forward to seeing you at the next reunion in 2014.

Brian Hutchins 61B

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 photo/images in TIFF or high JPEG formats are preferred. Photographs or diagrams must be high resolution if they are to look acceptable - aim for something at least 100kb in size. Send article and photographs separately, do not embed photographs within the text.

Membership of the Arborfield Old Boys Association is open to all those who served as apprentice or staff member, 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 Honorary Secretary, and on the website www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Front Cover Photograph: The Hinckley Island Hotel, our reunion home for now.

Rear Cover Photograph: Some of the 52 crosses that were laid this year to mark the passing of those ex-apprentices we have sadly lost. Photograph taken by Max Warwick.

©Arborfield Old Boys Association. All Rights Reserved.

Printed in Great Britain by Hampshire Press Ltd.
Southampton SO14 0SQ

Distributed by Trojan Mailing Ltd
Southampton SO14 1HU

Committee Members Reports



Honorary Secretary's Report

Well, as I'm writing this I'm still reeling after such a wonderful event. Make so of course by all our friends who

came to the Reunion, great turn out and I think everyone had a good time.

Elsewhere in this OBAN you'll find the full report but just a little from me159 made it to the Friday Sgts' Mess Curry Night – from the feedback received the hotel got the food spot on – well done to the new chief.

182 arrived at the NMA and loads of us made it on parade – Thanks to Ssgt Mick Bysh and Sgt Kevin Lancaster-Park for being so kind to us!

171 sat down for Reunion Dinner, and I have to say the hotel staff worked really well to turn the room around as we were – once again – late finishing the AGM. Loved the lamb by the way.

Anyway a few 'tweaks' needed for next year I think, mainly to the coach timings. Thanks for your feedback – always welcome and if you want to give us some more – don't hold back.....

Dates for your diary – 2014 18th to 20th July and 2015 17th to 19th July, so no excuses for not booking early!

My thanks to all who made the weekend what it was – wonderful to see you all. Thanks also to all the volunteers to take over from Mike Davis – wonderful spirit from everyone.

David (Tich) Schofield 65A



Honorary Treasurer's Report

From the Retiring Honorary Treasurer

I thought that this year's Reunion was excellent. Well done David Schofield.

There is very little that I have to report as you will have already heard it at the AGM! That said, however, Laurie Blakley (61C) came to me during the evening and volunteered to be the new Treasurer. Many thanks to you Laurie and I am sure that your 10 fingers will make more sense than my 9!!

In conclusion and on a more personal note, the job as Treasurer gave me a great deal of satisfaction over the 13 years. I considered the appointment as an honour and privilege and have valued your

support, generosity and most importantly, your friendship.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your most generous gift which was presented to me at the end of the Dinner night. I can assure you that it will be a treasured item. The decanter and glasses will last a lifetime but the whiskey has already started to evaporate very quickly!! I will always be fully committed to the AOBA and give you my best wishes for now and the future. Thanks to you one and all.

All the best, Mike Davis, (60B)

Honorary Editor's Report



Still learning, but at the same time still enjoying the job.

There has been a couple of hiccups on the way, which we have managed to get sorted out fairly quickly.

We can now settle to issuing three editions a year, providing we do not have to move the reunion to different dates again. In future I will try to issue as early as possible every January, May, and September, of each year. The electronic version being made available at the same time.

I would like to thank all of those members who have sent their notes of appreciation. Most of all to those members who have submitted articles, without you the OBAN would not exist. If you have enjoyed reading any issue of our magazine, please think about helping by writing of your apprentice experiences. It may not appear immediately in the next edition, but it will in time.

The reunion this year was excellent, thoroughly enjoyed by everyone that I have since spoken to. I am especially looking forward to next year, as it is our 50th. The word is that the lads who are searching for more of our intakes are doing a grand job. So I could be meeting up with a great many more of my old friends, next year. Which is the whole point of this association, as far as I am concerned.

Just remember your articles are always welcome, if you are not sure about what you have written, and want an opinion before hand. Just ask, and I will willingly give my feelings about what I have read.

Take care my friends,

Ray Stevens 64C

Honorary Registrar's Report



a) Since the last OBAN we have had 5 applications for life membership, no reactivations and no resignations.

b) New Members:

2758 Welch DR David Dave A-63B-C
2759 White DRC Douglas Doug A-64C-B
2760 Martin H Hugh Lou A-64C-B
2761 Menhinick RC Richard Charles A-64C-
2762 Leslie B Bruce Bruce A-75C-B

c) Numerous requests for detail updates have all been recorded to the best of my knowledge as are the sad reports of members passing on.

d) Bob Castell (64A) reports that a **YEAR 64** drive he is organising is as follows:

"Of the 70 current email addresses I had for non Arborfield Old Boys Association members I received 43 replies, all in favour of attending except one. So, along with current Association members and as long as we don't get any back sliders, we should have a pretty strong showing at the reunion."

Please let me know of any changes to your address information especially post codes. It is important to know where you are located

Alec Powell 64c



Honorary Webmaster's Report

The Arborfield Old Boys' main website has continued to be a popular and several updates to Apprentice Trademan RSM's, major prize winners and Pipe Majors have been

noted and implemented. These alterations are possible because members take the trouble to notify me. In addition two members have recently taken over as contacts for their years intake group. I am very grateful for everyone's help, my sincere thanks gentlemen.

Obituaries are always gladly received, if you lost a mate and know a bit about him, and would like to put something in writing of any form. Let me or Ray have it, and we will see that it gets published both on the website and the OBAN.

The forum although a little quiet at present, has seen an increase in membership of 18 members since last June. I do acknowledge that this sort of bulletin board/discussion site is not everyone's cup of tea, and occasionally some strong opinions get discussed, but it is there for all, so, if you have

joined and want to say your piece then please do so, do not let the old stagers make all the running.

Electronic OBAN, the online downloadable version of this magazine continues to increase in popularity, with 18 more members electing to receive it electronically. I have now made it available on a one shot basis on a secure site. (Dropbox), in addition to the AOBA website, and older copies will still be available there. I am always happy to help if any members experience difficulties with downloads, and I am pleased to say that the feedback so far received about the new system has been positive so far

John (Herbie) Coles 66B



Honorary Recruitment Officer's Report

To date the recruiting program has become somewhat slow, as many will know I have had a number of issues which have precluded me from doing as I would have liked. I am pleased to say that although not fully fit I am getting back into the swing.

I have managed to find a number of new 'outlets' where I have been plying our wares. One can only hope that some fruit will be borne!

As ever it is 'onwards and upwards'

Barrie Parker 65C

A very big thank you to all who have supported me through my 'illness' and for their continued support throughout my recovery!

Barrie

My Civilian career - last in a series

Trevor Callaghan 42C

Before reviewing my civilian career, I would remind readers of the technology of the years between 1953 and 1983. I started my research career using a slide rule and I progressed, using a mechanical calculator, electronic calculator and then onto a computer. When I first ran engines on the test bed, I stood alongside the engine, reading the instruments, calculating the results with a slide rule, then plotting the results and having to make decisions quickly. Instrumentation improved dramatically: for example, originally a thermocouple (for reading temperature), I manufactured myself. The diameter would be about 4mm, with a long response time. I used melting ice in a large thermos flask as a reference point for my thermocouple. Later, I could just go and purchase a thermocouple, about 1mm diameter, with a quick response time and an electronic reference point. This was about the size of a packet of ten cigarettes. When the Health and Safety rules came into operation, I was not supposed to stand alongside an engine. The data acquisition system I was using, just prior to my retirement, could read several thousand readings a second and plot the results, along with a prediction.

The vehicles of 1950 had poor reliability when compared with vehicles today. A good tool-kit and grease gun was essential to maintain the vehicle. My first car had 36 grease nipples! To change gear, double de-clutching on buses and trucks was invariably the norm. Very few vehicles had any power assistance, especially cars. If the engine, gearbox or axles did not leak oil, it was suspected there was no oil to leak out! Drip trays were the order of the day and a product that had good sales was the one that removed oil from drives and garage floors. Engine oil consumption would rise dramatically as cylinder wear increased. Cylinder re-bore was quite common. Engine 'de-cokes' every few thousand miles and the re-grinding of valve seats, was a constant chore. Most cars had a starting handle for the engine and its main use was to check cylinder pressures. When the engine was rotated by handle, the resistance, as each cylinder reached compression, should have been about the same. If there was a variation, this indicated that a de-coke, regrinding valves, or a re-bore was required. Fuel and oil was not of the same quality as today. The rest of the vehicle required as much attention as the engine; for example, brakes were notoriously poor and required constant attention. All these problems were deemed acceptable; it never put off the majority of people from going on journeys, even though tales of breakdowns were legendary I worked at *Lister Diesel* for a short time at Dursley, Gloucester. The job was not what I wanted and I was interested in going to college to

obtain the Ordinary National Certificate (ONC) and the Higher National Certificate (HNC). There were no opportunities at Dursley, so I went to work for the MoD, where I received assistance with my studies.

DERA, Chobham (Defence Evaluation Research Agency), MoD.

This establishment was originally at Farnborough and moved to Chobham in 1942. An undertaking was given to the local community that the establishment was not permanent and would be moved after the war. There was a lot of bad feeling with the locals when it was later discovered that the test track was being built and there was no intention of moving the establishment. When it was pointed out to the MoD that the proposed motor way would come through the establishment, it was stated that it was not possible and that it would have to be re-routed. How wrong can you be?

The test track surface was laid 'by hand'. The 'special tarmac' was melted and there was a row of workmen with big flat irons. The irons were constantly heated, to smooth the surface. Chobham Common was still in use for vehicle testing and was like a 'moonscape'. Shortly after I started work there, all vehicle testing was stopped on the Common. All future testing was conducted on the test track and its associate facilities, Bagshot test track and the Long Valley test area. Most wading trials were conducted at Instow in Devon and the gun firing trials were at Kirkcudbright, Scotland.

Many of the engineers and scientists were directed labour i.e. under war-time regulations people could be directed where to work. I worked for a few years with an engineer who had worked at *Lagonda Cars* in Staines. When he was at *Lagonda*, W O Bentley (former owner of *Bentley Cars*) was their Chief Engineer. The Director of the establishment, Mr Masters, was Bentley's assistant at *Lagonda* and, when Bentley left, he became Chief Engineer. The engineer I worked with had some very interesting stories of pre-war car competitions and of Bentley. Later in my career, on a visit to the Science Museum, I was asked to examine a rotary engine designed by Bentley in about 1918. The engine was a more powerful version of the French *Gnome* rotary engine of First World War fame. Pilots of planes with this engine fitted, used to say that turning one way you could 'turn on a penny', but turning the other way would take the width of a football field. This was due to the large mass of the engine that rotated, producing a large gyroscopic force. Bentley's engine being even larger, I would say that turning one particular way would require the length of a football field! The engine design was very good but would

have been very expensive to produce. This appeared to be the problem with Bentley's designs. I started in the workshops at Chobham and I was finally promoted to Senior Scientific Officer, after I had obtained the HNC. I also studied engine design and thermodynamics and most of my work was on engine research.

Postscript

During my career and in my retirement I have read numerous books on military activities and discussed with 'friend and foe' on battles of the last war and since. One area in which I was always interested was how the private soldiers viewed their own battles, because I have been critical of many military authors and senior officers' accounts of such battles.

In the Middle East there were thousands of German prisoners of war and they were relatively free to move around Depots. Many were employed in vehicle parks and I had many conversations with them regarding the 'Desert War'. It is interesting to note that many Germans were of the opinion that, whilst their tanks had superior guns and anti-tank guns and employed superior tactics, their equipment in general was less reliable. I have always considered that I learned most about the reliability of British equipment from both Germans and Italians! It is a sad fact that a considerable amount of British equipment was captured in the desert. It now accepted that the German advance to Alamein could not have been achieved without capturing large quantities of British equipment. A figure quoted by the Germans was that 80% of their equipment was actually captured British equipment, including vital fuel supplies. Another interesting fact was that the Germans only had twenty-four fit tanks and the German high command was so alarmed that a senior General was sent to the desert, to quote a German source, *"To bring some form of normality and rational thinking"*. It is also interesting to note that the Germans considered their supply tactics in the field were superior to the British, especially in replenishing tanks. But a report by a German supply officer doubted whether supplies could be maintained, due mainly to the fact that the main German base was about 700 miles from Alamein and under constant harassment from the RAF. The report went on to say the Germans would lose any battle of attrition, and that German and Italian forces should withdraw back to the Egyptian border, because their tank units could not be supplied.

It was often mentioned to me, by soldiers who were in the leading units on the final advance to Tripoli, that supplies were very short. One German prisoner of war's story was that he was part of the crew of an armoured car, which broke down; most of his unit was captured due to the breakdown of their vehicles. The British unit that captured them was exhausted and had very little supplies. It was the Royal Navy

that supplied the unit. The fuel etc was floated onto the beach from ships and it was a case of, if the prisoners wanted to eat and drink, they had to help. Over the years, I have discussed the advance with soldiers who were there and it would appear that, about 150 miles from Tripoli, the troops were exhausted and out of supplies. I have read that Montgomery had to make a critical decision of whether or not to continue. Several officers, with whom I have discussed the supply position on the final advance, were of the opinion that the Navy saved the advance.

There was another aspect of the advance that could be summed up in that many of the troops had been in the desert for about two years and had *"done the desert run several times"* i.e. advance and retreat. Tripoli seemed to them like a magical town in the desert. As one officer described the final advance, *"We hadn't washed for days because of shortage of water; we were covered in desert sores, exhausted and hallucinating; but if the tank had broken down we would have carried it!"* He said that everyone was *"on a high"* and that arriving in Tripoli gave him the greatest pleasure in the war. Before that, he could see no end to the war.

The battle of France in 1940 has been of great interest to me and I have, over many years, spoken with soldiers who'd been there, operating the tanks. If you talk to the German tank crews, about whether they were ordered to stop or had to stop, then you will find that on numerous occasions the tanks had to stop due to mechanical failures. A figure given by the British Army in 1940 was one tank/mile failure 'on the road'. (I have been told that this figure was often exceeded). The Germans quoted a figure of two tanks/kilometre (type of terrain not quoted). General Sir Peter de la Billiere stated, in his book on the Gulf War, that *Challenger* power packs were originally failing at 2.8 kilometres but had later improved to 6.8 kilometres. Also, those *Challengers* were restricted to 15 kilometres per week, to conserve them for action. This was 50 years after the Battle of France, when tanks were considered far more reliable.

These are some of the typical quotes from German tank crews who served in France:

The engines were misfiring badly and blue smoke was pouring out of the engines.
When the engine oil dipsticks were checked, no oil showed on the dipstick.
There were no oil supplies and oil had to be drained out of abandoned vehicles.
We had virtually no engine spares.
The tracks were worn out and no replacements.
The steering brakes were worn out and the tanks could not steer.
The armament could not hit a barn door at twenty paces!

