

**Jan
2015**



**Issue
60**

O B A N

The Arborfield Apprentice's Magazine



Arborfield Old Boys Association

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

ARBORFIELD OLD BOYS' ASSOCIATION

President

Colonel Dan Scott ADC CEng FIMechE

Vice Presidents

All Past Commandants

Chairman

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

Vice Chairman

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

Honorary Secretary

David (Tich) Schofield (65A)

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

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

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, Chaplains 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

Rob Castell (64A)

4, Grace Close, Haslington, Cheshire. CW1 5FX

Tel:01270 258978 E-mail rsc100@hotmail.co.uk

AOBA Chairman's Report



I was delighted to meet up with a dozen or so kindred spirits on the gravel square of Horseguards' Parade for Remembrance Day. I have said it before, but it is as true today as it was then, that

paying our respects as we march pass the Cenotaph instils such a sense of pride in being a part of the occasion. It was also very nice to have friends ask 'Didn't I see you on the television on Remembrance Day?' Indeed, this year we apprentices were not only shown, but actually mentioned! And if you will forgive the use of an American expression, attending the parade should be on every ex-apprentice's bucket list. You won't be disappointed.

It is always difficult to frame the Chairman's Introduction to the OBAN at this time of the year. At the time of writing there are 3 weeks to go until the Christmas celebrations. So with that in mind let me wish you all a great Christmas, hopefully with

friends and families. If however, you are reading this after the season's holidays, I hope you **had** a great Christmas with friends and families!

It's been a very good year for the Association. Those of you who attended the annual reunion had an excellent time of it (if somewhat damp!), the programme following closely that which we have had for many years, now with the recent addition of our ladies at the Saturday dinner. And what a splendid addition they have made - not only brightening the evening meal, but having earlier swollen the ranks of the audience for our parade and march past. Perhaps even those who preferred the all male evening have now mellowed and come to enjoy their presence. Let us all look forward to the Reunion 2015 - see you there!

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, please do not embed photographs within the text.**

Membership of the Arborfield Old Boys Association is open to all those who served as apprentices or staff member, at one of the Army Apprentices' Schools or Colleges at Arborfield between 1939 and 2004. There is an annual subscription of £15.00. Application forms are available by post from the Honorary Secretary, and on the website www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Introduce a Friend and get ONE Years FREE Membership

Both Front and Rear Cover Photographs: Are of the Side Walls of the Main Memorial, at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire.

©Arborfield Old Boys Association. All Rights Reserved.
Printed in Great Britain by Hampshire Press Ltd.
Southampton SO14 0SQ

Distributed by Trojan Mailing Ltd
Southampton SO14 1HU

Committee Members Reports



Honorary Secretary's Report

So I want to say a big thanks to all who were so positive about the last reunion, we all put a lot of work into making sure the weekend is enjoyable for

all in attendance so I'm delighted with everyone who expressed their appreciation – makes it all worthwhile.

2015 reunion is only round the corner I'm pleased to say our plans are now in place for what I trust will be another great time. This will be the 4th reunion away from Arborfield, and accepting that we would all still prefer to be there, I think the general format makes for a great weekend. Certainly if I take your comments as a guide no one has any real complaints, which confirms we have it right.

In accordance with our agreement at the last AGM I'm pleased to report your committee has managed to shave the cost of the weekend quite a bit, with the full weekend's activities reduced by £23 to £155 per person. When you consider the 2009 full weekend was £124 I think this makes today's cost truly amazing. Even more so as now you relax in the comfort of a 4 star hotel and not the joys of the Sgts' Mess Transit Block!

Enclosed with this copy of OBAN you will find your invitation and I'd like to ask you to return it in good

time before the cut-off point. Each year some leave it too long and sadly there have been instances where it has simply not been possible to fit them in. The hotel we use is very popular and most weekends in the summer are always fully booked and I'd hate for folks to be turned away.....

On the rare occasions something gets in the way of your attendance and as it's simply not possible for us to cancel bookings after the cut-off date I recommend you consider taking out insurance against this eventuality. I believe you can obtain this for around £15 or less and believe it is a worthy consideration.

Finally, a point regarding any and all benevolent situations. Please keep your eyes and ears open for any signs that an Arborfield Apprentice may be in difficulty or need. Don't hesitate in contacting either myself, Ray Stevens our OBAN editor or Alec Powell our Registrar and we will immediately look to see if the Association can offer any assistance. At the end of the day benevolence is a fundamental objective of our association and we want to help.

God bless

David Schofield 65A



Honorary Treasurer's Report

Yet another year has nearly gone by and still number crunching, although it is fairly quiet at this time, with the occasional amendment to the database for additions, cancellations and change of details. The most time consuming periods are when the subscriptions are submitted for inputting at the beginning and preparing the accounts for the end of year audit in January.

Having run a Software Accounts package in tandem with the current AB397 double entry book system for the last accounting year, I believe that it covers all that is required for our Association, hopefully the Auditor will agree. I can then dispense with the book and be fully computerised. May I wish all Members a Happy Xmas and Prosperous New Year.

Laurie Blakley 61B



Honorary OBAN Editor's Report

Over the last few weeks there has been a great deal of discussion between committee members, about changing the name of the association, and hence the newsletter. On page 25 you will find an article by Rob Castell about the subject. This is to try and improve the Associations image, to increase recruiting numbers. One suggested name for the association is 'The Arborfield Apprentice Association', with the name of the newsletter possibly becoming the 'Arborfield Apprentice Association Magazine.' With the word 'Association' being optional.

It is planned to hold some discussion on the subject at the AGM. For those of you who cannot attend, and would like to put forward your opinion.

Please either email or write to me, or any committee member, so we can consider your views.

Now for my usual plea for articles I would like to thank everyone who have sent in articles, but please keep them coming. Also send photographs separately, do not embed them within your text. Remember, without your articles there will not be an OBAN. (Or whatever it may be called in the future).

Can I take this opportunity to wish all our members a Merry Christmas and a very happy New Year.

Ray Stevens 64C



Honorary Registrar's Report

a) Since the last OBAN we have had 11 applications for life membership

b) New Members:

Mem No	First Name	Surname	Initials	Intake
0262	Alan	Ellerby	A D	A-64C-C
0738	Barrie	Ward	B	A-64A-B
0835	John	Fisher	J W	A-64A-B
0836	Steven	Lewsey	S G	A-75C-C
0837	Leslie	Napier	L H	A-60A-A
0838	Brian	Bushby-Jefferson	W B	A-59C-B
0839	Bobby	Haslam	B W	A-64C-D
0840	Clifford	Robson	C J	A-61C-C
0841	Peter	Moran	P	A-64C-D
0842	Mike	Tizard	M J	A-76B-A
0843	John	Griffiths	J W G	A-75C-D

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

Alec Powell 64c



Honorary Webmaster's Report

Everything is running as it should be, and I have little to add to my last report at the AGM this year.

I still have some minor problems with photo slideshows which have occurred due to a glitch in a new version of the AOBA website authoring software, but I am correcting these with a complete site check and reported errors by helpful users.

I intend to make some changes to the site's appearance in the near future, but nothing too radical, and leaving it easy on the eye.

John 'Herbie' Coles 66B



Honorary Recruitment Officer's Report

First I would like to thank my predecessor Barrie Parker for his sterling work over the years and wish him well.

There is no doubt that we are in need of more ex-apprentices to join our Association, especially those from the mid-sixties onwards, so we can continue to enjoy the comradeship, keeping alive our memories of Arborfield. Since becoming the Honorary Recruiting Officer I have been trying to find new ways of recruiting. Hopefully they will meet with some success! Meanwhile I

think we should mobilise our greatest asset, which is you, the members, to seek out any potential recruits from our ex-apprentice friends and contacts and get them to join up!

Rob Castell 64A

German experiences. By the late Mike Larby 42C

5 Armd Workshops, BAOR, 1953 - 1957 Celebration time?

Ptomaine poisoning (uncooked pork chops) at KDG Wesel; Balaclava Day centenary celebrations at 17/21st Lancers in Munster; happy nights in the Sgts' Mess of I-can't-remember-which Hussars - and a magnificent ball to celebrate some past battle of the same regiment. All the regimental silver on display, troopers in period uniforms, brilliant Mess dress (just coming back in then) - with Gerda, my wife, mightily impressed - as was I. Our host was a luckless Troop Sergeant, whose Troop I was due to inspect the next day. Needless to say, they were the three best *Centurions* in the regiment! - well, they had the best reports anyway.

Poor old REME only had the Queen's Birthday parade and the annual inspection. Did we celebrate REME's birthday? I don't think so. After a rehearsal for one of these parades in the early days, I never (or seldom) took part in them. This was because, standing in front of the platoon as acting commander, I was in the process of fixing my bayonet, on CSM Black's command, when on its own volition it flew through the air to land at his feet! There and then, it was decided that I was a bit of a regimental disaster, and a new task was 'invented' for me on these occasions - I was to be the motor-cycle escort to any of the visiting dignitaries, usually the Divisional Commander, Major-General Prior-Palmer. This involved meeting his car (an *Opel Kapitän*) on the edge of town, and then leading him through the traffic to our unit at Newcastle Barracks. The idea was to do a little sprint for the last half-kilometre, so that when the guard of honour heard/saw my bike, they would all tumble out of the guardroom in good time and fair order.

This arrangement always worked well except on one occasion. Instead of my faithful *Matchless*, which was terminally ill at the time, I had a *BSA M20* (arguably the worst motorcycle ever made); all went well until the Div Commander decided to drop his daughter at Windsor School before visiting us - and without telling me. Suddenly no following car, shock, horror! Guessing where he had gone, I was about to turn my bike around and follow him when - bang! - the clutch disintegrated. Dumping the thing, I walked or doubled up to the guardroom (luckily arriving before the General), to tell the CO what had happened. After hiding away during the parade, I met the General a couple of hours later when he visited the Sgts' Mess for drinks. Last in line

waiting to be introduced, still in my breeches and boots, he reached me, looked me up and down and said with a leer, "*We gave you the slip this morning didn't we?*" What does one say to a Major-General? "*Yes sir!*" of course, although I wished he knew the truth about the rubbishy *BSAs* someone had wished on his Division.

We may have celebrated one REME birthday in Hamm, come to think of it; anyway, whatever the occasion, we decided to have an 'Open Day' for all the German civilian staff and their families. We had a parade and march-past in the morning, with the band of the 2/60 Rifle Battalion. After playing '*Lily Bolero*' and assorted marches at our pace, they gave a display of marching and countermarching to their music - and at their pace of 90 mph. They were resplendent in their black and green, with silver instruments, and drew huge applause from our Germans and sighs from their wives and daughters. Especially so, as the Regimental March of the KRRs is (or was) Lutgov's '*Jagdmarsch*', a well known German Army Light Infantry march ('Hunting March' in English, so I'm told).

Not on parade as usual, I was in the meantime giving rides in my little tank to anyone brave enough to climb aboard for a trip round the barracks. This was popular with the ladies, and Terry Head, ASM of our field workshop, was master of ceremonies. His sense of humour dictated that the way up into the turret was up the front of the hull, between the tracks. OK for the men, not too good for the ladies in their flowing floral skirts, and absolutely hell for the luckless me, as the giggling girls stepped over and around the driver's hatch! Again that terrible English embarrassment - I suppose I should have dismounted between trips, but after the first one, I was probably too weak!

At the same time, ASM 'Tug' Wilson, a somewhat eccentric chap, was given the job of exchanging the German's Deutschmarks for *BAFVs* - the printed tokens representing British currency - only valid in military establishments, so that they could buy beer, refreshments and meals during their visit. The official BAOR preferential rate was DM 12 to £1 Sterling. As the day wore on, Tug, refreshed by the liberal amounts of *Beck's* beer bought for him by his civilian comrades, decided to have a 'Wilson' rate of exchange, in that towards evening the rate was nearer to three marks than to twelve! In the cold light of the next day, poor Tug Wilson realised that he owed the

owed the PRI about £200. However, it was eventually put right by collections, creative accounting and a few blind eyes, so all was well after a very successful and memorable day!

Domestically, married life became less strange. Gerda settled down with her new in-laws, as I did with mine. Mother and father were persuaded to visit Germany for a holiday; I took the train to the Hook of Holland on their first visit, picked them and Dad's *Austin A70* up from the ferry and drove them back to Hamm. Thus we had transport to holiday all over Germany - Bavaria, the Black Forest, Rhineland - and they loved every minute. Father, as you may recall, was a farmer, so we always stayed at a Gasthof which was part farm, part hotel, and perhaps a Weingut and/or butchers as well. These holidays continued later into my civilian life. I was lucky that, at *Vauxhall Motors*, I had a company car and apart from the ferry fare and some personal mileage, all costs (fuel, insurance, green cards) were all paid for by the firm. Those were the days!

Assisting the Trials Team

In addition to the *Vincent*, I acquired a 1947 *Austin 16*, a black ex-RAF staff car from the Disposal Depot in nearby Mark Hamm, as the boss of the unit, a civilian, lived in our Sgts' Mess. It cost me £70, I had it for two years and it ran like a bird. As I never had any money, my mother-in-law paid for it, so her family had holidays too. How did I fit it all in? Before we left 5 Armd Wksp (and the Army) in 1957, several other little distractions came my way. Motorcycling was a major interest, as has been frequently mentioned in the narrative. One day, out of the blue, Maj Tranter, our CO, asked me how I felt about going down to Garmisch-Partenkirchen (a Bavarian ski resort, and also a US Army leave centre) to act as mechanic and provide logistic support to the British Army Motorcycle Team. It had entered the ISDT - International Six-Day Trials - event to be held that year, 1956 I think, in Garmisch. (The ISDA was to the motorcycle world what the Monte Carlo rally was to the motor world.) This was an offer not to be refused, so Lieutenant Clements and I were off to 4 Armd Wksp in Hanover to meet with the rest of the team, which was forming there. Lt Clements was my platoon (still 'A' Veh Pln) commander, because by now 5 Armd seemed top-heavy with officers, warrant officers and senior NCOs. We had fewer soldiers and did less work, but there you go. If the Russians had come, no doubt thousands of reservists would have arrived, fully kitted within 24 hours! (??)

