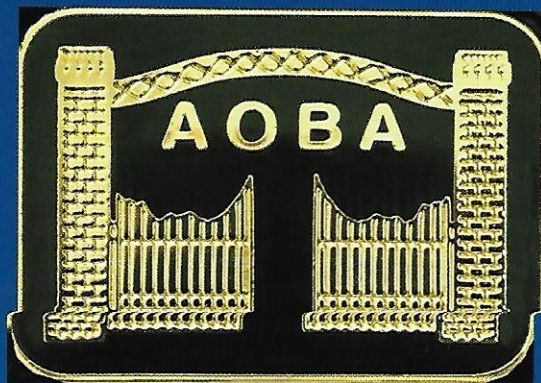


**Jan
2014**



**Issue
57**

O B A N



Arborfield Old Boys Association

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

ARBORFIELD OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

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To be confirmed

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All Past Commandants

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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

Honorary Registrar

Alec Powell (64C)

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

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

Honorary Treasurer

Laurence (Laurie) Blakley (61B)

47, Chaplain Avenue, Cowplain, Waterlooville, Hampshire. PO8 8QH

Tel: 02392258934 E-mail laurie.blakley@ntlworld.com

Honorary OBAN Editor

Ray Stevens (64C)

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

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

Honorary Webmaster

John (Herbie) Coles (66B)

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

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

Honorary 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



Silence on the course.

I was unable to attend the cenotaph ceremony this year due to a recent if somewhat minor operation. I suppose that the op must have been fairly serious because it had also stopped me playing golf! However, as vice-captain at Tidworth Garrison Golf Club, I volunteered to come in on the Sunday to sound the club Klaxon to mark the eleventh hour for the two-minute silence. Putting aside any discussion that golfers might be better positioned than on a course on Armistice Sunday, it should also be noted that the occasion coincided with a County Academy Sunday, during which, youngsters are brought to various participating courses by their parents to receive some

instruction from the golf professional and to experience the game for an hour or two. When the klaxon sounded, activities on the course stilled and golfers stood by their putts with caps removed. The golf club has long cut the cords of its direct attachment to the garrison, but as one would expect there is still a great affiliation with our military neighbours. What made the day particularly special to me was to see the young children, who had ringed the practice area, now standing still and in silence sharing the respect we all had for the occasion.

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.

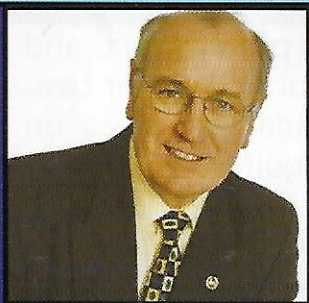
Send article and photographs separately, do not embed photographs within the text. Membership of the Arborfield Old Boys Association is open to all those who served as apprentice or staff member, at one of the Army Apprentices' Schools or Colleges at Arborfield between 1939 and 2004. There is a joining 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: Mike Davis our outgoing Honorary Treasurer, who has given our association 13 years unstinting service, and is still ready for more.
Rear Cover Photograph: Laurie Blakely 61B our new incoming Honorary Treasurer, welcome to the committee.

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Committee Members Reports



Honorary Secretary's Report

Time passes quickly – doesn't it?

Now I'm sitting here finalising costing for next year's reunion. I have to say the hotel are being very good to us – I guess that's because they now know we're returning to them for at least for the next two years! Anyway they have only increased their costs marginally – not too bad, especially as they held 2013 at the same as 2012. Sadly the same cannot be said for the NMA; you will remember in my last report I told you they had changed their pricing structure; this lead to a 25% increase last year – sad. So you will see in the Reunion Application enclosed with this copy of OBAN the NMA cost is much higher than the last two years. Please remember though this cost isn't simply your lunch; Chairs, First Aid Support, Pipe Band, Saluting Dias and Water etc. all have to be funded as well.

Anyway I'm looking forward to another great weekend – I understand 1964 year are making great strides in finding their lads – so much so that perhaps the record set by 1960 might be well and truly beaten!

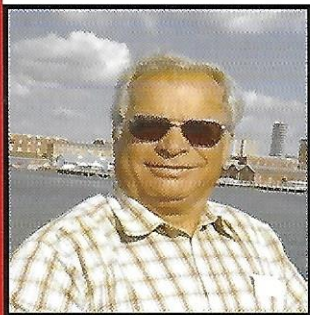
Please make sure you return your Reunion Application in plenty of time to ease the administrators!

If you were not aware, your committee have organised an Edition Two to the wonderful book Peter Gripton wrote for us all to enjoy – *The Arborfield Apprentice*. This second edition includes the final chapter very kindly added to the first edition in loose leaf format by Peter after the college closure in 2004 and is a must for all Apprentices whether your intake was in 1939 or 2004.

So if you want to keep updated with the latest edition, or never bought the book in the first place you can obtain your copy for £30.00 plus P&P by visiting our website www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk/shop.html and follow the links.

God bless

David Schofield 65A



Honorary Treasurer's Report

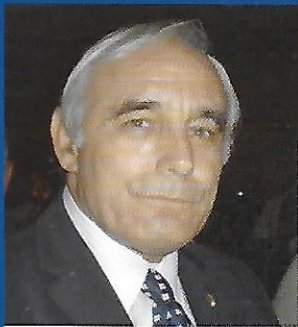
Having taken over the Honorary Treasurer's position from Mike Davis in October, I am grateful to him for handing over a well maintained and balanced set of accounts and imparting some of the knowledge he has acquired which has helped me dredge up from the grey matter how to run the old double entry accounting system last used by myself nigh on 30yrs ago.

I will be presenting the accounts to be examined by an independent accountant at the end of the year and asking for your approval at the AGM.

If you have any queries regarding the accounts please contact me.

Regards

Laurie Blakley 61B



Honorary OBAN Editor's Report

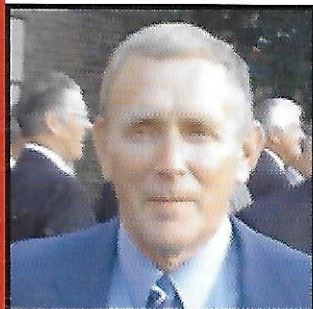
Looking back over the last few months, as Editor of the Old Boys' Association Newsletter, I have lost the wonderful services of two members who between them have contributed some tremendous articles for publication. I refer to Weston (Wes) Robertson 50B, and now Johnny Johnson 56B. I still have a few of Wes's articles to publish, which his brother has given permission for me to use. In this edition of the OBAN there is an article by Johnny, and his last article will appear in the next edition.

This will mean that I am looking for some of you to look back through those dim and distant memories, pick up your mud plaque and stick, quill, pencil, biro, or laptop, and produce that article that

we all have in us. It would be nice if it has something to do with the Army Apprentice School/College, whatever is your starting point. But it does not have to be, an article that will appeal to all is fully acceptable. If you are not sure about your subject's suitability, I and/or any member of the committee are always available to discuss it with you. The preferred formats are detailed elsewhere, again if you are having any problems, let me know.

Seasons greeting to you all, and take care,

Ray Stevens 64C



Honorary Registrar's Report

a) Since the last OBAN we have had 2 applications for life membership, no reactivations and no

resignations.

b) New Members:

2763 Brockhouse CJ Colin Colin A - 75C-A

2764 Kelly PJ Paul Kel A-65C-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.

PLEASE NOTE!

I am finding that a lot of members are not updating their contact details.

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

Alec Powell 64C



Honorary Webmaster's Report

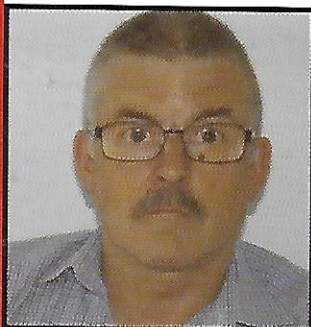
Both the Arborfield Old Boys' website and the Forum continue to run smoothly and steadily, and once again, I'm delighted to thank all those that made the effort this last year to send me updates and photographs for the website, and also those who have volunteered to be their intake or intake year's contact person.

At some stage, I will have to "bite the bullet" and update the Forum's operating system software,

I have been putting this off, but hopefully it will go without incident, and not without a very cautious approach and back-up!

I will continue to inform all of any interesting additions to the main website through "Latest News" otherwise known as the AOBA Blog. That's all from me for now, wishing you all a very healthy and prosperous 2014!

Herbie (John) Coles. 66B



Honorary Recruitment Officer's Report

Firstly may I thank all those of you who have supported me through my ailments. All things being equal I will be at the 2014 reunion for a whole weekend!

Recruiting, to date, has been slow but not unproductive. There is more to come, still beavering away. Still trying to encourage some 'locals' and finding others. The future is looking brighter.

Kind regards

Barrie Parker 65C

I was actually due to be 'demobbed' from the Army on my twenty-seventh birthday in August, having completed my nine years 'with the colours', but a month's 'embarkation leave' actually brought that forward to July 1967. Thus, on my return from BAOR in April of that year, I was nominally posted to the REME Depot at Arborfield, from where I would be officially 'demobilised'. I didn't really fancy hanging around the Depot for three months and, having spoken with the appropriate authorities, I was given special dispensation to return to SEME Bordon and carry on with some teaching, in readiness for applying for a civilian post. During that short period we were lucky enough to hire out No.18 Queens Cottages to live in, right next door to Joyce's Mum and Dad in the centre of Reading.

One incident that took place there still brings back the shivers! Our younger daughter Michelle was still a toddler, about eighteen months old, and one day just fell backwards and hit the back of her head on the tiled surface of the backyard. Instinctively, I must have read about it or seen it demonstrated, I began to administer the 'kiss of life', as she'd totally blacked out, and managed to get her sorted out. That incident also brings back memories of when elder daughter Lorraine, while we were still in married quarters at Oakley Road, Bordon, had managed to fall with a toy broom-handle in her mouth, jamming it down her throat! There was blood and panic at the time, but again fortunately, no lasting damage or after-effects.

While living at No.18, I was still in the position of being without my own means of transport, and used to depend upon lifts between Reading and Bordon. A guy called Dave Meadows had a hiring up near the '*Granby*' cinema at Cemetery Junction. He was actually on the permanent staff, stationed at Arborfield, but was attending a course down at Bordon, so his daily travel plan fitted in quite well with me. One thing I remember is him having to 'drop in' at a house in Newton Valence, I think one of his wife's family lived over there. It really seemed 'out in the sticks' at the time – but in later years became the focal point of many a walk over Selborne Common. There was one trip from Bordon that sticks in the mind. A couple of other lads were in the car with us, either they also lived in Reading or were heading to the railway station to catch a train connection. Anyway, it was a warm late Friday afternoon, so we decided to stop for a drink at a pub along the road. The one we eventually chose was the '*Leather Bottle*', still there nowadays at a place called Mattingley. One of the lads, happy to be on a weekend break, walked into the pub whistling – and the landlady had the temerity to say that she didn't allow music

in her bar! Needless to say, we all smartly 'about turned' and marched back to the car.

I had actually started to learn to drive in Germany back at Celle, when an old mate from boys' school, by the name of Benny Allhouse, used to teach me, behind the wheel of a *Commer* Z-wagon. That was a horrible old beast of a vehicle with a crash-type gearbox and very unstable to say the least! But at least it gave me the rudiments of driving. The only other tips I'd ever picked up were from my step-father, Jack Whitley. I can remember him telling me about automatic gearboxes, racing changes and double de-clutching, probably driving along the Formby bypass between Walton (Liverpool) and Ainsdale – seems like a lifetime ago now!

I'd also, at one stage, taken some civilian driving lessons in Reading, with a guy whose name I can't remember, but who had previously given lessons to at least one of the Jones family – probably my sister-in-law Janet. The trouble was, as soon as I got into the car, I tried to drive it like the old *Commer* – double de-clutching and literally having to stand on the brake pedal! However, my instructor persevered with me and I soon got the hang of synchromesh gears and hydraulic brakes. I recall driving along Caversham Road on one occasion (a little less busy than it is today!) and hitting a pigeon that flew right under the car. I was then commended on not panicking and braking, although the pigeon probably wouldn't have agreed! Even so, I later failed my test miserably, attempting an obligatory 'hill-start' at the top of Prospect Street, over towards Tilehurst.

So I was very fortunate when, one day, Major Dougie Hopwood (who was then the Officer Commanding 'A' Company SEME) called me in for an interview, prior to my civilian job application. He asked about my plans – where I would live etc – and found out that I had no driving licence. Quick as a flash, he picked up the phone and contacted the MT Driver Training section. With me still being (just!) a soldier, he was able to fit me up with an intense course of driving. So I spent a couple of weeks – or was it more? – driving all around Hampshire, in a *Land Rover* alongside my instructor, 'Sandy' Powell, who had at one time been RSM of the Scots Greys – my last posting in Fallinbostel! And to my eternal gratitude, I was able to pass my test down in Portsmouth and get a driving licence. On the day of the test, I was completely unaware that I'd be taking it that particular day. We'd driven down to the coast as usual and dropped in at the *NAAFI Club* for 'tea and wad' as our lunch. When we got back to the *Land Rover*, Sandy tossed me the keys and walked away! It was only then that I noticed the driving examiner

sitting in the passenger seat. With no time to think or worry, I drove a 'perfect' route around Portsmouth and Southsea and was handed my licence at the end of it.

The amount of traffic on the roads was then considerably less than it is today, and it was sheer pleasure, driving down from Reading to Bordon each morning, in charge of my own vehicle at last. The *Opel* was one of those old cars with a bench-seat right across the front and a column-mounted three-speed gearbox, but to me it seemed like a 'chariot of fire' as I whizzed up and down the thirty-odd miles of mainly country roads. Mind you, I did slow down a bit going up Worldham Hill in the evenings, I guess the engine was 'a bit' worn (to say the least!) and the traffic was always a little heavier at that time of day, having knocked off work around five p.m. Coming back down that hill of course was no problem, I'd even manage to get up quite a bit of speed. However, on one occasion, it was a good job that I wasn't going too fast! About halfway from Worldham to the Oakhanger turn is a house on the left and, approaching it one day, a little girl had wandered out into the middle of the road. Thankfully I was able to slow down and stop, before taking her in to her mother.

We were still living at No.18 then and I remember one afternoon I decided to knock down an old wooden shed in the back yard and then saw up the old wood for fire lighting. Whatever it was – sawdust, insects or something – I came out in the most horrible rash – red blotchy spots all over! I went to the Jones's local doctor in Southampton Street and, as I sat in the waiting room, the other patients sat as far away from me as possible. Luckily, I'd just had an allergic reaction – as I say, probably to the dust – and it soon cleared up.

Once I'd settled into the job as a civvie, in the Electrics Section at SEME, the next move was to look around for a house in the locality. An ASM in the Section, HAV 'Harry' Williams, who later went on to become Head of Department 'upstairs' in the Headquarters building and was also a very nice chap, showed me around some housing down at Cowplain, down towards Pompey; while Bert May, another electrical civvie instructor, put me onto a house at Four Marks, over near Alton. Now that place was brilliant – a detached place with a nice garden backing on to a disused railway line, which was up on an embankment at the back. But financially it was just beyond our reach and we finally decided on the first place we'd seen – and we went on to live there at Chapel House, Longmoor Road, Greatham, for the next forty-four years.

Just thinking back to the financial situation, I was fortunate in that Dougie Hopwood had signed some papers to say that I would (as a civvie) be

earning so many pounds a year. Now he had quoted the 'top rate', which I was not to reach for about seven years or more! But it did the trick, allowing me to take on a larger mortgage than would normally have been allowed – and for a period of thirty years! I'd been saving with the *Leeds Permanent Building Society* for some years, but they weren't prepared to offer me the mortgage terms I wanted. So it was eventually the *Leicester Permanent* that came up with the goods.