There were only six tanks mobile and we ran them around to make it look like a regiment of tanks. When we were ordered south to Paris, it took three days to get 40% of the tanks mobile - but only half of these had the armament serviceable.

One German Commander said it was not the enemy, or orders to stop the advance, but the inherent defects of the tanks and lack of supplies. It was recognised in the German Army that the *Blitzkrieg* could not be repeated, because success was actually achieved by psychological and audacity - and could well have been a disaster. I find the statement that the tanks were 'ordered to stop' very difficult to accept, when tanks of that period were considerably less reliable than they are today.

I have discussed with many people the operations of tanks in all theatres of operation. In Burma, the CO of a tank regiment stated that, to move a tank fifteen miles in the worst terrain, he always insisted that a spare engine was available for each tank. On the advance to Kalewa, on the Chindwin River in Burma, the tanks were transported to within 87 miles of the river. It took five days to move the tanks on their tracks to the river. Field Marshall Bill Slim insisted that he had an assurance that, when the tanks and crews reached the river, they would be fit for action and would have supplies. But he also stated that, on many occasions, the tanks had reached a battle zone and had been unfit to go into action and could not be supplied. No Army was immune from these problems; the sheer number of tanks was important in many battles, to overcome both mechanical breakdowns and disablement due to the terrain.

One subject that is very rarely mentioned in any description of tank battles is the health of the tank crews (I have mentioned this previously). If anyone has clambered on tanks or inside a tank, when they are cold/hot, wet, and/or exhausted, they will realise how many projections there are that may cause an accident or a minor abrasion. In an analysis of casualties for the whole of the 8th Army, from 1941 to 1943, there were more casualties due to accidents than to actual battle! Also illness could play a major factor. To quote an example: in Burma there were 648 cases of malaria per 1,000 men - 45 times the number of battle casualties. In Europe, from June 1944 to April 1945, the American Army had a total of 44,728 men hospitalised due to trench-foot; 41% were considered unfit for future active service. No doubt some people will ask how does this type of affliction affect tank crews? If anyone has been cold and wet, and been in a tank for the best part of a day, they will appreciate just how cold it can get.

A senior American army officer (he was a junior officer in the War) stated that, in many tank operations in the Pacific, it was assumed that a tank would be (a) disabled by the terrain, (b) have a

mechanical breakdown or (c) be disabled by the enemy, within fifteen miles. He went on to say that one of the biggest improvements was in the health of tank crews. On average, a dose of penicillin reduced the time by a half that a crewmember had an infection. Infection by abrasions etc and illness caused more casualties than the enemy.

Many soldiers will remember being sprayed with DDT from an aircraft! This was to reduce the possibility of epidemics. The plane used was often a Harvard, an old RAF training plane that had a particular engine noise - so one had a warning. It was then a question of covering everything possible, especially food, as the spray tasted and smelt like kerosene. DDT is banned today, but it was credited with avoiding the epidemics of previous wars.

I have related these experiences, of the operations of tanks, because, in designing Armoured Vehicles, the effort of operation and supply must be considered. I know it is a long time ago, and the debacle in France has often been said to be due to the Army still 'fighting the First World War', but the human effort is still the same. Many times I was appalled at the lack of interest in the effort required to keep an armoured vehicle operational, including recovery, repair and supplies. I was surprised to learn that the German Army used thousands of horse transports, due to the shortage of vehicles. Prior to the attack on the Soviet Union, a German Army report stated that the Army had 600,000 vehicles and 625,000 horses for transport. In Italy, attached to one regiment was a Veterinary Unit, whose main task was the disposal of ex-German Army horses. There were about four thousand horses for disposal.

From my experience of the Army in peacetime, and in my many discussions with REME personnel who served in recovery and repair teams in the War, I find that a major contributory factor in any tank operation is to have a well trained recovery and repair organisation. The recovery crews must be physically able to work under extreme conditions, while the repair teams must be of a very high standard, to repair the tanks in a minimum of time. It took the British Army nearly three years in the last war to learn this lesson and it contributed to the success at the Battle of Alamein and future battles. It must also be backed up with a good supply of spares and equipment

My Retirement

When I retired, I worked as a consultant on engines and friction, wear and debris analysis. My work on engines covered small generators, to be carried by one man, to marine engines. The friction, wear and debris work covered all types of mechanism, from audio-tapes to stone crushing machines. My main work was as an adviser. I also learned that saving

three beans per can of beans, by improving weighing techniques more rewarding than improving the life of gas turbine blades!

I have tried to show how my interest in engines started as a young boy and was with me throughout my career. There is an irony about my career, as I doubt now if I could even join the Army or be a government scientist. I am colour blind! (This is a loose term and can mean being colour blind in two colours to only seeing shading). When I was about to leave the army in Germany, colour recognition tests were introduced and I was informed that, if I stopped in the Army, I could not serve in a front line unit and it was possible that I would have had to leave the Army. When I was called up for the Suez crisis, my colour blindness was forgotten - but when I was discharged, I was once again informed that I could not serve in a front line unit! An amusing incident occurred when we were operating in Bideford harbour with a DUCW. We had to negotiate around different coloured buoys! The Officer, the

Corporal and myself were all colour blind and we had to rely on a member of the crew to tell us the colour of the buoys. When colour tests were introduced in MoD, I was informed that, as I had served with MoD for about ten years, I could stay, but if I attempted to 'join' again, then I would be refused.

Today I still take an interest in Armoured Vehicles, and especially in their engines. I read many books on these types of vehicles and, in particular, about tank operations. No doubt many people will say I am 'out of date', but my experiences and interests in all aspects of tank operations may be of some interest to future soldiers.

Unfortunately this is the end of a mighty work, thank you Trevor, and sorry it took so long to complete the publication. Ed.

The Army Apprentice National Memorial

The Final Act.

Sunday the 9th of September 2012, may be remembered by many as a lovely warm and sunny day, but for a small group of 10 ex Army Apprentices, (six from Arborfield, if you include our Patron, plus two from Chepstow and one each from Harrogate and Carlisle), from those erstwhile establishments that oversaw the life changing scheme that we were all privileged to be part of, it was the final act of three years dedicated voluntary work, that resulted in an iconic memorial that for years to come can act as the spiritual home of ALL ex Apprentices no matter where or when they did their training.

It is just three and a quarter years since the 2009 AGM when I put forward the idea of a memorial following a visit to the NMA. The progress of that idea from the Trustees first meeting in October of that year through to the completion of the memorial is well documented on both the AANM website and also in previous issues of OBAN.

A year to the weekend that the memorial was formally dedicated (Sept 7th 2011), forty plus people made up of Trustees, and ex Apprentices and their wives/partners came together on the Saturday night at the Menzies Court Hotel at Mickleover near Derby, just thirty or so miles from our memorial at Alrewas, for a ladies dinner night, to formally celebrate the closure of the memorial project for the Trustees and also act as the venue for the annual get together of the Arborfield 49ers, two of whom are Trustees. To the dedication team it also facilitated the coming together of the main service participants for a final briefing prior to the big day.

After an excellent three course meal, followed by a few drinks and banter about old times long gone, we were very well entertained by our after dinner speaker, Colin Weir, the representative of Chepstow to his after dinner monologue's and "Scouse" humour, and even a "Paddy" song. Following Colin's spot, our MC for the night Gordon Bonner gave his after dinner speech, which contained a heavy emphasis on the future use of the memorial, and it's ownership by all the four sponsoring schools, and closer co-operation of all the old boys associations before their eventual amalgamation into a national Association of Army Apprentices, which surely must come in the relatively foreseeable future. A good night was had by all, but not too much lubrication as we had to have all our wits about us for the service of dedication at noon on Sunday.

Sadly we found out on the Sunday morning that our own Rev Bev John who was earmarked for a major role in the service could not attend due to a family health problem, which we hope is now resolved. Luckily the Rev Garry Kelly was able to seamlessly cover the whole service thanks to our briefing the day before.

The ceremony itself was basically split into three phases, firstly the dedication of the Hadrians Old Boys new standard, followed by the dedication of the last remaining named commemorative tablets around the outer circumference of the memorial and the Information Lectern, informing any visitors exactly who and what we were, and finally the ceremonial internment of the "Rolls of Honour" of the four sponsoring Schools.



The scene was set at noon when the nominated representatives of the four schools took up their positions behind their respective benches. As the Trustees chairman David Chapman was on a family trip to the US, proceedings were started by a welcome speech from our vice Chairman, Keith Thrower. Carlisle had the honour of having their new standard dedicated and being unfurled by the removal of two bows, by their own padre the Rev Garry Kelly, supported by standard bearer Malcolm Davison and their nominated representative David "Ted" Cooper. Arborfields very own "Wordsmith", Tony "Tee-Cee" Church next took centre stage to read out his own very poignant poem entitled "Legacy", resplendent in full Highland Dress.

Since the original memorial dedication on Sept 7th last year, the remaining 30 "Com Tabs" have been laid, behind the monolith now making a total of 570 dedicated to old boys past and present, and also an Information Lectern has been erected beside the main memorial, highlighting who and what we were and the type of training given.

The "Com Tabs" and Lectern were blessed by the Rev Garry Kelly, with our Patron, Major General Gerry Berragan unveiling the Lectern.

The final phase of the service, and hopefully the most moving for the spectators, involved the internment of the "Rolls of Honour" of the four sponsoring schools into a sealed casket buried at the entrance to the memorial. I felt very honoured and humble to represent the many thousands of ex Arborfield association apprentices, to perform the act on their behalf.

A big vote of appreciation must go to our excellent stonemason Keith Rackham of H.L.Perfitts of Diss, for his gift of the sealed casket, and the wonderfully polished granite slabs that had had the paper "Rolls of Honour" sealed within them, a gift that was kept under wraps, In this case union flags on each school

bench, a secret to the school reps until the service, which came as quite a surprise when expecting to pick up and display to those present some A4 paper lists.

I had the very proud role of placing the first "Roll" into the casket, and then on bended knee receiving each of the other three schools offerings before placing them carefully into the casket. Following the internment of the Harrogate "Roll", Johnny McGahan remained beside the sunken casket while our Patron handed me a pristine sealed copy of last years dedication programme, order of service and "Tee-Cees" poem read out that day, for placing on

top of the school "Rolls", at which point Johnny and myself slid the lid into position, symbolically closing the casket. (The lid would be sealed securely by the stonemason after the service). At this point Gordon Bonner handed a Poppy Wreath to the Patron who placed it on top of the sealed casket, thus bringing that part of the service to an end. After the Harrogate





and myself had faced the casket, bowed our heads and returned behind our benches, we were ready for the final formal part of the ceremony.

The Rev Garry Kelly read out the Exaltation and Kohima verse, which was followed by the Last Post, played excellently by a Royal Marine Bugle Major, resplendent in best blue ceremonial dress. Then followed the two minutes silence, perfectly respected by all assembled, then Reveille.

Our Patron gave a short address to all those present, thanking all those responsible for bringing the memorial project to a successful conclusion. The event was closed by the vice chairman, who thanked everyone for attending and being part of the day, and wished everyone a safe journey home.

On a personal note, I was very honoured to have been the nominated representative of the Arborfield Old Boys Association on the management committee from its onset, and to have had the opportunity as

a trustee to carry out an active part in the successful conclusion of the project, helping to bring a dream to reality in just over three years.

A big thank you must go to all the Arborfield Trustees from our membership, who all played a significant role in the project, from our figurehead and Patron, Major General G.B Berragan CB., our excellent webmaster and photographic expert Max Warwick, Mike Davis for his duties as Treasurer, Keith Thrower as vice Chairman and co-ordinator of all the "Com Tabs", my own efforts compiling the orders of service and choreography for both ceremonies, and the massive contribution and hard work, and long hours put in behind the scenes by our secretary Gordon Bonner, for his fund raising efforts and driving the project along, without whose input we would certainly have not yet reached this point.

Maurice 'Mo' Hope.

AOBA Benevolence Fund

Please remember that the **Arborfield Old Boys' Association** maintains a **Benevolence Fund**, for the benefit of any Old Boys who may be in distress or going through hard times.

If you are aware of any circumstances where the fund can be of assistance, please contact the Honorary Secretary at the earliest opportunity.

Tee Cee's Rhymes of our Tymes

AOBA Reunion 2013

This was a time that was really quite hot,
A time for all, and none we forgot.

A gathering for those, who were still here,
The saddest moment: 52 gone this last year.

We gathered once more, to pay our respects,
We marched to the tunes, and we did keep in step(s).

The stories were told, we did drink our beer.

We promised each other: Yes we will be back next year.

So please make the effort, it may your first.

One thing is for certain, you won't die of thirst.

A weekend of great happiness, a time for real joy.

Yes you are the one: THE ARBORFIELD OLD BOY.

Andy Knowles 64B

DENSITY ALTITUDE

Some of the pilots in the Second World War
And some in the early days of the Corps,
Encountered problems with Air Density,
That caused them periods of anxiety.

There is no doubt, as ICAO defines,
That temperature drops as an aircraft climbs,
From fifteen degrees Centigrade at the sea,
It drops down quite consistently.

Every thousand feet rise in altitude,
Is two degrees down the Centigrade tube.
More height, the further the temperature drops,
Until so low and cold, it stops.

The Auster with only cylinders four,
Had insufficient power with which to tour,

Over mountains high and deserts hot,
It was difficult for it to handle that lot.

The Lynx suffers, too, in terrain hot and harsh,
Finding it difficult to carry out its tasks.
Only early morn and late in the day,
Can sorties be flown to assist the affray.

For though it tries hard, the Gems sometime lack,
Enough power to lift soldiers and packs.
So grounded it waits for the air to cool
When again its engine it can 'spool'.

Then the power they produce generates enough lift,
Through the 'Collective' and blades for the Lynx to shift,
To prosecute the Taleban in that land,
Especially in the province of Helmand.

But wait, have you heard; there's a new version,
Of an old favourite loved by many a person.
It's the Mark 3 Beaver that's become so topical,
For dealing with problems of a nature tropical.

You can be sure and have absolute trust,
In it's turbo-prop and its reverse thrust.
Even with nine passengers or a ton of cargo,
On take-offs and landings there is no embargo.

Come the Mark 3, Density Altitude's no worry,
For others, Beaver pilots' feel a trifle sorry,
For the Pratt and Whitney has power to spare
To cope with heat and the rarefied air.

So instead of the Lynx in Afghanistan
Use Mk 3 Beavers to fight the Taleban.
Its capacity, performance and STOL ability
Must appeal to the Corps, if not to the Ministry.