Anyway, Peter Clements was my boss; he also played rugby for Hamm Garrison; I was the

captain of this side. We got on well together but, like any good NCO, I got a bit terse with him at times. He wanted to load a *Centurion* on to a *Rogers* Trailer, to be RTUd after an engine change. "OK", I said, "you've seen me do it. Remember, whatever you do, don't lose your bottle and stop halfway up!" What did he do? He then compounded the felony by trying to hold it, by slipping the clutch. It took about two seconds to burn the clutch out, and the *Cent* rolled ignominiously back, enveloped in white smoke and the smell of burnt *Ferodo*. "What are we going to do, Staff?" he wailed. We? We? "You broke it," I said, "you'd better get your overalls on and help the chaps change the clutch - and do your share of the work!" He was a good chap really. The last Personal Report he wrote on me concluded, "Whilst SSgt Larby's manner is somewhat off-hand, it is not calculated to be offensive."

Where was I? Oh, yes, 4 Armd, Hanover. A sergeant general fitter and I had a machinery lorry; there were three RASC 3-tonners with tentage, stores and the like; a bin lorry which carried materials I thought might be useful, a *Jeep* with Peter Clements and a Captain, who was in charge of the lot - I've no idea who he was. The RASC chap was also a Staff Sergeant, and we had two VMs - a Corporal and a Craftsman. On arrival, we were allocated a magnificent ski lodge with a huge picture window overlooking the Alps; it was about a mile and a half up a mountain track, and a mere half a mile from Garmisch - if one walked straight up the side of the 'hill'. Down - good; up, with three or four litres of Bavarian beer on board - not good!

The RASC chap signed for the ski lodge and its contents (minimal), it was used as a communal mess. We slept in 120 pounder tents and a good time was had by all. The contents of the lodge, by the way, included two 9mm automatic *Browning* US Army pistols; RASC and I debated about pocketing them, but what for? He took them back to the unit who 'owned' the lodge, an infantry outfit, but they hadn't missed them and didn't care! Not like when I left my *Sten* on the back of some bloody 2RTR *Cent* I was testing. Luckily it didn't fall off and the crew returned it to me some hours later.

The only jobs we had were all small manufacturing items - bushes and brackets and the like. This was to be expected, because no major work was allowed on a component that failed - the bikes were out - the only spares allowed had to be carried by the rider each day. The only major job was to try and devise a 'fix' (portable) for the *Royal Enfields*, which all suffered major frame

failure. We came up with a looped cable and turn-buckle system, which could be tightened by a tommy-bar, but this proved ineffective. Never mind, it was a lovely holiday, and we got to know the night spots of Garmisch well! Incidentally, I was reading an article about this very ISDT, and the failure of the *Royal Enfield* team to complete the event. Apparently there was a major design fault in the frame and the designers knew this; the motorcycles were entered, not to win, but to give more specific information about frame behaviour. Sad in a way, but I'm glad our little contraption wasn't to blame. Actually, only one rider fitted it, and we took comfort from the fact that his bike lasted longer than the other two. One had already broken anyway because we used it as a template.

A REME sergeant and I left Garmisch a day early and I had to be in Hamm in time for a UK leave. We came home the scenic way, in a very heavily over-laden machinery lorry - a QL *Bedford*. With one thing and another, it took three days - a long valley the Rhine has, and all those vineyards! On return from this 'jolly' it was time to think about my impending status change from soldier to mere civilian. Bits and pieces were sent home and no long-term (military) plans made. I think perhaps I did the *Conqueror* course at REME School Duisberg about then (end of '56 beginning of '57). In fact I must have done, because the *Conqueror* instructor was an old mate of mine from REME School Tel-el-Kabir, where we had instructed on *Centurions* together. To be more accurate, my share was the *Merritt-Brown* gearbox and the *Rolls Royce 'Meteor'* engine. He suggested (it all comes back to me now) that I might like to become an instructor with him at TTS Duisberg.

Time to call it a day

On my return to Hamm, I mentioned this to my OC. "*Humph! No bloody fear*", said he. This was hardly surprising, as obviously I was the only *Conqueror* trained bloke in the unit at the time. Like most of my plans, I hadn't thought them through. At the time I must have been a bit confused, because although I intended to go at the end of my twelve years (I didn't plan on doing the extra four of the 8 + 4 either), I'm sure my CO and everyone else expected me to stay. But why? Nine years a Staff Sergeant, no 'Arm Art' course, a good mechanic but a poor soldier - it could only get worse. What if I got a posting to the UK, writing EMERs or a REME Standards job? No thanks!

Confusion also showed in my domestic life. For some reason, I thought that the *Vincent* wouldn't suit my civilian life, or something like that, so I sold it. I knew at the time that it was a bad

mistake and it was (and still is) the biggest or most regrettable wrong decision I ever made. Not just because it was a *Vincent*, they were cheap enough in the 60s and 70s, and I could have bought another anytime, but purely its association with some of the best days of my life. Today, a *Series C' Black Shadow* like mine fetches £14,000 to £20,000 and that must purely be rarity and investment value. They weren't that good! It is just that I miss that bike - or perhaps the lifestyle of which it is a symbol?

The last few months of my time was spent in setting up an in-house VM training system, mainly for VM3s to VM2s, or VM1s prior to the Artificers' Course. The CO said that if I felt like instructing, then to go ahead. So I did, until the time came to have my last drive around the test track in 'my' beloved *Centurion*, and say prolonged goodbyes to the various hosts of the local gasthauser over the years. Not so much 'farewelling' to colleagues though; we all know that people are posted in and out regularly, so what? If you see them again, you take up where you left off. If not, sometimes the odd character pops into your head as a memory, but in reality they are soon forgotten.

The day came when the quarter was handed over and the car loaded. Gerda, myself and the dog (an Alsatian and offspring of our German Security Force guard dogs) set off for the Hook of Holland, Harwich and home to my family. An uneventful trip, except that as the *MG Tourer* left the quay with the hood down, Franz the dog was swinging in mid-air from a crane-jib in his crate, on his way to six months in quarantine. He spotted us and his primeval howls of anguish and disbelief sent shivers down my spine. I know how he felt, but at least I knew that I'd see him again and I had confidence in my future.

What that future was to be, I had no idea. After 15 years away from home, nothing had changed. Living at home, with no idea what I wanted to do - except that getting my hands oily didn't figure in my plans. I had a load of demob leave to think about a career. At least I was being paid until July 22nd, my 30th birthday, and completion of service date! What we eventually did is another story; it was a career that was never planned but seemed to work OK. Maybe, dear reader, I'll write about the funny bits one day.

This brings to an end this magnificent series of articles by the late Mike Larby. A sad and sorry loss to the AOBA. R I P Mike.

Ed

Gunong Tahan. By the late West Robertson 50B

When Sandy Fraser approached me with the suggestion that we should organise an expedition to climb Malaya's highest mountain, I thought he was joking! We were both junior NCOs, serving with 656 Sqn, AAC, Noblefield, at Kuala Lumpur in Malaya. It took a day or two to realise that he was serious - and a couple more to mull over the prospect, then we decided to investigate the possibilities. Eventually we had sufficient volunteers to put the idea to the appropriate authorities for approval and, having acquired that, to set the wheels in motion. Weekends saw as many as could be spared from duties, plodding through the jungle, practising the techniques for varying terrain and vegetation. Those who required it were given advice on navigation and serious map reading - but most of all, we were getting fitter. Some fell by the wayside, and others joined us, and after a couple of months we considered that from those we had, we could select a twelve-man team capable of what we had in mind. Letters were written to everyone we thought might offer assistance of any kind. The Army would provide funding, suitable packs came from the *Nuffield Trust* and *BATA*, the shoemakers, offered 'planters boots', a shorter jungle boot. Information on, and permission to enter the National Park area, which surrounds the mountain, was gleaned from the Malay authorities, so detailed planning could now begin.

Rations were the immediate source of concern. There was no shortage of food, we had copious quantities of 'compo' on offer, but weight was the problem. A supply drop was an option, but that also meant a radio. Eventually I modified the ration packs, substituting dry rice and spaghetti for most of the bulk. We would not carry weapons, first aid was reduced to a minimum and I used my past jungle experience, wandering with the Gurkhas, to recommend what kit we would carry. For sleeping, three sections from a parachute formed a suitable hammock and cover! Each man was to carry a personally selected light lunch, enough for all, as an occasional treat. A date for departure was nominated.

Our final itinerary estimated a total of fourteen days, of which eight would be used to reach and climb the mountain, the remainder to build rafts on which we would then return. Supplies for sixteen days would be carried, in case of emergencies or delays. Just how far we could travel daily would be subject to terrain and weather. The state of the rivers, upon which we intended to start the journey using motorised canoes, would determine the dropping off point. These, and many other potential unknowns, including the fitness of the men doing

it for real, caused additional worry. Then, because of the involvement of the *Nuffield Trust*, it was decided that an officer should accompany us; the Adjutant, a Gunner captain, was nominated. My last task was to request a supply drop of beer to be delivered at our exit point by a friendly pilot, and then we prepared to leave.

Firstly by train, then by local bus, to where three large canoes waited. Outboard motors pushed us up river for an hour or so, to where a Government Rest House stood at the junction of two great rivers, within the boundaries of the National Park in Pahang State, where we spent the night. Early next morning, packs stowed aboard the boats, we headed up river towards our start point. Initially, travel was easy, but then fallen trees restricted our passage and time was lost as we cleared a way. Because of the delay, the boatmen decided to spend the night with us, to take us further upstream in the morning. We spent our first night in the parachute hammocks, slept not too well, and managed a few more miles by boat next morning. Midday saw us parted from the river and scrambling up its steep banks, to start the long slog towards Gunong Tahan.

Slow going

We travelled in single file, with Sandy in the lead and myself in the rear, each navigating and estimating distance travelled. It was with some dismay that I realised we were not travelling as fast as I hoped. The trouble was the Captain, who, not having trained with us, was struggling to keep up. At about three in the afternoon, with about a couple of hours travelling time left, I called to Sandy to take the party forward, while I would follow at a slower pace with the Captain. After feeding the struggling man some glucose tablets and resting for a few minutes, we eventually moved on and reached the camp about half an hour after the others. Sitting around the fire that first evening, discussing the day's progress, it became clear that our estimate of daily travel was being seriously compromised. A decision was reached that we should cache part of our ration load at about where we were now, it being close enough to our return route for easy collection, should we require it. It was tempting to have as much as we could eat prior to dumping our supplies, but I refused this, seeing hungry days in the future. With lighter loads, the rations having been redistributed, the going was easier and we started to achieve the sort of distance I had hoped for. Midday saw us stop for a brew and a light snack, also to remove the accumulation of leeches we managed to attract. Now in primary

jungle, with less of the body grabbing shrubbery, heat and humidity were our major opponents, taking their toll on our energy. Being so close to the equator, days and nights were of equal length, so I had planned that we should walk each day until about five in the afternoon, then strike camp. This gave us an hour or so to sling our hammocks, build a fire and cook our supper. The evening meal consisted of either curried corned beef and rice, or compo stewed steak and spaghetti, which became rather monotonous, but adequate! Initially I had decided that we should have someone awake all night, to keep the fire burning and generally stand guard; the last stag was to have the water boiling for breakfast, but after the first few nights, I abandoned this. We all needed as much sleep as we could get and, if the fire was well stoked each evening, it was easily coaxed back into life in the morning.

Although the sun rose about seven, it was after eight before we had sufficient light to see to prepare for the coming day. This was the worst part of our many discomforts. Dry, warm clothes of the night were changed for the cold wet items of yesterdays travel; water took an age to boil and the smell of compo bacon tantalised the gastric juices, already underworked from the mean repast of the night before. Hands clasping warm mugs were reluctant to do more, but by nine we were again moving forward. And so we progressed, some nights on ridges without water, some by rivers where the sound of running water provided an unnecessary lullaby. We came across an abandoned aboriginal camp and met a party of twenty porters, supporting a single surveyor, who was walking contour lines. This group had a native tracker, who taught me to fish using natural fibres and berries. This never worked for me then, or since, but he produced a fish of about four pounds to prove it possible. We were now two days from the summit, late, and getting slower!

We camped about three in the afternoon, by the banks of the great river that was to be our highway home. A decision had to be made as to whether we abandon the attempt or continue. The Captain was depressed, knowing that, in part, he was causing the delay; but he was not the sole problem, three others were also showing flagging abilities. I sat on a rock by the edge of the river and searched for a decision, torn between the desire to succeed and the responsibility I had for the safety of the team. The water flowing past my feet changed colour. Upstream, a gunner was cutting a growth from his foot, using his clasp-knife! It was hard to be too critical of the man. He had done what he thought best for the team, but while I could admire his determination, it left me in the situation where the man required hospitalisation, or expert medical assistance at least, and there was none within ten

days march. All in all, there were three men about whom I had doubts about their physical ability, the Captain and my 'self treating' idiot, so calling Sandy to one side, we took stock. There would be no easy decision. Half our members were fit and willing to go on, the others, although willing, not really capable of doing so. After much deliberation, we arrived at two alternative solutions, which we would put to the team

First, with a day in hand, we could start to construct the rafts which would carry us the majority of the distance back to the Rest House, which of course, would mean failure in our attempt to reach the summit of Gunong Tahan. Secondly, I would select five men who would, with minimal supplies, attempt to conquer the mountain by travelling at speed, returning on the second day by which time the majority of the raft building materials would have been gathered by those remaining. It would not be an easy journey, I explained, they would make as much distance as possible on the first day, attack the summit early next morning then return all the way to where we were now camped. Option two was unanimously selected.

Four of the climbers were obvious appointments, the fifth was a choice between Sandy and myself. I was nominal team leader, there were sick and injured members to consider - and if there was to be glory, I would have my share. Sandy must go! Preparations began for an early start. Suitable ration packs were made up for each individual, all water bottles were filled, purified, with lemonade powder added for taste, and extra large portions were served that night for supper. Before the sky was fully bright next morning, the fire was ablaze and men were dressing in the warmth surrounding it, those remaining feigning sleep or watching with little envy. I stood alone, trusting my decision, trusting Sandy to bring them back, but aware of the difficulties we both faced. Mentally I wished them '*God speed*', and then roused the remainder into action.