The civilian supervising instructor at that time was George Armitage, newly arrived from Chepstow (boo! hiss!), and he was living in the house next door – in fact it was George who put me onto the house in the first place. With the prospects of sharing cars on a weekly basis to reduce costs, plus the fact that it was only about four miles from Bordon, it wasn't too hard a decision to buy Chapel House. And having George next door was a great bonus when I consider all the old cars I was to have over the next twenty years! He was an ex-Royal Engineer and could turn his hand to just about anything. I only had to put my head under a bonnet and George would be there, ready to help a hand. Sadly he had been a long-time diabetic and the insulin he took eventually destroyed either his kidneys or liver. He fought bravely, even had a couple of transplants, but died in May 1988.

Our own house

Once we'd bought the house, and taken possession on October 31st 1967, we had to move all our stuff down from Reading, in a number of separate journeys of course. I used to pop down to the house from Bordon during the lunch break with a few bits and pieces. On one of the other trips, on November 5th, I had the back seat full of chairs, with Joyce and the girls on the bench-seat alongside me at the front. Coming down the Basingstoke Road in wet conditions, a van pulled out in front of us and then, without any signal, just stopped to turn right near to the Gillette factory. We smashed into the back and poor 'Herman' was a write-off – I'd only had it for three months! Fortunately, none of us were hurt. Someone passing by kindly gave me a lift back to Queens Cottages, we managed to raise my eldest brother-in-law, 'Wack', on the phone – no mobiles then – and somehow we all managed to get into Wack's old *Hillman 'Minx'* and he brought us down to Hampshire. I think he and another brother-in-law (handy guys aren't they?) Mike eventually got the *Opel* down to the scrap-yard the next day. (I'll perhaps cover the rest of my cars in a future separate article!)

Looking back now, Joyce and I just cannot believe how quickly time has passed by since we moved into Chapel House. The years have flown by so

fast that it is difficult to chronicle all that has happened. The two semi-detached houses, Chapel House and New House next door, were built around 1965. I guess the Armitages bought their place when it was new – and we weren't too long afterwards. The family that lived here before us was named Blamey, I think that's the correct spelling. Prior to the building of these houses, the site was occupied by a Wesleyan – or Methodist – chapel, constructed from corrugated iron on a wooden frame, probably dating back to the early 20th-century. Hence the name '*Chapel House*' of course. We did think of changing the name when we moved in, no doubt I wanted to call it something suitable, like 'Goodison' or 'Dunsoldiering', but we never did change it, leaving its historical link firmly in place. Many years later, at '*The Maltings*' fair in Farnham, which takes place on the first Saturday each month, I actually found a good postcard photograph of the old chapel. It felt quite eerie at the time, but I was really pleased to find it.

Buying the place was a bit of a struggle, I had to supplement my wages by working part-time at '*The Silver Birch*', then a thriving pub in the village, well sponsored by the many soldiers serving at Longmoor Camp, just up the road. I also used to earn extra cash by instructing evening classes at SEME, for soldiers trying to pass what were known as 'pot Art' exams – potential Artificer to give them their full name. We managed to extend our mortgage loan a couple of years after moving in – using the money (£500 if I recall correctly) to buy a small parcel of land to extend the garden to around three times its original size.

In hindsight that was a good move, as later years saw two houses being built alongside ours, but their gardens have had to 'stop short', as our extra garden space runs behind them. Without that, we would be overlooked, which would rather spoil things. Behind the garden is a large field that, thankfully, has seen off a couple of planning applications over the years. It remains just grazing land and mainly supports horses, which provide a nice sight most of the time. Sadly, the opening of the dual-carriageway A3 trunk road in 1992, bypassing both Petersfield and Liphook, now provides a constant background of noise from morning to night, a permanent reminder of 'progress'! Luckily, soon after the road's opening, we were able to join a local 'pressure group', which successfully gained a compensation award for many villagers. It just about paid for the house to be completely double-glazed, so at least the noise is abated indoors. We'd already had some double-glazing fitted some years previously, but the new PVC-clad windows are far more convenient – no painting and far more easy to keep clean.

Enjoying life

Life as a civilian instructor couldn't have been better, it was a job I loved doing, passing on knowledge is certainly most rewarding. The thing with teaching Army students was that, in the main, they *wanted* to learn – not always the case in civilian schools, I know. I soon graduated from teaching 'basic principles' and was always keen to teach armoured vehicle electrical systems and new equipments as they were introduced. This meant lots of research into new types of electrical systems, as vehicles became more and more sophisticated as solid-state (or transistorised) control systems came into their own. I also progressed to teaching Artificer students – now they **were** keen to learn – and would later be invited to their end-of course 'parties' in the Sergeants' Mess, an invite that was hardly ever turned down!

At one point in time, the Shah of Iran was still in power and decided to buy *Chieftain* MBTs (Main Battle Tanks) from the United Kingdom (UK). Hesent over squads of technical officers to learn all about them and, as I was well into tank electrics by then, I found myself standing in front of a class of pretty high-ranking Iranian officers, all hanging on to my very word! At that time too, a civilian firm called *MTS (Millbank Technical Services)*, had a contract to maintain the vehicles out in Iran. Trouble was, they managed to copy a lot of training precis and notes from our staff, so much so that we said that the 'MTS' stood for 'mind-tapping specialists'!

As an instructor, I started off teaching the basic subjects and, as I became more experienced, so moved on to the more technical side – as with that officers' course just mentioned. Possibly the most rewarding course to take was the 'Tiffany' course. The students would be well motivated and mature, being Sergeants wishing to move up a vital step in their careers. Being of similar age to many of them, I was able to build up rapport and really enjoyed spending some six weeks or so with the same bunch. However, it did have its pitfalls! I walked into the classroom one morning, to find a cheap plastic 'Christmas fairy' on my lectern. Around her neck was hung a sign, with the one word '*NUFF*' written on it. I could sense the giggling from the lads and recognised that they obviously knew something that I didn't! When I asked for an explanation, it went along these lines. "*Sir, whenever you explain something and then ask us whether or not we understand, you finish it off with 'Fair enough?' So that's what you have on your desk – Fairy Nuff!*" Well, I had to see the funny side of that, of course, it showed that everyone picks up these little habits, without realising that they have them. It's certainly something that has stuck in my memory all these years and I have enjoyed telling the tale to many audiences.

!One of the oldest civvie instructors at Bordon was a guy by the name of Tommy Groves. I'd first met up with Tommy when I was changing trade and on course at Arborfield, that must have been around 1964. We had to go down to Bordon to see the electrical 'mock-up' of the *Centurion ARV* (Armoured Recovery Vehicle), on which Tommy was the expert. Now that I was an instructor myself, he was now a colleague – even when he later became one of the supervising instructors, alongside George Armitage. At one stage, Colin Drasutis (ex 55B) and myself had to go off and visit the FVRDE (Fighting Vehicle Research and Development Establishment) over at Chertsey, in order to learn all about the newly-arrived *Chieftain* electrical systems. Here, we were guided by an ASM in the MAG (Maintenance Advisory Group), a chap called Joe Price.

Joe later came to Bordon as an instructor himself and, as he lived in Aldershot, he used to travel in a car-sharing scheme with Tommy G and another chap, Pat Maher. Having been in Chapel House for a few years, I'd decided to block in the porch outside the front door. I was looking for material from which to construct it, when Joe told me that he was extending his kitchen and had a spare window – which seemed to fit the bill. I remember Joyce and I going to Joe's place in our old *Morris Minor*, fully equipped with roof rack. How we got the window, still in its metal frame, with its wooden sill, back to Greatham, I don't know! It was a huge thing and overhung the car both front and back. But manage we did and, having had to saw the middle portion out, that window is still there some forty-odd years later.

Pat Maher was a nice guy, he had served in the RF and, despite his Irish brogue, always said that he was from Norwich. Once he gave me a 'brass rubbing' that he'd taken in Norwich Cathedral and was always saying 'you must go there'. (It was only in 2004 that we eventually did!) At one point, I can't remember exactly why, but Pat and I started going to the pictures! I guess we were both tied up with young families and not able to get out that much. So I would drive through Weybourne (Farnham) and pick him up outside a pub called '*The Running Stream*', then we'd continue onto the cinema in Aldershot. One film we saw was '*Tora, Tora, Tora*', all about the Japanese raid on Pearl Harbor and the Battle of Midway that followed. We also went to see a film starring George C. Scott, when he played the part of General Patton.

At some point, probably in the early Seventies, I was enticed into resuming my cricketing career, which had been severely curtailed back in my 'Inny' (Liverpool Institute High School for Boys) days by a certain 'Squinty' Morgan! This came about by my friendship with Colin Drasutis, who had settled down to live in nearby Liphook, after first living at

Liss. Colin had always had an interest in cricket and was currently playing for their 'Second XI'. One of the main attractions was that the lads met up rather frequently at Liphook's '*Green Dragon*' pub and I don't mind admitting that I enjoyed a pint or three there, in pursuit of cricketing fame and fortune! I suppose one of the main reasons behind being actually chosen to play was the ownership of one's own transport – with the obvious ability to give some other lads a lift to the away matches! The captain of the team at that time was an older chap called Harry (can't recall his surname), who picked his sides on two abilities really – drinking and driving! Anyway, despite the above qualms, I did spend a couple of seasons with Liphook Seconds and, in the main, it proved quite enjoyable. Home games were at the Recreation Ground, while away matches included some really nice locations. One such idyllic spot was down at '*ICI Verdley*', actually in the village of Fernhurst, and I think that when I played there, Joyce and the girls, along with at least her sister Eileen and family, came along as spectators for the afternoon. Another nice spot was down on the common, just north of the Chichester Festival Theatre. Apart from Colin and Harry, I really cannot remember the names of any others, except for Malcolm 'Bomber' Webb. He gained his nickname during a match by bowling one ball that went straight up in the air, before falling directly onto the stumps at the batsman's end! As mentioned, the social side of events seemed to figure large, and I recall joining a coach load of players, friends and family, on a trip to the AWRE (Atomic Weapons Research Establishment) at Aldermaston, to participate in a 'pub quiz' evening. But most of the socializing (i.e. drinking!) took place at the *Green Dragon*. It's lucky for me that, in those days, the Longmoor Road was pretty well dead straight between the edge of Liphook and the gates of Longmoor Camp! The drinking and driving laws hadn't then come into effect, so it was probably a damn good thing that my cricketing 'career' lasted no longer than a couple of seasons!

Back at the 'work-face', for a few years in the late Seventies, I eventually moved out of the classroom environment and became one of the 'practical' instructors. That involved demonstrations, maintenance, supervision of practical work etc, both on real vehicles and realistic skeleton models, which included all the electrical apparatus. I recall one day, having been 'putting faults' onto a circuit, inside a vehicle framework, I stood up right under a metal corner and made a large dent in my head! Blood was running down everywhere and I had to be taken down to my own doctor at Liss for stitches! Eventually, after I'd been teaching in the classroom – and on practical work – for a number of years, the scent of promotion started to drift across my nostrils and I decided it was probably time to move on!

Junior Leaders Regiment RA, Nuneaton.

It was pleasant to drive through the green countryside to Nuneaton. I had made a careful study of the map and picked a reasonably straightforward route. Later, I was to discover a shorter one, but isn't that always the way? I drove up to the main gates of Gamecock Barracks just after lunch, showed my identity card to the guard and, saying I was new staff member, received instructions on how to get to the Sgts' Mess. This was located at the rear of the camp, at least as far as the built-up area was concerned. Actually, the Mess looked out onto a vast playing field, the remnants of what was once an airfield. Gamecock Barracks had once been *HMS Gamecock, RNAS*, a Royal Naval Air Station. It was decommissioned and handed over to the Army, when I do not know. It had been a Junior Leaders (JLs) Regt of the Royal Artillery for some time, when I arrived. The purpose of the unit was to train young school leavers, keen on a career in the RA, in the arts and skills of artillery. Once these young men reached the age of 17 or so, they could sign on for full-time service and be paid at regular Army rates. I parked outside the Mess, careful not to be in a reserved space, not wanting to start out on the wrong foot. The Mess had double wooden entrance doors, leading into an anteroom. I saw two or three berets on the refectory table in the entrance, so I knew there was someone about. I heard the murmur of voices and it led me to the bar, where three Sergeants sat in comfy armchairs, chatting.

The first one to see me said, *"What are you doing in the Mess? Bugger off!"* It wasn't said vindictively, just in a normal tone of voice. I was taken aback, as the saying goes, and before I mustered a reply, the second Sgt said something to the effect of 'wait outside'. *"I'm your new Armourer Sgt"*, I said, *"just looking for someone to book me into the Mess"*. There were apologies all round, with the explanation that I looked like one of the boy soldiers! Up to then, and for a few more years afterwards, I often found it difficult to convince people that I was as old as I claimed to be. So, at that introduction to the unit, I was past getting upset about it. I found the Mess secretary and he allocated a cabin on the first floor, a pleasant room, all to myself. What a contrast to being a Corporal. It's a very large step in the Army, going from Cpl to Sgt, a lifestyle change like no other. Here I was, at the tender age of 25, a Sgt in the REME. To be a Sgt before 27 or 28 in my day was good going. But my 'baby-face' was going to have this problem of looking far too young for my rank. This was borne out when I had my interviews the following day. It began with the RSM, then the CO, then the QM and finally with the MO. The RSM was not my cup of tea but, as the

senior NCO, he had a lot of clout. It was unfortunate that he was unmarried, because it meant he lived in the Mess and it is well known that this usually makes for a subdued Mess and more often than not, an unhappy one.

I got the usual chat about his high expectations of turnout and bearing, etc, etc. The CO was a different kettle of fish, a very nice man indeed, who put me right at ease and explained that as for the other staff members, I would be on a probationary period to see if I fitted in with the system. The usual military lifestyle was to be handled much more softly, being unable to treat the young men as might take place in the rest of the Army. I cast my mind back to the greeting I got when first I stepped foot into the Mess. So much for that! The next thing to do was get a medical clearance. I can only suppose that this was to ensure that I was bringing no exotic diseases into the camp. However, when I walked into the MI room (sick bay), I was greeted by a Cpl who said quite rudely, *"Sick parade is in the mornings"*. Once more I explained who and what I was, and why I was there. Following his apologies, I saw the MO and the Dentist. Of the MO, I remember nothing. Of the Dental Officer, I have this memory of a Major who was the epitome of the British officer one sees in the movies. He reminded me a great deal of the actor, Dennis Price, not so much in looks but in speech and attitude. Today it's called 'laid back'. He also affected the use of a straight walking stick plus, of course, a smoking pipe. For all that, he was a good dentist and an easy officer to talk to.

My next port of call was back to the QM, where I collected the keys to my Armourers' workshop. The RQMS accompanied me to the Armoury, which was between guardroom and my workshop. This made quite a change from the normal, where the workshop was sited far from the unit's arms store. The arms store was centrally situated as just one store, not split up into Company armouries. There were two arms storeman, an ancient Corporal who sported WWII medals when in full uniform, and a civilian, Mr Dick Shade, an elderly man with a gammy leg. This arose from an accident during his days as a test rider and mechanic for the now defunct *Francis Barnett Motorcycles*. Dick and I hit it off immediately, but I had a little difficulty with the Corporal - and other Corporals - to begin with. I think this was because I was a baby face, and looked more like a pupil than permanent staff. I can only assume that there was also a small measure of resentment. I did the usual thing and checked books, tools and equipment and then prepared an inspection programme for the QM's approval.

One thing amazed me - the fact that I would be responsible for the unit bicycles, something I knew was really the job of the vehicle section. However, having been requested to take on the responsibility, I acquiesced. I had two separate bicycle kits, a basic bag of tools and spares and a supplementary bag containing other weird tools that I never really used or knew what they were for. What I did know was how to gauge wear in tyres! You may recall my story about this when I was with the KOYLIs. My inspection programme for weapons and bicycles was approved and soon I was deep into my work.