So search the internet on your P.C.
To find Viking Air of Victoria, B.C.
For less than a million they can supply,
A 'brand new' Turbo Beaver, for you to fly.

Remember, there are Beaver pilots, old and bold,
Expecting the call to come out of the cold.
Eager and many are the Corps brothers,
Waiting for a commission to rejoin the Colours.

So, please, give us another chance to prove,
After a Mk 3 conversion we can move,
What a Lynx cannot do during the heat of the day
With a new Beaver, any load is OK!!

Derek Palmer 54B

AOBA 2013 Reunion Report.

Jonny? Yes Dad; "Would you have a look at my broken widget please?" After I (usually) fixed it he would say; "Ah, your Arborfield apprenticeship" He never said Army apprenticeship, always Arborfield apprenticeship. I think our formative years there instilled in us an attitude to 'have a go' and usually succeed.

When some of us met on Friday it was the first time since boy school since we had seen each other, laughter lines and expanding waists were the only differences we saw. Unfortunately we could only muster five from 63B for Friday and Saturday evening; two more were to join us for the main day on Saturday. Others wanted to attend but were looking after family members, speedy recovery to them. All of us from 63B were from C company and five were in the same room in Jeep! We came from near and far, Joe from Edmonton, Alberta and Joe from Nottingham. There were also two members from 63C.

Friday evening

After picking up our badges and finding the all important bar the memories came flooding back, I'm sure this was the same for every table.

There was a nice choice of curries and it was a reminder of happy times in past Sergeants messes.

Just as we were about to get our dinner someone was thieving our last popadom; yes Taff 66C, you know who you are. Dave Gardner, our eagle eyed ex policeman witnessed the offence and apprehended the culprit!



'This is what you'll get if you do it again'

If only we had known how tiring all of Saturday was going to be we would not have been last to leave.



Going



Going



Gone

Saturday

We all managed to get on the coaches after breakfast to go to the National Arboretum, it was my first visit there.

We met the other two before we formed up for parade.



Arboretum group

After a one minute silence we were brought to some semblance of order by S/Sgt Michael Bysh and Sgt Kevin Lancaster. The pipe band struck up and lead us to the saluting dias. I know we are all a bit long in the tooth, but the pace was a bit slow, the D/S were shouting out the time but not quite in sync with the bass drum. Lots of changing step and sniggering; hopefully we arrived at the dias before anyone noticed.

The parade was handed over to the chairman Colonel Brian Hutchins, I was surprised at the power of his voice, a legacy of being boy RSM. We were inspected by Brigadier Nigel Williams, at the beginning of his address to us he said that he also was an ex apprentice of 72C, this brought on cries of 'Boo – Jeep' I hope it was taken in the spirit it was given.

After the parade we all went to the Apprentice memorial, which was very impressive. The padre in charge was Gary Kelly, an ex apprentice from Carlisle, although we didn't hold that against him. The sound system was malfunctioning and someone called for a competent ECE (Ekky), several were there but none were forthcoming;



All at the Apprentice Memorial

The padre said that he didn't want to sing a solo, so most joined in. There appeared to be two groups, one about a second behind the other so that was cause for a few more giggles.

Then came the sad bit, Roger Traves read out the names of fifty two members no longer with us.

The act of remembrance, last post and then silence enabled us all to think of those departed.

After all that marching and singing we had worked up an appetite, we made our way to the tent for a well laid out lunch. At the end mini cake stands

were put on each table, Dave was on guard in case our popadom pincher was going to strike again.

After lunch Joe McCormack and I used the colour of the tree bark and other natural features to navigate our way to the Army Commando Memorial; two birds with one stone!

We went to the main memorial on top of the mound and all found it quite moving.

We then said our goodbyes to those not attending the evening dinner and had a well earned rest on the coach.

Saturday evening

Warmers into the bank were consumed before dinner. It was a pleasure to sit at the table with our Chairman, Colonel Brian, S/Sgt Michael Bysh and his wife Jo. We were treated to an excellent dinner and were entertained by a quartet and Alex Burt on his pipes (not at the same time of course!). Alex then piped in the port and we all raised our glasses to the Queen and then to the hotel staff for their excellent service. The chairman then gave a speech and was followed by Dave Welch, some of his 'Mummy Mummy' jokes fell on deaf ears, maybe it was an early sixties thing. He gave a valiant effort especially as no one else volunteered.

We were also entertained by the trial of three members for defacing WD property. The accused were Tony Strong 53A, Ted Stanford 60C and Larry Jarvis 56B, the accuser was Alec Powell 64C. The accused had allegedly scribed their names on bricks in a wall behind Jeepland, the bricks had recently been discovered so the culprits were charged for defacing WD property. They were each fined approx. £800 or buy drinks for their tables for the rest of the evening.



The weekend is a celebration of everyone's three years of hard graft, not just those fifty years on. There were also three members from 1953 and two from

1943, unfortunately I did not get to speak to the 53'ers, but I did have chat with Bob and George. George Wooley was fourteen and a half when he joined and was a fitter general in the Royal Engineers. Bob Jones was a VM Royal Engineers and ended up as a source controller. Their army numbers only have seven digits and they were a bit miffed because their numbers came from a block allocated to the Royal

They even had redundancies in those days too, there were three options to stay in the Army. Transfer to either the Royal Army Pay Corps, Royal Army Service Corps or Military Prison Staff Corps, in all cases dropping a rank.

Our intake of 63B engendered many special friendships and an overall sense of comradeship that has thus far endured for over fifty years - and that's longer than most marriages last. And I feel sure that is the same for all Divisions.



Bob & George

Signals. After a weekly room inspection the best room got the radio! Different times.

Jon Rencher 63B

I looked at the photos of the 2011 reunion, 1961 intake marching on the square in front of Jeepland and then out of the School gates. It would be more poignant to us all if we could do that every year. Our Irish contingent met at the gates this year, I have a photo but is too distressing to add here! There was a notice that the site is to be developed with 2000 houses. I shall remember it as I first saw it, I dropped my bag on the ground and looked up at the School sign; the guard outside the guard room said "Come on in lad, the sky is the same here as is it at home".

656 Squadron AAC 'From Auster to Apache'.

The launch of this Book also records the REME support from when the AAC was formed in 1957 and the new trade of 'Aircraft Mechanic (later Aircraft Technician)' was born.

Both Arborfield and Chepstow apprentices who passed out in the top of their groups as Vehicle Mechanics were invited to convert to the new trade. A large number of the early Aircraft Mechanics were ex-boys who rose to both commissioned and WO1 ASM ranks. This was the purpose of the Army Apprentice, to provide a core of senior ranks. Early tradesmen were trained by the RAF instructors at Middle Wallop, later ATs were trained by REME.

Many of the MBEs & BEMs listed in the Honours and Awards since 1957 were awarded to REME tradesmen whilst serving with the Squadron.

Beaver Pilot, Sgt MR Nichols REME, was awarded the Distinguish Flying Medal, the only gallantry medal awarded (656 Sqn AAC) in the Brunei, Borneo & Malaysian Peninsula campaigns of 1962-66. I also believe that he may well be the only REME soldier with this award.

This book includes accounts of tradesmen's experiences and COs & OCs praising the work of REME tradesmen.

A small team of three of us helped the author in research, one a son of a pilot and two ex-boys, Derek Walker (Chepstow) and myself (Arborfield).

I would be grateful if you would consider publishing the details in the OBAN & on the web site, **33%** of the profits are donated to 'Headley Court Rehabilitation Centre'.

Ron Ward 56A



Friday Buffet Night

Paris Suite Hinckley Island Hotel

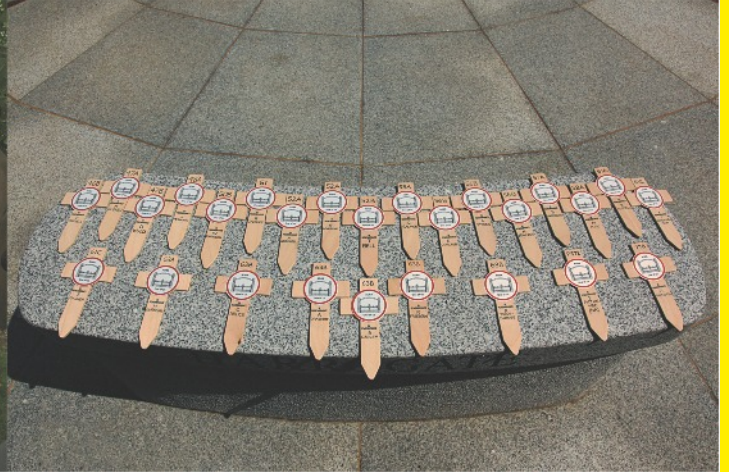




Saturday Morning Reunion Parade
National Memorial Arboretum Alrewas
20th July 2013







**Drum Head Service held at
The Army Apprentice National Memorial**



All Photographs courtesy of Max Warwick, Dave Cosway, and Neil Turrell.



Arborfield Old Boys' Association

50th Reunion Dinner





Adventures in the Desert. Pt5 Mike Larby 42C

Tel-El-Kebir (TEK), 1947 - 1951

And so, it was early November 1947 and I was off on embarkation leave to Welham Villas, Retford. I made a few trips into Gainsborough and had a few dates with Sheila, the daughter of a corn merchant friend of my father's. She had been a 'sort of girlfriend' for some time past, whenever I went home on leave. In fact we first met when she called in with her father with instructions from him, I presume, to 'befriend a lonely soldier'. Then, back to Mill Hill, to suffer all the necessary jabs, and on up to Otley in Yorkshire, the then REME holding centre, awaiting a draft number and a troopship. All transit centres showed the very worst of the then very large Army, utterly soulless and uncaring. So we were glad to finally set off for Liverpool in a troop train one dark and dismal day, to board the jolly ship '*Scythia*'. She had been a pre-war liner, but had now been a 'trooper' for many years - and it definitely showed! I was on deck E3 - I've got the boarding card still - and after 24 hours or so of loading up and sorting out, we set sail.

A REME AQMS was in charge of our mess deck and he lost no time in appointing me as 'troop deck Corporal'. He borrowed my copy of '*Brave New World*' (Aldous Huxley), and I never saw him - or my book - again. He never even appeared on Captain's rounds in the morning! The deck held about 180 men or more; there were ten or more mess tables jammed together, twelve men to a table. We slept on hammocks, slung over the tables, from where they had to be unslung and stowed in the racks provided each morning, before breakfast could be eaten. Our food was collected from the galley by table mess orderlies and, by-and-large, was inedible. We survived on biscuits, tea, cocoa, bread and soup. Often, no one even bothered to go to the galley. Most of the deck dwellers were infantrymen, who didn't give a toss for anything. But, with the aid of their NCOs, we all mucked in and soon had the deck fit for inspection every morning. As I told them, "*The sooner you've done, the sooner you're out on deck*". There were no other duties to perform, but a myriad of little tasks (like, for instance, caring for the seasick) seemed to occupy my time and I seldom felt fresh-air until hammocks were slung for the evening. We duly arrived at the Mediterranean island of Malta, where some disembarked - including one chronic case of *mal-de-mer*, who was put ashore suffering from dehydration - the ship's MO didn't want to know, even though I told him that the poor chap hadn't stirred from his nest in the life-belt rack since we'd left Liverpool!

Landfall at Port Said - I couldn't believe my eyes or my nose - and then by train to a transit camp at Suez, which was even worse! On the second night at Suez, I found myself 2i/c guard; the guard commander was a Grenadier Sergeant. We had *Sten* guns with real live rounds! During the night, the orderly officer made his rounds and, in the guard tent, found only me awake at the table, the guardsman having sensibly divided the guard between us. "*Where's the guard commander?*" he asked. "*Resting*", I replied. He went ballistic! "*Turn out the guard!*" he screamed - and we all tumbled out. He inspected us and told the guard commander that he was on a charge for sleeping on duty. I commiserated and he just grinned. "*We'll see*", he said mysteriously. Thus I learned about the pecking order in the infantry: no more was heard, so presumably the Grenadier Sergeant's CO leaned pretty heavily on the orderly officer!

REME School

Then it was off by train to Tel-el-Kebir and REME School, where I learned I was to a) take a VM1 trade test, b) start a 'LASSie' course (Leading Artisan Staff Sergeant) and c) stay on the permanent staff until the course came up in April (1948). There were six Craftsmen on the staff, and we all shared a very homely billet in a room built in one of the hangers. All the rest of the staff were S/Sergeants and above, about twenty in all I think, and all instructors in various trades. They had a very nice spacious wooden building as a Sergeants' Mess, with a corrugated iron roof and a large veranda, very colonial looking. As it was a long way away from the school buildings, they didn't bother us. Apart from maintaining the training vehicles, we had little to do and, as there were literally dozens of motorcycles on the strength, I would get one sorted and explore TEK garrison. There were some metalled roads and sand tracks, but mostly just desert; vehicles just went to their destinations in a straight line, and when a route became too damaged it was just a matter of driving alongside it to start another track.

The garrison was vast, even at REME School we used a truck to and from our billets. I never knew the total distance around the perimeter fence, but no doubt someone out there does! I reckon it was between 12 and 20 miles, a big fence of coiled wire - *Dannert* wire, was that the name? - with an old minefield outside and a crumbling but deep anti-tank ditch on the inside. Inside that, a perimeter track with searchlight and machine-gun towers. The perimeter track was patrolled by the Garrison Defence Force (whoever they were) and a company

of Mauritians. The two main units within the perimeter were 2 Base Workshops REME and 5 Base Ordnance Depot (BOD) RAOC, together with minor regiments. Scattered at random were other minor units, a recreational centre with swimming pool, sports pitches, NAAFI's and several other canteens, including a Church of Scotland. Outside the perimeter were satellite camps - RASC transport companies, a RE pumping station and water towers, a RE plant workshop, a British Military Hospital (BMH), and probably a few others. The whole *raison d'être* for a complex of this size died in 1943, when WWII first moved on to Italy and then, in 1944, to Europe. True, there were Canal Zone forces, but one infantry workshop and one armoured workshop could have covered for them. Yet it continued to function as if there were a full-scale war going on. There were thousands of acres within the perimeter, covered with cased vehicles and their parts, waiting to be issued to ghost armies, together with battlefield casualties of all types - German, Italian and French 'B' vehicles, from motorcycles to 8-wheelers, tanks and armoured cars too. There were sizable quantities of British and American 'A' and 'B' vehicles too, *Churchills*, *Cromwells* and *Shermans*, plus any number of *Bedfords*, *Austins*, *AECs*, *Leylands* - you name it, and they were there. I discovered more about their fate later. Enough that there were things to marvel at and ponder upon as I increased my sand-riding skills on assorted motorcycles. I felt as if I was the first to visit some of the more remote parks, since the vehicles had been left there at the end of the war. I probably was!