A pair of hardy individuals soon found and felled the first suitable tree, standing close by the river. It sank like a stone! The second convinced us that those trees growing close to the water had the buoyancy of a rock. Upstream about a quarter of a mile, I found a stand of bamboo, with stems about four inches in diameter and up to forty feet in length. A single stroke from a parang was sufficient to fell each pole, vines were in abundance for tying them together and soon we had more than enough for our requirement. Tied together in bundles, they were floated in the river then tethered to the bank. More vines were cut and split for lashing, large flat leaves were collected for flooring, then we cut a bit more bamboo, just in case. Supper was eaten late that night, the mood was jovial and with a good

supply of wood for the fire, spirits climbed!

Health problems

Morning saw a late rising, with no immediate tasks to bother us. Clothes were battered clean on rocks by the river, the sun rose high and warm, its rays forming a speckled pattern on our swinging hammocks where they filtered through the trees – and not a single fish was tempted by the various berries I offered! In mid-afternoon I began to listen for the sound of the returning party, and by four I was getting anxious. At five, I told the men to build a huge fire and start preparing supper, so that we could eat as soon as the travellers returned, while I would head out to meet them. Within half an hour I found the first two of the party, staggering, weak and almost incoherent. I took them to where they could see the light from the fire, left them to make their own way back, then went looking for the rest. In the half light of evening it was difficult to determine detail. I searched as much with my ears as with my eyes, then almost stumbled across them, as they lay resting in a hollow, desperately attempting to regain sufficient strength to continue. As with the previous two, they were weak and exhausted, and it took almost an hour to return them to camp. Those who could ate a little supper and we seemed to brew sweet hot coffee all night. There were too many questions and too few answers to allow me much sleep that night, but I dozed off just before dawn, to be almost instantly awake as the serious predicament we were in, really struck home. And it started to rain!

Sandy was the first of the patients to wake. Standing by him as he sipped his coffee, I hoped for answers, but got little help. They had been making good time and had camped about an hour away from the summit. The day had been hard, they had found no water over the last few miles, but were carrying enough to see them back to the last stream, so didn't worry. Morning had found them all feeling weak and none could eat the dry rations. So, drinking most of the water they carried, they started the assault. Within minutes, none had energy to continue climbing. There was no real pain, just exhaustion and a desire to lie down and sleep. At that time, Sandy made the decision to return. Whether or not they had found water, he couldn't remember. He thought he had sent the two ahead to seek assistance, but as far as the day was concerned, all was really just a blur. By now the rain had eased, but the river alongside us was starting to change its tune – from a lullaby to a war cry! The river had become a roaring turmoil of raging brown water. Huge boulders, from which I had fished yesterday, were being engulfed as I watched. Surmising that our rafting material had been dispersed brought both disappointment and relief, for it would have been

foolhardy to attempt to raft down a river in full spate. We would now have to walk back and I would have the task of informing my weary team. There could be no discussion, we were already eight days into our expedition, had supplies for six more if we were frugal, and waiting for the river to recede was not practical. If there was dissension, none was voiced, but a sombre mood prevailed for the rest of that day.

Morning saw us in better fettle than I could have hoped for. The assault team appeared to have regained most of their energy and the rest days had revived those flagging. Strange footprints were found under a hammock, and while not claiming to be an expert, they looked awful like tiger to me! The tigers of Terengannu were well known, and I don't suppose that they recognise borders, so I was probably correct. But we hadn't supplied one with supper as yet, and it helped speed our departure! The gunner with the self-inflicted injury cut sticks to assist with walking, and with packs secure and tight, we headed for home. This was an easier journey, with more downhill than climbing, and we made good time. By ensuring that water bottles were filled at every opportunity, we were not so tied to water-courses. We camped one night on a ridge without water but found a spring, with water being filtered through the roots of a stand of bamboo. With purifying tablets available, our bottles were filled, but one intrepid adventurer decided to drink from the pool. He claimed the water was lovely, but his mouth looked as if he had badly applied lipstick, covered as it was by tiny crimson leeches. Fortunately, neither he nor the rest of us suffered any ill effects from that water.

For four days we walked and made good time. Perhaps the smell of cats, big cats, encouraged us not to linger. Around midday of the fifth day, Sandy walked into what appeared to be a manicured lawn and called a halt for lunch. This was a magical and a mysterious place. A cut stone wall retained a moat-like water way and a huge building of some sort was being devoured by vines and creeping plants, to the extent that it was no longer recognisable as such, and an unreal silence added to the atmosphere. Just what we had found, I have never been able to identify and I am not aware of any ancient civilisation as being recorded in that part of the world. What was plain to see was the exotic, erotic, swaying, searching progress of a multitude of leeches, as they homed across that close-cropped grass towards our recumbent bodies. Little encouragement was required to continue the march. Within a couple of hours of leaving that mystical spot, the smell of wood-smoke teased our senses, then the steady rumble of an engine mingled with the roar of cascading water. Ahead, one last small hill to climb before

before reaching the sanctuary of the Rest House, and our journey was completed.

The welcome Rest House

Packs were cheerfully dumped on the lawn. We were required to strip off and be hosed down, then searched for ticks and leeches, before we were allowed admittance to the building. Freshly baked bread rolls were devoured to such an extent that the bakers were recalled to duty. And then came the luxury of hot showers and sheets on a flat bed. My last duty, before falling asleep, was to signal for the supply drop of beer! Among our fellow guests at the Rest House was a doctor. He was happy to look at the injured foot and was surprised at the extent to which healing had already progressed. What was more puzzling was the energy loss of the others, to which he suggested that it might have been some sort of poisoning. I remembered that we had filled the water bottles the night before departure, and had flavoured the water with lemonade powder. The bottles were aluminium, the powder contained citric acid - could the prolonged duration of the mixture have created some sort of toxic brew? This seemed a reasonable explanation, so we left it at that, since all appeared fit and well now.

Also present that morning was the Head Park Ranger, summoned because of increased tiger activity and the knowledge that we were in the suspect area. We had hardly met, when the sound of an aircraft engine had us all running to the front lawn. A dozen pairs of eyes scanned the sky, motor and monkeys now competing for dominance. Then

from the tree-topped canopy of the river below us, an *Auster* burst, with wheels all but touching the sloping bank to rise above us, then do a spectacular wing over before returning at walking pace to drop a message. "*No beer. Not allowed within Park boundaries*". Signals were sent, arranging return transport, before we spent the rest of the day doing odd jobs around the Rest House, much to the pleasure of the manager.

It is true that the desired objective wasn't achieved, in that we failed to reach the summit of Gunong Tahan. Perhaps, more importantly, we, as a team, had proven that we were capable of travelling and navigating through hostile terrain, being self-sufficient as we did so, and had hopefully learned something about ourselves. Our planning had proven almost satisfactory. I say 'almost' because it was my fault that the beer episode failed. I had left that one stone unturned! Whether or not it was the lemonade powder that caused the problems, or even if it was true, as rumoured, that the powder contained citric acid, I really have no idea. What I do know however is that, years later in Aden, where the local water could stain porcelain in a remarkably short time, that same powder was used for scouring in preference to proprietary brands!

Not quite finished yet, I still have a couple of articles from West. Ed.

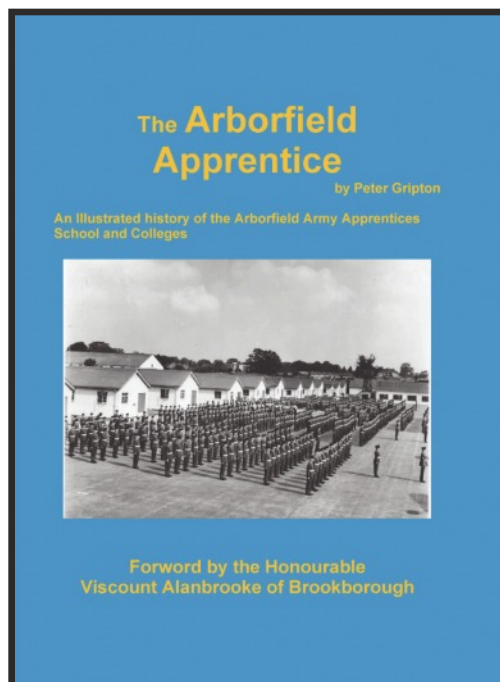
Arborfield Old Boys' Association Web Shop

Edition Two of The Arborfield Apprentice by Peter Gripton. Includes the 'Final Chapter' written by Peter after the college closure. It is a MUST for all Arborfield Apprentices whether they joined in 1939 or any time up to it's closure in 2004.

Foreword by the Honourable Viscount Allenbrooke of Brookborough

Available from the Webshop, £30.00 plus postage and packing

Lulu buy now image html code
<http://www.lulu.com/commerce/index.php?fBuyContent=13935110> > <img
src="http://static.lulu.com/images/services/buy_now_buttons/en/book_blue.gif?20131122144021" border="0" alt="Support



British Army Memoirs (Pt 1) Mike Jackson.

I arrived at the School of Artillery in Larkhill on December 12th 1956, my fourth posting since I passed out of the apprentice school in February that year (see OBAN 39).

The Instrument Shop was quite modern and had the test equipment to service the instruments the Artillery used. The cleanroom for the optical work was entered through an airlock door system and to work inside you had to be wearing a green hospital-type gown and rope-soled shoes. They took the cleaning of the optics very seriously; we worked on every type of instrument the Artillery used and even saw the new Zeiss theodolite that came with the Corporal missile, the latest weapon the Artillery had.

The general side of the shop had a couple of small lathes and a pantograph for engraving, along with the required vises and other equipment to make the shop complete. The Artificer Sergeant-Major (ASM) who ran the shop encouraged us all to use all the equipment. He was also very keen for us all to upgrade our trade qualifications. It did not take me long to find out that the HQ Battery Sergeant-Major (BSM) that we were attached to did not like the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME). Every chance he got he would give us a hard time; at least every week or so he even used to ride his big old "sit up and beg" Army bike up to the three REME huts just to make sure we were out of bed in the morning.

I was told the old sweat gunners still held a grudge because the Artillery lost its independence in 1942 when it lost the Gunfitters. As there were no civvies in the shop that specialized on certain equipment, we had to work on the next piece of equipment that was next to be repaired. We all got lots of experience quickly; so much so I was sent to Aldershot in April 1957 to do my second class trade test. I don't remember much about it, but I passed.

Later that month I got my first tape and my rise up the ladder had started. A few months later I got my second stripe and in November of that year I was sent to Bovington to do my first class trade test. All I really remember about that was for my practical piece the shop foreman pulled out of a box the oldest, dirtiest director (an instrument used for gun laying) I had ever seen. I got lucky. I cleaned the outside and one lens. The rest was perfect: no backlash, just a perfect instrument. All I had to do was to pretend I was working hard until the end of the allotted time for the repair. Thanks to that instrument, I passed.

Two stripes did not change my life much. Instead of carrying a pickaxe handle and staging out the hours on guard duties, I was Orderly Corporal. The hardest part of that job was to clear

out the newly installed TV room, especially because the cookhouse staff members were ladies of the Women's Royal Army Corps (WRAC) and a TV room was a warm, dark place. I also had the duties of Guard Commander at a small satellite guard in our workshop area. I think the statute of limitations has run out on being asleep on guard, so I must admit occasionally after the Orderly Officer had done his rounds we used to check around all the other satellite guard rooms. If we thought he was done for the night I would send one of the sentries back to his bed, lock the door and get a couple hours sleep.

One night I made the mistake of not locking the door. I was jarred back to the real world by someone poking me with a swagger stick. The first thing I saw when I opened my eyes was a pair of Blues trousers with the stripe. That's when I knew I was in big trouble. The Orderly Officer had come back and found me asleep. I had no excuse. He gave me a severe talking to (that is the civvie PC way to describe the dressing down I got!). I was truly expecting to be on a charge before the day was over but for some strange reason I never heard another word about it. I can assure that was the last time I ever made that silly mistake.

In March 1958 I was told I was to be posted to the base workshop in Singapore and was sent on embarkation leave. But when I arrived at the depot, my first of many visits, the posting had been cancelled. I hung around the depot for a couple of months until they found a home for me at 34 Base Workshops, Castle Donington. The only thing I remember about that posting was the long march from the barracks to the workshops. I suppose I did some instrument work but I don't remember what.

I did buy my first vehicle while I was there, a Flying 12 standard van. It was matte grey and had belonged to the milkman in my parents' village. Over the years it had lots of milk spilt in it, so on warm days it smelled pretty bad when you were driving. The other problem was that it had Bendix cable brakes that hardly worked going forward, and never worked when reversing. I never did get them working properly. It did not matter much, as in June 1958 I was back at the depot.

This time I was bound for Cyprus and this time they meant it. We flew from Blackbushe to Nicosia (my first flight) and ended that day at Waynes Keep, the transit camp. I had never seen such a dirty, broken down place. Luckily, the next day a couple of corporals I had met at the depot scrounged a truck and came to pick me up and take me to 8 Infantry Workshops, my new home. I did hear later that some people were stuck at Waynes Keep for days.

8 Infantry Workshops was a well-established tented camp. All the ridge tents had been raised and most of them had doors and windows in the ends, put together with old packing cases and anything else that could be scrounged. They were all quite smart. My only problem was they did not have an instrument shop, so I was put to work in the receiving and issuing office. There were three or four sergeants and higher ranks that handled the entire vehicle side of the operation. I looked after everything else that came for repair. I did not like the job, especially as I had to get dressed up every day in full Khaki Drill (KD). I was just lucky I did not lose track of any weapons, as it was active service.

In September 1958 I found out what I was really there for. I was posted to 51 Infantry Workshops. The only problem was it was a workshop on paper only. A second lieutenant and a sergeant were in charge. The rest of the unit included four corporals, about 30 craftsmen and a couple of Bedford RLs. We were given a mattress and put in a two-panel marquee at the back of a unit close to the airport. The next day we were driven to barren piece of land closer to the airport. There we found a really big pile of metal stakes, a bigger pile of barbed wire and dannert wire. The perimeter of the camp had been marked out in the sand, so all we had to do was to start pounding the stakes into the ground and build the fence: barbed wire and three rolls of dannert wire wide and three high. We had been fence-building about a week when we arrived one morning to find that some locals had cut the wire in a couple of places. That could only mean one thing. Someone found a tent for us to act as a guardroom and every night after that we mounted a guard. It was a little scary along the back wire, knowing the perimeter wire was not finished, even though we had a rifle and ten rounds. Eventually we finished the fence.