My duties did not involve day-to-day contact with the JLs, only when I was on duty as Orderly Sergeant. This was true of the other REME personnel, the Gun Fitter, Vehicle Fitter and the Instrument Fitter. We tended to drift together in the Mess, although I did make good friends among the Artillery members. The names escape me now, except for Wally Blowes, the Gun Fitter responsible for the 25-pdr guns. I have the face of the Instrument man in my mind but no way can I dredge up his name. Naturally, one of the first things I did was to apply for married quarters. As I was to discover, there was a limited number of quarters on camp, but none unoccupied. The next best thing was to find a hiring and in this I was successful, after about a month. The house was in Golf Drive, about a mile or so from the camp. Ann resigned her job and joined me in Nuneaton, as soon as we could arrange to occupy the house. Shortly after we had settled in, a job at the camp came up and Ann applied for it with success. With both of us working at Gamecock, it didn't make sense to go home at lunchtime, or sit with sandwiches, when casual Mess meals were available for a small charge. So we ate our main meal at lunch in the Mess and had a light supper in the evenings. This suited us perfectly.

One summer's weekend I answered a knock on the door, to find a young man hovering on the doorstep, armed with a clipboard. *"Can I speak to your father?"* he asked. Here we go again - do I not look old enough to own or rent property? *"You can if you can speak loudly"*, I told him. *"Why? Is your father deaf?"* *"No! He lives a hundred miles away in Canterbury and doesn't have a phone"*. I then got an apology and he said not to worry and shuffled off - was it something I said? Nuneaton itself was a typical Midlands town, an old centre and sprawling built-up suburbs. We were not too far from Birmingham and a bit closer to Coventry. Being England, everything was so close together, sometimes it was difficult to tell the end of one built-up area from the start of another. An odd thing at the time was the invisible border-line, to do with petrol distribution in England. At one end of the town, the petrol price was a penny or so

higher than the other end, at least as far as one fuel company was concerned. This was due to the invisible line I spoke of, dividing Nuneaton. *"Daft, I calls it!"* to repeat a common Midlands phrase.

Gamecock Barracks was well known to industry through the Forklift and Drivers' Competition, which took place there every year, and had done so for a long time. It was held during a weekend and usually when the unit was on recess. Concurrent with the Forklift competition, there was a big truck drivers' competition and a private car drivers' competition, thrown in for fun. Needless to say, I entered none of them. When we left Tidworth, we had taken the precaution of filling in the necessary forms for our mail, addressed to us in Bhurtpore, to be sent on to Nuneaton, in fact to the camp post office. For a while, all was well, then we began getting mail addressed to a Johnson with unfamiliar initials. I telephoned Tidworth PO to query this. It turned out that another married couple, with the same surname as us, took over our old quarter and, in consequence, we got all their mail as well! Next time we were at Ann's parents, I went along to Tidworth and sorted things out. Believe it or not, when we were allocated a married quarter in the camp at Nuneaton, a Sgt Johnson was leaving the Army and vacating a quarter. No! We didn't take over his old house, but as he too told the camp PO to forward his mail, they forwarded everything addressed to 'Johnson', which meant ours too. We had a lot of fun getting the PO staff to understand what it was we wanted, who's initials belonged to which family. After a while, things settled down, until only the odd piece of mail addressed to THEM, came to US!

My first duty with the JLs was one to remember, because it fell on a Saturday and entailed drilling defaulters on the square for an hour. Following this, I did my rounds of the barrack blocks, to ensure that all was well within. As I made my jaunty way between blocks, I happened to be passing an open window, when a JL chose that moment to dispose of the cold contents of his drinking mug. This left me wet down one side, my dignity besmirched and one very red-faced contrite young soldier, who must have thought the end of his service life was nigh. Fortunately, I took it as the accident it was, and made my way back to the Mess for a change of shirt etc. Other than weekend duties, which we all know are onerous at the best of times, weekday duties were quite bearable and came round not too often. As an attached member from REME, I was not generally expected to participate in after-hours activities, but I soon became involved in small-bore shooting again. It came about that I was asked to coach small-bore shooting to the JLs, which I was only too pleased to do, being a fairly good shot myself. We revamped the indoor range in one of the old

hangars that formed part of the camp. It was a system that required the bullet traps and firing point to be assembled and dismantled at the start and end of each session. This was necessary because that particular hangar was also the wet-weather parade ground. I raised a lot of interest in the small-bore club and thoroughly enjoyed the sports afternoons coaching these keen young soldiers. Unknown to me, there was an ulterior motive behind the initial request. I soon learnt that, for a number of years, the JLs had taken part in an annual sports day at *HMS Ganges* (now defunct), the sea training school for boy sailors. I also discovered that the shooting team had NEVER won the small-bore shooting match, or even for the most part even come close to the winning score. I'm proud to say that, on the one and only time I coached the JLs, for their match with *Ganges*, we came within a few points of winning.

Although it's difficult to remember that particular trip, other than the shooting, I can recall being in their indoor drill hall and looking at photographs of old naval ships, going back to the days of sail. I took the opportunity of looking for my Granddad's old ship, *HMS Agincourt*, but failed to find it. The other memory is being shown into the Chief Petty Officers' Mess, to my cabin for the night. I think that, because I wore the Armourers' badge above my stripes, they thought I was Staff Sergeant. Anyhow, I arrived in time for the evening tot of rum. Being a guest, I was offered a tot, which I politely turned down, much to the amazement of the Navy members. They began making bids for the tot. Years later, I took a liking to the occasional rum and wished I had actually tasted the genuine *Pusser's* issue. *Pusser* was the naval name of the Purser, who in the old days was the equivalent to the Army Quartermaster, issuing rations, etc. 'Pusser', today, means the genuine naval-issue anything.

It was during the time that I was into coaching the JLs that a terrible shooting took place in London, three policemen shot dead on the street while investigating a crime. *(This would have been the infamous incident in August 1966, when the three policemen, attached to Shepherd's Bush Police Station, approached a suspect car. One character, Harry Roberts, shot one policemen at point-blank range, then pursued another, before shooting him too. The third copper was shot by one of Roberts' accomplices. Roberts hid out for three months in Epping Forest, in a small tent, before being eventually captured. He had served in the Army during the Malay Emergency, using this experience to avoid being found. Ed.)* The shooting of policemen was then so rare an event that it shocked the country. In response to this, a few weeks later, the Chief Constable of Warwickshire

required all his policemen to undergo shooting training. Our barracks being the nearest place with a range, and the local police station having found some old .22" rim-fire rifles, they requested my services as an instructor and the use of the range. We did have a fixed pistol range in the camp, which was used only infrequently, when officers qualified annually with their pistols. I had to strip and clean these police rifles, as they hadn't been used for years and years. It was mooted that perhaps they last saw use in WWII, but, having cleaned and serviced them, I found all fit for shooting. So Saturday afternoons, as volunteered by the CO, were given up to two hours of coaching the local police force in rifle shooting and pistol shooting. In the latter art I had help. This is because one of the JLs was a noted junior pistol champion, having participated at national level. I think it was a bit difficult for the policemen to come terms with being coached by a 16-year old. Nevertheless, I think we did quite well between us and the police were satisfied.

While the work at the JL unit was steady, it wasn't stimulating and I still had thoughts of becoming an Artificer. But I still needed to get that Maths exam under my belt if I was to apply for Artificer training, so I studied part-time at home and then asked to take the exam. It was scheduled to take place at the area HQ, in Chester, and so I had to motor up there. The journey was uneventful, as was the exam, me being the only candidate - it was quite lonely in that exam room. Afterwards, on my way home, I had to pass over a rough piece of road whose top surface had just been ripped off, presumably for resurfacing. The moment I bumped over the rough ground, my silencer broke in half and the rest of England knew where I was. I had little money with me, and no chequebook. The nearest garage was a small country petrol station, with a wood and iron lean-to as the service station. Luck was with me, in that they were prepared to collect a new silencer from the nearest town, as the boss was there on other business and they knew where to contact him. Secondly, when I asked the price, I was told 'five pounds'. Searching through my pockets etc, I came up with a few pennies over that amount. After what seemed a long, long wait, the boss arrived with my new silencer and it was fitted quite quickly. It was also fortunate that I had plenty of fuel to get home. The good news was that I managed to pass that exam and now only had the trade exam to pass, in order to qualify for selection to the selection board.

You will recall that I mentioned we had a REME Instrument fitter on staff - but sorry, I can't remember his name. However, we were good friends and usually ended up in each other's company at Mess functions, etc. He was

He was unfortunate, in that the RSM took a dislike to him and had very little to say to him at any time. This didn't bother my friend at all. One evening, at a function, he had prepared a piece of carrot, cutting it up into small, elongated triangles, which he put in his top pocket. During the evening, he would now and then dip his fingers into the Mess goldfish tank and make like he was trying to catch one. At an appropriate moment, when some wives were watching, he concealed his prepared piece of carrot in his palm and then, making a quick splash in the goldfish tank, withdrew his hand and popped the piece of carrot in his mouth. It appeared that he was swallowing a live goldfish! This drew shrieks of horror from the ladies, one throwing up into her hand, and astounded looks from some of the Mess members. Most of all the RSM, who marched over and demanded to know what was going on. My friend tried to explain what he had done for fun and patted his pockets, looking for the other piece of carrot, by way of proof. As fate would have it, it had been left behind and so his proof was non-existent. The upshot was a ban from the Mess for two or three months, I don't recall the span exactly. At the time, my friend said it mattered not, as he rarely went to the Mess in any case, mainly because of 'you-know-who'.

Meanwhile, I gave more and more thought to an alternative future and, despite the fact that I was ready for that selection board, I made up my mind to leave the service at the end of my 9-year period. Having made my intentions known, and truth to tell was somewhat nervous of the prospect of being jobless in the coming month of May (1968), I settled down to my last few months service. The

Mess dined me out, along with one other, as I recall - both of us were asked to make a farewell speech. I didn't have a clue what to say and, when my turn came around, I arose and addressed the multitude. *"Not knowing what one should say, or not say, on these occasions, I conducted my own consensus of opinion and the advice received amounts to this - gentlemen, Bollocks!"* - and I quickly sat down. There was a short silence and then a general round of laughter, except for the RSM who glared at me. Just before I left Nuneaton, contractors began tearing down the unwanted hangars, leaving only those still in daily use. How much difference this made to the storage facilities, I don't know, but it did add a few pence to the pockets of those permanent staff that the demolition company took on as casual staff during a term break. The day finally came when I said my farewells and severed my ties with the Army. The CO interviewed all departing staff, so mine was probably no different to many before me. I was wished 'good luck' and told it was a pity I was leaving the Army with a good career ahead of me if I stayed. Did I know that I was on the accelerated promotion roll? Like Hell I did! Why tell me when I'm leaving?

(So, as far as the Army was concerned for John, it was 'game over'. But maybe there is more to come? Ed.)

Johnny Johnson, 56B

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 – last part of 4

Kuching, Borneo, May 1963 – Aug 1964

I had now started my last stint, as I would need to be back in Kluang about a month before returning to UK, at the end of my tour, in September. The composition of the Flight detachment did not resemble what I had known as 7 Flight and was now a mixture, but nonetheless we still worked well together. We were told that the *Scouts* were coming and that we would return to Kluang in the next month or two. Again, someone had not read the script! One job we had to do from Kuching was to fly down to Tan Jon Datu, the southernmost tip

of Sarawak, and have 'a peep round the corner', to see if anyone was coming our way. This occurred every evening, returning about 8.00 pm.

One joy was to strap the RAF *Hunter* pilots in, when they came over for a joy-ride in a 'proper' flying machine. No turning the wick up and pointing it in the right direction 'ere! And believe what the seat of your pants is telling you and flying without doors! 'G'-suit, oxygen and parachute! Sorry, we don't do them 'ere. Use your nose for oxygen and wait until the aircraft stops before getting out - and don't 'exit forward', as the prop will chop you up. Another thing - if you 'go in' and settle on the jungle canopy, remember it's another 100+ feet to the ground! All in all they enjoyed it, but the look in their eyes trying to 'suss' out if you were telling the truth was something to behold.



Jack Greaves, Steve Hillard, Derek Saxton. And Bob Lennon (56B), Entry of Sarawak into Malaysia 16th September 1963



WZ667 arriving by Beverley after Major overhaul, Pete North in foreground with main planestrut.



On top of ramp, Maurice Hayes, Ron Beadle, onlooker Maj Jim Dawson.

July ish 1964.

The Tanjung Datu run at night was combined with dropping 'bits and pieces' to anyone who needed them. One night, I was asked to drop a nose-wheel for one of the RAF helicopters into a HLZ and I suggested attaching it to a small parachute. I was told 'no don't bother, drop it as it is. You can't hover in an *Auster*!' On arriving at the DZ, I made sure that it was going to clear our aircraft and let it go. Well, it bounced everywhere, narrowly

missing the helicopter and scattering the ground crew in every direction for safety. But it survived - the wheel that is.

Another night, we decided to dispose of our spent cartridge cases that were used to start the engines. Not the sort of thing you would put in the dustbin and the locals would love to have had them, as they would make new ones using the base again.



7 and 16 Flight, Kuching, March 1964

*Back: Cpl Hugh Calder REME, Cpl John Heyes REME, Cpl Steve Hilliard REME Gnr ? RA,
Cpl Ron Ward REME, L/Bdr Alley Kiddle RA, Bdr Ernie Bolsover RA, Gnr ? RA
Centre: Cpl Bob Lennon REME, Cpl Ron Beadle REME, Cpl ? REME, Gnr Smudge Smith RA,
Cpl Pete North REME, Gnr John Coates RA.
Front: CPO Derek Saxton RN, Capt Tim Deane RA, Capt Mike Monro QOH, Maj Jim Dawson AAC,
Capt Dinger Bell RAAC, Sgt Milton 4RTR(?), S/Sgt Jack Greaves BEM REME.*

So, these were collected in a sandbag and, when full, we would dump them out at sea. Well, this particular evening, we also had the yellow waterproof mail container, to drop to the minesweeper, on the way. It suddenly became 'a good idea' to drop the sandbag first, near the minesweeper, and provoke some reaction. This we did, after making a low-level approach to establish wind direction, dropping the sandbag into the water. As usual, the crew was ready to recover what they thought was the mail, only to find, after a splash, nothing on the surface! Well, I don't think even the cook or the Captain were left on board as what they saw as 'their' mail' going to the bottom of Davy Jones' Locker - lots and lots of bodies, ducking and diving everywhere! We went round and then dropped their mail canister and there was a lot of waving - but with two fingers! But they saw the joke and we shared a few laughs over it when they came ashore later.

Sadly, we heard the news of the loss of *Scout* XR 596 on a training flight with **Capt Jacot de Boins-**

od, Daniel B de V, Coldstream Guards and Qualified Helicopter Instructor **WO2 Hutchings** WJ, AAC, near Kluang on 15 July 1964. It turned out to be a 'Fuel Control Unit failure'. This also meant that all *Scouts* were grounded and it would be a month or two before they were cleared to fly and 7 Flight would be delayed in returning to Kluang. At this time, I believe S/Sgt 'Ginge' Townsend had taken over from Jack Greaves and our Admin Sgt was now a Sgt Barryclough. After a farewell party in the VIP lounge, courtesy of John Seal (who allowed us to use it on special occasions), I returned to Kluang. It was obvious that, with the arrival of the '*Scout AH*', the way in which AAC gave close support would change forever.

Kluang, Aug - Sept 1964

On arriving back, parties of Insurgents landed near Melaka. The Squadron gave air support in the operations and in other areas of the Malay Peninsula. I was at Kluang for 30 days but did not qualify for 'the clasp', as the 'Indos' started the

campaign two days late. I did have the winning raffle ticket for 'Hutch's' car, however! With only three days left in Malaysia, I sold it to a S/Sgt Miller REME (donated 50% to widow), who was the Team Leader at AACC Middle Wallop Workshops, where we carried out the first Minor on a *Beaver*. This was when the P531 *Scout* Intensive Trials Flight, on which I was working, was grounded due to technical difficulties.