Anyway, back to REME School and the LASSie course. On joining the course, I became a student and moved my kit to a tented camp for students, about 400 yards from my old billet and 400 yards nearer the cookhouse. The tents held four students and four bedside lockers, plus boxes under the beds. There was a six-foot table in the middle and, I presume, four chairs. The whole thing was floored with paving slabs just laid on the desert sand. The tents were standard oblong shape, two tent poles, and sides that were rolled against the four corner posts during the day, and closed at night. Standard 'mizzie' nets and that was it. But they were better than buildings - lighter and cooler, but dusty. The nine-month course flew by; even the regimental training part was OK. CSM Ross, the instructor, was an enthusiastic shot, so we seemed to spend most of the time out on the sand firing countless rounds of surplus ammunition, everything from automatics and pistols to *Spigot* mortars (or were they *PIATs* by then?). Anyway, they were fired from the prone position and had one hell of a kick - they must have been *Spigots* I guess. Most of all, I loved the .45 revolvers with hammers, just like the old Wild West! The technical stuff was easy and I lapped it up. There were good friends too, all 42C - Trevor O'Callaghan, Alan

Rayner and Michael McGuire. I didn't know McGuire's Christian name until I met him at an Arborfield reunion many years later and addressed him by his nickname. "*Don't call me that!*" he snarled - a bit like Major Stevens if you recall.

The tank - sorry, the 'A' vehicle - course was the best, so now I had two loves, motorcycling and tank driving. S/Sgt Ken Slater was the 'A' vehicle instructor, a nice chap whose wife came to join him later and they'd often ask me to their quarter for supper. On his posting back to UK, Ken asked me to a farewell supper on the eve of his departure. Because I didn't know how to say goodbye to them, I just didn't turn up. Much later, he made a point of coming into the classroom, where I was lecturing, to make a point about good manners, so I was even more embarrassed than I would have been if I had turned up. All this occurred about twelve months after the LASSie course, when I was a fellow instructor at the REME School, so we'd been pals a long time; but how could I tell him about my problems with social behaviour? The course was more than successfully passed, and it was back with the three stripes plus a crown, and my next posting came through - to 2 Base Workshops, just a mile or so away! Four of us were posted there - Trevor, Alan, Mike and me. We were in 'D' camp Sgts' Mess; it had a membership of about 200. At the other side of the workshop complex was 'H' camp mess, also about 200 strong. One supposes that in 1943 there would have been A, B, C, E, F and G messes as well - but probably not!

2 Base Workshop - and back!

2 Base Wksp gave employment to hundreds of Egyptians, 5 BOD the same; there were also tailors, barbers, shopkeepers, dhobi-wallahs and servants galore, and all for what purpose? My fate was to spend about three months in (I think) 47 Shed, dedicated to the overhaul of axles and brakes. It was a large workshop, run on a production line system: crates of axles were dragged in from the desert at one end, opened, their contents overhauled to as-new standard, re-crated and sent to 5 BOD, where they were put out on another pile in the desert. Two years later the cycle would be repeated, as the oil seals, etc of the axles deteriorated in the hot dry climate. There were probably another thirty or so sheds - huge hangars really - doing similar things with other bits. There was a foundry - a good one - machine shops, presses, engine test sheds, 'A' vehicle sheds, textiles, carpentry, blacksmiths, tinsmiths, in fact all those crafts necessary to build complete spare parts, and all waiting to die. It was the pointlessness of it all that made TEK a terrible place to be, not the sand and the sun - people pay good money for that nowadays!

The Egyptian employees were generally good

tradesmen, especially so the metal workers. I have a beautiful copper and brass mug they made: a farewell gift from 2 Base Rugby Club. It stands before me as I write, full of £2 coins, which I save for my *Vintage Motorcycle Club* projects. I also have a twin-float carburettor, made of a zinc-based alloy, which one of the Egyptians actually welded together from my design (at least 10 years in advance of a similar *Amal* model). This was using good old oxy-acetylene gases, none of your fancy MIG and TIG stuff! However, I felt that the Egyptian staff were badly treated - not by the system (although the pay was meagre, it was the going rate and working conditions were OK) - but by the NCOs and ORs. Their attitude to them was often petty, mean and spiteful, as well as demeaning (to both sides). I was often ashamed of the behaviour of some of the senior NCOs, and their attitude could only further the cause of the Arab activists: a small but significant part of the population. The average *fellah* was a peace-loving man who just wanted to work and live by the Sweetwater Canal with his wives and kids. Working for the Brits was better than working for the Egyptian land-owners, and they knew it, but they had to put up with a lot of abuse just the same. I soon had enough of 47 Shed and 'D' camp Mess, so I agitated for some sort of move. I got a posting after 12 weeks - back to REME School as an instructor! My other three colleagues applied for the Arm Arts course (anything's better than the dreaded TEK) and off they went together on the same course. I should have done the same myself I suppose - would have done too, had I realised I'd got another two years or so of TEK to do! A lot of time was spent, and some mental anguish experienced, considering the pros and cons of taking the Vehicle Artificer course. On the one hand it would have got me out of TEK; I would learn more, I'd be better off in the promotion stakes and, unlike LASS, it would be substantive. On the other hand, I could see myself spending 16 months at Blackdown, Bordon or Arborfield, as a 'mature' student, with (I imagined) the unbearable petty disciplines and restrictions of Depot regimental life. I know I would have enjoyed the technical training, but coping with RSMs and their offspring may have created a few problems, or so I thought. In hindsight, of course, it wouldn't have been like that - one would have had course colleagues 'sticking together', and thus transform (perceived) adversity into something tolerable. Anyway, I was only doing 'Eight and Four', with four more years still to do, so what? - I still wonder about it though. As it transpired, it would have made no difference. The Arm Arts promotion roll was as long as the Artisan roll, so all promotion, in my time anyway, was local, acting and sometimes unpaid!

But again, I digress! Back to Instructor, REME School. My subjects included FIE (Fuel Injection Equipment); the *Merritt-Brown* gearbox (as in *Centurion*, *Comet*, *Churchill* etc.), a thing of wondrous

beauty, I loved it. *Rolls Royce Meteor* engines; the *M10*, which was a *Sherman* chassis with a 17 pounder anti-tank gun in an open turret and was a good bit of kit, in service in the Army for a good fifteen years. *GM* two-stroke diesels - engines with which I was involved for nearly thirty years; and sundry other short courses. One of these was an MT Officers' 'Vehicle Maintenance and Basic Principles' course, which was interesting, because it was left to me to devise a syllabus for the whole thing. There would be about 25 officers on the course, I assume one from each battalion, regiment or whatever in the Canal Zone. It was obvious that some would be keen 'Petrol Heads' as they say today, and others who had just been given the job, as the CO didn't know what else to do with them. So, basic essentials, POL (Petrol, Oil and Lubricants), daily checks etc, plus vehicle inspection (how to be an instant expert and impress the regimental drivers) and then what? Driving on sand; riding motorcycles on sand, without falling off too often; how to get stuck in sand; how to get unstuck in sand (lower tyre pressures, don't forget to pump them up again - no CTI (Central Tyre Inflation) in those days); how to recover vehicles; how to tow them. What great fun we had! They all went home tired, exhausted, slightly injured, but happy. God knows what their COs thought, but I heard no complaints. Well, one actually, months later, from HQ REME Inspectorate to my CO. "*Who was it who told the MTOs to use light grease in motorcycles instead of oil?*" "*Me, Sir, because that works better in the heat*". What were these EMERs they kept quoting to me? Only one thing had embarrassed me - no-one told me how to address officers in a group! They'd all be seated in class in the morning and, when I arrived, they'd all say, "*Good morning, Staff*" in concert and I'd mumble or say nothing, because I didn't know what to say. Why didn't I ask my boss? Or why didn't one of the course tactfully tell me the correct reply was "*Good morning, gentlemen*"? Don't trivial things stick in one's memory? - but I worried about it at the time.

As the MELF diminished in strength, the REME School ran down also. The courses became mainly basic trade courses, or equipment courses for those luckless National Servicemen who found themselves stranded on the banks of the Suez Canal. Eventually the camp closed and we moved back to a hangar in 2 Base, which we turned into classrooms. The senior NCOs became members of 'D' camp Sgts' Mess - now the only mess that 2 Base had. Life went on until, at last, the three-year 'Python' (actually 3 years and 3 months) was done and it was time for Port Said transit camp, then home on the 'Oxfordshire'. (Why 'Python'? - because it was long, I was told!)

Reflections

Like life everywhere, Tel-el-Kebir life certainly had

its odd moments, but wasn't all bad - there was rugby! I played for REME Canal Zone and was captain of the 2 Base rugby team and also TEK garrison for a time. There was the Bar None Motorcycle Club, latterly the Army Motorcycle Sports Club. This was to make it 'official' and was run ostensibly by Army Welfare from HQ MELF at Fayed, as DQMG was beginning to ask funny questions about the source of the 'demilitarised' motorcycles and the fuel and spares to run them! Actually, most of my time was spent 're-designing' and building hybrid motorcycles, but these pages are probably boring enough to read without going into this. (If anyone's interested, and if these pages are ever published, please get in touch with me.) Then there was *Stella* beer, boring evenings in the Mess, and that was about it. Stories, of course, abounded; the more one drank, the better they were. Many long nights were spent listening to some of the old ASMs, who'd been in Cairo (Abbasia?) Ordnance Workshops in 1938/39 and were still there (or at 2 Base Wksp anyway) when I left in Feb '51. There was ASM Dick Milsham, who lived in Cairo with his Greek wife at weekends; and ASM Bailey, the 'tank shop man', who'd been there for ever. Some bright Adjutant decided that the sheds should have planted areas around them, with shrubs and plants, corn, maize and sunflowers et al - to be known as the 'Green Belt'. ASM Bailey's effort was predictably feeble. "*Where's your green belt, Sergeant Major?*" enquired the Adjutant one day. "*Anging on that bloody 'ook!*" came the terse reply. Any civilian employee, asking for leave or a pay rise, had to submit a written application to his PWF (Principal Workshop Foreman). In the tank shop, writing on behalf of the applicant, the Egyptian clerk always finished the letter thus: "*God bless King George VI and Sergeant Major Bailey*". This became a regular toast at Mess do's.

Security was quite a problem at TEK. A number of vehicles, including armoured cars, were stolen by '*klifti wallahs*' (thieves) by the simple expedient of putting '*REME on Test*' signs on the front of the vehicle. When approaching the garrison exit, the duty REME or RAOC man would spot the sign, lift the barrier and out would go the vehicle, never to be seen again. Enough became enough, and garrison security was strengthened by the arrival of a couple of companies of Irish Fusiliers. Good for security, but poor for PR. They soon made 'D' camp NAAFI their temporal home and thereby hangs a tale. I was guard commander - it was Christmas 1950 and I was doing a series of guard commanders and orderly Sergeants, because Sandy Thompson, the 'D' camp CSM, and I had had a bit of a falling out. Anyway, on this occasion, a breathless sentry arrived and informed me that the Irish were having a *cailagh* and had set fire to the NAAFI. Obviously, I contacted the orderly officer, an ASM, who duly arrived in his *Jeep*. "*Come on*", he said, "*jump in and we'll go and sort it*". Not a good idea, and I suggested he contacted the RIF guardroom

and get their RPs to sort it. "*It's our bloody NAAFI - let's go*", said our hero. Being breeze-block and corrugated iron, the NAAFI wasn't on fire, but all the furniture, piled in a heap in the centre of the room, was - with the Fusiliers doing a war dance around it! In burst the orderly officer, followed at a distance by me. "*QUIET!*" he roared. There was a sudden silence - and we were transfixed by twenty pairs of hostile eyes. "*Now put that fire out!*" ordered our intrepid ASM. "*Sorr!*" said one, as he picked up an extinguisher, inverted it and bashed it on the floor. A lovely jet of foam appeared, all over the orderly officer - I was already holding the door open for him. We, with the aid of a couple of drunken Fusiliers, righted our *Jeep*, which somehow had become perched on its side, and we retired to the guardroom. We made the call we should have done in the first place, and in no time at all the RPs, with their *shillelaghs*, had restored peace and quiet to our little domain.

(Some 25 years later, we moved to a village in Bedfordshire- a hamlet called Wilstead. Naturally, I soon got to know the pubs (six of them then, now one!) and their habitués. One of these was a rotund little Irish leprechaun, Patrick Swinford, who was universally known as 'Rommel'. Why? Because he never stopped talking about his days in the Canal Zone with the Irish Fusiliers. Naturally I was intrigued, so we chatted, and it transpired that he'd been in Tel-el-Kebir. "*Were you there when we set fire to the NAAFI?*" he asked. That conversation took place in 1975 and, until we moved to Norfolk in 2001, he mentioned it at least once a week. And, as far as I know, he still does!)

A few more Tel-el-Kebir moments come to mind - the more one writes, so further long-forgotten memories emerge. What sort of entertainment did we have, for instance? Well there was 21 shed of course - this was the AKC cinema, a short walk away across the sand. I don't remember much about it, but it must have had a roof, otherwise it wouldn't have been a shed! The earlier cinemas, two of them, just had a sort of wall around an open space, with benches, a screen and of course a projector. The wall was obviously to channel the customers past the pay desk. Apparently, these cinemas were dotted all over Egypt (and elsewhere too, probably), run by some Eastern gentleman whose name escapes me, and who obviously had a War Office contract to do so (Shaftoe rings a bell). Then there were the ENSA touring parties - *Ivy Benson's All Girls Band* was popular, mainly because her girls preferred the Sergeants' Mess to the Officers' Mess. During one of Ivy Benson's visits, they spent some time in our Mess, and it so happened that I found myself entertaining one Norma Cameron, a trumpeter by profession. According to the *Daily Mirror*, she had broken off her engagement to some jealous fellow, in order to entertain our brave troops. Well, this one wasn't so brave!

After beating off the competition from other members of 'D' Sgts' Mess, Norma and I found ourselves ensconced on a sofa in front of the dying embers of a log fire, totally on our own. She gave me a light blue silk (or nylon probably) head scarf as a keepsake. We sat there until dawn was breaking, sharing intimate thoughts and, I am ashamed to say (and bitterly regret) that I escorted her back to her quarters without even discovering what her embouchure was like! I wore that scarf with my tank overalls and my motorcycle scramble gear (motorcross to you) for many years. She was a lovely girl - and I hope life was good to her.