That's when they started delivering tents of all sizes. The first was the permanent guard tent at the main gate. After that we put up many marquee tents of varying sizes to act as dining hall, offices, stores and cookhouse, etc. Then came the tent lines: four-man ridge tents with duckboards on the sand. All that was left for us to do was the Aldershot shelters, to be used as the workshops. They had all been used before and were pretty beat up and very hard to assemble. Civvies came in to put up a shower room: just four corrugated iron walls, some standpipes with a tap, no showerheads. Washing was done in some bowls on the other side of the shed.

Toilets were the real stars in our ablution facilities. Imagine a four- or five-foot high hessian wall with no door and about ten large buckets with seats and lids. If you timed it just right, on some days you could be sitting on a bucket when the Middle East Airways Viscount left. You could see faces at the windows looking down at you.

A month or so later, civvies with earth-moving equipment did show up to dig us a deep trench latrine (DTL). We had separate partitions that were really quite private, but with no doors. This was much too late for most of us as they started posting people in as soon as the tent lines were completed. It was about this time that one of the members of the unit was found asleep on guard duty. He was Court-Martialed and sentenced to do time. We all thought it was all over, but then the whole unit was paraded to form three sides of a square. The guilty party was marched into the square, flanked by a couple of MPs. At this point I looked around to see if there was a large stake in the ground with sandbags behind it. I had only seen such a scene in the movies before, but the charges and the sentence were just read out to the whole unit. Then he was marched out and it was all over.

It was soon evident that we were going to be a vehicle repair shop when ambushed, accident-damaged and simply unserviceable vehicles began to arrive for repair. My problem was that we had no instrument shop. So I was summoned to a meeting with the ASM, who asked me what I thought I might like to do. I informed him I thought with my seniority with the unit I would make a good bedding store man.

I ended up as a vehicle mechanic's (VM) helper and a sometime escort when the CO went out of camp. I quite enjoyed both jobs. In my capacity as a VM helper I was working on an ambulance that had been ambushed. Their weapons of choice this time were a Thompson submachine gun and a shotgun. As standard procedure we had to send all rounds found for ballistics testing, just in case one day the weapon was found. It could then be linked to any previous incidents. Initially, we could not find all the rounds, but a couple of days later I did find a .45 round. At this point nobody seemed interested so I kept it as a souvenir.

We, of course, had to put on a nightly guard, plus we were often called on to help out at some downtown locations. We also had to provide a roadblock when there was trouble in Nicosia. That was a 24-hour duty. All of our kit including our rifles, was stored in the guardroom. A three-ton truck was kept loaded and ready to go. As soon as trouble started we were on our way. Sometimes it took five or six hours to clear the backlog of vehicles, which did not go down well with the locals.

What happened next defies all logic. In early December 1958 we were told the camp was closing and the unit was going to Dhekelia, also on Cyprus, to take over a tented camp because a tank regiment was moving on. The powers decided the whole unit would move in one convoy. All the repairable trucks were put on trailers and we set off for Dahlia, about 30 minutes south of Nicosia. We came to an unexpected halt and, as per procedure, we took up our defensive positions. Nothing else happened, so we were obviously not

Nothing else happened, so we were obviously not under attack. It did not take long for us to find out that the recce mech who had been the escort in the lead vehicle, a Scammell, was slumped forward over the windshield. He had been shot and was bleeding. We quickly got him in the back of a one-ton truck and on his way back to British Military Hospital (BMH) Nicosia.

Later, after many tests were carried out on his Sten gun, and after he was interviewed, the conclusion was that he ducked down into the cab of the Scammell to light a cigarette. He stood back up, then pulled his Sten gun back through the hip ring, catching the cocking handle of the gun on the hip ring. He pulled it back just far enough that when it became free it picked up and discharged a round into his chest. That was not the end of the story. A couple of weeks later he was on his way home to the UK and he sent a request for the unit on British Forces Radio: Who's Sorry Now, sung by Connie Francis.

Cambria camp had hard buildings for the offices, stores, cookhouse and dining hall, etc. We lived in tents that had all seen better days. The flies sagged down on the tents, having rotted with years in the sun. We did get one luxury, though: Valor paraffin stoves for heat. The toilets were novel back-to-back stalls. As usual, there were no doors, with a urinal at one end and a tap constantly running to flush everything into the DTL. This was just the setup for pranksters as a little cotton waste soaked in any flammable liquid lit and floated under the stall would give the meditators

a shock! This was, of course, done by both friends and enemies.

With Christmas nearing, a couple of us decided that as we had no NAAFI (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes) and no access to alcohol in camp we would get the Greek who ran the Wise Oriental Gentleman (WOG) shop to bring us in some wine. The only problem was that it came in a big glass carboy the type that used to hold sulphuric acid in garages. He wanted more money for the deposit on the jar than the cost of the wine, so we liberated two or three cases of empty vinegar bottles, washed them and decanted the wine. We kept it all in our big old green lockers. It had to be cut with lemonade to make it palatable and it did make you depressed, but we survived, and had a great Christmas.

One of our tent-mates who had a liking for ouzo drank a little too much one evening during the festive season. He did not make it outside to relieve himself and managed to urinate on the hot Valour stove. That cleared the tent quickly! In fact we had to roll up the sides of the tent and wash the concrete base before we could sleep in the tent that night. I will never forget that smell.

Once we were set up and started back to work again, the priority was to get the Centurion tanks left behind updated and readied for storage. That, of course, meant many trips outside the wire for test drives. I even did some of the driving. I could not manage the whole gearbox but it sure was a lot of fun ripping up the countryside in a tank!

A seasonal one....

A woman tells her husband to go out and buy her an unusual Christmas present - just for a change! Hubby scratches his head, pondering the problem, when he sees a notice in the pet shop window, "Singing Parrot for Sale".

He goes in and enquires the price. "Fifty Pounds sir, you may think it pricey but this bird will sing Christmas songs for you - allow me to demonstrate", says the pet-shop owner.

So saying, he places the parrot on his perch and, taking a lighter from his pocket and lighting it, holds the flame under the parrot's left leg.

"Oh Come All Ye Faithful!" warbles the parrot, shifting from one leg to the other.

"Amazing!" says the customer, "Can he sing anything else?"

"Listen to this", says the shopkeeper, placing the lighter under the parrot's right leg.

"Silent Night, Holy Night", sings the parrot, gently rocking in time to the music.

"Just the sort of present my wife will like, she'll be

really pleased!", exclaims hubby, "Does he sing anything else?"

"Well, I'm not sure", says the pet-shop man, "Let's see", and so saying, holds the lighter BETWEEN the parrot's legs.

At first, nothing happens ... until the parrot suddenly bursts into "Chestnuts roooooasting on an open fire!"

98% OF CANADIANS SAY "OH shxt" BEFORE GOING IN THE DITCH ON A SLIPPERY ROAD.

THE OTHER 2% ARE FROM NEWFOUNDLAND AND THEY SAY, "HOLD MY BEER AND WATCH THIS."

Rhymes of our Tymes

Army Wives

It is lately the fashion for ladies of passion to demand equal rights in their lives,
Yet the hardships they mention defy comprehension to our long suffering faithful wives.
These verbose dolly birds would find it absurd and most likely would go out on strike,
If faced with the things that that a service life brings to our ladies and families alike.

The strident appeals that we're hearing just deals with attaining some business career,
And the tasks of wife, mother, are somehow another role, therefore precluded, we hear.
So it seems that, at best, this should be addressed, and our ladies be given their due,
For when all's said and done, they are the ones who give our lads the will to thrive, too.

Who is it that, at the drop of a hat, finds their carefully planned life awry,
And suddenly find that their husband's in combat, while they must continue to try
To pursue life's normality, in the reality that there could be some bad news to come?
Yet they put it aside, take it all in their stride, uncomplaining, courageous, each one.

And while they're apart, who is facing the start of each day, minding family affairs,
Raising children alone, far from family and home, single-handedly dealing with cares
And the regular routine, and always the umpteen small things that occur in the day?
Valiantly coping and fervently hoping that her man will be not long away.

And those women who sneer, pursuing careers would do well to take note and take heed
Of these ladies who hold the heart and the soul of our soldiers who serve country's needs,
And never refute – they're as tough as old boots – the great contribution they make,
By giving their men the belief that they cope and succeed in whatever it takes.

And to those who've been there, done it all, had their share of the role of a military wife,
When times were much harder, separation much longer but never gave up on the life,
A special acclaim to you who became the example to all who have come
And followed your lead, and in turn, guaranteed the high standards which you had begun.

So then, chaps, raise your glasses to these lovely lasses who never signed on as you did,
And give them three cheers for the many long years that they willingly gave you, amid
Countless upheavals - married quarters, some evil, in places quite strange and exotic,
Where prolonged residence in surroundings intense could make less stable ladies neurotic!

Cheer Up

I suppose there are times when we all feel quite low,
And for ordinary blokes who have nowhere to go
To unload all their troublesome worries and fears,
Unable to find a considerate ear,
Life must seem at times to be too much to bear,
Lacking someone who is able to share
And sympathise, help, and listen a while,
Until all cares are banished, and able to smile.

But thankfully, that is the fate we evade,
For while we were busily learning a trade,
We also were weaving a bond, never broken,
Which tied us for life with a vow, quite unspoken,
That we would remain truly comrades of worth
To each other, even to the four corners of Earth,
So, like it or not, 'cos you're luckily numbered
Among Arborfield ex-boy's, you really are
lumbered!

We all meet courage every day,
Not in the grand, heroic way,
But in the humdrum daily round,
With ordinary folk who've found
The inner strength to face the ills
That happen, though it sometimes fills
Their daily life with black despair,
Encountering pain too hard to bear.
But bear they do, as bear they must,
For they know that what does come first
Is their own strength to give support
To loved ones who endure the hurt.

And that is why they will not stray
From rightful courses, they will stay
As staunch support, do all they can,
Because they are the one person
Who will not fail when things are tough,
Their presence now will be enough
To aid, sustain and surely prove
Their caring and enduring love.

Courage

Around the beginning of March 1998, I spotted a notice pinned to the telegraph pole in the front garden outside of the house. It announced a meeting to discuss what was called a '*Village Appraisal*', to be held in Greatham Village Hall. I was none too sure as to what this entailed, but decided to attend the meeting and find out for myself. A lady called Jo Dixon, on behalf of a group called '*Rural Action*', gave an interesting presentation of what this Village Appraisal was all about. Essentially, it asked local people to get together and discuss what they wanted for their future community needs – such things as local transport, education, leisure activities, health and services – just about anything really. Apparently this had all started up after John Major, Prime Minister at the time, had attended a conference in Rio some years previously. A Village Appraisal invited people to look at their community – maybe even to peek into its past – and come up with viable ideas on how things could possibly be improved in the future.

To cut a long story short, there were sufficient people interested – myself included – who thought that this was a good idea and we arranged to meet up the following week to discuss how the Appraisal could be set up and supervised. For my sins, I ended up as Chairman of the ten-strong Steering Group, reporting to the Parish Council. Over the next few months, we diligently prepared a questionnaire, based upon those questions that were mainly asked during our research. The questionnaire was produced, then delivered (in February 1999) to every household in the parish. Later, of course, it had to be collected after completion. Another member of the Group used his home computer to analyse the results and eventually we produced a report, along with conclusions and recommendations, on what appeared to be the main concerns to residents of the village. The eventual outcome of this was the setting up of another group – '*GLAMA*' (*Greatham Leisure Area Millennium Appeal*) – in order to raise funds for what had been shown to be Greatham's most immediate need – a children's play area with adult leisure facilities. This would be based alongside the Village Hall.

There was finally a satisfactory outcome to all this and, along the way, I was pointed onto the path of another possible career – that of an author! This came about because, before presenting the findings of the Appraisal to *Rural Action*, whilst reading the 'small print', I found that, as Chairman, I was expected to produce a brief potted history of Greatham, as background information

to go with the report. Having already lived in the village for just over thirty years, you'd have thought I must have known something about the place – wrong! The sheet of paper in front of me remained stubbornly blank. But I was sufficiently interested to start my own investigation regarding Greatham's history. With many acts of assistance from innumerable sources, many based on personal experiences, I found myself becoming more and more amazed at the fascinating amount of material I was collecting.

Fortunately, my elder daughter Lorraine and (still 'boy-friend' at that time) Phil had by this time presented me with a PC (Personal Computer), which enabled me to start putting all the information into one place – and hopefully into a sensible format. Around the start of the new millennium year of 2000, I had probably enough material to produce a book on the subject and that was now what I was hopefully going to do. As part of the project, I asked an ex-Arborfield colleague of mine, Brian Hornsey 54A, to put my book together with the aid of his desktop publishing system, on his computer over in Basingstoke. However, it proved no cheap or easy task to have a book published. I visited one publisher in Windsor and the estimated cost was in the order of £6,000. Despite my efforts at getting sponsorship or some form of funding through the Parish Council, or local Historical Societies and other sources, I ended up with 'the book' just 'put onto the back burner' for the foreseeable future.

Retired – well, for now!

When my 'early' retirement from SEME Bordon eventually came up in the summer of 2000, I had to step down as the 'SEME Rep' on the Arborfield Old Boys' Association (AOBA), of which Brian Hornsey and I had been keen members for a number of years. The Apprentices' School (or College, as it had later become) had been wanting a definitive history produced for about the last eight or nine years at that time. Thus, at many Committee meetings, I had gone on and on *ad nauseam* at successive Chairmen on the subject – "*What's happening with the College history?*" Well, now that I was stepping down, and with his knowledge of my 'expertise' with the Greatham history, Brian suggested to the Committee that I was probably the guy to produce their history for them! (*Or, in other words, 'put your money where your mouth is'!*) Needless to say, they almost bit my hand off at the thought that here was someone who could possibly bring an almost dead project back to life! The previous 'volunteer',

Victor Brooke, had suffered from ill-health for some time and, despite a promising start around about 1993, had never really got much achieved.