UK, Oct 1964 – Jun 1966

On return, I joined AACC Workshop and worked on Advanced Rotary Wing in the *Scout* section, commanded at that time by Maj 'Wee Jimmy' Crowe and later by Maj 'Low level Glenville' Edgecombe, prior to him leaving for Aden. Rumour had it that a new Flight was about to form, to be part of 19 Brigade - the Static Reserve. I saw this as a ticket to free holidays in Europe and North America and put my hand up. The Flight was to be of all experienced REME guys and that sounded good. It formed at Netheravon on 13 January 1966 and it was 2 Flight AAC. Well, the 656 Flight from Ipoh, up until July 1962.

To cut a long story short, the 'all experienced' REME personnel would arrive a week later, having just finished their course at Middle Wallop! So what we had was a section of tradesmen, none of whom could sign for their work, with only Brian Fowler and myself who could. As it happens, they turned out to be a great bunch of guys and the whole Flight knitted together nicely. After the first parade as such, where the Flight looked like 'Joseph's Coat of Many Colours', Maj JEM Elliott decided that, as almost everyone came from a different Regiment, everyone would wear the Light Blue Beret, AAC stable belt, the green trousers (No2s?) - but their own cap-badge. Now we looked like we came from the same Flight.

By May, we were informed we were off to Borneo (Surprise, surprise!) to relieve 3 Flight at Sibul. In fact we did not get there until after they had left and the Borneo campaign finished on 11 August 1966.

Labuan and Paroi Camp, Seram, July 1966 – Sept 1967

After in-theatre training at Kluang, we went to Labuan and were based there till mid-December 1966, when we moved to Paroi Camp, Seram, where 14 Flight were once based. Again, just like my first trip, the campaign was over - but we were still running detachments at various forward positions like Sibul, Kapit, Long Pisia, etc. Our only claim to fame was 'the breaking of the grandfathers' rights' for cinema seats in the RAF Sergeants Mess in RAF Labuan, where some of the

older senior NCOs were stationed and had claimed 'squatter's rights' to the front row!

One evening we, that's Brian the Tiffy, Roger Moreton (of Infantry that walks quickly), Dave Burnan AAC, Don Tom (Tanky) and myself had an early dinner. Then we sat ourselves down in the front row and you could have cut the air with a bread knife when they came in - but we proved a point. But so did Glen Ford in the film, *'The Sheep-man'*. It was the equivalent to defying the Mafia!

Labuan is a small island in Brunei Bay where, on the 9 September 1945, the Commander of the 9th Division of the Australian Imperial Forces received the Unconditional Surrender of the 32nd Japanese Southern Army in North Borneo and Sarawak.

Could I lay claim to be one of the '**FILO**' (First In Last Out) in this one?

Tribute

When we look back, we remember the good times and put the bad into the background, but the credit must go to all members of 656, who worked long hours and, in many cases, under poor conditions to help achieve the end result. We mustn't forget the wives and families, who suffered long separations during this time and had to look after children in a foreign country, whilst their loved ones were on active service, in what was a 'forgotten war' to those in UK.

My only slight criticism is that the two years, during which the *Austers* and *Beavers* were involved (1962 -1964), does not appear to be represented well in the Museum of Army Aviation, Wallop. Also WZ721 was a part of the Malaya, Brunei and Borneo campaigns, but there does not seem to be any reference. If we take a modest figure of 250 hrs per month for 7 and 14 Flights in the first two years, that is 12,000 flying hours. Before the *Scout* Flights became fully operational, that was a big contribution - and a lot of hours in what my wife calls 'an aircraft that's only two people wide'.

Final Tribute

23396474 Sergeant D J B 'Doc' Waghorn,
Royal Army Medical Corps

Date of Death: 20 September 1965

Commemoration: Terendak Military Cemetery,
Malacca, Malaysia Memorial Wall

I understand 'Doc' took off in marginal conditions and had crew and a prisoner on board, but never reached his destination. A fisherman trawled up a 'snubber strut' in his net and the serial number was traced back to Doc's aircraft.

Still listed as 'missing'.

This brings to an end Ron's outstanding description of his Army Air Corps service in the Far East. Ed

Back to the UK

In February of 1951, it was homeward bound on the troopship *'Oxfordshire'*, after a three-year stint in MELF (Middle East Land Forces). Things could only get better and, by and large, they did. The *'Oxfordshire'* was a cruise liner, so utterly luxurious when compared to my outbound trip in the *'Scythia'*. ORs had berths, and NCOs and WOs had 2-man cabins. There were no duties, and I had a new posting to look forward to (I had nightmares for years in which I was posted immediately back to TEK!). The cabin was shared with S/Sgt Ted Smith, who went out on the same draft as me in the *'Scythia'*. He was a Staff/Sgt then, had been for many years - and still was. A stolid Lincolnshire man, married with a wife in UK, he spent all his 'Python' at 2 Base as PWF (Principal Works Foreman) of 41 Shed, the motorcycle rebuild place. Ted was a quiet man, placid and unshakeable, a great source of spares and manufacturing for the *Bar None Motor Cycle Club*. He spent most afternoons in 41 Shed, building a working scale model of a *'Pacific'* class locomotive. A beautiful thing; it was timed for completion shortly before the end of his tour. I remember him running it in for hours on compressed air, before finally steaming it up. It was heavy, must have been 1½ cwt when crated: I know, because I helped him carry it from Tel-el-Kebir to Liverpool docks!

Through customs, with loads of kit - packed in those camel leather suitcases, which weighed a ton even when empty! Very smart though, and completely durable - I've still got one, full of junk, out in my workshop, but I can barely lift it these days. I brought home a load of tat for the family, as we all did. Cigarette cases and trinket boxes, made by Italian and German POWs (TEK garrison power station, a big one, was run entirely by Germans and was immaculate); motor cycle parts; and a load of American KD, beautiful heringbone pattern in 100% cotton and a lovely cream shade. I wore it for years when in shirt-sleeve order in BAOR, until it virtually fell apart - then I wore it at home. It was obtained by judicious trading with a REME S/Sgt at the RE workshop (it was used as test stuff for their laundry repair section). He was a 42C boy - I can still picture him now, but I forget his last name; a small chunky lugubrious Yorkshireman, who knew every dubious rhyme or song ever written! Anyway, it was Liverpool docks and then entrain for home and some 70 days disembarkation leave. It was really good to see mother and father again (not sure how they felt about me) and to see how my brother and sister had grown up. My sister

was at London University, *Goldsmiths*, on the way to her career as a teacher, and my brother was working on a farm, already saving hard to become a tenant farmer. For my part, I suppose I was happy enough to play with vehicles, my 'boys' toys' as they say today.

My two priorities on leave were a) to pick up again with Sheila, with whom I'd corresponded warmly (more on my part than hers) over the years at TEK; and b) to acquire a competitive scramble (Motor X) bike. I have to say that I had far more success with the latter! Sheila was now working for the BBC in Manchester and, although we went out together quite often, I think she found me a bit pedestrian: *"Too slow"*, she remarked petulantly once as I sat with her on the platform at Retford, waiting for her Manchester train after a weekend at home. By now, I could handle quite well the social situations one encountered with girls met in Army life; but I was not so sure about clean-cut daughters of family friends - in fact Sheila was the only one I'd met. Later, I realised that they are all driven by the same clockwork! The motorcycle competition world wasn't exactly holding its breath awaiting my entry, but I had a great deal of success with a one-year-old ex-works 500cc *Ariel*, itself an ex 'pot-winner'; but not as competitive as the *BSA* scramblers, which, together with *Matchless* and *AJS*, dominated the scrambler world. Nevertheless, I was pleased with my little self - good on sandy circuits, a learning curve on mud. Sheila's brother was also a motorcycle enthusiast and often lent me his *Ajay* jam-pot 500-twin for a day or so when he was at work.

5 Armoured Workshops, Tidworth, Feb-Dec 1951

So then, generally a good leave, over far too soon, and back to the REME Depot at Arborfield - in Poperinghe Barracks, was it? There, who should I find as CSM but Sandy Thomas, a man, I discovered, with a long memory and served by the dictum that *'revenge is best taken cold!'* It was just before Easter weekend, and I'd entered a National-level scramble event some weeks before, somewhat optimistically, as I knew my leave would be running out about then. A few days before Easter, I had my posting interview with Maj 'Daddy' Knight, a dear old buffer who remembered me from 2 Base. *"Ah, Larby, the REME Canal Zone rugby man"*, he said, *"I've got just the posting you'll enjoy. A new workshop, 5 Armoured, is being formed at Tidworth and will be going to Germany at Christmas. You'll get all the rugby you'll want there."*

Sergeant Major Thompson, if Staff Larby is not on duty, send him home for a weekend - and good luck, Staff", he beamed. Who was guard commander at Poperinghe Barracks from midday Saturday to midday Sunday? You're right! All this 'Old Guard - New Guard - taking post' stuff, rehearsed on the Saturday morning for the mounting at 12.00 as well. I understood that this charade took place up until the time the IRA emptied the Armoury, after which, some real security was put in place. But, even then, live rounds were not issued until further raids were made at Aldershot. From then on, guard and security duties had some meaning, and no longer a ridiculous waste of time.

A few days later, I had a few more days' leave, during which time I managed to acquire some transport for the *Ariel*. In those days, competition bikes were often carried cross-wise on a grid, or mounted on the back of a car, and I bought a 1931 *AC Magna* 2-seater coupe, which also had dickey seats in the back, outside the soft-top hood of the 2-seater bit. The engine was a 2-litre 6-cylinder OHC design, and was used in *ACs* in their various designs well into the 60s or later. This was bought purely as a bike carrier, but I found other uses for it almost by chance. The day came when I loaded my kit and the bike onto the *AC*, to report to the nascent 5 Armd Wksp at Tidworth. 5 Armd was in 20 Armd Brigade, itself one of three brigades that formed the new 6 Armd Division, being raised to combat the increasing Eastern Bloc threat of the 'Cold War'. 61 Brigade was the lorried infantry brigade, but I can't remember the nomenclature of the second armoured brigade of 6 Armd Div. But I'm sure someone reading this will know. Anyway, 10 Armd Wksp was our sister workshop, though we didn't see much of them.

On arrival at 5 Armoured I found it to be at about 60% strength, but building rapidly. It was pretty chaotic but purposeful; for the first time in my career I felt as if I was about to do 'a real job in a real army'. The OC was a Maj Ball, an Australian lease/lend chap, who'd only a few weeks to do before returning to the Australian Army. A nice man, very capable and laid back; I admired him because he owned a beautiful *Railton* sports/tourer, with a large American *Hudson* engine. A side-valve engine, it didn't have much BHP, but oodles of torque. Capt 'Billy' Wells was the workshop officer, a happy, gregarious, rotund man in his forties, good company, good fun, and who knew more vulgar poetry and bawdy songs than any self-respecting REME officer should. One began, *"Life presents a dismal picture, dark and gloomy as the tomb; Auntie Mary has a stricture, mother has a fallen womb"*, sung to the tune of *'Deutschland, Deutschland uber alles'*. Try as I might, I can't remember any more of it; does anyone else? I'd like to know! We had two ASMs,

Terry Head and 'Tug' Wilson, very different characters but both OK; more of them anon.

Once I'd reported to the OC, I'd been given two jobs (well three really); i) acting CSM (!) ii) 'A' vehicle platoon and iii) Sgts' Mess Treasurer. I was given a billet and a room in a wooden spider-type building, which I was to share with S/Sgt Les Bradley ('Brad') for the next few months. Like most of the WOs and NCOs, he was married, but there were to be no quarters - and therefore no wives - for another 18 months. Until then, they all intended to make the most of their freedom, but most especially Brad! We were both lucky, because the unit's main accommodation was in a two-storey barrack block, together with guard-room, cookhouse, stores and sundry offices - all built in the mid-19th century or earlier. I believe they are now preserved as listed buildings of historic interest. Every day, more men arrived and were taken on strength; luckily the Chief Clerk, WOII Trevor Metcalfe, was in post, together with a press-ganged staff of three tradesmen, pending the arrival of clerks. There was also a 'Quartermaster', in reality a Corporal vehicle electrician, Desmond Banham by name. So I only had to look after the rationing and general provisioning of the place, plus parades and the general welfare, cleanliness and discipline (?) of the men. There were four general duties men to look after the guard-room, and any other bodies needed could be 'borrowed' from the morning roll-call parade.

After a few days into the job, it became obvious that the most important task was the provisioning of the cookhouse and Sgts' Mess. The daily ration indents were fairly self explanatory, and involved adding ration requirements for hypothetical visitors, and forgetting (or delaying) the deletion of the numbers on leave, courses, etc. Quantity of food then was not a problem. A part of my job was to go to the RASC Salisbury Plain District Stores and collect the rations from the various departments: bakery, butcher and grocery - it wasn't actually called that, but you'll know what I mean. To a man (usually Corporals or Sergeants) they were helpful, open and honest, and told me, in confidence of course and as a new boy, they'd given me some really good stuff. What they meant, as our ACC Cook Sgt pointed out, in no uncertain terms, was that they'd given me a good stuffing! What to do about it? The Cook Sgt suggested that we might talk to the ACC boss at Tidworth and seek the aid of a catering advisor. A word with Maj Ball; a phone call from him to the ACC district office; and, that very afternoon of the ration collection day, a WOII catering advisor arrived with a worldly-wise ACC Sgt, who knew everyone in the RASC at Bulford. He stayed for a few days; problem solved. I never went again in person; just did the paperwork, but some other

poor unit must have got the rubbish, because he and a newly-appointed ration corporal did the business for us!

After about three weeks, CSM Bert Black arrived and soon got the place ticking over smoothly. A grizzled old soldier, he was about 5' 2" tall, and must have weighed all of 9 stone when dressed in battle order. But was he fit! Occasionally, when taking a parade of the whole workshops and standing to attention, with no flicker of emotion on his face, he'd perform a lightning and perfect on-the-spot back-flip. It was so fast, you'd doubted you'd seen it, especially as he landed perfectly to attention again. It was only the crash of his boots as he landed that confirmed that it had really happened. And why didn't his beret come off? After Bert's arrival, it was a thankful little S/Sgt who scurried back to 'A' Platoon, where all the kit was rolling in on a daily basis. Everything from basic toolkits to the *Diamond T*, complete with *Rogers* trailer, and *Churchill* ARV; several *Scammell* 6x4s and a *Caterpillar* D8; and - recovery platoon's pride and joy - the brand new *Scammell* 6x6 recovery vehicle. The 6x6 was of modern specification and light years ahead of the old 6x4. However, it proved to be unreliable, especially when attempting to achieve long journeys at speed on the German autobahns; it ran so hot that the grease would melt out from the prop-shafts, often with expensive, dramatic and sometimes spectacular results. Later versions were better - or more likely, we expected less from them!

The assorted machinery wagons were mostly all *Bedford* QLS, but there were several *Ford* WOT6 chassis, which no one wanted to travel in or drive. Although powered by a *Ford* V8, they never seemed to run at any one time on more than six cylinders, usually less. There were several different layouts of ignition systems, all totally unreliable, thus requiring constant attention, but not getting it until the engine was *in extremis*, because of the poor accessibility factor. Of side-valve design, with no tappets to adjust, compression became poor; carburation was basically dependent upon whichever carburettors were fitted - the combustion chambers got fuel in dribbles instead of a good mixture. Anyway, the WOT6s were always down in power and thus quite tiring to drive. A robust and basic engine, it was tuned, developed and raced by amateur motor sportsmen all over America; but, surrounded by sheet metal in a military 3-tonner, it just sulked, as it must have done in every theatre of war since its into-service date.