Of course, there were other ladies, or female guests rather, who descended on us from time to time. When each others' company became unbearable, the Entertainments Committee would decide to hold a Mess dance. Accordingly, invitations would be sent to HQ MELF at Fayed, Moascar Garrison, and various RAF units where ATS and WAAF lurked. Buses would be hired from the RASC, and the said ladies collected from wherever, but obviously from miles away. No great incentives for them there then, especially as they had all the men they wanted on their own doorsteps. Inevitably, a motley crew would arrive, dressed in various attires, but mostly uniform, but all with capacious shoulder bags. 'Overnight kit'? we thought lewdly. Not a bit of it! We prided ourselves on the quality and quantity of our buffet suppers, and presented so attractively too. So, when supper was eventually called, we realized what the capacious shoulder bags were for. Platefuls of food disappeared into these receptacles 'for me mate what's on duty' - all gone in the blink of an eyelid! As were the girls and buses: no last dance for them - well not in 'D' camp anyway! Mess food wasn't all that bad, but it well behove one to be on time for meals. Often, playing rugby away, I'd book a late dinner - there were always kitchen staff on duty until about 8 p.m. Usually the meal was a bit dried up, but I assumed it was because it had been dished up at dinner-time and kept warm in the oven - anyway, it was always eaten, dry or not. One day, back later than usual, the staff had all gone, so I wandered into the kitchen to get the supper myself. On opening the oven door, there was a sudden tide of brown bodies, disappearing as if by magic. It wasn't heat that had evaporated the gravy, it was the myriad of cockroaches! And how many late dinners had I had? Would one more make any difference?

Most day-to-day entertainment, or at least evening entertainment, was spent in the Mess, usually listening to and telling (inventing) anecdotes. There were card schools and domino schools, but I have neither the wit nor the attention span to play - after a few hands of either, I was usually asked to find something else to do. One pastime was to bait 'pinkies', newcomers to the Zone. Those of us who'd 'got our knees brown' became quite adept at this. Nothing so obvious as to address them direct-

ly, but once they were in earshot, a typical conversation might go something like this: *"Did you hear about Lofty Morris in 7 Shed? He's in BMH, poor chap. One of those roof scorpions got him". "Roof scorpions? What are they?" "Oh, you know, the ones that live in the roof trusses, and when you're on patrol at night in the shed, they wait until you're directly underneath, then drop down your neck. Poor Lofty forgot to button up his collar".* And so on - and so on. The more inventive the story, the wider the listener's eyes became, but the story had to be (slightly) plausible.

My favorite, true as it happens, concerns a similar scenario of 'pinkie' and 'brown knees' group. To set the scene, 'D' camp Mess latrines consisted of a long galvanized iron building, with a doorway (no doors) at either end. Along one wall ran an iron trough, which served as a urinal; along the other, about 12 or 15 open stalls, raised one step up along the length, with wooden seats and divided by a partition. At the back of this wall was a series of flaps, which could be raised to remove the iron receptacle beneath each seat when the Midnight Mail came to collect. Got it? Right! We'll continue. One evening, at the bar, it was subject normal - with a group of pinkies avidly eavesdropping. The chat got round to the type of scorpions and spiders that lurk in the latrines, especially the scorpions that lived under the woodwork of the bog seats, waiting for the bare bums to appear. One pinky, suffering from a bout of 'gippy tummy', had to leave the company for a trip to the bog, whereupon one of the brownies had a brilliant idea. Remembering that he had a pair of dividers in his bunk, he sent a colleague to the latrine to saunter through, count in which trap the target sat and report to the guy who'd, in the meantime, collected the dividers. *"Trap seven"*, whispered the accomplice. Up with the flap, and sure enough there was a bare backside in all its glory. A fast jab with the dividers - a terrible scream from inside. Down with the flap, rush back to the bar and nonchalantly pick up the *Stella*. Seconds later, in rushes a distressed and overwrought pinky. *"Guess what happened"*, he gasped, *"the guy sitting next to me has just got stung by a scorpion!"* We never did discover the identity of the victim and, perhaps more luckily for the perpetrators, the victim never found out who they were!

The latrines of TEK were a tribute to the architects and tradesmen of the Royal Engineers (probably ex-Chepstow boys, they've got to be useful sometimes!). They used skill and imagination to build square ones, large and small, one-man urinals ('desert roses' - got one in the garden in the bushes) and, my favourite, a round one with a sort of beehive roof. These had just one entry/exit. Light was provided by narrow slits at intervals in the wall, and a passageway ran 360 degrees inside. The stalls or traps were in 30 degree segments, open apart from partitions which radiated from the centre. The whole thing built upon a bottomless (no

pun intended) pit; heat, decomposition and dung beetles taking care of the ordure. A story comes to mind, probably apocryphal, of the elderly blacksmith AQMS with years of desert service, sitting peacefully on his trap, shorts down, *Egyptian Mail* in hand, ruminative pipe in mouth and peace in his world. In comes a sanitary orderly, whose task it is to put a little Jeyes fluid into the pit, really as an air freshener. Unfortunately he had run out of Jeyes on this day, but thought a drop of petrol would do the job. Blissfully unaware of what was happening at 180 degrees from him, 'Q' lights his pipe and drops the match between his legs into the pit below. 'Whoof!' Luckily, no real damage, but as he ruefully remarked, "*Welder and blacksmith I may be, but I've never managed to singe my scrotum before*".

Finally on this subject (isn't all this supposed to be about entertainment in 2 Base?), not far from my bunk was a small galvanised latrine serving two of our accommodation blocks - about twenty men altogether. One night, I was awakened by the sound of grinding gears, a bright light and shouts. It was a

Marmon Harrington (South African) armoured car belonging to our security chaps. It came to a halt about six feet from my door, shouts rising to a crescendo, followed by a long burst of 0.5 calibre *Browning*, it seemed like about 100 rounds, from the turret of the AFV. By this time, I was out of bed and out of doors, with my fingers in my ears, watching in horror as the mad security men shot our shithouse to smithereens! When all the dust and noise settled down, I politely asked the vehicle commander why he'd razed the building to the ground. "*There's a klifti wallah in there*", he said succinctly. "*Poor sod*", thought I. As the commander dismounted and went to inspect the ruins, the galvanised iron stirred and a dazed Egyptian emerged, hoisted his *galabiyah* to his knees and legged it into the dark, closely followed by the armoured car. We never saw them again. Did they put on this act every night in different parts of the garrison, one wondered? Anyway, we didn't get our comfort station back before I left the black velvet skies and golden sands of Egypt forever. (To be continued including a montage of Mike's photographs.)

With the Army Air Corps in the Far East

7 Reconnaissance Flight, 656 Light Aircraft Squadron, Army Air Corps and 2 Flight AAC

by Ron Ward, 56A – Part 3 of 4

Belaga, Oct - Dec 1963

The first detachment to Belaga was manned by Kiwi Andrews, George Gillson and Barrie Shepherd and started our presence there. This was followed by a Kiwi Brown, Maurice Haynes and Allie Kiddle. My turn came mid-October – November, after a gap that may well have been because 845 RNAS were operating from there. It would just not have been possible to operate fixed and rotary aircraft in any numbers, as there was little space. The party consisted of Kiwi's Brown and Andrews, Snowy Goody, myself and a Signaller (can't remember his name, he is one of the names missing from picture at Kuching).

During my stay, most of the pilots visited and, at times, we had four *Austers* for a few days. Cpts Mike Munro and Tim Deane did a stint as well. The reason for two *Austers* was that, with little or no communications between base and aircraft (no HF), it was considered necessary for two aircraft to fly together, in case one 'went in' with a technical failure. The border was 100 miles away and we normally flew only one sortie per day - this was after the mist had cleared, about ten o'clock. Returning after 2.00 pm in the afternoon, it was a case of 'one

hour to the border, a couple up and down, then return'.



Belaga Airfield, Oct 1963

Belaga is on the upper reaches of the longest river in Malaysia - the Rejang River. Four hundred and fifty yards long and barely adequate for *Austers* in the heat and humidity, it was overshadowed by a 2,500-foot mountain ridge on either side - must have been the nethermost part of the Commonwealth. It can now (today) be reached by road/track from Bintulu, or by air or river. At that time, only river and air access was possible. It has been said that it's the only airport (south of Belaga) in the world where, on arriving, you have to take a boat, instead of a taxi, to get into town.

The journey by boat from Sibu to Kapit is about four hours, followed most probably by putting up for a night in Kapit. Then take a boat in the morning to go to Belaga (5 to 9 hours, depending on the water level). The stretch from Kapit to Belaga is the longest and most dangerous voyage. There is a famous 'killer' – the Pelagus Rapids – where many lives have been lost. An express boat, carrying ten passengers with women and children, capsized there in 1985 and many perished.

Our fuel supply came by this route and the 40-gallon drums were unloaded and carried the length of the rapids (800 yards), then reloaded before continuing. On arrival, the drums were winched up the riverbank, about 20 – 30 feet high at this point, by auxiliary engine of the small bulldozer that was there. Then loaded onto a flat-bed truck and taken to the fuel dump, approximately 400 yards away, along what was named 'Motor Way M1' (far-East section of course). The labourers who worked for us enjoyed this ride, as you must remember it's quite possible that they had never travelled in a vehicle of any kind before.

There was a small bulldozer and two trucks at the airfield, which had been used for its construction. The batteries were long dead and the only means of starting was by using the dozer auxiliary engine to winch the truck in and bump start, or to use the dozer to give it a bump start. Once running, they weren't stopped until the end of the day's work. There was another dozer at the edge of the jungle that had not survived the air-drop and it is believed that the others were stripped down, brought up-river and re-assembled.

The labourers were 'inherited' from 845 RNAS, who worked for us, their income was the only source of money for the longhouse. Their own responsibilities were carried out by other members of the longhouse in their absence. We did get asked if there was any chance of 'a head or two', as they were no longer allowed to collect them. The last, I believe, was during WW2-ish, and we politely pointed out to them that we too were banned from that pastime! Every morning at 7.00am, ten would arrive for work and they used to take it in turns to have a day off and send a 'sub' to stand-in. This ensured that income remained at maximum; it also applied if one was off sick. All monies, I understood, were paid into a central 'Pot' and shared by all at the longhouse. Everything, except their women, was shared and 'cash' was hard to come by - and out of their earnings they bought a new outboard motor.

A local called Lewis seemed to be in charge of everything at the Airfield. 'Want a boat to go to town?' - see Lewis. Lewis also re-ordered fuel, oil and rations. He was also the Air Traffic Controller for *Borneo Airways*, in fact he was the-jack-of-all-

trades and 'Mister Fix-it'. At this time, a *Twin Pioneer of Borneo Airways* used to come in once or twice a week, with the odd passenger or spares for us. Lewis also paid our labourers. We did have a communication problem with them and Lewis helped out but, on most occasions, we managed. I named the two leaders 'Heckle' and 'Jeckle' and had my first strike early on. The group who helped in the kitchen decided they wouldn't work, as the group that helped with the aircraft was not doing anything! After much ado I thought I had cracked it, but then the aircraft group downed tools, as the kitchen staff, who had finished clearing up the breakfast bits and pieces, were doing nothing when they were! This raised its ugly head again when the fuel arrived and we were in full swing getting the fuel and moving it to the dump, because the kitchen staff was doing nothing! As a compromise, I resolved the morning problem by allowing them to do what all workers do when they got to work - have a long 'fag break', so that they both started at the same time! The fuel strike was resolved by withdrawing the ride about the airfield on the truck to anyone refusing to work - and it all got resolved.

The next problem was the delivery of a bag of rags for use with the aircraft. Well, as soon as the bag was opened, they rummaged through and changed their tatty clothing for my rags and gathered up a good selection for their families. Put it down as a 'hearts and minds' exercise and we probably had the best-dressed labourers and families in Borneo. We had a damaged parachute and gave it to them, in exchange for some local head-dress. They would take it all apart, including separating all the strands, and use it to decorate the hat. They were great to wear and kept the sun off your shoulders. The natives were totally honest and would not take anything that was lying around, including money and valuables - it was like living in one of those Nature Films that you see.

By now, the airfield was protected by an over-strength Gurkha Company, reinforced with Heavy Mortars and *Vickers* Machine guns and nearly 180 men in all. Our instructions from their Officer were clear. "See that trench?" "Yes Sir!" "Anything happens, get in and leave the rest to us". Good advice, we never felt so well protected and we were in the middle of nowhere. Every 40-gallon drum we emptied disappeared, was filled with earth and dug in, to form part of the fort they were building. I had the privilege of firing a *Vickers* whilst I was there, while they were setting up the fixed firing positions (area cleaning I called it) to cover the airfield. The surrounding area was declared a 'no go area' and the Gurkhas just carried out defensive exercises as and when they pleased. (During my time here, JFK was assassinated and that gives me a time marker.)

Our water supply was along a jungle path behind

the aircraft and had to be carried over to our basha. There were two or three Gurkha guards hidden in this area during the hours of daylight, to protect anyone washing or collecting water - and I seldom saw them. We complied with the request to wear shorts when bathing, as a matter of respect to the guards. Lighting at night was by *Tilley* lamp and someone had a portable radio, but most of us were not interested in it. Rations were paid by cash allowance on a daily basis! Ah, lucky! 845 RNAS left about 40 boxes of 10-man Compo packs behind, which we used to supplement our diet. The signaller would go to Belaga every other day and buy rations like fruit and veg etc. This left a surplus, which meant we were able to add a tin or two of *Tiger* beer to our evening meal, to avoid beri-beri due to lack of vitamins.



Wing man Capt Monro. Back row: ? ? Kiwis Brown and Andrews, Snowy Goody, Front row: 'The Boys'



'Teeny Weeny Airways' - 'The Boys'



Ron Ward and Snowy Goody, with local head-



Could never get 'Jeckle' to stop smoking when moving AVGAS, so we just kept a suitable



Snowy 'herding' AVGAS



What Health & Safety?



Ron Ward, 'Ground Crew Training'



Down-town Belaga



This is what you call a flood, 182 ft above MSL



*7Flight's answer to a Pilot shortage - 'go local'!
'Heckle the Iban Aviator'*



Kiwi Brown and Snowy Goody in XN410, enroute to Sibu.

Taken from XK408, Kiwi Andrews and Ron Ward December 1963

One day a Wessex from 845 dropped in and left a SAS patrol with us, on 'board and lodgings' - and one of the members was an ex-boy from Arborfield of my own group, Wally Walters (B Coy?) and we caught up on lots of news. On one of the mornings, at first light, the Gurkhas had a 'stand-to', starting with the heavy mortars, then the *Vickers*, followed by the light mortars, doing a bit of 'area cleaning'. I forgot to warn the SAS! Oh dear! I realised this when two mosquito nets, complete with blokes still in them, went past the end of my bed! I felt a right fool, going round the edge of the ulu, trying to find them. Just like a mother looking for her cats - "Here, kitty, kitty!" I managed to get them back and they were not amused. Fortunately they left a day or so later - and not before putting a couple of stitches in a wound in my hand.