I was fortunate enough to start with a booklet called 'A *Brief History*', which had first been produced by a guy by the name of Bryn Richards a few years previously. This eventually became the framework of the complete and definitive history that I hoped I would eventually be able to produce. First of all, I brought the 'brief history' up to date (2000) and then started to 'flesh out' the history from the 'bare bones' provided by Bryn, using many different sources. One great source of material was the *Old Boys' Association Newsletter (OBAN)* that had been resurrected in 1992 and issued about two or three times a year ever since – full of personal anecdotes of experiences, both at the School/College, as well as in later service. Then there was the regular edition of the School/College magazine, each one presenting facts and figures, names and details, about what had been going on at Arborfield at the particular time. From these sources, I was able to keep adding to the overall story – a task that kept me busy (ask Joyce!) for a full three years. "*Retirement? What retirement?*" But it did prove to be a 'labour of love' and I enjoyed the challenge immensely.

Early on in the project, I had made an announcement in the *OBAN* about the task I had undertaken and just how much work and time I thought it would take. I was delighted to receive an e-mail from Rodney Smith, of my own intake 56B now living and working in California, who undertook to cover a lot of the expenses that would be involved. Thus, over the next three years, I kept Rodney updated as to the progress and cost of the project. I am happy to say that he 'came up with the goods', which certainly oiled the wheels, so to speak!

Towards the end of that project, I was also lucky enough to have the assistance of Ken Anderson. Ken had been a 'wet behind the ears' young soldier just behind me at Arborfield and had obviously done well for himself in later years, becoming a 'multi-media consultant'. He had already taken up the post of 'webmaster' for the AOBA, running an extensive web-site on its behalf. Now, he kindly offered his help with the publishing of my work, for which the Committee must be eternally thankful – I know I was! Over a period of quite a few weeks, we would meet up at the REME Museum and sort out the photographs from the archives, picking those we thought most suitable to complement the story of Arborfield. That was quite a labour intensive effort. The archive photographs were all kept in envelopes, themselves stored in cardboard boxes,

stacked up on racks in the Museum. I did the sorting, while Ken, nodding in approval (most of the time!), then 'scanned' each one into the Museum's computer. He then had to copy them to compact disk and take them back home to 'edit' into the text. I think that, between us, we did a reasonably good job in the end.

Back on track with Greatham book

On one such occasion, we were having lunch in the *Bramshill Hunt*, when I must have mentioned my 'latent' book about Greatham, still sadly lingering on Brian Hornsey's computer at Basingstoke – as well as 'the original' text on my own PC at home. Ken's interest was immediately aroused and it ended up with my e-mailing some chapters across to Ken's home at Worcester and, all of a sudden, he was hooked! He soon offered to publish it for me and then, with the enhanced 'state-of-the-art' software that Ken had on his system, he was able to copy many of my local photographs and historical postcards into the Greatham story. It just so happened that, on the day that the first 'Arborfield' books were delivered to Ken at Worcester in late 2003, I was up at nearby Redditch on a reunion get-together with a few of my old Arborfield mates from 56B. Ken kindly brought a few books over to Redditch and the 'official launch' of '*The Arborfield Apprentice*' started there and then! Since then, the book has been for sale through various sources – many through the REME Association shop at Arborfield and over the web-site. I have also been able to sell around fifty copies myself and feel that I've certainly done my bit for the AOBA! And, of course, it wasn't long afterwards that my '*A History of Greatham*' book was also published and it has been a great success around the village.

After that, I found myself presented with another pleasant task! Another ex-Arborfield boy, John Dutton, who joined up in 1943, later found himself serving in 'the forgotten war' in Korea, 1951-53. He later gathered plenty of stories from other REME soldiers and, together with his own memories, put them together with the hope of publishing his own book. Unfortunately for John, he was unable to find the requisite backing for his project. Ken Anderson got to know of this and asked me if I'd be prepared to take John's original manuscript and, hopefully, make it suitable for publication. This is something I am working on now, as 2003 fades into 2004 – and it could be a couple of months yet before I'm happy with it. Whether or not Ken will ever get it published on John's behalf, I don't know – but it won't be for the lack of trying on my part! (*As a footnote to that, the proof copy arrived back here during March 2004 and, having posted some relevant amendments, the book was printed and published very shortly*

very shortly afterwards. It is called 'The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist'.)

Family Matters

Yes, my 'final career', as an author, came about quite unexpectedly, but has certainly given me an enormous amount of pleasure and pride. And it hasn't stopped really. The evidence is that you, dear reader, are looking at part of another endeavour of mine, to write down some sort of life history of my own. In my own mind (like many of you guys I'm sure), I never did get to know my own family well enough, but I am determined to hand down to my own descendants some account of the family history. Perhaps, one day, someone will be able to say, "This is the book what my ----- Granddad wrote"!

My 'talents' in the writing area brought me another unexpected task, one that is now giving me great pleasure. I've already mentioned the 'OBAN' somewhere above and I now have the honour of being the editor of that magazine, while Ken Anderson covers the publication. Between us, we bring out three editions each year and it has begun to look very good in its presentation, with a full-colour illustrated cover and glossy format. I hope to carry this on for a few years to come – either until the old brain and/or eyesight become too suspect, or until the other old boys get fed up with what I'm doing! What the job entails is receiving articles, letters and e-mails from many other ex-Arborfield boys, then making sure that it is all edited and suitable for Ken to publish. I'm amazed at the amount of material that arrives regularly – mainly in response to something published in the most recent magazine. I also contribute quite a lot of stuff myself, but try to 'spread it around' and not hog a whole issue! What has been good is my ability to persuade my own 56B lads to make a few contributions, even from guys living as far away as Australia, Tonga and South Africa. The whole job certainly keeps my brain active and enables me to keep in touch with many ex-colleagues from all over the world – and of course their stories make fascinating reading.

Postscript

Readers may well recognise that the above was written over a period of time, so is now more of a 'retrospective' account of how things came about. My research into my family background and origins proved very therapeutic and I was finally able to publish a book called 'A Happy Life' in 2008. My thanks again go to Ken Anderson, who kindly 'did the honours' once again on the drafting and publication side. The book was written as a personal thing and gave me great pleasure, as well as providing much background information on my branch of the family, which may prove interesting to future generations. Following the publication of my 'A History of Greatham' book, over the next couple of years or so, I was amazed – and delighted – to receive so many responses from people all around the place who had received copies of the book from friends or relatives. Many of these told me that it had brought back treasured memories of their own times spent in the village. I was thus able to put a few of these stories together and it finally ended up with me putting out a second book, 'Greatham Memories', which was published in 2007. Even after that, a few other stories came to light, but by then I had decided that I has probably reached the end of the line on that particular line of work!

During the summer of 2011, Joyce and I finally left our home in Greatham and moved to her home town of Reading. (I actually met Joyce at the Oxford Ballroom, Reading, back in early 1961, whilst completing training at 5 Battalion. So things have turned virtually full circle, except for the fact that dear old Arborfield is 'virtually no more'.) At the same time, now during the Olympics Year of 2012, my editorial duties on OBAN were recently handed over to Ray Stevens, so my 'authoring' days have gradually declined. I still have a few anecdotes 'in the bank' – including this one – which I will be passing on to Ray, in the hope that they will be published in the OBAN at some time 'in the future'. It has certainly been an interesting few years since I 'retired' and became 'an author'!

AOBA Benevolence Fund.

Please remember that the **Arborfield Old Boys' Association** maintains a **Benevolence Fund**, for the benefit of any Ex-Apprentice or Member of Staff who may or may not be a member of the association. If you know of anyone who is having problems, and you believe a contribution from the fund could be of assistance, please contact

the Honorary Secretary at the earliest opportunity.

Also the fund makes annual donations to the 'Chairman's Charities', this year being Combat Stress and Blind Vets UK, as voted on at the AGM.

Just a little voice. By the late West Robertson 50B

Have you ever wondered just how Local Overseas Allowance (LOA) is calculated? Perhaps not - and neither had I, until I arrived in Shiraz, Southern Iran, with the Commission and Advisory Team (CAAT). LOA was not something we had thought about, the fifteen or so mixed body of men from REME and RAOC, about half of whom were accompanied by their families. We were in receipt of £1.00 per day inducement pay and ignorant of local conditions. It didn't take long for us to realise that things were going to be tough. A small tin of pineapple, for example, took five days inducement money, if it could be found. A number of pleading telephone calls to our immediate bosses in Teheran brought action, when MoD sent 'victualling lists'. These, of Royal Naval origin I believe, are comprehensive, encompassing almost everything you can think of, from basic necessities to cars and entertainment facilities. Families searched the streets for items listed and entered the local price. Similar facilities were harder to equate, from ten-pin bowling to an opium cave on a hillside, just would not hold water! With something like only a quarter of the items listed with prices, MoD rejected the request for LOA on the grounds that, if an item cannot be purchased, then no extra money is required. They also added, with astonishing naivety that we had failed to take into account NAAFI facilities. This was true, but since the nearest NAAFI was in Cyprus, six hundred miles away, shopping there was hardly an option!

Some months later, two more arrived to join my team. They were both Tank Corps men, sent to teach driving and gunnery. Both integrated well and soon had classes running. Sitting one day in what I called 'my office', the gunnery sergeant, for both had been granted acting ranks, appeared and asked if he could talk about an incident which had occurred earlier that day, on which he needed advice. He had been taking a class of officers, things were going well, when one student, a Captain, had got a loading sequence wrong. As was common practice, both here and in the UK, the man was told to run around the tank, holding a bag charge above his head. To help him on his way, the instructor had jokingly swung his foot as if to kick him up the rear. No contact was made. The remainder of the class had thought it quite amusing - they were all officers remember. Knowing the officer in question, I sent for him and asked if he had any complaints. The Captain agreed that he had indeed been sent around the tank, but knew nothing about the attempted kick. With the gunnery instructor still present, I explained that these things were done to keep a happy class, that no insult was meant, but if he

wished me to take any action, I would do so. The Captain also saw the funny side, shook hands with the sergeant, and said that the matter should be forgotten. Three days later, I received a message informing me that I should have all my British personnel assembled in the Team House at eleven next morning.

Although puzzled, I had the men assembled. A delegation had arrived from Teheran and the UK, comprised of not one, but two British Generals, the Colonel from the Embassy, and a Tank Corps Captain. While the senior visitors went into conference with the Iranians, the 'Tanky' came to address us. Entering the room in a bullying, arrogant manner, his first action was to demand the identity of the gunnery instructor. Making himself known, the man was told to consider himself in close arrest, leave the room and pack his kit for an immediate return to the UK. From then on, it was one continuous tirade of abuse, we were accused of most everything from treason to murder, and any further incident would mean an immediate Court Martial. I'd had enough! I demanded to know what he was talking about, although I already had an idea, but wanted confirmation. A report had been received, the Captain said, that an officer of the Imperial Iranian army had been brutally assaulted by a British soldier. I asked where the report had originated, and by whom. This was not known. I asked what evidence there was to support this allegation. This was not known. I asked whether an enquiry would be held. This was not known. I asked if he would leave the room and collect the answers to my questions. He would not!

My turn to speak

Now I had the floor. I told my team to also prepare for immediate repatriation, they and their families would fly home as soon as I could arrange flights. Stunned, the tyrant hurriedly left to get support. Not completely sure of my ground, but with anger causing me to throw caution to the wind, I was certainly not going to accept such statements lying down, neither was I prepared to have my men do so. There was going to be trouble and I thought it better to leave the men out of it, some might say things better left unsaid, so I sent them to their quarters. Climbing the stairs, I went to offer my sympathy and apologise to Hank, the gunnery man, telling him I would do what I could from this end, to ease his plight. He was quite resigned to the situation and accepted that none of the blame could be laid at my door. Pausing on the stairway landing, I looked out the window and there were 'the big guns' arriving. They stopped and held a

conversation, the Colonel and Captain remained outside, the two Generals entered the building.

An explanation was given about a report, possibly from SAVAK (secret police), regarding an incident where a British soldier was seen to kick an Iranian officer. With so much at stake, drastic action had to be taken, and taken quickly. Jobs in the UK and valuable export orders were in jeopardy, the reputation of the British Army was at risk, and all due to the deplorable actions of a member of my team. Did I not feel ashamed that I had allowed such a thing to happen? Adopting as calm an attitude as I could muster in the circumstances, the truth regarding the 'kicking' incident was explained. The fact that a potentially embarrassing situation could arise had been reported to me, and I had taken appropriate action to resolve it. The supposedly injured party had accepted my apology and reasoning, and we had agreed that no further action was required. Was I ashamed? Of course I was! I was ashamed that, on the strength of an unsubstantiated report, the MoD would threaten 'me and mine' with a Court Martial and ashamed that officers in my Army could agree to this. I was ashamed that all I could receive were platitudes instead of assistance and ashamed that I had no more to offer my men than '*Just a little voice*'! I was tired, I told them!

Tired of the double-dealing, where my vehicle states were written twice so that the truth be concealed, tired of watching every word I spoke at home because my house was bugged, tired of lugging my bag wherever I went, because if I left it unattended, SAVAK would be into it. I was tired of entertaining UK visitors, 'swanning' at the expense of the Team, and tired of promises of assistance, offered by these very Generals, which never materialized. Funds could be found to provide visits, but not to help us workers. If objections were raised about Iranian behaviour, false sympathetic noises were heard, and now, we could be punished on the strength of a lie. Just as they felt action must be taken, and quickly, so did I. Therefore, in the best interests of my men, we would return to the UK.

Both sides of the discussion had their merits. Perhaps the Generals were impressed with the passion in my case, but we were in an impasse. They could not relieve me from my position as senior REME member, with the ability and entitlement to make such decisions, but they could order my men back to work, myself included. Accepting this, I tendered my resignation, stating I would pursue the action for withdrawal in the UK, but agreeing to stay until a replacement could be found. With a plane to catch, and probably more humiliating talks to be held in Teheran, the meeting closed. It was a ridiculous situation, and

one that should have never arisen.

Stating the facts

Within the terms and conditions of our detachment to CAAT, it was stated that those who elected to serve eighteen months, could have sixty days leave at the end of the first year. Our Major, Blues & Royals, a tactical advisor and actually senior member of our team, was enjoying this while the escapade with the Generals occurred, although we had not yet served a year. Before he returned, I had a personal visitor from the MoD. While he did not state it, there was an undercurrent about the visitor that I could not identify - I could only surmise that it had to be political. He appeared to be prepared to listen, asked what would be necessary for me to reconsider my decision to resign, and just why I had felt this to be the answer to my problems. Again I listed my grievances, adding to those about which he already knew, and for good measure, threw in the fact that we had one blanket per person and the temperature had remained below freezing for weeks, even the chairs in our house were rationed to one per person. Without LOA, it was costing team members a high proportion of their wages just to live, without the added burden of protecting themselves from the elements. Copious notes were made, and as he did so, I mentioned that if he had missed anything, I was sure that SAVAK would make the recording of our conversation available to him. He paled visibly at this!