Our G1098 kit was growing, the RAOC stores section's bin wagons were putting on weight, and 5 Armd would soon be ready for its first little foray into the wide, wide world. We might even get us as far as Bulford or Larkhill for a night or two, after

a tour round Salisbury Plain. The process of readiness for work was accelerated by the arrival of the new OC workshops, Major George Riddick MC REME. Stern of visage, forceful, sparing of words and extremely knowledgeable, he was the antithesis of the departing, laid-back Maj Bull; we were sorry to see him go, he'd been a good CO, while Maj Riddick showed all the signs of being a bit of a martinet. This impression was confirmed with our first meeting within two days of his arrival; the workshop phone rang, a call summoning me peremptorily to his office. Upon my arrival, he requested that I, in my capacity as Mess treasurer, should immediately present to him all the books and cash in hand. No worries! I trotted blithely up to the Mess, picked up books, petty cash, bank takings *et al*, then headed back to his office.

Halfway back, totally confident in the state of the accounts, but mentally reviewing them, I was struck by a sudden realisation; in the petty cash box was a ticking time-bomb in the form of an IOU for £5 signed by the OIC Mess accounts, one hapless Capt Billy Wells. What could I do? I didn't have a fiver (a week's pay was about £8 in 1951). I didn't have time to ring up Billy at the workshop, so it was 'into the tiger's den'. "Thank you, Staff, take a seat". A look through the various accounts, then the petty cash book, then - the cash box! Maj Riddick's expression didn't change, but his eyes hardened. Delicately picking up the offending chitty in one hand and his phone in the other, a terse call had the miscreant stumbling into the CO's presence within five minutes, the usual smile on his face. This lasted for only a few seconds, as Billy realised the situation. "Captain Wells", said the CO, "you have a choice. Five pounds in the funds now, or accept a Court Martial". And, to me, "Thank you Staff, you may go". Knowing what I now know about George Riddick, that little scene was for my benefit; in fact, he would have given Billy a stern lecture after my departure and, if Billy had had no money, he would have put the fiver in himself! Anyway, when I collected the books from G R's office (as, for the sake of brevity we'll call him from now on), the cash was OK and nothing more was heard. Billy Wells was also OK about being 'dropped in it' by me, as he realised there wasn't much to be done in the time available.

The above episode was written to illustrate the sort of man G R was: strict, fair, very moral, and above all determined to make 5 Armd Wksp efficient, motivated and with lots of *esprit de corps*. Anyone who didn't meet his exacting standards found himself posted out; it was pretty high numbers to begin with, because other units, when asked to provide men for a new workshop, took the opportunity to get rid of their misfits. By the time we were ready for BAOR in December, only two of such were left - we'll call them 'McBass' and

'McGuinness' - both from the Gorbals. Small, tough and ginger, they were inseparable, spending many days together in the guardroom cells. I think G R kept them as pets and permanent whipping boys! By July '51, 5 Armd was up to strength in manpower and equipment, and we set out on tentative training exercises, initially of the basic convoy discipline kind, making sure we all got to where we were intended to go, by the right route and at the right time. We must have travelled hundreds of miles that summer and autumn, initially around Hampshire and Dorset, usually on 'B' roads or less, mostly at night and sometimes on convoy lights only. How civilian traffic didn't run into us, God only knows - there probably wasn't a lot about in the New Forest, in the middle of the night, in those days!

For the first couple of exercises, the 'D' wagon was my allotted transport, driven by Cpl Lofty Banham (the QM). It would have been OK to sleep in, but G R stipulated that there was to be no sleeping in trucks, so people inevitably got cold, wet and uncomfortable under trucks and trees. However, after a couple of weeks, and the expenditure of hard-earned pay at ex-Army equipment shops, two-man bivvies, tents, beds, sleeping bags, etc. were purchased and everyone had their own pet solutions. The three main requirements of the kit were a) quick and easy to assemble, b) rainproof and c) quick and easy to disassemble and stow, not necessarily in that order. G R loved inflicting mystery tours on the hapless unit. True, we'd had an 'O' group, but only about three hours before departure, so each platoon commander had to cope as best he could. There weren't enough OS maps for each driver; no time to issue route cards, and the destination was usually just a 6-figure reference. This ensured that one didn't lose sight of the vehicle in front, so we all arrived (theoretically) together wherever we were heading. One can imagine that convoy discipline went to pot! After the second chaotic outing, I volunteered my services as a convoy outrider on one of the unit's three *Matchless* G3L 350cc motorcycles. G R thought this a good idea so, next time out, when I wasn't 'riding shotgun' behind G R's *Jeep* and trailer, I was doing about four times the route mileage, playing sheepdog to the convoy. I enjoyed this, much better than nodding off in the 'D' wagon, so I gradually developed the bike, the system, and my kit. The job, and other sundry tasks, was to be mine for the next five or so years. Would I have thought up the job if I'd known that? Emphatically 'YES!' The *Matchless* was modified in line with TEK and motor-X experience, but within the bounds of acceptability *vis-à-vis* MoD property. In workshop 'silent hours', I polished the intake port, extended the inlet 'manifold' (i.e. two fibre distance-pieces instead of one) and fitted a larger bore *Amal* carburettor - a 1¼" bore from a 16H *Norton*. For some reason, although the bore of the

Matchless inlet was 1¼" standard, only a 1" bore carburettor was fitted as original equipment. Presumably it was to limit performance.

Sorting through my stock of engine sprockets and Stores Section parts lists, I found a sprocket with three more teeth than the standard *Matchless*, but obviously with a different hub - it was, I think, from an *Ariel*. A quick visit to 2 Platoon fitters, with *Matchless* sprocket in one hand and *Ariel* sprocket in the other, and it was hey presto! Part the 2-sprocket rings from the hub, fit the *Ariel* sprocket over the *Matchless* hub, and I'd got the fastest *Matchless* in 6 Armd Div - and possibly the whole Army! And nobody knew - well, nobody that mattered anyway. The panniers and carriers were modified, over a period of time, to take my 'independence kit': a two-man bivvie, a 'W'-spring bed, a No. 1 (or 2?) petrol burner (which I've still got) and a couple of waterproof pannier bags for small kit, rations, etc. This all packed neatly onto the back of the bike and probably didn't weigh more than 50 lbs. This arrangement made me completely independent, with no fears of cold, wet or hunger, should I find myself separated from all the rest of the unit. There were also no worries about death or injury caused by less-than-capable drivers; much rather do it myself! Anyway, to this day, I hate being driven, unless I know the driver's capabilities. This happy state took about a year to achieve, step by step; it also had its downside, in that I had to keep others off the bike when on leave or detachment, though in the latter case it often went with me. Also, it had to be away from base during annual REME Inspectorate visits; I didn't want it downgraded because of the unbelievably high mileage it eventually achieved, or road-tested by another rider, who would immediately spot the difference. How was this achieved for more than four years is too boring to relate, but inevitably the 'Black Day' eventually arrived - more of that anon.

As readiness progressed, we moved to Divisional exercises and G R became very stern indeed. Suffice it to say, I don't recall even one of our vehicles failing to cross the start line on time during G R's reign; or to arrive in location late. As drivers became more confident (and also acquired their own maps), they stopped the sheep-like habit of bunching up and began to maintain proper convoy distance and discipline. They also knew that the vital piece of information was their destination or new location and, once they'd obtained this, usually by low cunning and experience, they were quite happy to amble along and enjoy the countryside - or even 'break down' and make their own way! Later, in BAOR, this became a fine art, and developed into a battle of wits between the straying sheep and the sheepdog; G R, the shepherd, didn't mind too much, as long as the whole thing didn't get out of hand. Of course on serious

exercises at Divisional level, or Army level such as *'Battle Royal'*, we didn't play about like that; G R expected and got nothing less than 100% from everyone. He looked after and cared for his unit, while no outsiders such as CREME or Div GSOs dictated to him the way things should be done internally. He considered that, as long as 5 Armd did their job and complied with Brigade or Divisional orders, the actual method of achieving it was no concern of theirs. This initially upset CREME more than somewhat, and he very often dropped in unannounced, both in the field and in barracks, to snoop and generally pry. He was by name Col McCulloch, by nature a civil servant, bean counter and administrator, and in appearance slightly *Gilbert & Sullivan*: rotund, portly and with short very spindly legs which made him look faintly ridiculous, especially in mess kit. In reality, he wasn't such a bad bloke and held his own at Sgts' Mess dos, especially in whisky drinking! Gradually we saw less and less of him - and hardly at all when we got to BAOR.

Life wasn't all work, however; and although there was no time for motor-cross and trials - it was impossible to enter for events as no time-off could be planned - we took every opportunity to explore the local hostelrys in my trusty *AC Magna*. As often as possible, I would drive up to Retford to see mother and father, as I'd missed out considerably on family life for three years whilst in Egypt. On days off we would go to Bournemouth or Salisbury on pub crawls, 'we' usually being me, Trevor O'Callaghan and Trevor Metcalfe, our treasured chief clerk. The two Trevors loved to ride in the dicky seat, exposed to the weather, but equally exposed to the gaze of the bold girls as we grandly drove past. That *AC* was something else - it had a large pneumatic full-width bench seat, which was inflated by a tyre pump; the bigger the load, the higher was the air pressure, well that was the theory. However, if it was a bit soft, the movement of the driver would cause a ripple to spread across the seat. Judicious movement of one's posterior would cause female passengers to have all sorts of unmaidenly sensations and thoughts and, as the gear lever and handbrake were to the right of the driver, there was no impediment in transforming naughty thoughts into gallant deeds. Generally speaking, a good time was had by all - and all because I thought the car would make a good bike transporter! Well, it certainly seemed to transport the ladies! The car and bikes were sold on my first leave from Germany. But I would like to think that PJ 9033 still exists, in the hands of some rich vintage car owner, and there are still some dear old grannies around whose eyes twinkle at the thought of that bench seat! The two Trevors and I - plus one or two others - didn't use the Mess bar much that summer and autumn, but mostly went to pubs, away from brutal soldiery. There was *'The Hatch-*

et' at Chute, delightful then, and still is now, or was some twelve years ago when I used to entertain members of the LE(A) (Logistic Executive Army) from Andover there. Here was *'The Swan'* at Wylie, *'The Partridge'* on the A303, *'The Boot'* at Shipton Bellenger, *'The Old Bell'* in Swindon - the list is endless, and I can recall them all; because years later, as a new Fleet Sales Rep for *Vauxhall Motors*, I visited them regularly once again!

Our training period more or less concluded with a major exercise, the biggest since WW2, *'Battle Royal'*. In truth, I don't remember much about it but it was probably the last exercise to be held on land that was other than military. Sometime during the event, I found myself with 'B' Squadron 17/21st Lancers - I've no idea why. They were advancing up a minor road, when they found the way blocked by a group of RASC re-fuelling trucks (so maybe they were retreating?). Anyway, *"Stick right"*, says the leading tank commander and off they all went, through the hedge and across a massive cabbage field. All one could see from the road were huge clods of earth and hundreds of cabbages being hurled thirty feet into the air. Very impressive, and I bet the farmer got more money for his cabbage crop from the MoD than he would have done in the market! As the son of a yeoman farmer, however, I felt uncomfortable about the waste of a good crop. Some years later, I read that most cavalry units recruited from the counties, and consequently had a lot of crew with a strong inbred reluctance to drive through standing crops. To overcome this near-phobia, every opportunity was taken by the squadron and troop commanders to do just that! A few more exercises were held, where we set up for work in earnest, notably about ten days on Dartmoor, near Okehampton, supporting 61 Lorried Infantry Brigade. There must have been some Armour too: 6 Armoured Div had both *Valentine* and *Churchill* Bridge-layers, and we prevailed upon them to dump a couple of bridges in our location, which we used as repair ramps. The CRMP, also on this exercise, had *Jeeps*, most of which seemed to be dumped on us for repair; there seemed to be dozens all over the place. Seeing a couple of VMs struggling to change a gearbox, I dropped a casual remark to the effect that the US Army found access to the transmission was made easier if the *Jeep* was tipped on its side. It seemed only seconds before the site was littered with upturned *Jeeps*; I kept my distance, hoping the engine oil at least had been drained! Sgt Mick Hill (another ex-boy) and I spent our evenings in Okehampton, two miles by road, but only about half a mile up a steep gorse-clad hill at the back of the town. During our visits we acquired two little playmates, both nurses, who lived in a nurses' home at the foot of the said hill. After our first fond farewells, Mick and I decided to climb (and it was a climb, we had to clamber up the gorse and shrubs in complete darkness)

rather than use the road to go home. Well, OK, but we had forgotten that our location was completely dark and silent. About half an hour later, and 400 feet higher, we emerged from the scrub onto Dartmoor. Where were we? Where was the unit? The things we did for love!

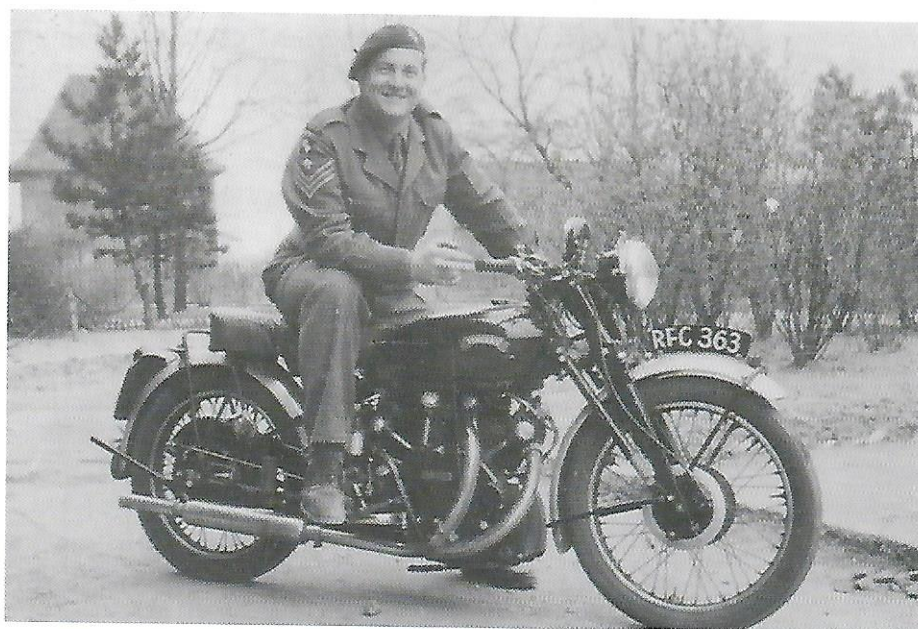
Preparing and packing

Back at Tidworth, it was now packing-up time for the move to BAOR, stowing all the 'goodies' in the steel-bodied Tels, Instruments and Electronics wagons, the theory being that the steel doors could be welded shut to prevent pilfering during transit. During this time, I spent a week or so away from 5 Armd on a daily basis, riding the *Matchless* over to Tilshead, where 3 Dragoon Guards (Prince of Wales Own) were stationed. Known colloquially as 'Three Carbs', because the rest of their title was 3rd Carabiniers, they were my first encounter with a cavalry regiment at close quarters. I was there to carry out a series of 'A' vehicle inspections and reports, taking them back to G R in the evening; no copies left with the EME, LAD or Tech Adj. Strange! On arrival, I was dazzled by the white paint, whitewash, paint in Regimental colours and general 'spit and polish'; no overalls in sight, outside of the tank hangars. Even the *Centurions* were the same, no mud or oil on pristine turrets, hulls or tracks. Imagine the shock and horror then, to discover that the engine compartments had been painted and sprayed with layers of aluminium paint over layers of oily dirt; as the paint was sprayed over dirt a scrape with a screwdriver or thumbnail revealed the metal beneath. At least it wasn't rusty! Everything was covered in that paint - fan belts, HT leads, filler caps - even crew's overalls, crew's boots, crews themselves and, last but not least, my boots and overalls! I began to get a glimmer of an idea why I was there and, by Exercise 'Spearhead 1' the

following year in BAOR, they appeared to be as any other armoured regiment. I did have some memorable fun for an hour or so though. The CO's command tank was a *Cromwell*, a tank I'd never driven before. Taking it out on the plain, I quickly realised that with the same 600 bhp as the *Cent*, but some 18-tons lighter - it was great fun to drive. Earlier models could do 40 mph, but resultant suspension damage caused later models to be fitted with a closer ratio final drive, reducing its top speed to about 33 mph. Not fast, modern battle tanks exceed this, and light tanks can do nearly twice the speed. But, because of the ratio change, acceleration was improved, and it was quite exciting to bang one's boot on the accelerator pedal in 3rd gear and feel the front of the tank lift like a sports car! (Torque reaction, dear boy!)