Around mid-December we all moved back to Sibu, four of us in the air party and, during this flight, the TR1998 VHF radio failed and we lost communications with Kiwi Brown's aircraft. I managed to reach over the back of my seat and somehow moved our kit, which was on top of the long-range fuel tank. Releasing the radio fixings and pulling the radio out, I found the fuse had blown. I fitted a spare and we were back 'on air' but, in doing so, I tore the stitches out of my hand. When I got to Sibu, I popped down to the MRS and was seen by a medic who said, "I've got just the thing for that. As the stitches are unlikely to be of any use, it's a new thing called 'plastic skin' and you can spray it on. I had a bit of a problem when I used it this morning," he continued, "as I stuck a bloke's scrotum to his leg". I tightened my belt and held my hand out at arm's length and said, "I don't think there's a chance of that this time!"

Sibu, Dec 1963 – Feb 1964



Sibu Control Tower

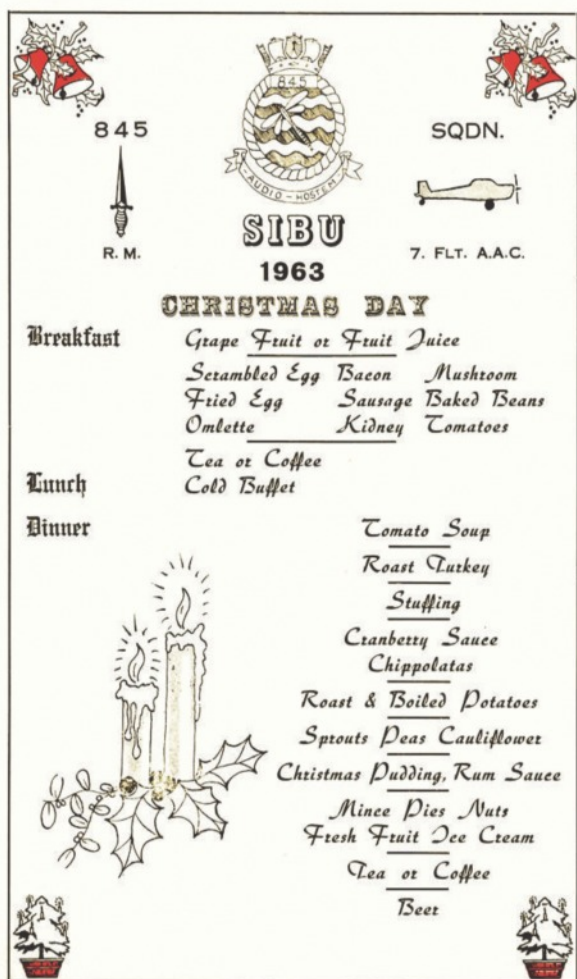


XK408, December 1963 (last photo?)

Not long afterwards, the detachment dropped to being just a pilot, myself and one aircraft, XN410. We settled in with the 845 'Junglies' (named for their Army support) and were accommodated in a bungalow, similar to the one at Kuching, but now known as a 'Mess Deck'. Just before Xmas, we got the bad news that, on 18 December 1963, XK408 flown by Dave Thackery came under fire near the border at Lundu. This caused the loss of life of the passenger, an RAF Chaplain, and the wounding of Dave, who was unable to reach Kuching and had to make a emergency landing in a HLZ (Helicopter Landing Zone).



845 RNAS (Junglies), Sibul



We had a great Xmas - as you can see from the menu - and, with the total strength of two plus an aircraft, they did us proud by giving us equal credit in the title with the 'Boot-necks' (Marines). They had a load of bad luck with the 'A' call-sign and had lost two to date, when it was reported that the present one had rolled over the hill during the night at Nanga Gat. Apparently it was there the night before and in the morning the crew went up to carry out the pre-flight checks and it had gone! On questioning the Gurkha guards, they said that they

heard nothing during the night - but there was the 'poor old girl', nose down in the Rajang River. Aaaaah! It was decided that they would not have another 'A' for the rest of the tour.

Another incident, if you can call it that, was during Admiral Begg the CinC's visit to Nang Gat. The local labourers stood smartly to attention for him and sang 'A#!\$le rules the Navy' etc to him, with big smiles on their faces. He saw the funny side of it and laughed it off (no officers were reported to have been 'keel-hauled' for it). They had, of course, been taught by 'the lads' that this was the correct way to greet visiting officers.

At one point we were asked could we go and 'drop a few grenades' if need be, to cause a bit of havoc. I was handed a couple of boxes of No 36 grenades to prep. Suddenly, I was treated as if I had the plague and everyone had something to do elsewhere! We were to have a 'dry run', by going out and dropping them out of the door at varying heights to establish 'the optimum' - and, hopefully, no-one would be around. But, after doing all the prep, the idea was abandoned.

The detachment moved back to Kuching between the beginning of and mid-February, while I returned to Kluang in March for a spot of leave and a month as rear party. I worked on the assumption that, as I was single, I was quite happy being in Borneo and it meant a married man would not be separated from his family. Being the son of a serving soldier, I knew the problems of having your father away for long periods. The Borneo Confrontation was starting to take a toll and really stretching all the Squadron's resources. We now had pilots on one-year unaccompanied tours from the UK.

I spent two weeks in BMH Kluang and two weeks in BMH Cameron Highlanders during this time, recovering from Yellow Jaundice, so I had a good break and, upon completion, got a six-months 'no drinking chit'. As soon as I could, I returned to Kuching - that was at the end of May 1964.

(The final part of Ron Ward's story of his AAC experiences will continue in a later OBAN. Ed.)

Tee Cee's Rhymes of our Tymes

COMPANY ORDERS

The lad stands by the Orderly Room and
contemplates his fate,
The Sergeant Major's voice of doom makes him
anticipate
A longish stretch of punishment to make him mend
his ways,
Which he'll find inconvenient (!) for seven or
fourteen days.

So he removes his hat and belt, ('cos that's the way
it's done)
Checks his dress, prepares himself for his retribution.
Then, crashing boots, through swinging doors, he's
in with headlong rush,
While bellowing commands resound, then sudden,
deadly hush.

Facing him, across the desk, the CO sits, and frowns,
While listening to the charge of his misdeed, as
written down.
He speaks. "Well, what have you to say about this
evil crime ?
Can you give me one excuse to mitigate your
shame?"

The lad knows that it's futile to deny his delinquency
And mutters, "No excuse Sir!" Prepares for ignominy.
He listens, captive audience, while the CO then
expounds
How military discipline could ultimately break down.

If he should go unpunished, then anarchy would
reign,
And spread out to the civil population, it would gain
Momentum, then eventually bring down the
Government,
And Civil War would then ensue, caused by the
discontent.

So given all this circumstance, his punishment must
be
Confined to barracks for three days, ensuring then
that he
Would learn a useful lesson, and an example made,
To others who were guilty of being late on parade
!

The message contained in this verse is very plain
to see,
That if you decide to sign on, and join the military,
You'll learn the phrase that all the squaddies long
ago had coined,
"If you can't take a joke, my son, you shouldn't have
bloody joined !"

Who's been lumbered with the 2 till 4 stag in
midwinter ?

WATCHING and WAITING

Your feet are so cold, your breath mistily shrouds
The window beside you, you gaze at the clouds
Scudding so swiftly on the face of the moon,
Watching and waiting for dawn to come soon.

You take a pace forward, into the chill
Of air that stings sharply, and an effort of will
Is needed to shoulder your rifle again,
Watching and waiting for night-time to wane.

Your beat's twenty paces, and then turn about,
Remember it's left turn, then paces to count
Till right about turn, so you're facing your front,
Watching and waiting till your watch is spent.

The clock on the guardroom says twenty to four,
An hour or so later, it reads ten minutes more,
They say that time flies, but take leave to doubt,
Watching and waiting for time to run out.

The bark of the fox hidden in the shadow,
At least he's got choices of places to go,
He's out on the prowl, slinks on his way,
Watching and waiting to leap on his prey.

The Orderly Officer's skulking around
So be on alert, keep your ear to the ground,
He's lurking close somewhere, without any doubt,
Watching and waiting to call the Guard out !

You look at the shrubs, growing over the way,
They're moving around, your eyes start to play
Tricks on your brain, blink, and then carry on,
Watching and waiting till your stag is done.

The grey streaks of morning appear in the East,
It seems it's a lifetime you've been on your feet,
You know that it's over - the sun's rising fast,
Watching and waiting is over at last !

Tee Cee 55A

Flying with the Army Air Corps. Pt2 Derek Palmer 54B

Flying Round the Radfan.

Close by is the Radfan, a mountainous area stretching northeast from Dhala up to the Yemen border, east of the town of Mukerias and south towards the Zinjibar plain. 1963 maps clearly show it is physically in the Western Aden Protectorate. Politically it is "beyond the Pale", for dissident tribesmen inhabit this area and British governance of it has long been difficult. Only a few British Government Political officers, trusted by some of the leaders, dare venture into this domain. And they must be fluent in Arabic ways and language, and knowledgeable of Radfan attitudes and customs. We in the Army and R.A.F. are forbidden to over-fly it. To do so invites one of two punishments: being shot down, and if not killed by that, suffer a nasty death at the hands of the tribesmen; or having managed to return to one's base, face a court martial for disobeying a General Order. Neither is palatable, and any one with a modicum of commonsense complies with the order. Hence when doing the "round robin" trip to other outlying stations we fly round the Radfan, going south from Dhala, then west over the Zinjibar plain before turning northeast to Mukerias, Lodar, Ataq and Beiham. The flying distance on the outbound leg is doubled by this "dog-leg"

However, for some time diplomatic efforts have been made to bring the Radfan under British control. After protracted talks the Political officers have been able to gain agreement with the local chieftains to hold a meeting in the Radfan with British senior officials and Service officers. The objectives of this gathering is to overcome the existing distrust and strained relations, and prepare the ground for the future entry of the Radfan into the South Arabian Federation.

A date is fixed and we are given the name of an airstrip in the Radfan. Identified on the map, it is in an oval bowl shaped plain, some 5300 feet up and surrounded by mountains. We are told that one of our Beavers is to accompany the Twin Pioneer that will fly in the "Big Wigs". Our Beaver will carry the "not so Big Wigs".

A briefing is convened with all the participants a couple of weeks before the event. It covers the overall plan with key events and timings; the political situation, which I gather is still not that good; the flight plan; the agenda for the discussions; arms to be carried, and the contingency plan. We all come away confident everything has been covered.

When the day arrives it is an early start. From my flat in Aden I must first travel to Little Aden, some 15 miles away. Then the usual document and aircraft checks before, Arnold Parker, my Flight

Commander and I make the short flight to Khormaksar. There Arnold makes a final check with the "Twin Pin" crew on the Flight Plan, while I collect the not so important passengers and make them comfortable in the not so comfortable seats of our Beaver.

A little later both aircraft taxi out and take off and, having cleared the runway, head just east of north for our destination. To match the "Twin Pin's" speed and to keep open formation with him Arnold must cruise a little faster today. There's only a light breeze coming from the East so the flight will take only about 40 minutes. Twenty minutes into the flight we hear the radio call of the four-engine Avro Shackleton that is to accompany us and act as command and control for this operation. Ten minutes later we hear communications between the Shackleton and the two Hawker Hunter fighters that are coming too. These are to fly "top cover" over our destination as a show of strength and to discourage any treachery.

Soon we are over the plain marked on our maps. This bowl contains a light brown, cake like mixture of unforgiving sand, rocks and hills, interspersed with small fields of pale green and stunted agriculture. We find the airstrip without difficulty as finding remote landing places is something we do quite regularly. But we don't know this one; no British aircraft has landed here for years, so we do a couple of circuits to assess the approach, the surface and the under and overshoot areas, and in particular the reception committee. Satisfied all is as well as can be expected we call the "Shack" to notify him we are going to land. And in we go. It's not a difficult approach and the 'strip is plenty long enough for a Beaver. The "Twin Pin" does not come in until all appears well on the ground.

Prudence dictates we should park close to the runway as up-country tribesmen have a strange way of welcoming visiting dignitaries. Sure enough as the lower ranking passengers deplane there is a fusillade of shots fired vertically into the air by the local Sheikh's henchmen; the traditional method of greeting. The first time it happened to me I made a fool of myself, I instinctively dived to the ground. Now it seems commonplace, but if one of those bullets comes down and bores a hole in my skull I shall be very annoyed! Even if unscathed, I don't want any hitting vulnerable places on the Beaver. All goes well, however, and after formal introductions where official etiquette is observed there is an exchange of gifts between both parties. The "Big Wigs" are then conducted to a large, several-storied, mud brick "palace", painted white with wooden windows decorated in bright colours. We, the "bus drivers", follow on, for we too have been invited to the palace for dinner.

Through a door and up several flights of stairs we go. The riser of each step is small by western standards and the tread is long; it needs two paces to reach the next step, with each one covered in a rush like mat. There are few windows, even less in the inside wall. Eventually we reach a landing that would please a cobbler, for here there are many pairs of discarded shoes. They rank from the simple, worn sandal of the Sheikh's followers to the polished black and brown of the visiting delegates. This is an Arab custom, shoes are not worn in the house and not when eating. Why? Because you do not sit up to a table, but on the cushioned floor and dirty shoes are not kind to cushions. Having removed our shoes it is equally important not to point the soles of your feet at anyone, as this, too, offends Arabs.

There are no knives, forks or spoons; nor is there a serviette or a menu. And the food we get would have been unacceptable in English restaurants, but it is substantial. There is no starter and no wine, for Arabs do not drink alcohol. Once we are all seated, men servants bring in plates and many large platters of hot, curried goat and steaming rice. These are followed by an equal number of small dishes of goat's eyes and honey, delicacies to the Arabs. When offered one I decline very politely. After the Sheikh has said a Muslim "grace" we take rice and goat from the platters using our right hand. The left hand is not used, because it is considered "unclean" and is for other, more intimate uses. When this meal is finished and the plates cleared away, sweetmeats and black, sweet coffee is served. The food was satisfying, hot and well cooked, but now there seems to be some urgency to get on with the talks. The officials file off to another room while we leave to return to our aircraft.

A crowd grows outside the room searching for shoes, and it soon becomes obvious the shoes belonging to one of the officers have "walked". The Sheikh is humiliated by this insult to his guest and issues orders in a grindingly annoyed voice to one of his lackeys. Unable to understand Arabic I don't know what they are, but I can guess. If caught and found guilty, when tried by the Sheikh the sentence will be "Off with the offending hand". Similarly, the officer is red faced with annoyance and embarrassment, but reluctantly passes it off in order not to prejudice the talks. I, however, cannot escape the humour in the situation and have to smother a laugh.