We walked to the tank-park. As we walked, he talked. Was I aware that my action to remove the REME team had reached the highest echelons of both the UK and Iranian Governments? Did I fully recognize the consequences of such action and just what could be done to rectify it? To me, it appeared that the same old platitudes were about to be repeated, but I suggested anyway, that if even some of the help I had requested was forthcoming, if our conditions of service were observed by both sides, if LOA was provided, I would withdraw my request. In for a penny, in for a pound! So I added that I felt that a personal apology should be given for the slight to both the Corps and myself, in that my action regarding the cause of the dispute had been ignored. And that another was due to my team from that ranting Tanky, where excellent service was rewarded with threats. The man may not have been happy as he left, but he had facts, which somehow seemed to relieve him!

A couple of weeks passed by and our Major returned from leave in a rather worried and puzzled state. "*Just what has been going on?*" he demanded to know, "*and just why was I called to the MoD and to be told the good news - that Mr Robertson has agreed that he and REME will stay*

in Iran?" I recounted the events of those troubled days and, as always, he backed my decision, but I suspect that he was rather glad he had not been seen to do so. There were a couple of letters for him to deliver to me, which he duly presented, the contents of which he knew nothing. There was also the news that it had been decided to find a member of the Embassy staff, whose responsibilities were similar to one of those on our team, and from the allowances paid, relate an appropriate LOA.

Regarding the letters - the first told me about the formation and expected arrival of a technical company, to be called *Millbank Technical Services (MTS)*. As an interim measure, a number of REME personnel would be sent to assist with tasks which I was undertaking - although it was appreciated they were beyond my remit. The contents of the second, well that is personal, sufficient to suggest that most of my conditions had been met! Well there you have it, a tale of how LOA arrived in Shiraz. It was, I believe, a typist in the Embassy who provided the base line, the duties comparing favourably with a L/Cpl Vehicle Specialist in the Ordnance Corps. Of course, by the time the MoD

had a chance to modify it, again referring to the NAAFI, 'X Factor' and whatever else they could conjure up, they arrived at a figure that was a fraction of what embassy staff received. Was I happy with this? Well, no, but foundations had been laid, and there was something on which I could now build.

Footnote: The date for my inter-tour leave arrived. I was asked to delay for a few days to meet a new addition, an assistant, I was informed. This was not convenient since my daughter, now attending boarding school, had to return, but I agreed to wait alone. The assistant arrived and his rank was Major! The moral of this is that, if you wish to silence a loose canon, send in a bigger gun! But there was still powder to burn, and the delay had given me the opportunity to set my sights on RAF Cyprus, but that's another tale!

West's next article will be the last of a very interesting series of exploits that he left for us.

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 £1:50 postage and packing per item. The Web Shop is run by our Honorary Treasure Laurie Blakley, and he will have items available at the reunions.

Company Ties



Available in original Company Colours
£8 + £1:50 P&P

Lapel Badges



Very attractive Lapel Badge in Black and Gold

Approximately 25 x 20 mm. £3.50 + £1:50 P&P

Also available are a small amount of Blazer
Badges @ £10.60 + £1:50 P&P,
Mugs with the AOB badge @ £5.88 + £1:50
P&P

Please contact Laurie for overseas postage costs,
and any other enquiries.

Arborfield Old Boys



GOD SAVE THE KING

The AOBA urgently needs new members. In order for us to continue as successfully as we currently are, your help is needed to recruit more Arborfield veterans to our Association. So if any of you know of a likely candidate, who is not a member, use all your persuasive powers to get them to join! Your reward will be a year's free membership, well worth it.

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

Introduce a Friend and get ONE Years FREE Membership

A Rose by any other Name would smell as sweet.

No doubt most of you will have seen the recruiting posters on both the web site and in OBAN.

It's a fact that we, as an Association, in order to continue successfully, need to have more new members. Sadly, as those of you who attended the reunion service at the NMA will know, we are losing members at an alarming rate. And, as Alec Powell's graph in OBAN 59 shows, recruiting is on the decline. Figures show that after the mid 60s intakes, with a few exceptions, our membership is sparse – we are not attracting the younger members from later intakes that we need.

So it follows then that we, as an Association, need to ourselves ask why.



Could it be how these later intakes see us? Does the 'Old Boy' part of our title project the wrong image to these younger ex-apprentices? After all the OED not only defines 'Old Boy' as a 'former pupil of a school' (which we are) but also an 'elderly man' (which anecdotal evidence in fact shows is our image) If we were to substitute 'Apprentice' and became 'The Arborfield Apprentice Association' it would not only take away the

age stigma but more accurately describe us. What putting in the word 'Apprentice' would not do is alter who we are or what we stand for. And, after all, there is nothing in our present title to say that we were apprentices, just that we were at Arborfield at some time, which could equally have been SEE, the Depot or elsewhere within the garrison.

I'm aware this discussion came up a few years ago when the question of female apprentices was raised and it was decided against, however we have yet to get a female member and again the question why must be asked.

Interestingly our Facebook account is called 'Arborfield Apprentices' and attracts a younger demographic.

We have already demonstrated that we're capable of breaking with tradition by inviting wives and partners to attend our reunions, which has proved to be a success. And when we moved from Arborfield to the NMA, another big break from tradition, it was expected that attendance numbers would fall off, but this has not happened.

Are we prepared to let our traditional title be a barrier to our continuation? Or can we be bold enough to make a decision to try to secure our future?

This is being raised now in order to give you, the members, plenty of time to mull it over before the next AGM. To present it there, without time for everybody to calmly reflect on it, would not give sufficient opportunity for us to have an objective discussion. Think it over, the pros and cons and please email me with any thoughts or comments.

As Shakespeare wrote 'A rose by any name.....'

Bob Castell 64A

Hon Recruitment Officer.

Army Apprentices' National Memorial Trust Annual General Meeting and Trustees' Dinner



The Annual General Meeting of the Army Apprentices' Memorial Trust will be held at 13:00hrs Saturday 9th May 2015 in the Poppy Room of the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire. All ex-Apprentices are invited to attend. An Agenda for the meeting and the minutes of the 2014 AGM will be published shortly and copies will be available at the meeting.

A memorial drumhead service will be held at 11:00hrs on Sunday 10th May 2015 at the Army Apprentices' National Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum. Rev Garry Kelly (65C Carlisle) will officiate and the Standards of Arborfield, Carlisle, Chepstow and Harrogate will be on parade. Major General JD Stokoe CB CBE, Patron and ex-Harrogate Apprentice, will be on parade together with the Burton Citadel Salvation Army Band, pipers and bugler. All ex-Apprentices are warmly invited to attend.

The Trustees will also be hosting a dinner at the Menzies Court Hotel in Mickleover, Derby at 19:30hrs on Saturday 9th May 2015. All ex-Army Apprentices and their partners are warmly invited

to attend. In addition to the dinner there will be a cabaret starring Johnny Victory who will feature songs and music from the '40s, '50s and '60s. There will be a voluntary collection at the dinner to defray the £300 cost of the cabaret. The Menzies Court Hotel are offering a special discounted rate of £95 per single room and £132 per double room inclusive of bed, breakfast and the Trustees' Dinner. To book a room please contact the hotel, quoting "Army Apprentices' Re-union", on 01332 521234. Information on the hotel can be found at www.menzieshotels.co.uk.

The menu for the Trustees' Dinner is attached for information.

ARMY APPRENTICE NATIONAL REUNION 9TH MAY 2015

STARTERS

Creamed tomato and fresh basil soup (v)

Chilled poached salmon with a potato, spring onion and horseradish salad and herb oil

Chicken liver pate with fruit chutney and toasted bloomer bread

MAIN COURSE

Breast of chicken with a lentil, smoked bacon and shallot cassoulette, sherry vinegar dressing

Braised belly of pork rolled with English mustard and herbs, creamed cabbage, cider jus

Butternut squash, blue cheese and red onion tart, wilted red chard, balsamic glaze (v)

DESSERT

Glazed lemon tart, raspberry coulis, Chantilly cream

Mature cheddar and french brie with grapes, celery and biscuits

Tea, Coffee, and Mints.

REME Association
Potteries & District Branch



**The Potteries
& District
Branch
of the REME
Association**

**Royal Electrical and
Mechanical Engineers
Association**

Meetings held every 4th Tuesday in the month,
7pm at Meir Royal British Legion Club.

For further details contact:

Branch Secretary, Malcolm Caddick on
01538 756100, malcolmcaddick@hotmail.co.uk

or

Public Relations Member, Maurice Hope on
01782 874149

*Come on lads , meet up with many members of our own association, as well as
being in the REME Association. Ed*

Cars that I have owned (Part1)

Recalling some of the old cars mentioned over the years in OBAN, by the likes of Jim Macdonald (43A), I decided to cast my own mind back over the 40-odd years since I myself became a car owner – and came up with the following:

1957 Opel 'Rekord' (444 ALX) I suppose the first car you buy always has a special place in one's memory, and so it is with '*Hermann the German*' as we called it! German built, as suggested by the name, but part of the American *General Motors* (GM) lineage. I bought it from Ross Crapnell on August 4th 1967, having just started my career as a civilian instructor at SEME Bordon on leaving the Army. I was still living in Reading, so used it on a daily basis, morning and evening. Ross was still a sergeant in those days and I remember picking it up from outside his quarter after work one day, 'she' cost me a whole fifty quid! (*Why do we guys always refer to our cars as 'she'?*) What an exhilarating feeling of freedom it was, to finally be driving my own car, especially as the roads weren't so clogged with traffic then. On my way home at night, she used to struggle a bit up Worldham Hill, but then she had only a three-speed gearbox, operated by a shift on the side of the steering wheel, what used to be called a 'column change', long out of fashion nowadays. She was a bit of an oil guzzler though! I used to turn into Alton High Street each evening, where there was a roadside garage just around the corner from the station. (*The business is still there today, but only for tyres, exhausts and batteries.*) There I would buy petrol – by the gallon – and a pint of daily oil! At first, I thought the yellow oil-warning lamp was just for company! I had the *Rekord* for just three short months before 'pranging' it on the Basingstoke Road coming out of Reading on Bonfire Night – but that's another story!

1952 Morris 'Minor' (PPP 815) This was a quick replacement for '*Hermann*', bought only five days after the accident and write-off, as I seriously needed my own transport – once the bug has bitten, you can't shake it off! We were now living in our own home at Greatham, Hampshire, but wanted to get out and about to explore the new world around us. She was pretty old even then, with a split windscreen and a small side-valve engine that had definitely put its best days behind it! It used to chug around, I don't suppose it was ever that powerful. When my sisters, Sue and Pam came to visit us, we decided to go down to the seaside one day. The car was affectionately known as '*Betsy*', but she certainly didn't want to go up Butser Hill with all of us inside. It ended up

with the girls getting out while I drove *Betsy* to the top of the hill and they all walked up behind me – or did they make it first? I recall George, my next-door neighbour, giving me a hand, I think we tried to 'de-coke' the engine. Being a side-valve, it needed special tools to compress the valves, so we struggled a bit – and I doubt if it ever made that much difference. But we tried! At least it got George and I to work when it was my week to drive, we used to share the trip to SEME each day. I can't remember where I bought it – nor where she ended up – but I do have a photo or two to prove that she existed!

Vauxhall 'Victor' (66 HKM) – no known date

With the little *Minor* not being very powerful, we came to the conclusion that something a little larger was required, although we managed to get one summer's motoring out of *Betsy* before replacing her. I can't recall how we heard about the *Victor*, but in September 1968 we bought her from a guy at Whitley in Reading – he sort of 'bought and sold' cars (wrecks?) from his front garden on a council estate! Perhaps we should have known better, but at first she really seemed like 'luxury' to its discerning new owners! Similar in style to the *Rekord*, it came from the same GM family. She looked quite stylish with her two-tone colour and rakish body style, as well as having those plastic windshields on either side, so that you could wind down the window and still be streamlined. We actually kept her for exactly two years, but fought an endless battle against rust! We later found out that the particular range of *Vauxhall* cars during those years were renowned for being rust-buckets, there was just no answer to it. I eventually drove her down to a scrap-yard at Buriton, from where I came home with just the number-plate – which still hangs in my garden shed!

Morris 'Minor' (VGT 455) – no known date

And so, in September 1970, I was looking for another car. Just around the corner on the main Petersfield Road was a garage. I reasoned that I would get a reasonable deal from my 'friendly local garage', and I think she only cost me another £50. '*Betsy Mk2*' was slightly more modern than the first one, a light green in colour. But it wasn't long before bits started to go wrong! I remember my brother Geoff came back from Australia in March of 1971 and later that year, he and 'other brother' Cliff came down from Liverpool to visit. They stayed with us and, one day, accompanied us for a day-trip to Reading to see Joyce's sister Eileen – they in their car, we in ours. We were going down Southampton Street when there was

a loud clattering noise from under my bonnet and no way that I could find a gear! It ended up with us borrowing a van from Eileen's neighbour Maurice and then me towing Geoff back to Greatham, while Joyce and the girls must have come home with Cliff. What a perilous journey that must have been, but somehow we made it back the thirty-five miles to Greatham. I found another gearbox in a scrap-yard (they figure a lot, don't they?) and George helped me fit it. After that, whenever I took off in first gear, it sounded like a tractor – but at least it went! I can't remember when MoT tests came in, but the *Minor* was eligible for it that year, but was rejected for 'holes in the chassis'. A WO2 at SEME, a Scots chap named Bill, with a huge walrus-style moustache, said he'd try to weld up the floor for me. But when it came down to the work, he told me that "*there's more holes than bodywork*"! So I'm afraid *Betsy Mk2* met a similar fate to my previous cars!