Anyway, back to Tidworth. The day came when the advance party departed, shortly to be followed by the main party. The last few pounds of coffee and chocolate were safely welded up in the wagons and personal effects carefully concealed. (In my case, an old KTT *Velocette*, for which I'd paid £15 and was going to restore - a good example today would fetch £8,000 or more!) The whole lot was loaded on railway flats at Tidworth station (or was it Ludgershall?). Anyway, we all entrained at Tidworth, then on to Liverpool Street and Parkstone Quay. Wasn't that the name of the ferry as well? (Yes Mike, I think that's been well and truly decided upon over the years! Ed.) It was almost four years earlier, to the day, mid-December, that my draft had left Liverpool for Port Said. Then, I was really, really unhappy, but now I was 'full of beans' and eagerly looking forward to my time in Germany. Off we all go, then, to the Hook of Holland.

(To be continued)



Mike Larby, 1952, on a Vincent 'Black Shadow' Series C



Sgt 'Ferdie' Fox, S/Sgt Mike Larby, S/Sgt Bradley, S/Sgt Trevor O'Callaghan, 5 Armd



A Centurion on test, S/Sgt Mike Larby ;in the saddle'. Crew from his 'A' Veh Pln, 5 Armd Wksp, Hamm, 1955.

Site is a slag-heap and disused coalmine.

Tee Cee's Rhymes of our Tymes

Arte et Marte

Gold Lightning barb and Silver Steed, the Crown
and Globe enclosing
The opening Scroll, proclaiming REME - simple,
yet imposing.
This is the badge so proudly worn by members of
the Corps
Which keeps the army on the move, prepared to
go to war.
Yet, battle honours there are none despite its
long existence,
For it has been in every action, giving its
assistance;
And if all of these engagements were actually
listed,
It would be (probably) the longest standard
that's existed.

Now there are those who claim that REME
personnel don't fight,
And this misconception must, in all justice, be
put right,
For, lacking military expertise, there's no hope of
promotion,
As 'Soldier First and Tradesman Second', is the
REME notion.
For, when in action things look bad, the frontline
combat soldier
Knows REME men will be fighting with them,
shoulder to shoulder
Until the battle has been won, or till the danger
fades,
And then assume their primary role, returning to
their trades.

So REME soldiers of today continue this tradition,
Supporting, as has always been the case, without
condition,
Prepared to do whatever is required to aid
success,
Regardless of the toll that they may suffer, or
distress
That might be part of helping out in whatsoever
role
That they may be required to fill, to answer
duty's call;
One thing is sure, no matter what is asked of
them to do,
Tradition's always safe with REME lads, they'll
see it through.

At the Cenotaph

Yes, I saw them standing there with quiet,
understated air,
But what a glorious sight they made, stepping
smartly on parade!
For just one hour, or maybe two, the intervening
years just flew
Away, and there they were again, ignoring ages
aches and pains.

The medals gleamed and shone so bright,
reflecting chill November light
As, shoulders back, they marched with pride,
honouring their friends who died,
And old, familiar marches brought the memories
back of those who fought
With them and fell, so very young, heroes all
with deeds unsung.

And, for those in recent times, far from home in
foreign climes,
Too many died, again the flower of youth, sent
thence by those in power;
For war was ever made by those who, sat in
distant, lofty pose
Required the young to fight and die, with loved
ones left to grieve and cry.

But that was e'er the soldiers lot, to battle on,
however fraught
The circumstances that are found, and to obey,
they're duty bound,
For honour, truth and loyalty are soldier's
strengths for all to see;
So, for the price that they might pay, we all must
keep Remembrance Day.

Older Apprentices.

As an older apprentice, then gypping's allowed,
No need to hang back and be one of the crowd,
And Jeeps give respect to your senior status,
Unless they are ready to suffer hiatus
Around lughole area, or, failing that,
A boot up the backside, knocking 'em flat.

At least that was how these things used to
transpire
Then, being a Jeep was really quite dire!
But now it's all ended, they've got "yuman rites,"
So no more the bullying, aggro and fights,
It's peace, perfect peace, but when all's said and
done,
For an older apprentice, it just ain't no fun!!

Flying with the Army Air Corps. Pt3

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

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.

Another day, another flight. It's 5.00 o'clock in the morning and I've just arrived at Falaise camp near Little Aden to start an up-country flight. XP774 is being got ready so I check the Form 700, the book that contains the history of all the servicing done to this Beaver, including refuelling. "Blast", I mutter to myself, "the tip tanks haven't been filled".

I nip outside to tell Corporal Hackett, the N.C.O. in charge of the servicing crew, to fill them. Meanwhile I sign the Authorisation book, the document in which my Flight Commander has entered details of the flight and his approval of me to carry it out. I change into my flying suit, gather up my map and navigation kit and walk out of the hangar.

To my astonishment two petrol tankers are parked across the hangar door and in front of XP774, one hitched to the other. Momentarily a "Why" flashes through my brain, but goes instantly: I'm already late, and the priority is to get going. Hackett, a member of R.E.M.E., is refuelling the port tip tank with the filler neck. Just as I put my things in the cockpit he gets down, comes over to me and in a downcast voice says, "Sorry sarge, something's gone wrong; somehow we've filled the tip tanks with kerosene, not Avgas".

My face goes from calm to angry surprise, "What?" Then to annoyance, "How the hell did that happen". Then to suspicion, "And why have we got two bowzers linked together? Has that got anything to do with it?"

"I don't know, sarge, but it might. The tankers are linked together because the engine on one of them doesn't work, whereas the other does. We should be able to use the good one to pump the Avgas out

of the other, but it doesn't seem to have worked. It looks as though it's pumped its own kerosene instead".

Exasperated I reply, "Looks like it? I'd bet on it". In a slightly calmer voice I ask, "How do you know that's happened?"

"Well, when I took the filler neck out of the tank it was wet, and that's unusual, because Avgas dries instantly. So I smelt the neck and it was kerosene, not Avgas".

"Well done", my irritation changing to relief. What was it that had provoked this man to question something many others would have missed? Was it instinct? Common sense? Good training? Experience? Curiosity? Who knows, probably a combination of some or maybe all of those attributes. Whatever it was, it saved my life, for just imagine what could have happened had he not noticed.

As I return to the crew room to phone my passengers at Khormaksar that the flight will be late, I go through the routine in my mind. I would have started the engine using fuel from one of the three belly tanks. The tip tanks cannot be selected for that as they are not connected directly to the engine; they have to be gravity fed into one of the belly tanks after fuel in it has been consumed. So, save what Hackett did, no other checks could be performed on the tip tanks contents before take-off; I would have taken off oblivious to the lurking problem.

After flying for an hour I would have checked the fuel gauges to see if I could transfer some of the fuel in the tip tanks to the belly tanks. Ideally the tip tanks should be empty before making a landing, thus avoiding putting any strain on the wings. With the centre belly tank down to about 6 gallons, I would have switched to the rear belly tank and then started transferring fuel from the tip tanks into the centre belly tank. That's fine, until later I switch back to the centre belly tank – unbeknown to me, now almost full of kerosene – and then things start going wrong. Within a short time the engine begins to complain: it doesn't like this fuel, its octane rating is far too low, and it's oily, so the spark plugs foul up. The fuel pump and carburettor start to clog up too. Then the engine starts to run rough and there is a marked loss of power. It's time to find somewhere to land before the engine stops. It's also time for a Mayday call.

But it didn't happen, the corporal saved us from that. Arnold arrives and on seeing XP774 and the bowzers on the apron, asks, "What the Dickens is going on? Why haven't you gone?" I briefly explain what has happened, strongly emphasising the corporal's part in the events.

"Whatever the outcome of any inquiry, Sir, Corporal Hackett's exceptional attention to detail

at such an early hour in the morninghis sixth sense whatever, saved my bacon. If he is charged, I would like to act as a witness in his defence".

"Yes, sergeant, all right, calm down, I'll take over now", says Arnold acknowledging my strong feelings on the matter. "And give Staff Sergeant Tilley my compliments. Tell him to have XP775 rolled out and ready in five minutes ... with the tip tanks full of Avgas". And almost as an afterthought, "Change 'XP774' to 'XP775' in the Flight Authorisation book and I want you off the ground in six minutes!"

Cpl Hackett was charged, but received only a 'reprimand', for the 'bowser' mistake. On the plus side he was commended for his intuition, perception, and instant diagnosis. That act was publicised in the Army Air Corps quarterly magazine, as an example of the standard that all R.E.M.E Aircraft Technicians should desire to attain.

The days that followed passed uneventfully, until a trip to Ataq. I've been to Ataq many times. It is a small, but relatively tidy village by Arab standards, dominated by the usual big, white, several-storied house belonging to the local headman. I don't think he is an Emir or a Sheikh; I'm sure I would have heard by now. He certainly isn't a Sultan.

How the locals survive here, I do not know. The village sits in a plain of sand on which nothing grows. To the north, nothing but sand as far as the eye could see. To the east, west and south there are mountains, but they are miles away. And what can they get from them? Water perhaps, but nothing else as far as I can see.

The flight I am to do today is simple: pick up three passengers at Khormaksar, take them to Ataq, and then wait until they are ready to return. No tip tanks. No weight problems; should be a doddle.

We land at Ataq just after an Aden Airways Dakota (DC3) leaves - they are a subsidiary of B.O.A.C. Garrison activity here is pretty laid back. Nothing of note has happened here for a long time, so only high-powered visitors are met, and I don't think my passengers fit that category. So it comes as a bit of a surprise, today, when we are met by one of the British officers of the F.R.A. One of my passengers must be more important than I thought, and the Major is the welcoming party.

No, I'm wrong; it's me he wants to speak to. Apparently there was an incident on one of the 'roads' last night. A mine exploded beneath a Land Rover while on a 'recce' and the driver is badly injured. "Can you get a stretcher in there?" he says, pointing at the cabin full of seats. And in his concerned voice "Can you take him to Khormaksar?" And then, "Oh, and a medical orderly as well?"

Yes, Major, just give me a few minutes and I'll be ready". I catch up with my passengers who are already walking to the camp. "Excuse me, sir, I've got to casevac a chap to Khormaksar who's in a bad way, so I'll have to leave you here. I'll try to get back today, but if not I'll make sure my Flight Commander knows you need a flight tomorrow". I could see they were not pleased, but they said nothing, for they knew the injured soldier's need was far greater than theirs. In their facial expressions I could just detect, "There, but for the Grace of God, go I".

From behind the rear seats of the Beaver I retrieve some webbing straps and with them change the seating layout into two stretcher cases and one seat, stowing the rest out of the way. I deliberately leave the straps loose; it makes it easier to slip them over the stretcher handles. Within minutes the patient is carefully carried out on a stretcher. It is impossible to ignore the pitiful state of the poor devil. His left leg is a mass of bandages over which there are large blotches of bright, red blood and it's obvious he is in pain. The back of his neck and head is pitted with red nicks, bruises and plasters. A torn shirt reveals his left arm and the left side of his back are swathed in bandages too. The medics lay him flat and strap him to the stretcher.

I explain to the bearers how the stretcher must be manipulated to get it in the cabin and the straps. To ensure the minimum of discomfort to our unfortunate comrade six men are needed. The four holding the stretcher wait for the other two to climb in the cabin. They then take the handles from one end of the stretcher and move a bit further down the cabin. Those outside who have just let go, climb into the cabin. The two outside extend their arms above their heads and lift the stretcher as high as possible for the pair inside to reach the handles. Released of the weight, the last pair climb in and

feed the strap loops over the four handles. Then I make sure all is tight and the patient is as comfortable as is possible.

The medic accompanying our patient checks he has everything he needs and climbs into the seat next to the stretcher. As I get into the pilot's seat I ask the Major to signal the British Military Hospital (B.M.H.) at Steamer Point in Aden, "Please pass details of the patient and his injuries, and tell them to have an ambulance at the 'Twin Pin' dispersal at Khormaksar by 13.00. Would you also tell 653 Squadron the change to my flight and ask them to notify me at Khormaksar whether I am to come back to Ataq for my passengers".

From then all went well, the wounded soldier was taken off the Beaver straight into an ambulance and to hospital. I was lucky, too. I didn't have to go back to Ataq: as soon as the signal arrived at Falaise, one of my colleagues was detailed to leave immediately for Ataq. I'm just a little surprised we didn't pass one another en-route!

One good thing came out of this, though. We pilots in 653 are now not allowed to land at any 'strip' until a vehicle has driven the full length of the runway to check for mines. I'm happy with that, but I don't think the Landrover drivers are!

Derek Palmer 54B

AOBA Benevolence Fund.

Please remember that the **Arborfield Old Boys' Association** maintains a **Benevolence Fund**, for the benefit of any Old Boy who may be a member of the association or not. If you know of anyone who is having problems, and you believe a contribution from the fund can be of any help or assistance, please contact the Honorary Secretary at the earliest possible opportunity.

The Arborfield Experience James R 'Dick' Wade, 39A

Arriving at the RAOC Apprentice School gate on May 2nd 1939, we sixteen ex-Lawrence Military School boys from India were part of the first intake. We were met by the Commandant (Colonel White) and permanent staff from various regiments. After a formal introduction, we were directed to the Cookhouse dining-room for a meal, which I believe was intended to make us 'feel at home'; the meal was an absolute disaster – 'curry and rice', which amounted to meat and veg stew, laced with a sprinkling of curry powder, and this concoction was poured over a plate of boiled, thick, lumpy rice, which was more suitable for use as wallpaper paste! I did overhear one of the staff say to another that 'the boys must be homesick'. After the meal, we were moved into our accommodation, 'A' Company spider huts. The following days started off with square-bashing and, May 1939 being a hot month, the melting tar on the half-finished barrack square stuck to our boots, making it difficult to keep in step, in spite of our drill experience at our respective military schools.

In those early days I remember that, among others, I had to attend the Aldershot Tattoo in Rushmoor Arena, and our job was to show visitors to their seats. I picked up a few 'tanners' (six-pences) in tips which, at the time, was wealth indeed. It was not long before I was moved from 'A' to 'E' Company, at the top left of the barrack square. New intakes were due to come in from Jersey, Didcot and other apprentice establishments, the bulk of these arrivals was in October that same year.

Prior to that, on September 3rd, we all went down to the NAAFI to hear on the radio the declaration of war by Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. There were a few tears from some of the ladies present, who were no doubt remembering World War I. After that fateful broadcast, we were told to return to our huts to get our tin hats and respirators, which (initially) we were to carry with us wherever we went. I cannot recall the date, but one day a German plane came over and dropped a bomb; it fell in a field, not far from the School hospital gate, killing a cow. At the Sunday church service, the Chaplain showed us a piece of shrapnel from that bomb; for many of us, that brought home the realities of war. I believe that the plane was later shot down over the Guildford area.