Throughout all this, the welcome, the dinner and the official formality, we have not seen one woman. And nor will we, for in Arab life the women look after the family, the children and the domestic tasks and certainly do not play any part in politics. They are very much part of an Arab's private life and are seen only by relatives and friends. They will not be present at, nor take part in any of his business dealings. The Arab male is very much the head of the house and he makes all the decisions, often without consulting his

wife. Although most husbands are very kind to their spouses and children, Arab customs and law allow him a great deal of latitude in what he can do, and some of these laws might appear strange and cruel to us.

Arnold and I go back to the airfield to await the end of the talks. We pass the time with our "Twin Pin" colleagues, exchanging aeronautical stories and anecdotes. The skies above rumble from the "Shack's" engines and the roar of the Hunter's jets. I'm sure the Hunters are a new pair, for their endurance isn't long enough to cover the time we have already spent on the ground.

Strangely, the talks don't last that long, which isn't very encouraging. However, the "Big Wigs" seem reasonably happy as they walk back towards us.

Then, suddenly, that dreadful sound: "rattat tat, rattat tat". Once the initial shock of that machine gun fire is over consternation and panic break out as bullets seem to whine past in all directions. Arabs are dashing for cover and the "Big Wigs" are racing for the aircraft. As Arnold starts running he shouts to our passengers, "Get in the plane". Instinct takes over: out with the revolver and run like crazy for the plane, firing on the way.

"Where are the bastards", I gasp at Arnold, but he doesn't know, and we're not stopping to look. Within seconds I had broken my previous best time for that distance, whatever it was. Back at the Beaver we all tumble in. Forget pre-flight checks, just get it started and go. The two of us carry out enough essential actions to get XP773 moving and I've got her ready for take off by the time we reach the end of the 'strip. Almost tipping it on one wing I turn her into wind, open the throttle and away we go. The "Twin Pin" has narrowly missed beating us, but is also airborne with great haste. Her captain tells the "Shack" the firing appeared to be coming from the opposite side of the airstrip to the Sheikh's palace.

Once the "Twin Pin" and I have called "Airborne and clear", the Shackleton flies overhead directing the strafing Hunters to the targets that had been identified. When finished the "Shack" bombs the same areas and the runway.

We, of course, were on our way back to base while this was happening. We are shaken and disturbed by the perfidy of the Arabs, but keep ourselves under control. Nearer to "home" we start to relax, but on arrival find two bullet holes in XP773. This and the premature relaxation set off a nervous reaction making my hands tremble. One of the bullets entered the side of the engine cowl, but deflected by it had gone through some of the cooling fins at the top of the engine, finally going out through the cowl on the other side. Thank the Lord it had not pierced a cylinder or piston. The second bullet went straight through the fin, making a neat entry hole, but a jagged exit.

None of our visitors was wounded, but the odd scratch was caused by diving for cover and falling over in our haste to be gone. Later our "Twin Pin" colleagues phone to say no one in their party suffered any serious damage, and kindly enquire about our welfare.

I think the Radfan leaders were keen and confident of eventually concluding a deal with the British and their men were under strict orders to behave. However, I suspect the uprising had been the idea of ill disciplined insurgents from over the Yemen border.

That was the first and only time I went into the Radfan, and not surprisingly the order not to fly over the Radfan not only remained in force, but was strictly adhered to!

Mukerias Deliveries.

Today I am to go to Mukerias for a week to support a detachment of the F.R.A. Several days ago they were rushed to Mukerias by air and then hastily marched into a valley some 20 miles east to a place called Husn Suffa. There they are attempting to separate two warring tribes, but I haven't been told why or any other details. Whatever it was though, was enough to set off a blood feud. But before we descend into this valley of the shadow of death, first let me take step backwards in time to provide a little background.

The African Rift Valley cuts a deep gash through eastern Africa for approximately 2500 miles from Mozambique in the south to Ethiopia in the north. One arm of it, that crosses the Red Sea at Djibouti, shows its striking face near Mukerias, only to peter out further northeast. This ancient upheaval of the earth's crust becomes spectacularly visible as we transit over Lodar (or Lawdar), a small village with its own airstrip at about 5000 feet above sea level. Three miles ahead I can see solid rock rising almost vertically another 3000 feet, a huge 'wall' starting 5 miles to the west and running east for roughly 12 miles. Here its flat top gradually changes to jagged, saw tooth rocks which eventually subside into the desert some 30 miles northeast. Pilots in "Aden" colloquially refer to this towering formation as "The Escarpment".

On top of the escarpment is Mukerias. Ostensibly it is an unimportant, insignificant, scruffy little village, the type you normally wouldn't give it a second look. But it is important. It sits astride one of only three 'main roads' leading from Sanaa, the capital of the Yemen, into the W.A.P. And when I say 'road' I mean one that is hard packed track, rutted and stony, not smooth tar macadam. It's even more important now because the political situation in the Yemen is gradually deteriorating. As I mentioned before, the Egyptian president, Abdel Gamel Nasser, is backing the Republican faction in the Yemen in an effort to overthrow the existing Royalist regime.

We in 653 Squadron have not yet been affected by this, but my gut feeling is we will be. And why? Well, the British government and people are still sore at Nasser from the Suez debacle in 1956. Apart from wanting to even the score, Nasser's influence with his communist leanings and support on the doorstep of one of our Protectorates is viewed with suspicion and considerable concern.

Unlike Dhala, Ataq and Beihan, each of which is occupied by a battalion of F.R.A. soldiers, Mukerias is garrisoned by a Company of men from an English infantry regiment. The fortified encampment they occupy is only four miles from the Yemen town of Al Bayda just across the Yemen border. These men might seem a woefully inadequate number to prevent a sudden attack by a large force, though should it happen it is hoped Yemen soldiers will not be that well-armed. Their sole job is to hold the road until reinforcements arrive. Behind their well-made sangars and fortifications any attack will be protracted and difficult, because fighters and bombers from R.A.F. Khormaksar will arrive quickly to assist their defence.

This position was chosen because it is the last defensive opportunity before the road disappears over the edge of the escarpment down the 3000 feet to Lodar and on to Aden. And even if they dislodged the English soldiers, a Yemen force would face severe punishment getting down the escarpment, for it is fraught with two dangers.

One is the drive down that track. Although dropping down the 3000 feet to the Lodar plain takes only three miles, it entails negotiating 59 steep, hairpin bends - so I'm told - down a rough, rutted track. This journey should be tackled by experienced drivers driving slowly and carefully in well-maintained vehicles. Over the years there have been many accidents, most of which were attributable to brake and clutch failure or a minor lapses in concentration. Invariably the vehicle toppled over the edge, somersaulted down the steep sides, smashed violently into the jutting, jagged rocks, reducing it to matchwood. Sadly, the occupants of these accidents rarely survived. Those that did were so severely injured it ended their army career. During tenure of this outpost a number of British servicemen have died this way. Clearly it would be folly for inexperienced Yemen drivers to tackle such an obstacle.

The second danger is even worse. It would combine the risks of the first while providing the R.A.F. with the golden opportunity of strafing the vehicles as they slowly descend that steep road. Imagine the destruction and loss of life to the Yemen soldiers if not supported by their own air force. It would be a catastrophe.

Enough of history and tactics, now back to Mukerias. The airstrip there is far from ideal. It is not even as good as the one at Dhala, though it is horizontal. Over the years the treadmill of aircraft

wheels has eroded large oval, sandy depressions down the 'strip'. Heavy thunderstorms have then stirred the earth and sand into glutinous mud, to be packed hard into a concrete like surface by the burning sun. Though it is over a thousand metres long, it is the 'strip' I like the least.

Its popularity is further diminished because at 6600 feet above sea level it is hotter and higher than any other airstrip in "Aden", causing a reduction in aircraft performance. All aircraft engines, systems and instruments are designed and calibrated against a standard which lays down certain criteria. These criteria rarely, if ever, occur at this latitude and this altitude, in fact usually deviate so far from them, flight performance is significantly reduced.

The result of flying at this height and temperature is a reduction in engine power that equates to operating as though at 10,300 feet, not 6600 feet. Confronted with this situation I ask myself a number of questions:

1. *What is the All Up Weight (AUW) of the aircraft with fuel, passengers, etc?*
2. *At this AUW and in these conditions what length runway is needed to get airborne?*
3. *Is the airstrip (plus a contingency factor) at least as long as this?*
4. *If the answer is "No", do I offload some weight or wait till late p.m. when the temperature drops and performance is better?*
5. *Has a thunderstorm just passed? If so it may be cooler. Conversely the runway may be inches deep in water, which retards acceleration.*
6. *Shall I mark a point on the runway by which I must be airborne or take off be aborted?*

I'm lucky; I have previous experience of Mukerias. There was one occasion, when having satisfied the above questions; it still took an Auster 9 around 700 yards to become airborne. I was on the point of aborting the take off when we lifted off the ground. And the rate of climb was appalling, no more than 150 feet a minute. I can remember thinking at the time, "*it normally takes only 200 yards at sea level to unstick*". That memory didn't help, but on all subsequent visits to Mukerias the above considerations came to the forefront of my mind.

One other incident about the weather at Mukerias comes to mind. On this particular day I had been on the ground for about half an hour when a heavy thunderstorm started, a not uncommon occurrence up-country during the "hot" season. The usual sequence of events is a few crisp gusts of wind as the black, low, mamma cloud gradually approaches. Thor then arrives with his lightning and thunder, distant at first, but getting brighter and louder with a smattering of heavy rain drops. Then the sudden, strong gusts of wind with torrential, penny sized drops of rain and hail start, accompanied by lightning as bright as a

momentary magnesium flare and combined with ear splitting, whip cracking thunder.

After making sure even the dead knew of his visit Thor leaves about half an hour later. In his wake everything was sopping wet with muddy pools and streams everywhere. The 'strip' was almost awash with puddles of every size and shape. On the plus side there was a slight drop in the temperature and you could almost hear the parched plants sucking up the muddy water. Some fifteen minutes later I heard and saw a Vickers Valetta, an R.A.F. twin-engine transport coming into land. On touching down it was immediately in the rainwater. It reminded me of the roller coaster rides entering the pool of water at the bottom of the steep rail. All one could see were two enormous fountains of water arching either side of the cockpit. This continued down the runway, but not far, as the braking effect of the water brought the Valetta to a rapid halt. Having gingerly taxied into the parking area, the captain made an inspection of the aircraft. There he found the flaps were no longer flat and retractable. On the contrary, as befits the effects of water they were best described as "scalloped and wave shaped". It left about an hour later for Khormaksar, flying back all the way with half flap down. It pays to be careful; no two flights to the same place are identical.

But let us return to the operation at Husn Suffa. By the time I arrive at Mukerias I'm told the F.R.A. have hacked a landing 'strip' out of the bottom of the Husn Suffa valley. It is reputed to be around 500 yards long, but I'm warned the surface is loose, uneven, soft sand. I conclude it will be all right getting in, as long as, once down, I keep the yoke well back. But getting out is likely to be an altogether different "kettle of fish" and I'm a little concerned about that.

Not more than half an hour later I'm supervising the loading of the aircraft with all manner of 'kit' required at Husn Suffa. Before taking off I get a briefing from a F.R.A. officer who gives me the map reference of the 'strip'.

On arriving overhead I have a good look around. It's far from ideal; the valley is narrow and its "walls" are only about 500 yards across, so I cannot fly a normal circuit. However, the under and overshoot are clear; there are no trees or obstacles.

First, I work out my approach. I decide to fly a long "downwind" leg, dispense with a "base leg" and do a continuous turn on to "finals". I get nicely settled on the approach and surprise myself by making a good landing. To prevent that soft sand from tipping the Beaver on its nose I wrap and lock my left arm around the yoke. It does the trick, but now I can feel the rapid deceleration as the wheels sink into that sand and I'm surprised, yet again, at how quickly "she" comes to a halt. But now a lot of power is needed to get "her" moving again, and turning round is laborious.

Once parked at the take off end of the 'strip' a group of F.R.A. soldiers quickly unload the gear. In its place they stack empty ammunition and 'compo'

(food) boxes, and a broken tent. An officer tells me he has already signalled ahead to Mukerias for more stores, but can I also bring more paraffin (kerosene) for the cooks. Oh yes, and some tea, sugar and milk for the 'Brits' in the group. On enquiring how the operation is progressing I'm told "It's difficult because both tribes are shooting at us as well as themselves. They don't want us interfering in their own affairs, but we've got to separate them".

I start up, do the checks and prepare for take off, but I'm still concerned about that soft sand. Wait, I remember someone saying that *"to keep drag down to the absolute minimum and reach "rotate" speed as quickly as possible, don't put down "take off flap" until the ASI registers "lift off" speed"*. It sounds logical, so I'll give it a try.

I open the throttle fully against the brakes before releasing them. For a few seconds nothing happens, but then the wheels rise over the troughs made by them and we are moving. At first the gain in speed is slow, but as acceleration increases and lift is generated over the wings the weight is reduced and the speed increases rapidly. At 45 knots I pump the hydraulic lever to move the flaps to the "take off" position and with a positive 'unstick', the wheels the Beaver literally jump into the air. I establish the normal climb attitude and speed and out of the valley we climb. It crosses my mind I was well down the 'strip' before becoming airborne. I wonder if the technique of delaying flap gave any benefit, or was it cancelled out by my response time between registering take off speed and putting down flap? I make a mental note to put some markers down the 'strip' before the next outbound trip.

On the second day I put out some markers along the runway and compare a normal take off against the delayed flap operation. The results were inconclusive in terms of take off distance, but the late use of flap gives a very positive "unstick".

This sequence of events continues almost unchanged for the next few days; only the freight alters. Sometimes I take in items I consider unusual for an operation: kippers for the officer's breakfast, sandals for the Arab soldiers - presumably lost while

patrolling at night, and a few cans of beer for a British warrant officer. One day I take Brigadier Lunt, boss of the F.R.A., for a visit. Most days, though, it is food, water and blankets - oh, yes, and its dammed cold at night at 6600 feet, even at these latitudes.

On the return flights most of the cabin is filled with the "empties", but on two occasions I take a wounded soldier, though these are not serious casualties.