1965 Ford 'Cortina' Mk1 (NNO 816 C) In November of 1971 we took ownership of a dark blue *Cortina*, it was purchased from a house down Bat and Ball Lane, on the turning just before Wrecclesham Hill down into Farnham. It was a fairly well-to-do area and the car was only six years old, so at last we'd joined the true motoring society – Ha! Ha! From a reliability point of view I suppose we could say that we got more than three years out of her, but at the same time I was doomed to learning all about the working parts of cars from George next door! Mind you, George – and son Clive – were always working on their cars too, and our front drives must have seemed like garage workshops at the weekends, we were always pottering about with something or other between us. The *Cortina* developed a nasty habit of leaving a smokescreen behind it, the reason was (as I found out) that it was burning oil. I think what finally polished it off was a trip to Plymouth in January 1975, to watch Everton play an FA Cup-tie. I took a carload with me and just about made it home with the car's dying gasp! Again it was George to the rescue, as we stripped down the whole engine. The old piston rings just literally fell out in little bits! Despite having a re-bore and new rings, it was definitely on its last legs and so I decided she'd have to go!

1969 Ford 'Corsair' (URE 360 G) One of the Colonels at SEME was advertising his *Corsair* for sale. It was silver in colour, with a black vinyl roof and – for those days – definitely in the luxury class! It had a V4 2-litre engine, which was certainly 'man enough' to cope with a growing family. I bought her in March of 1975 and the first trip we made in her was up to Barmouth in North Wales that Easter – now an annual tradition that has lasted until this very day (but sadly not the *Corsair*!) I do recall how good the engine was,

you could literally drop the speed down to walking pace whilst still in top gear, then pull away effortlessly as required.

1963 Austin 'Cambridge' (311 MPO) With Joyce about to start a new job as 'kitchen assistant' at a school in Bordon, we decided to go for a 'second car' and in August 1976, during the height of a drought, we went down to Fernhurst and bought the old *Cambridge*. The chap who'd owned her had been an estate manager for *ICI* Verdley, a place where they tested herbicides, weed-killers, insect killers and such like. He was retiring and going for a new car, but the *Cambridge* had hardly really been used, except for driving around the *ICI* estate. So, for its age, it had remarkably few miles on the clock. Built like a bus, it was very stable as you drove it along – and the engine was as quiet as the proverbial church mouse. Just after we'd picked her up, we had to stop at a junction outside Liphook and it was so quiet I honestly thought the engine had stalled!

1972 Vauxhall 'Viva' (APY 442 K) Things get a bit vague after we became a two-car family! I can't remember now just which one of the two went first, but in March 1977 I bought a small family saloon from Dougie Gilbert at SEME, he was a Staff Sergeant at the time, serving down in 'B' Branch, so I knew the car had been pretty well maintained. There was nothing remarkable about it and I don't know how long we kept it, before I sold it on to Nick Scantlebury, who was another soldier serving with me at Bordon, he was being posted to the West Country and needed a cheap little runabout. Thinking back, that must have happened after the end of 1979 and possibly not until 1981, because Nick was in my office after I'd taken over the Internal Validation post at Bordon. The other event that dates it was my first ever TA Camp, towards the end of 1979. I was in Louis-berg Barracks at Bordon, awaiting the move down to South Cerney, when I phoned Joyce to say 'Cheerio'. She'd been out to Petersfield and had a 'prang' in the *Viva*. Another car had run into the front offside wing at the junction that joined the old A3 and A325. The other driver was an Army officer and he and his son moved Joyce's car to the side of the road – she thought that was very kind of them, especially as it was the other driver's fault. Obviously though, there was an ulterior motive because, later this officer, a real 'gentleman' I guess, and no doubt following instructions from his insurance company, swore blind that it had all been Joyce's fault! Needless to say, we never did get any satisfaction and ended up having to pay for the front wing to be replaced. I think it must have also been the *Viva* that gave us a bit of a laugh! We'd been up to see my Mum at Ainsdale, in her new house north of Liverpool, and

had a roof-rack on top, because we were picking up one of those stainless steel kitchen sinks. We dutifully tied the sink onto the roof-rack and set off down the Formby by-pass, before turning left across towards Maghull to pick up the motorway link. We were mystified by a slight 'knocking' noise and so pulled over at the side of the road. What had happened was that the plastic sink plug

was hanging down on its chain and gently tapping away on the roof as we drove along!

(Peter Gripton 56B)

To be continued by Peter, but do any other members have recollections about the cars they have owned. Ed.

Unusual Hobby.

Well, I had applied to be Tels when I joined, but the old maths wasn't up to it! No regrets, I enjoyed my time as a VM.

I really started in Radios when I was about 8, destroying my granddad's radio in the process, but I managed to graduate to old tellies as a youngster, doing a spell at a radio shop where I lived, and joining the Radio Club at AAS.

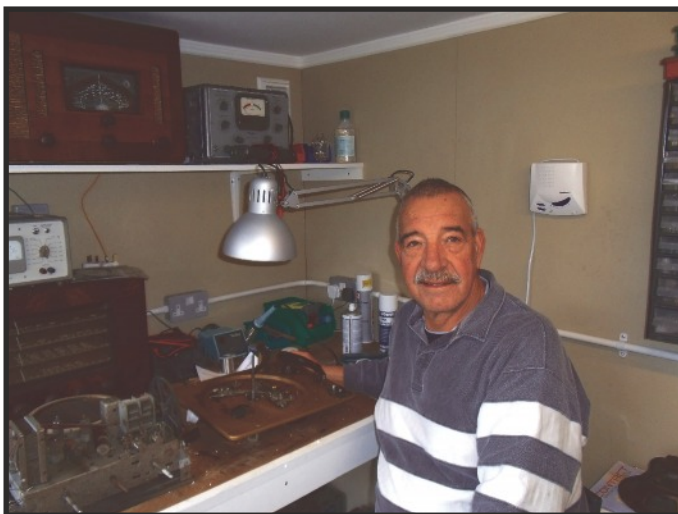
I kept my hand in, my first colour telly success was an old SABA that I got from the annual street chuck-out in Berlin, then I ended up doing sound conversions on Brit and German tellies in both Berlin (AFN) and BAOR, BFBS of course.

After I retired from the police I did repairs self-employed for a while, but the cheap videos and tellies from Tesco put an end to that!

I got interested in vintage stuff after seeing them at the local tip, and a bit of research found me joining a Vintage Radio Society, and going to their auctions, that was 2010 ish, since then the price of everything has rocketed especially on Ebay!

I converted a pigeon loft in the garden with dry lining and a new roof lining, it's not too warm in the winter, but I have heat if I want it.

An old Collaro 78rpm only deck, I managed to get all the parts I needed for it.



Here's a photo of the workshop



Avometer Mk 11. Lovingly restored. Needed with valve circuitry. A modern digital meter doesn't give correct readings.

Valve vintage scope and RF Sig Gen, all in good nick.



Some of my valves, a lot are unused, they include ex-ministry WW2, British and American.



My "homebrew" H.T. (high voltage) power supply, none too tidy, but safely earthed, and needing a front panel and meter when I get round to it!



More sets



John 'Herbie' Cole 66B

My Paris Caper.....

Tales of 'derring do' have figured a plenty in recent copies of OBAN. I really cannot compete with the globetrotting escapades of so many Old Boys but, without travelling to the ends of the earth, I too have 'had my moments'. Although I never saw the sort of action that so many others experienced, my own military endeavours were not without a certain degree of personal stress.

You may say, "What on earth is he blathering on about?" Well, I will now tell you! It all began when, as a none-too-humble Lance Corporal in the King's

Royal Rifle Corps (KRRC), and suffering greatly while trying to teach National Service recruits how to dress properly, tie shoelaces and neckties, I spied an intriguing notice on the Company notice board. (Readers of 'The Arborfield Apprentice' - see page 58 - will recall that John's transfer to the KRRC came through on the day before his 'PoP'. Ed.)

I must confess that reading Company notices was not a regular pastime of mine but, on this occasion, my eyes were drawn to the magical word 'Paris' and my natural curiosity made me give it my full

You may say, "What on earth is he blathering on about?" Well, I will now tell you! It all began when, as a none-too-humble Lance Corporal in the King's Royal Rifle Corps (KRRRC), and suffering greatly while trying to teach National Service recruits how to dress properly, tie shoelaces and neckties, I spied an intriguing notice on the Company notice board. (Readers of 'The Arborfield Apprentice' - see page 58 - will recall that John's transfer to the KRRRC came through on the day before his 'PoP'. Ed.)

I must confess that reading Company notices was not a regular pastime of mine but, on this occasion, my eyes were drawn to the magical word 'Paris' and my natural curiosity made me give it my full attention. It was to the effect that vacancies had occurred for a junior NCO and several Privates, on the Headquarters staff of the Benelux nations. This was the military alliance, which preceded both NATO and SHAPE, and which included Great Britain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands (well, all right then, Holland) and (would you believe it?) - Luxembourg! The HQ was in f The following day, the new arrivals were paraded before our new CO, whose name I am ashamed to admit now escapes me. The unit CSM, a Coldstream Guardsman, told us that he was definitely the man in charge and, thereafter, I seldom ever saw the CO. The function of the British soldiers at the HQ was to supply clerical staff, batmen for the British Officers, and a couple of drivers for everyday transport. I, for my sins and having act situated at Fontainebleau, about forty miles from Paris, and the duties were simply listed as 'Regimental'. The thought of escaping from the training camp, in which I was presently incarcerated, was all I needed to disobey everything I had been taught at Arborfield - and I VOLUNTEERED! My CSM asked me if I had any particular qualifications for the job and I told him that I could at least speak reasonable French.

My name was duly put forward and, after the usual interminable wait, I was sent to London for an interview. Oddly enough, a civilian and an American Army officer conducted this. They asked me questions about my politics, which I told them were non-existent. However, they were very much into the politics business, wanting to know about my parentage, my parents' politics, any relatives living abroad, in fact everything but my favourite colour of toilet paper. (Come on John - that's the one we want to know! Ed.) It seems that they were satisfied as, a few days later, I was told to 'take up my kit and walk'. In London I reported to the RTO at Waterloo Station and was given my rail tickets (civvy-style) to travel on the Golden Arrow express to Paris.

Travelling in style

Luxury travel indeed, as the other occupants of my reserved compartment were two Colonels and a French Army Captain. They politely asked me what the hell I was doing in their compartment but, on production of my travel documents and ticket, they actually became quite chatty. I discovered that they were going to the Embassy in Paris, but learned that I should take a taxi across Paris to the Gare de l'Est, from which I would get the train to Fontainebleau. On explaining that I had no French currency (indeed all I had in my pocket was a couple of quid's worth of change), one of the Colonels handed me a 500 franc note. Now that seemed to me a great deal of money, but I later found out that the rate of exchange was 980 francs to the pound!

In the event, I successfully travelled across Paris, to find six other Riflemen waiting for the train; they had come from BAOR. We all travelled third class on the Fontainebleau thunderbolt, which had narrow wooden slatted seats and no toilets. To cover the forty miles took a little over an hour and a half, just a mite slower than the Golden Arrow. We arrived at Fontainebleau at about 2100 hours, to a deserted station. On recon- noitering outside, I collared an ancient local and enquired politely, "Ou est le Chateau des Fougères, sil vous plait?" He looked at me with a blank expression, leaving me wondering if my French was not as good as I had hoped. It turned out that he was as deaf as I am now, but on showing him the address in writing, he told me that we were only about 300 metres from our destination. So, lugging all our kit, we wearily wended our way to this very imposing building, outside of which stood a tall, stiffly starched and beautifully blanched Military Policeman. "Is this the Chateau des Fougères?" I enquired? He grinned (not a pretty sight on an MP) and said, "No, this is only the entry lodge, the Chateau is at the end of this driveway". The said driveway rose before us at an angle of about 1 in 10 and seemed interminable.

Upon arrival at the building, a RASC Sergeant told us that we were not expected for another week and that there was no accommodation. After hunting around, I managed to get all the Riflemen settled, but sleeping on the floor. The Sergeant then conducted me to my sleeping quarters, on the top floor, which was situated up five flights of stairs. He opened a door and said, "There is a folding bed in here, you can use that for tonight".

On entering, I found myself faced with the said folding bed, minus a leg, plus a row of ten bidets, all neatly arranged along one wall! He then explained that, during the German occupation, the Chateau had been occupied by German Officers and was, in part, conducted as

a bordello. The 'ladies of the night' had occupied the top floor of the building, where I would now rest my weary head.

The following day, the new arrivals were paraded before our new CO, whose name I am ashamed to admit now escapes me. The unit CSM, a Coldstream Guardsman, told us that he was definitely the man in charge and, thereafter, I seldom ever saw the CO. The function of the British soldiers at the HQ was to supply clerical staff, batmen for the British Officers, and a couple of drivers for everyday transport. I, for my sins and having boasted of my linguistic abilities, would be in charge of local purchases, shoe repairs, laundry, liaison with local tradesmen and the collecting of fresh supplies from Les Halles, the Paris equivalent to our Covent Garden at that time. It turned out that I was the only junior NCO, all other NCOs being either Sergeants or Staff Sergeants. They were all in the RASC or Pay Corps and operated in the offices spread throughout the Chateau. I was then given a billet in the general stores, responsibility for which was also thrust upon me, and off we went.

Under Monty's supervision

The whole shebang was being commanded by Field Marshal Montgomery, who occupied a large office on the first floor of the Chateau, while we 'odds and sods' were accommodated in what had once been the servants' quarters. These were a couple of hundred yards from the main Chateau and we saw little of the Officer establishment, other than 'Monty' himself who, when actually at Fontainebleau, took a daily walk around the grounds. He was always civil, always spoke when saluted and often enquired about the health and general well being of the squaddies on site. Monty already had a KRRC batman and a KRRC driver and had apparently requested that his regimental and supernumerary staff should also come from the Corps. "Why?" I never found out.

My week was spent in running around the countryside, dealing with the locals, and collecting bread daily from the local French baker. He baked our bread to an English recipe, using flour supplied by the Army. The bread was good but the baker said he didn't know how we could eat such rubbish! The shoemaker repaired boots for us, using leather soles, studs and heel plates, which I supplied from the stores. I found that, for two extra pairs of leather soles, he would repair my civvy shoes 'free of charge'. The laundry visits always meant sharing a large glass of local red wine with Madame Hamard, the patronne, while stealthily eyeing up the female staff.