From here on, RSM Cook came to the fore; sand-bags had to be filled, for protection of the MI Room (or First Aid Post if you like) and the

admin blocks – but not the spider huts. Our shelters were the air-raid shelters beyond the top end of the barrack square. Our defence amounted to a sand-bag pit in the middle of a field with a mounted *Lewis* gun, on which we were instructed; when I was on guard, manning that anti-aircraft weapon, I had grave doubts that an enemy plane would come low enough to be shot down (nice thought if it did) – I would surely have qualified for the *Guinness Book of Records*!

Now to that wonderful man, RSM 'Ben' Cook, what an experience that was. The 'Dig for Victory' campaign had started and Ben became completely involved. One day we had to plough up a field and there, in the middle of the field, was a slave carrier (half-track vehicle) with a harrow attached. Ben ordered me to drive this vehicle, so there I was, merrily jogging along, pulling the steering levers left and right, until there was a terrific commotion outside; Ben was screaming "*Stop! Stop!*" so, looking out to see what was wrong, I saw Ben point to a large unploughed patch that I had missed and subsequently had to plough over.

The harvesting of the spuds was another event; we were outside the QM's stores, bagging and weighing the spuds up to the required weight. One boy, obviously hoping to get into Ben's good books, was washing the mud off each potato – but when Ben saw this, he went berserk. He made the lad fetch a bucket of soil and mix it with water into a mucky sludge. He then had to dip each washed spud into the mixture, then leave it out to dry, before bagging. "*You'd never make a good farmer*", said Ben. Then there was this Welsh boy – I think his name was Pardoe. Ben was forever chasing him. On cold winter mornings, Ben had us double-marching along the perimeter roads around the spider huts. Though Ben could hardly see us, he would be shouting out the step, "*Left, right, left – get in step Pardoe!*" Poor Pardoe, who was actually 'in step', would mutter, "*He's at me again!*"

Saturday mornings were often confined to barrack-room and kit inspections; we would distribute a thick orange polish onto the floor the 'bump' it until it shone like glass. The windows were cleaned, then buffed up with newspaper – on the day, they were so spotless you'd have thought that someone had nicked the glass! Above the overhead steel lockers – steel hats and respirators. Below the locker – great-coats, hung 'dolly' fashion. On the bottom half of the beds – spare socks, rolled and inverted, with cardboard slipped in on four sides to make them square. Among

Among this layout – spare shirts, pullovers etc. Also on display – PT kit and pumps (plimsoles): a 'housewife' pouch for make-do-and-mend; green hold-all, opened out with the following contents on display: 'eating irons' (knife, fork and spoon), razor, lather brush, comb, toothbrush, button stick and button brush. Then, beyond all that lot – second pair of boots, highly polished, including the studs beneath. And of course there were other items such as water bottles, ground sheets and mess tins.

Next to all this was our service dress (SD). How we hated those narrow-bottomed trousers; when on leave, we had 'V' inserts let in to produce flared bottoms. Most of us thought these looked real smart – little knowing that, in time, 'drainpipe' trousers would again become the 'in thing' for youngsters of a later era – the so called 'Teddy Boys'. Another little dodge was inserting a broken toothbrush handle to prop up our SD peaked caps – only to see Sgt Hotchkiss yank them out and dump them into a bucket alongside the booking-out table. Goodness knows what Hotchkiss did with his collection – perhaps he used them to 'bone' his toe-caps, just as we did during the final 'spit and polish' ritual.

Now to the workshops; my instructor was a Mr Lee, and I think I can go one better than what was stated in a recent *OBAN*. Filing that metal cube down to 'OXO' proportions – I could never get it right. "A little bit off here, a little bit off there", old Lee would say again and again, until my cube ended up the size of a small dice; all it needed was one to six centre-dots punched on the sides! When

it came to the 'square and plate' test piece, one boy came up with the perfect fit. In fact it was too perfect; he had the male square hardened in the blacksmith's shop, the drove the square through the opening in the plate. But he got caught out and thereby failed his test.

Outside of the workshops there was motorcycle and driving instruction; our m/c instructor (sadly I cannot remember his name) had ridden in motorcycle events in pre-war Germany, so we were in good hands. Our first exercise was to be pushed down the barrack square to master the art of balance; later we would start engines and ride along the top road off the square in bottom gear. Later came the ultimate – going through the gears and changing up and down. The driving instruction – who remembers the dual-controlled *Morris* commercial? We used to drive between Wokingham and Reading, stopping at a wayside transport café for a NAAFI break – we all enjoyed that experience.

In the end, I passed my trade test and gained my 'Hammer and Tongs', which to me was a status symbol. I finally left Arborfield, wondering what the future had in store for me.

(Dick Wade's article first appeared in OBAN 17, another tale from one of Arborfield's earliest old boys. Much of Dick's recollections were still going on until around twenty years later. Perhaps this re-told 'tale of yore' from way back when will encourage younger members to write about their own experiences? Ed)

Arborfield Old Boys' Association Web Shop

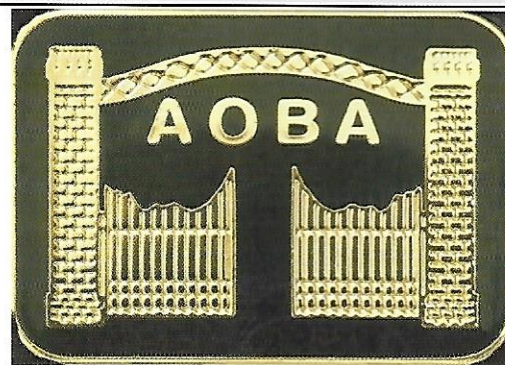
Here we have a few items which we hope are of interest to you. They can be ordered and paid for using Paypal, or credit/debit card. We have added 4% to the prices to cover the cost of this service, plus £1 postage and packing per item. The webshop is run by our new Honorary Treasure Laurie Blakley, and he will have items available at the reunions.



Ties

Available in original company colours.

£8 + £1.50 P & P



Very attractive Lapel Badge in Black & Gold.

Approx 25mm x 20mm, £3.50 + £ 1.50 P & P

Also available are a small amount of Blazer Badges, @£10.60 +£1.00 P&PMugs @ £5.88 + £1.50 P&P.

All enquires please contact Laurie Blakley.

Letter to the Editor.

A Most Peculiar Engine.

Trevor Callaghan's reference to the Gnome Rotary engine in his article 'My Civilian Career' brought back the astonishment I felt when on a visit to the Shuttleworth Aircraft Museum. Seeing the propeller and engine revolving together as the power unit on a WW1 Sopwith Camel fighter plane. Once a VM always a VM; this oddity required investigation.

1907, France. The Gnome becomes a successful Aero, light weight, racing engine. A general description of the engine is: Cylinders arranged about the rotating crankcase like the spokes of a wheel. The single crank is locked in position and the pistons connected to it by the usual connecting rods. The engine is a petrol 4 stroke and is 'lightweight', is cooled by rotation of the cylinders and lubricated by using a flow of Castor oil which does not mix with the petrol vapour in the crankcase.

1912. The Le Rhone company makes improvements in the Gnome's crank arrangements and makes rotary engines under its own name. The Germans also develop the rotary engine principle.

1914. The Great War starts and the Rotaries are found in many of the protagonists' fighter aircraft.

In order to supply the army's Royal Flying Corps and the Royal Naval Air Service expanding needs the Gnome and Le Rhone Engine Company set up an office in London and issued licences to about seven British engineering firms to produce Rotary engines. It is thought that over two thousand were made here during the war. Once the war ended the contracts were cancelled leaving huge orders unfulfilled. The curious thing is that within a few years the Gnome/Le Rhone engine virtually vanished from sight, In-line and Radial motors were more suitable for commercial work and no problems with gyroscopic effects on turning which would frighten fare paying passengers.

Germany, in the latter years of the war, ran out of the indispensable lubricant for Rotary engines **Castor oil**. Chemists made a substitute oil called **Rizinus Oil** which weakened at high temperatures

resulting in increased maintenance periods and reduced availability for service and the gradual withdrawal of the Rotary type engine.

The engine grew from 5 cylinders to 7 to 9 and 18, two rows of 9, ever increasing in power, among its quirks was one that no commercial firm could tolerate. The exhaust stroke discharged from the cylinder at the lowest point of rotation into the atmosphere to keep the burnt gasses and the castor oil therein away from the pilot. A servicing instruction demanded that once the engine was switched off the two lowest cylinders' spark plugs be removed to drain any residue castor oil out of the two cylinders. It is assumed that there was a history of cylinder hydraulic locks. No commercial firm could operate a stop/start business with such an engine.

Most Aero Museums that I have visited have examples of the Rotary engine on display, but one part is always missing: the hollow shaft, around which the crank case revolved. The Royal Flying Corps manual refers to this as the Crank shaft, the crank being on one end of it but which also serves as the tube feeding petrol/air mixture and Castor Oil into the crankcase, the crank shaft extends many feet out of the rear of the engine making it an awkward model to put on a display stand.

When the crankshaft tube is mounted on the aircraft it acts as a cantilever taking the weight of the engine and propeller, also positioning the crank at the correct angle for running the engine.

The rotating mass of the engine block sets up a gyroscopic precession affecting the direction of flight, while the torque reaction on the crank from power strokes is exerted on the fuselage through the crankcase tube mounting, what a mixture of forces for the pilot to control.

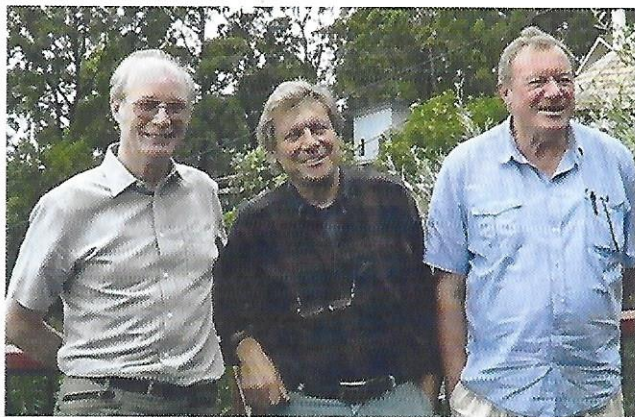
When this engine is compared to the apparent 'simplicity' of IN-LINE engines, one can only admire the ingenuity of the people who got this engine to work efficiently.

Nory Wilson 43B

Letter to the Editor.

In February this year 2013, I was in Sydney visiting my wife's cousins and whilst there met with Stretch, (Mike Street) Arborfield 57A.

Mike came out of the army in 1968 being discharged in Hong Kong. where he joined a local air-conditioning company, met his wife Susie a New Zealand girl and later set up his own company in Sydney where he has lived for many years.



Mike thought we (my wife Mary and I) should meet up with another old boy Blondie (Norman Bilton) Arborfield 58A who lived at Empire Bay, approximately 2 hour car drive north of Sydney, with his wife Anne an English girl he had met whilst working in Hong Kong.

Mike and Norman both worked in Hong Kong for the same American company (Mitchel Discall), installing car air-conditioning, after leaving REME.

Norman was well travelled having worked in San Palo, Brazil, Bangkok, and Japan, for a Japanese company Sanden International, before settling down in Australia. An interesting aspect of Sanden International is that Bob Wallace-Jones, Ex-Arborfield 56B a good friend of both Mike and Norman was the first European director of Sanden International.

Like Mike and Norman, I left the army in October 1968. Joined Philips Medical Systems in London, and worked in London and the Home Counties for the first year. After which I transferred to the South West of England living in Launceston Cornwall. (my home town). Working from home I was the sole engineer in charge of the maintenance and repair of x-ray and associated medical equipment for al the hospitals and clinics throughout Devon and Cornwall, on behalf of Philips Medical Systems until I retired. The photograph was taken n the veranda of Norman's house which overlooked the bay. From left to right - Jim Elliott D Coy 57A, Norman Bilton B Coy 58A, Mike Street D Coy 57

Jim Elliott 57A

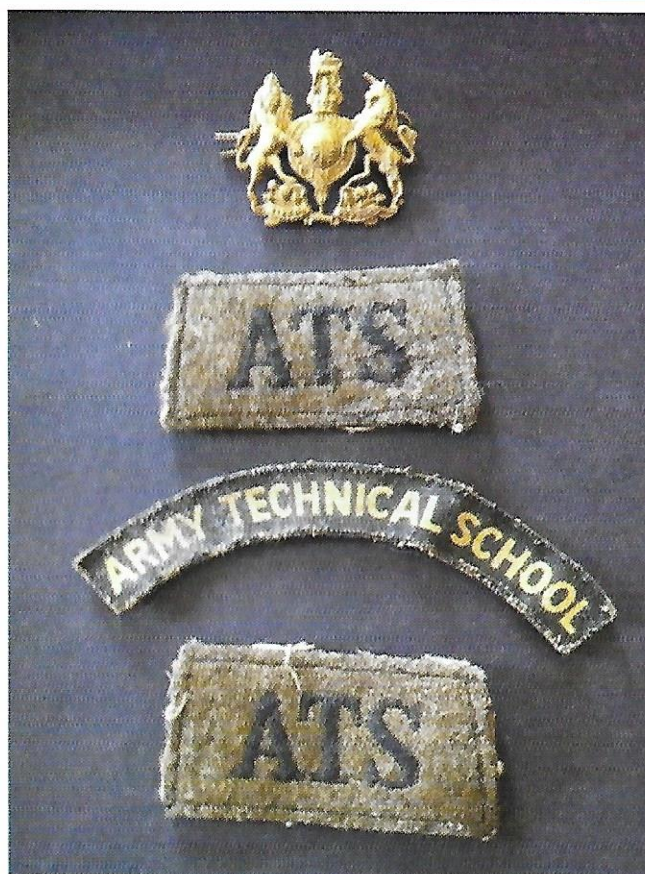
E-mail to the Editor.

Some time ago there was some correspondence re the earliest school shoulder flashes with Eggy Eggleton at the centre of the discussion. Eggy provided a photo of his collection of badges, shown in Issue 48 of OBAN. I seem to remember telling Eggy that I thought I had a pair of the ATS flashes, circa 1942, but could not find them.

At a recent family get together we were talking about a visit my son had made to the Derbyshire Yeomanry Museum and my father's memorabilia kept there; he reminded me that I had passed on some of his old badges to look after, so we had the collection out - guess what turned up!! The attached photo shows my General Service cap badge, the ATS flashes and one of the first Army Technical School flashes (the latter a printed version rather than embroidered). 'Flash' was the appropriate word for the ATS ones. The moment we were on the station going on leave, the flashes had flashed into hiding, never to be seen again until the school gates came into sight.

Changing subject, I note that in the last OBAN Pete England is a recent joiner, Pete, welcome, I can visualise your 1942 face as clear as day,

Mike Allcock 42C



In Memoriam

G F 'Johnny' Johnson, 56B - passed away February 2013.

'Tiny' Noble - did anyone ever know his 'real' name?

"I was three months past my fifteenth birthday and of an independent mind when, on August 28th 1956, I set out with very little fear or trepidation on a lifetime of adventure. The train ride to Brighton was straightforward, being on a direct line from Chichester. When I arrived at Brighton railway station, there were three or four other lads also waiting for the recruiter. We all met in HM Forces Movements Office on the station, as instructed in the letter. My next clear memory is of our being seated in the recruiter's office and then being duly sworn in together and signing on the dotted line. In retrospect, it was somewhat foolish to expect a fifteen-year old lad to really know enough of life to commit himself to a three-year apprenticeship, followed by nine years with 'the Colours', an archaic expression meaning full time regular service in the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). And so, in that short and not so meaningful ceremony, I signed away twelve years of my life to the service of my country for a starting wage of 31 shillings and sixpence per week, before deductions. An adult decision by a mere child!"