By the fourth day the F.R.A. have separated the protagonists of the two tribes and confirmed the cause of the feud was because a man in one tribe murdered another from a nearby tribe. Talks to settle the dispute are prolonged because the wife of the dead man cannot be consulted. Arab custom decrees it must be the male next in line who becomes head of the family, in this case his 14-year-old son. He is offered a fairly substantial sum of money to call off the fight, but this, too, does not suit Arab pride. "No", says the son, "only if you execute the murderer will we call off the feud". After protracted talks and much pressure by the F.R.A., the other tribe agree to the sentence. However, this poses another difficult problem for the F.R.A., for it is cowardly for an Arab to shoot another without reason. Fortunately, one of the F.R.A. soldiers was a member of the murdered man's tribe and he is "volunteered" to execute the offender. But his name will not be conveyed to either tribe to avoid any future trouble and only those in the F.R.A. with a "need to know" are privy to it.

The sentence will be carried out today, after which both tribes should settle down to normal life. However, this incident will rankle between these two tribes for some time, but having given their word to keep the peace they are duty bound to keep it. Only time will tell.

I spend the next two days back and forth to Mukerias, transporting as much equipment by air as I can, to save it being trucked up the valley. My job is over, but it has put more experience under my belt, both about flying and Arab culture.

Part 3 to follow soon Ed.

Mini Reunion 54A/B

John Rainey 54A

If any one from either 54A or 54B intakes is interested in attending a Mini-Reunion in the Arborfield/Reading area, in 2014. Please contact either John Rainey, Tel: 01205 260680, or Brian Stone, Tel: 01953 602316.

A decision about venue, costs, and exact dates will be decided, when an idea of numbers wanting to attend is known.

John Rainey 54A

In Memoriam

Clive Swatton 54B

Clive was the son of Major Charles Henry Swatton and Bertha Slade. He was born in a British Military hospital in Karachi, India on 21st June 1939, the last child of four children.

As the war had just broken out the family were requested to return to England. At two months old they prepared to travel by ship to Southampton when Clive developed dysentery. Due to this their departure was delayed, and were instructed to travel on the next available ship. Clive's dysentery saved their lives. The ship ahead was torpedoed, and sank. For the next 6 years Clive lived with his mother, 2 brothers (Mick and Sid) and sister (Patsy) in Titchfield, near Portsmouth. Their family home town. His father was supporting the war effort in India, Egypt, and Iraq to name a few. In Titchfield the sirens would signal an incoming air raid, and it was essential for everyone in their homes to "run for cover." Brother Sid recalls one typical instance of a raid when after the very first note of the sirens, a tiny three year old Clive had jumped out of his cot and was observed racing downstairs and out to the shelter before anyone had even got out of bed.

When the war ended the family were reunited, and posted to Berlin, Germany. Even when young, Clive seemed to have "warrior" characteristics. Although he would always be prepared to fight the usual bullies, invariably dragging his older brother, Mick, reluctantly into the melee. Clive often told stories of his time here, being shoved off the bus by the German boys on the way to school, and how he was champion at not wincing to a Chinese burn.

On return to England the family set up home in Dover. These were happy years for Clive, the best being when at the tender age of 15 he attended the Army Apprentice School in Arborfield. Wokingham. He trained as an Instrument Technician making "satisfactory progress" although needing to improve his map reading.

On completion of his apprenticeship in 1957 Clive passed out as a soldier and tradesman where he joined the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME).

He really took to the engineering lifestyle, enjoying the company of his army comrades, and making good friendships, which lasted many years after finishing his actual military service.

During his military service Clive was posted to a camp in Gibraltar, which his father had served in years previously. It was here, in Gibraltar, where Clive eventually met, and subsequently married, his lovely wife, Terri just after his 21st birthday in June 1960. Somehow Clive managed to climb the ranks to Sergeant and returned to Swindon, England with Terri where they had their first child – Cedric in 1965. As a devoted father in 1967 Clive joined the Army Reserves. The family set up home in Herne Hill,

London where Clive took work as a civvy technician in Camberwell, South London. After a few years his work took him to Cricklewood, where he managed to put a deposit down for his first home in Bushey, Watford. Soon after in 1971 Michelle was born - His family was complete.

Clive was a hard working family man taking many family holidays to Gibraltar. He even started his own business making camera filters, but after the start of the technological age he spent more time brewing beer in his garage.

Clive and Terri were married for over 52 years spending a lot of their time in their 3 time-shares, (Malta, Madeira and Tenerife).

In later life Clive and Terri visited his older brother, Sid, who lived near Philadelphia, USA, and he enjoyed seeing all the sights. In return, Sid would come over to England to join Clive in many enjoyable hiking holidays along the coastal trails of Devon and Cornwall. They also travelled to see Michelle in Australia several times and Clive loved the Aussie lifestyle, Sun, sea, Barbecues and of course beer. Clive and Terri loved to travel and see the world experiencing new things and dancing together. Their home was full of happy memories for family and friends with open arms and an open door.

He remained in the Army reserves until 1988, after which he joined the Home Service Force, E COMPANY, THE 6TH (VOLUNTEER) BATTALION THE ROYAL ANGLIAN REGIMENT. It was his role to guard key points and installations in the UK likely to be the target of enemy 'special forces' and saboteurs.

Clive was former Chairman of his Company's local HSF veterans association, and an active member of the working party which brought about the Home Service Force Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire. In fact it was his idea! To the end he was dedicated author of the Boots and Bergen quarterly newsletter.

Clive had many happy years attending annual events at Twinwoods, Family Camp and on his annual remembrance trips to France.

He never forgot his army routes and was an avid member of OBAN – The Arborfield Old Boys Association.

Clive had a strong sense of loyalty and devotion towards everyone and everything he did. His later years were spent fitting in all his activities around caring for his wife, Terri. After Terri's passing earlier in the year, Clive planned a fresh start with Sedge in Colchester. embraced his new home wholeheartedly, and was making plans to join his friends in France and travel to Australia.

He will be sorely missed by family and friends alike.

A true gentleman

Cedric (Clive's Son)

Lawrence Alan Nixon, April '42

Lawrence (Nick) would be remembered by the boys of the years '42, '43 and '44 as the leading chorister, in a surplice, following the Padre at the Sunday service in the Camp Hall. He sang bass.

Following an 'Overlord' dispersion to Donnington, he



'passed out' in April 1945.

He was back as an instructor in the Instrument Shop as an artificer – the youngest in peacetime—he was proud of that and his position on the course was

impressive. He was attending the third year of an ONC, Mech. at night school when he was posted to Malta. Three years later, after 'PYTHON', he was back at the School.

In 1954 there was a danger that the old-boy reunions would wither: the Hon. Sec. job (amongst others) was held by a non-apprentice RO. Reunions require rather more dedication and Lawrence volunteered to assist. His offer was accepted and he became the impressively titled (?) 'Assistant Honorary Secretary'.

With the support of the O/C instruments, Lt Col Richardson, WO2 Nixon set-to: gathering all records, recruiting new members from the senior intake (the only source of revenue), approving a constitution, editing a newsletter, issuing membership rules and cards and arranging the manufacture of lapel badges. The following two reunions relied heavily on ex-boy staff members and volunteers from the Gun Shop. They were sparse* affairs compared to the recent or the wartime and term-time ones where the Garrison was bustling and sports events like 'old boys v boys' were organized by the extensive PT staff.

In all cases, a great reliance was on attendance from the recent school leavers – the term-time reunions facilitated visits to the staff, military and civilian.

Lawrence was posted to Singapore before he could finish his HNC, Elec. at night school or the C&G Inst Making at the School. His fortune with the opportunity of any early artificer course was balanced by the frustration of postings interrupting study of other nationally recognised qualifications.

*organized on a shoestring with no contributions sought from attendees.

Ron Janes 42B

Alexander (Pat) Patterson. 39A

It is my sad duty to have to report the passing of WO1(ASM) Alexander (Pat) Patterson, at the age of 88 years.

He was born in Streatham, London, into a military family and became a lifetime member of the R.E.M.E family from its birth, having joined the old Army Technical School (Boys) at Arborfield, (intake 39A), in April 1939 as an Armourer Apprentice, all the way through to when he passed away as a vice-president of the Potteries & District Branch of the R.E.M.E Association.

On leaving the A.T.S.(Boys) in June 1942, he spent 3 years at 1st A.A. Div in London District, during which time he met and married his wife Rose (a Dagenham girl) in 1944 at Romford, after which he was posted in Aug 45 to M.E.L.F serving at 2 Base Wksp & 533 Base Wksp in Cairo.

He was promoted to a local/acting S/Sgt while in Tel-El-Kebir, before doing his Armourer/Artificer course in 1947/48 at Arborfield, prior to posting to the Command Wksp in Portsmouth.

August 48 to 51 saw him back to M.E.L.F at 2 Base Wksp as a WO2, before doing a three year stint at the LAD in Bovington.

1954 to 56 saw him at the Scales Branch in Singapore, before returning to the UK as a PSI at the T.A Centre at Epsom.

From October 58 to April 62 he was seconded to the Malayan Army as a WO1, running a Transport Wksp, as well as acting as a Brigade E.M.E, and running the Inspection Team.

From April 62 to July 65 saw him at his only B.A.O.R. posting to a Transport Company LAD, before completing his service as a WO1, (ASM) PSI at the

T.A. Centre in Stoke-on-Trent, being discharged in June 1967.

As a civilian he was employed as a foreman making printed circuits at I.C.L. Kidsgrove for many years until he retired.

In 1991 he was the main instigator and one of the founder members of the Potteries & District Branch of the R.E.M.E. Association, being the first name on the branch membership list, and continued to be a very active member throughout his remaining years, as a lifetime vice president of the branch, still organising the branch Christmas Party last year, and even though in his eighties he revelled in acting as the Parade Marshal at the annual remembrance parade at the local cenotaph, and was always willing to act as the stand in branch standard bearer as and when required.

Following the death of his beloved wife Rose, whose photo in her service uniform he always carried on his person, it was the Association activities that kept him going, until sadly just before last Christmas he had to curtail his involvement due to heart problems that meant he lost his licence...he was still very positive that following the heart by-pass surgery that followed, he would return full of his usual vim & vigour, but sadly following complications this was not to be, and he passed away in the Critical Care Unit of the University Hospital of North Staffordshire on Wednesday 24th of April..

He was very proud of his family, his two sons, the eldest being Michael who followed the family trait and enlisted into the Army rising to the rank of L/Col in the Royal Corps of Signals, and two daughters, who between them gave him eight grand children and several g/g/children. Last year he proudly informed the branch that his (step) grandson, the UK pole Vault record holder Stephen Lewis was in the British Olympic Squad.

He was very much into anything to do with model trains, with his own extensive layout.

They say these things come in threes, and sadly that has been the case in our branch with three of our senior members passing away since Christmas. Alex's passing will leave a large hole in the branch, as he was one of that ever decreasing number of original Corps founders who loved his involvement in the branch, and who epitomised all that the R.E.M.E Association holds dear.

His funeral took place with a Requiem Mass for family, friends and neighbours at the Sacred Heart Church in Hanley on Wednesday the 8th of May, where his coffin had been placed overnight, covered by the Corps drapes, and surmounted with his photo and beret with medals. At the funeral service the R.E.M.E Association branch standard was present at the families request, carried by Mr John Hughes, this service was followed by a committal service at the Carmountside Crematorium.

Sadly, it was only five years ago that Alex had



attended his beloved wife Rose's funeral.

Our own branch Padre, the Rev Richard Pemberton assisted the resident Priest throughout both services.

The Chapel was full of family, friends and veterans with the coffin flanked by the standards of our R.E.M.E. Branch carried this time by Mr Gil Mould, and the R.A.S.C./R.C.T standard carried by Mr Michael Beaman.

There were 29 veterans and wives present from the branch to pay their final respects, and also a detachment of three uniformed regular soldiers from our twinned unit from M.O.D.Stafford (22 Signals Regiment, LAD), which was very much appreciated by the family..(L/Cpl Gareth Forster, and Craftsmen Greg Williamson and Ryan O'Gorman).

The veterans had formed a Guard of Honour on either side of the Chapel entrance, under the command of our branch Chairman Ed Gibson, and all with berets saluted as the coffin passed between them into the service. Mourners entered and exited the Chapel to the Corps march "Lilliburlero", with all the branch veterans wearing a beret approaching the coffin and giving an individual salute to a departing comrade at his final posting. His presence will be sadly missed by the branch.

Maurice Hope

Weston (Wes) Robertson. 50B

With deepest regret I report the death of my brother Weston [Wes]. He succumbed to an inoperable brain tumour on 12 Jan 13 at the home of his daughter Janet in the Kyle of Lochalsh. His wife Irene had moved there with him from their house in Erroglie so that Janet could assist with his care. Weston was a larger than life character, a fact with which any one who knew him would agree. His postings were mainly in the Far East, Singapore and Malaya from 1955-62, also Iran, and Germany, another unusual one in South Georgia. It was in Singapore that he met and married Irene, also serving there at the time. He was a keen winemaker and warning of a posting usually resulted in a series of wine evenings to reduce his stock prior to moving. I recall one concoction made from a surplus of after dinner mints; unusual but very drinkable. On retiring, they set up home in Erroglie, approx 15 miles inland from Inverness and proceeded to live 'the good life', rearing pigs, chickens, ducks, and at one time, quails, small birds which insisted on sticking their

heads through the netting of their enclosure. Risking the attention of pine martens, ever present in the area. During the stalking season he would assist the local estate by transporting the deer carcasses down from the hills by horseback. He wrote articles for the Stalker magazine, he was given a wood to fuel their wood fired central heating boiler, he would run the local hotel when the owners were on holiday, on one occasion returning home to find their door blown open and the hallway blocked by snow. Each year they would pack their camping equipment and head south, calling at his brothers homes and going on to attend the Arborfield reunion before spending their holiday together on the Continent. With the support of his wife, Irene, his daughter Janet, and his grandson Stewart, he lived life to the full, and is now, sadly missed.

Ian Robertson (Wes's brother)

Deaths notified since last OBAN

n/a	Hutchinson	T	Traff	61C	01/03/2013	
1833	Patterson	A	Alexander	39A	24/04/2013	
277	Swatton	CJ	Clive	54B	05/05/2013	
2120	Harrison	HF	Jock	42B	23/05/2013	
2444	Bell	TC	Tudor	52B	21/02/2009	Belated Entry
n/a	Garner	SA	Scottie	61C	17/02/2013	
2124	McConnell	J	Paddy	39C	24/05/2013	
n/a	Burns	R	Robert	56A	06/06/2013	
n/a	Mankinder	CA	Charles	39A	07/04/2013	
n/a	Druce	C	Christopher	63B	Sept 2002	Belated Entry
n/a	Draycott	A	Anthony	63B	July 1996	Belated Entry
n/a	Carley	B	Brian	63B	Jan 2002	Belated Entry
n/a	Freeborn	R	Richard	63B	2006	Belated Entry
n/a	Burbank	M	Micheal	63A	28/04/1981	Belated Entry
n/a	Trowbridge	R	Ronald	63B	n/k	Belated Entry