Thus began John's article in a *Craftsman* magazine of a few years ago, under the title of *'We know it doesn't fit'*. The occasion of John's recruitment is frozen in time by the accompanying photograph. Amongst his companions in that recruiting office were 'Tiny' Noble, a chap called Colin Fry and another called Frank Suggett. When they got off the train in Wokingham, they met up with others who were also going to the apprentices' school, amongst whom were two of his old acquaintances from Windsor School (BAOR), Ralph Wright and Klaus Pennington. Looking at the photograph, I don't recognise the first two lads on the left, but then, in order left to right are Johnny himself, Frank Suggett, Colin 'Fritz' Fry, Johnny Winter and

During my time as editor of the *Arborfield Old Boys' Association Newsletter*, I was privy to John's written life-story, which he'd originally produced for the benefit of family members if I remember correctly. Several parts of his tale have already been published in the *OBAN*. From those jottings, I have been able to put together what I hope is an accurate but brief overlook of John's career:

John's Dad served with the Royal Sussex Regiment, and the family were living in Chichester when John was advised to join the Army and get himself a trade. After his three years as an apprentice, and graduation as an Armourer, his first posting was to 32 Armoured Workshop at Liebenau, BAOR. He followed that by spells at 8th Royal Tank Regiment at Fallingbommel, just as that regiment was being subsumed into 5 RTR on amalgamation. He then had a short stay with the Queen's Royal Irish Hussars at Hohn, followed by a move to the King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry, firstly at Dusseldorf and then back to UK at their depot at Pontefract in Yorkshire.

John then got posted to the Royal Welsh Fusiliers at Bulford, Salisbury Plain, service with them including spells firstly in Singapore, then Iserlohn and Minden (both BAOR). During his stay at Minden he took a 1st Class trade course at Bordon, which must have been during 1963, as he recalls hearing of the assassination of President J F Kennedy. It was also during his spell at Minden that he took some leave to marry Ann at Amesbury, Wiltshire - not too far from Bulford Camp. That was in October 1964 and it was quite disappointing when he was then posted away with 24 Infantry Workshop for a 12-month tour in Aden. After that he came back to UK, joining 7th Armoured Workshop at Tidworth, although his workshop was located a few miles away at Ludgershall. Upon promotion to Sergeant, he was then posted as the Unit Armourer to the Junior Leaders Regiment Royal Artillery at Nuneaton, Warwickshire.

This proved to be John's last appointment with the British Army, as he decided to leave the service at his 9-year point in 1968. Seeking new adventures, he looked at several overseas jobs before settling on 'the dark continent'. He was offered the rank of S/Sgt in the Zambia Army Ordnance Corps, to take up the post of Battalion Armourer to 3rd Battalion of the Zambian Regiment, stationed in Kabwe. Towards the end of 1969, he was transferred to 1st ZR in Lusaka.



For bureaucratic reasons, John and Ann returned to UK in 1971, but their future had been decided and they later returned to live in South Africa, where John went on to serve with the South

African Defence Force – see photograph. It wasn't until 2006 that they attended a large 56B reunion, held at Sonning, not far from his old Arborfield roots. Sadly, this was to be the last time we saw him, although Pete Swanston did visit him in South Africa as reported below. An e-mail from Ann in November 2013 explained a lack of recent communication:

"I've just realised that you won't know that John died on 13 February. He was diagnosed with lung cancer last October but died of a diabetic coma, having been diagnosed with Type 2 diabetes in January 2012. He was in a coma for 53 days and fought so hard to come out of it, but the specialists told me that if he came round he would either know us and not be able to speak or be able to speak but not recognise anyone. John would have hated being in such a state and I just know that he is now in a better place."

Pete Swanston wrote: Thanks for forwarding Ann's e-mail, it was shock to hear of Johnny's death. After the last reunion at Sonning we kept in touch, he used to write long chatty e-mails and send me jokes. Then, when we went to S Africa we met up with him and Ann. Around a couple of years ago he stopped writing - I assumed he'd got fed up but it is likely that he was becoming ill.

Pete Gripton, 56B

John Houghton 56B - passed away 29 October 2013.

When the Arborfield Old Boys' Association rose phoenix-like from the ashes back in 1977, John was one of the first guys from my old Intake that I remember started turning up regularly to the annual Reunions. In fact there weren't that many from 56B that did turn up too often in those early years. And so, it must have been around 1994, when John and I first mooted the idea of trying to round up as many of the old 'Div' as we could, essentially in time for 1996, which would commemorate our 40th anniversary of joining. Three years later we managed to re-create that first meeting, on the 40th anniversary of our 'Passing-out Parade. After those first two memorable get-togethers, which both took place at the old Sergeants' Mess at Rowcroft, we then managed to get at least a few of us together on an annual basis at such diverse locations as Reading, York, Redditch, Diss, Rutland, Wotton-under-Edge, Hellidon Lakes, Nantwich and Hayling Island. We also had the benefit of two other reunions at Sonning, hosted by old friend and colleague Rodney Smith in 1999 and 2006. John and his wife Marge attended most of those

reunions and were always good company. I know that John's health started to deteriorate a few years ago, but it was still a great shock when I found out just how badly he had suffered. Well John, they have saved a bed-space for you in that great heavenly barrack-room – let's hope it is more comfortable than our first accommodation back in 1956!

Other messages from 56B ex-brats are below:

Dave Braithwaite: This is sad news. 'Doc' was always the quiet reliable type of guy; unflappable. We sailed out of Plymouth together to Cyprus May 1960, on the *HMS Devonshire*, the last of the Troop Ships on its final voyage I believe. We were then serving with the LAD of 29 Fld Regt RA. I remember having some good fun with him in Famagusta on a number of occasions. Our start to each day, at 0530 hrs, was a race down to the sea, diving in off a flat rock and swimming out about 100 yards, before heading back. I also can recall him facing down one of the Regiment's hard-cases, refusing to bow down to his bullying - Doc saw him off.

Pete Simpson: I am sorry to hear that Doc was in such bad health. Being in 'C' Company,

was he, I knew him well. He was someone who I admired, what I would term a 'cool dude', knew all the latest dance steps, dressed very snappily and was a genuinely nice guy.

Dave Howlett: John and I served together for some time in Woolwich Garrison, and later we were both engaged in separate overseas trials in Australia, albeit we did not see each other whilst we were there. I'll always be grateful for all the effort he put in towards our special 56B group re-unions.

Ken Dawe: Thanks for the not so welcome news about 'Doc'. I hadn't seen or heard from him since about 2010, at one of the last Old Boys' reunions at Arborfield. On that occasion we were accommodated in the same room together, so had a couple of seemingly long conversations together. We were to have met again in 2011, but I was in hospital that year so never made it.

Pete Swanston: Although we were both in 'C' Company and were friends, I don't have any special memories of him other than he was a very nice bloke. There must have been lots of laughs along the way but my memory is not good these days.

John Stewart: Thank you so much for taking the time to let me know about 'Doc'. I well remember him as one of the nice guys and although I didn't know him really well, being in a different Company from him, I am really sad to hear of his imminent demise and have prayed for him this morning.

George Fleetwood: Sad news indeed! I didn't get to know John, 'Doc', closely, we moved in different circles as I remember. But I have a mental picture of him dressed up ready to go to Reading, with a longish dark coloured coat over his thin frame. From that moment on I have always associated him with that other 'Doc' of western fame, 'Doc Holliday, incidentally his first name was also John. Although I have no more to add to that single memory of John, he is part of the 56B family, which I also became a part of all those years ago, and as such my thoughts are with him and his immediate family at this difficult time.

Tony Domoney: I remember 'Doc' well and am saddened by this news. Although many years had passed, it was great meeting him again at a recent AOBA reunion where memories were revived with many a laugh. Go well and in peace old friend.

Larry Jarvis: I'm deeply saddened to hear of John's passing. Please pass my condolences to all loved ones left behind.

My wife Joyce and I drove down to Wiltshire on a bright and sunny autumn day, November 7th 2013, to attend John's funeral service held at Christ Church, in the small village of Shaw, just outside of Melksham. Although I didn't really get to know John until later in our lives, I shall always recall him as a true friend and ex-Arborfield boy.

(The accompanying photograph shows John as an ASM during his Army career, along with Dave Morris, also a 56B ex-boy.)

Contributed by Pete Gripton, 56B

(I am indebted to John and Marjorie's daughter Sue for sending me the following history. It was meant for family purposes and it has now been edited for a wider publication.)

The life and times of John Michael Houghton

John was born on 16th January 1941 in Gainsborough, Lincolnshire. Straight after leaving school at the age of 15 (1956) he enlisted as an Army Apprentice at the Army Apprentices' School at Arborfield and undertook a three-year engineering course as a Gun Fitter. At his passing-out parade he was awarded 'The Gun Fitter Trade Prize' as the best student of his intake (56B). It was during his last term at Arborfield (a day after his 18th birthday) that he first met Marjorie Amy Bates at a dance in Reading. Marjorie would eventually become his wife.

John's first posting in Aug '59 was to the Royal Horse Guards, LAD REME, at Windsor. It was here that John was promoted to A/L/Cpl. In April '60, due to the Regiment's equipment change, he was posted to 42 Field Regt, RA, LAD REME in Plymouth. In May '60 the Regiment embarked on the troopship *HMT Devonshire* for a two-year tour of Cyprus. Initially, the Regiment was deployed on IS (Internal Security) duties and housed in a tented camp on the beach at Karalos Camp. When Cyprus gained its independence in Sept '60 the Regiment re-deployed to the newly-built Slim Barracks in the Sovereign Base Area of Dhekelia. John then became 68 Battery's Gun Fitter, responsible for the maintenance of its six 25-pounder field guns.

At Christmas 1960 John returned to the UK on leave and became engaged to Marjorie. This was followed on 1st July '61 by their wedding at St Mary's Church in Reading. John returned to Cyprus and Marjorie flew out to join him on her 21st birthday (2 Sept) and they lived in a Cypriot hiring in Famagusta.

On 10th Jun '62 their eldest daughter Susan Mary was born in the British Military Hospital, Dhekelia. During his tour in Cyprus, John undertook two six-week exercises in Libya with the Regiment and gained his 1st-Class Gun Fitter and 1st-Class Regimental qualifications and played basketball for the Regiment. In Sept '62 the Regiment embarked on the *HMT Navasa* for the UK to be stationed in Llanion Barracks, Pembroke Dock. John secured a civilian hiring in Tenby for his family. The Regiment had an equipment change and now had 5.5in Medium guns and undertook exercises in both the UK and Germany.

Around Apr '64 the Regiment moved to Churchill Barracks, Lippstadt, Germany. On 5th Dec '64 their youngest daughter, Janet Dawn, was born in the British Military Hospital, Iserlohn. John was part of the Regimental swimming team that was runners-up in the BAOR championships. In May '65 John was promoted to Corporal and applied and passed the Artificer Selection Board. The family then moved to Bordon and John commenced his 18 months Artificer Weapons Course at SEME, Bordon as a Sergeant. On completion of his course in 1967, John was promoted to Artificer S/Sgt and with his family was posted to 7 Armd Wksp, REME in Fallingb.,

Germany, where he was responsible for the Armament and Armourers sections. Whilst there, he was responsible for overseeing 2nd-line

armament repairs of some of the first *Chieftain* main battle tanks. John identified a major problem with the tank turret 'slewing' on its own accord when the vehicle was travelling. He proposed a modification to the traverse gearbox and was awarded a Local Staff Suggestion Award, accompanied by a letter to say that his idea was to be considered by the Ministry of Technology for a further award. Whilst in 'Fally', John was part of the unit's shooting team, participating in competitions in BAOR and the UK.

A new posting followed in Jun '69 to FVDRE (Fighting Vehicles Design & Research Establishment), Chertsey. John then embarked in Sept '69 with a trials team on Ex-Corinthian, for six months deployment to Australia for tropical trials (hot wet and hot dry) on prototype CVR (T) and CVR (W) armoured vehicles. On his return from Australia he joined the unit's shooting team, which won the REME Minor Units Championships.

In the summer of '71 he was posted to the REME Wing, Royal School of Artillery, Larkhill, and took charge of the Armament section, responsible for the maintenance of all of the School's artillery equipment. It was there that the family decided to buy their first house, in Warminster. In May '64 John was promoted to WO11 (AQMS) and was transferred to the Mechanical Trials Section of REME Wing, where he was engaged in trials work on such equipment as prototype 105mm Light Gun and 155mm FH70. Here he also took charge of running and coaching the successful REME Wing shooting team.



A posting to 28 (UK) Ind Sp Wksp, REME, Singapore followed in Aug '74, the family being quartered in Sussex Gardens. Here John had a 'two-hatted' job of WO i/c A&G section of the workshop and that of Brigade Armourer. Whilst in Singapore he was deployed for a month to Brunei on weapon inspections of two local infantry regiments. The tour was short-lived however as, after his 13 months deployment it was decided to withdraw all British troops from Singapore.

The family returned to the UK in Sept '75 and John was posted to 14 MAG, Weapons Branch REME and promoted to WO1 (ASM), but detached on a permanent basis to the RSAF (Royal Small Arms Factory), Enfield. Whilst at RSAF, John worked in the Research, Design & Development Dept and undertook Ease of Maintenance Assessments on prototype weapons, predominantly on work with EWS 4.85mm IW & LSW (forerunners of SA80), new riot weapons, and was the project officer for the 30mm RARDEN cannon.

In early 1979 he applied, and was accepted, for a short-service commission in REME as a 2nd Lt. Following his commissioning course the family moved to officers' quarters in Woolwich. John took command of Light Weapons Section, 14 MAG, Weapons Branch REME and was promoted to Lt and then Capt and was responsible for the investigation of SA & MG weapon defects for all three services and weapon technical publications.

The next move was a second posting to Cyprus as OI/C REME Technical Services, Cyprus. This

time he was only accompanied by Marjorie and they lived in Akrotiri. His two daughters (Susan and Janet) stayed behind in the UK, having secured employment in London. Once again, John took up the reigns of coaching and participation in the unit's shooting team. After 2 years in Cyprus, John and Marjorie returned to the UK. He was appointed 2I/C and Production Officer of 30 District Wksp, REME, Mill Hill, London. After about a year, John decided to leave the Army and secured employment as Head of Technical Publications with Westinghouse Signals Ltd, Chippenham. He and Marjorie sold their house in Warminster, bought a house in Melksham, and settled down to civilian life. They were also blessed by the arrival of two grandsons, Ben and Josh, children of Janet and husband Russell.

For the last two years of his 17-year employment with Westinghouse, John was the R&D Contracts Control Manager. In 2001, he decided to take early retirement and undertook a part-time tutor position for 3 years at Chippenham College, teaching Technical Authorship to mature students. John and Marjorie also 'downsized', moving into a 350-year old terraced cottage. But they still continued to travel the world, to such far-flung places as Australia, Croatia, France, Goa, Sri Lanka and Turkey. Around five years ago, John was diagnosed with a cancer called Myeloma, which eventually took his life on 29th October 2013. He leaves behind Marjorie, daughters Sue and Janet, and grandsons Ben and Josh.

Deaths notified since last OBAN.

1	Ashton	AJ	Anthony	51B	27/06/2013	
2743	Middlemas	M	Michael	62C	July 2013	
n/a	Wearmouth	E	Eric	52B	18/09/2013	
n/a	Stokoe	DM	Derek	41A	28/09/2013	
n/a	Haynes	P	Butch	49B	16/10/2013	
179	Trill	H	Harold	54A	16/10/2013	
718	Houghton	JM	Doc	56B	29/10/2013	
n/a	Ledford	B	Brian	61A	28/10/2013	
682	Johnson	GF	Johnny	56B	13/02/2013	
n/a	Cantwell	B	Brian	44A	Dec 2012	Belated Entry
n/a	Hind	H	Hugh	57B	n/k	Belated Entry
n/a	Boardman	P	Peter	57B	n/k	Belated Entry
n/a	Beadle	C	Colin	57B	n/k	Belated Entry
n/a	Rycroft	J	John	57A	1960s	Belated Entry