On Monday and Thursday mornings, I rose at 0330 hours, had a quick rinse and headed down to the

cookhouse. There, I usually had a large mug of coffee, with maybe just a hint of cognac, plus a steak or double-egg sandwich. Then, with my driver, I left for the market in Paris. On arrival, a strict routine had to be followed - first choose a porter, who, with his big two-wheeled cart, would collect all our purchases. There were many available, but we always used the same one, always haggling over his charge, which he and I both knew would end as 500 francs on Monday and 600 francs on Thursday. This ritual completed, a handshake, followed by a trip to the little bistro to seal the bargain with a cognac all round - for the driver the porter and me.

Then it was down to business. First of all, potatoes then fresh veg, then fruit followed by fresh eggs. Haggling

was at first a problem, as the market traders didn't speak the French I had been taught and which served me so well in Fontainebleau. No, they used the local equivalent to Cockney slang and it took me quite a while to get my tongue round it. Nevertheless, we always managed to get what we needed - and within the budget set. Just as well, as I never carried any money, the bills being settled by an officer in the Catering Corps, who usually arrived just as we were finishing. After delivering the purchases to our Bedford QL, we paid off the porter, who insisted that we join him for a drink. So it was then back to the bistro, where Jacques the porter would order three cognacs, then I would also order three cognacs and, on the odd occasion, the driver would also order (yes, you've guessed!) another three cognacs.

Suitably fortified, we then wended our way through the chaotic Paris traffic, with one hand on the horn all the way, just like every other Parisian motorist. On one occasion, we had been told to detour to the British Embassy to collect an officer's kit for delivery to Fontainebleau. On leaving, we made our entry to the Place de la Concorde, where the driver turned left instead of right onto the roundabout. This was not a good move, as we found ourselves faced by six lanes of traffic, hurtling at speed towards us and honking furiously! After much profanity and not a little sideswiping, we managed to get free of the crush, but my driver swore he would never use that route again.

One of those moments

At the beginning of this tale, I said that I had 'had my moments' - let me therefore describe just one of them. We had been in the market for about ten minutes, when I needed a visit to the pissoir, one of those ornate but half-sized gents' urinals found all over Paris. There one nonchalantly stands, doing what comes naturally, while surveying the surroundings over the chest-high wall. On this

occasion, while I was engaged in relieving myself, a large, rotund French lady (and I use the term loosely!) approached, clutching this enormous cabbage in her meaty hand. Flourishing this under my nose, she demanded to know where else, other than at her stall, could I buy such a beauty for only ten francs? I had by then gotten into the French habit of talking with my hands but, due to the business in hand, felt that I was unable to reply with a suitable gesture at this precise moment!

Another thing about the market, the eggs were never more than half the size we are used to in England. So our allowance, which was numerical rather than by weight, didn't go very far. Our cook told me he needed twelve eggs to make a decent omelette. I did, after filling in reams of paperwork, manage to get this allowance doubled, but often wondered was it worth the effort. I also found that our duty-free cigarettes were a useful form of currency. If you have ever smoked or even smelt original French Gauloise cigarettes you will know just how evil they are.

The French National Servicemen, who were paid the princely sum of seven francs a day (one old shilling a week), were issued with forty cigarettes every two weeks, when they were paid. These were of the Gauloise Troupe brand, made especially for the Forces. They consisted of nothing but tobacco dust and, if you lit one and inhaled, the flame would run the length of the cigarette and burn your nose. The art of smoking one was to angle it upward in the mouth, light it and withdraw the light before inhaling. The 'upward' tilt was to prevent the tobacco simply falling out of the end! National Servicemen in France were paid so poorly to encourage them to sign on, when their pay went up to about 500 francs a day. Of course, the snag was that, as soon as they signed on, they were shunted off on the next draft to Indo-China, where losses of men were astronomical.

Another of my many duties was to prepare the drinks and supervise the waiters at Monty's monthly cocktail party. This was held at his residence, the Chateau de Courances, some distance from the Headquarters. I would be given three French waiters and three of our British squaddies to serve the drinks while I, being bilingual, acted as supervisor. The other part of my duties was to mix the drinks. As about 100 to 120 officers and ladies would be in attendance, I chose to mix the drinks in a sunken marble bath, situated in that part of the Chateau not in normal use. What went into the 'potion' depended entirely on what I had been given by Monty's cook on the particular occasion. There could be cognac, red and white wines, gin, Pernod, Martini and,

sometimes, a bottle of best malt whisky. Whatever it was, I mixed it all in with a large wooden paddle. The resulting mixture was then ladled into large enamel jugs, from where it was served into the glasses. Monty himself always attended, precisely at 6pm, circulating among his guests and departing precisely at 7pm. He did not imbibe my 'magic potion', but a waiter followed him around, bearing a glass of pure orange juice, freshly squeezed, on a silver salver - 'just in case'. On the only occasion he ever turned to take it, a portly Belgian officer beat him to it. Give him his due, he just smiled at the terrified waiter and carried on talking.

The tales to be told would fill a large tome, but one last incident I thought funny needs to be related. At a conference, while supervising the doling out of tea and biscuits, the bar was approached by a very tall, athletic looking American officer, a Captain I believe. Although America was not a partner of the Benelux Agreement, it was American money that funded it and so 'observers' were often present. Anyway, behind this giant figure, pushing through the crowd, came a tiny man, but wearing the uniform of an American Air Force General and the biggest peaked cap imaginable. On his reaching the table, the Captain picked up a plate of biscuits and said, "Hey General, would you like a cookie?" I almost poured hot coffee over myself, as this big, big man owned the highest pitched falsetto voice I have ever heard! The General replied, in a really deep, out-of-your-boots voice, "Not now son, maybe later".

Ooh la lah! We're English!

During my first Christmas in France, a party of ORs, about thirty in number, arranged to visit the Folies Bergere in Paris. This cabaret show was reputed to be the 'only show in town', with scantily clad dancers and - hold it - the odd naked lady! Needless to say, our contingent included six sailors, all signallers, who formed the entire naval contingent at the HQ. They were not stationed at the Chateau, but at a French Army barracks in Fontainebleau. On arrival at the Folies, we all trooped in to the gallery, where we occupied the front row. The show was good, the comedy turns totally unintelligible - but the dancers! Now, that was what the boys had come to see!

During the interval, as is the French custom, everybody tripped off outside as, even in those days, 'No Smoking' was the strict rule in cinemas and theatres across France. We all met in the foyer of the theatre, where the dancers, now offering trays of expensive mementos for sale, paraded around. Upon their seeing a clutch of British uniforms, we were suddenly surrounded by these

e nubile young ladies who, to my great surprise and without exception, turned out to be English! Most of them were 'Brummies' and they explained that the reserved French girls would not strip or wear the flimsy outfits on stage. Needless to say, we really enjoyed the experience (and the show as well).

There are many tales told about Monty, how he was a 'martinet', who hated smokers and drinkers etc. But Jackson (his driver) told me that, when on a long journey by road, Monty would order him to stop about every hour, then dismount from the car and take a walk. Jackson enjoyed a cigarette and Monty knew it, so the breaks were to give Jackson the chance of a quick 'spit and a drag'. Monty didn't drink alcohol, so when the Humber Company presented him with a custom-built Humber Super Snipe, he was more than a bit put out to see that the rear of the front seat opened out into a little bar, complete with glasses etc. Needless to say, the vehicle was returned and altered before he used it.

One day, an order was issued that all we odds and sods would parade for a cross-country run, as the 'big white chief' thought that we didn't get enough exercise. This we duly did and, as we returned to the Chateau, all out of condition and out of breath, several French and Belgian officers catcalled us out of their office windows. Apparently, they were unaware that the big chief was in his office - and overheard them. The following day, a memo was circulated to all officers under the age of 40 years, telling them to parade for an 'exercise run' the next day. We were not supposed to know about this, but the grapevine worked as well as ever. About thirty officers actually attended and took part, with Monty in attendance at the start. Military Policemen were stationed around the route, to ensure that all went well and the Field Marshal was at the finish to see them all return. It was satisfying to note that, if we were deemed 'out of condition', then some of the officers had obviously never been in condition!

We are diminished in more than just numbers.

He came and served while just a boy, to share his youthful years,
The highs, the lows, some tears and joy among his boyhood peers.
And as time passed a bond grew strong, which time would not erase,
It was to last through life, sincere, defying memory's haze

Through three long years those friendships grew, as youth became a man,
The loyalty and trust so true would still continue on.
Despite the different paths of life as each went

I'm all right Jacques!

CSM Hughes, our Coldstream boss, also decided that we Riflemen needed smartening up and so it was decreed that, as he knew nothing about Rifle drill, I should be the one to take a one-hour drill parade once a

week. This meant forming up my little band of warriors and marching them at a respectable 'Rifles' pace - out through the main gates, round the corner into a quiet cul de sac, where we could all fall out and enjoy a quiet smoke! A little way up the road from our quarters stood the Café de Paris, a quite large establishment run by a retired Sergeant Major of the Foreign Legion, Jacques by name. It was popular with our boys, as Jacques spoke quite good English and popular with French National Service men because he often gave them a free bottle of wine. I do suspect that he grossly overcharged our bods, to make up the shortfall, but nobody bothered, as we were quite 'wealthy'. We were given a Local Overseas Allowance of 26/8d a day (£1.33 for the Jeeps among you), which was greatly appreciated, especially as my Army basic pay at that time was only about £2.40 a week. This LOA was supposed to bring our pay up to the equivalent buying power to that in England, but it was complete nonsense of course. In France, clothing was expensive, while a bar of soap was three times dearer than at home. But we didn't really need clothing and we had a small for the bare essentials.

John Maddox 44B

It is my intention to publish some of the articles that are on our website, under the title 'Fond Memories'. I do not know which of these articles have been used before, so I hope you will all bare with me. As there are loads of good stories that I am sure that many of our members who are not on the web have not had the chance to see. Ed.

seperate ways,
The spirit of his youth remained, to cherish all his days.

Yet even though the years may pass, and memories can fade,
Those early days will abide, heartfelt, deeply engraved.
And when his epitaph is seen, with pride it will read thus,

"He was an Army Apprentice - Forever One of Us"

TEE CEE 55A

E-mail to the Editor. From John Worland 52B

After reading Barry Baxter's (57A) 'Recollections of Gun Fitter' (4 parts), I thought I would do a spread sheet of my 3 years as a Gun Fitter (1952 to 55) and see if any Gun Fitters of the 1950's era would like to write in and put me right.

I was posted to Bicester in July 1955 where there was 'Acers' of 25 pdr's and 3.7 A.A. guns.

I was then posted to Malaya in 1956 and never touched any guns. When I was at Bicester I applied

for a Conversion course to guided missiles and 1958 was posted to 4 Batt: for a Conversion course. I then completed my last 4 years in 27 G.W. and left R.E.M.E. in 1962.

The trade training at A.A.S. proved to be useful in my lecturing career for 30 years teaching basic skills at my college to E.I.T.B. students and C.A.A cadets from Bletchley Park

So 'Come on you old Gun fitters' write in.

A.A.S. Arborfield - Sept 1952 to July 1955.

Trade training My Remarks My Thoughts and 'Memories'

Sept 52 to Feb 53, H.Q Company Basic fitting, filing etc **Trade selection period!?** 6 weeks 'Square' bashing, Education & P.T. etc. = **'Trade Selection!!!'. I became a 'Gun Fitter'.** We had 5 squads, 'A' to 'E'. I was in 'E' squad with a 'Cpl of Horse' in charge. I was 3rd smallest at 90lbs & 5ft 2ins

Feb 53 to Sept 53, 2 Division - 'C' Company Basic fitting, filing etc: As I was excused boots for about 6 months because of 'Foot problems' my boot size went from 5 Small to 7 Medium **Passed Army 2nd Class Cert: of Ed: 16 June 1953.** Military training, Education & P.T. etc. This went on right up to 6 Div. 'C' Coy was 'Champion Coy' which lasted right up to July 1955. We had 'Taffy' Hill as C.S.M & Sgt Herbie Payne and a Fusilier Sgt Lawrence known to us all as 'Rastus'.

Sept 53 to Feb 54, 3 Div:- 'C' Coy Arc (2) & Gas (2) Welding, Blacksmithing (5), Tinsmithing (5) = 14 weeks I have combined 3 Div and 4 Div timetable because of my Lathe & M/c tool hand written Notes. D' Coy came into being in about 1954 which meant that to form up the Coy many A/T's & A.T/N.C.O's were transferred into 'D' Coy from all the Coy's.

Feb 54 to Sept 54, 4 Div - 'C' Coy 16 weeks fitting + **11 weeks Lathe work & M/c tools Army Senior Test July 1954 passed 3 subjects** Rifle Drills' started & learning to 'shoot' with rifles, Bren and 'Sten' Guns.

Sept 54 to Feb 55, 5 Div - 'C' Coy 10 or 11 weeks Armaments and the same for R.E equipment was awarded a 'G' Flog. My Uncle who was a boy entrant at Woolwich in 1904 told me that my 'Armaments' notes was the best he had ever seen.

Feb 55 to July 55, 6 Div - 'C' Coy 4 Div filing work again. **Then last 6 weeks 'Battle training!?'.** **Completed my Army Senior Test in Feb 1955, passed 2 subjects.** Passed my 3rd Class Trade Test as a Gun Fitter.

52 weeks - 10 weeks for Xmas, Easter & Summer leave = **21 weeks/Div.** This is for Trade training, education & military training etc: **Which is not a lot of time**

I have a set of 12 Armaments notes & a set of printed notes in their own folders for each Div: from 1 Div to 6 Div

They really are 'Collector items'.

Screwcutting Notes - Better than any 'Text book' ever written. I was an (Eng Lecturer teaching 'Toolmaking'[C & G Parts 3] for 30 years).

Are they still awarded 'G' Flogs in this modern Army? Who knows?

All through my 1955 to 1962 army service I was with National Servicemen. To have an idea what that was like read 'The Best Years of Their Lives' by Trevor Royle

The Arborfield Apprentice - page 121 - July 1955 - A/T Stewart(52B, C Coy) & A/T Endesby, (C Coy, 54?)

They were in the team that won the Southern Command Golf Cup.

Well done John, now lets see how many replies we get. Ed

In Memoriam

Brian 'Clem' Clements 50B

Brian Roger Clements, known to all as Clem, was born in Aldershot on 28th September 1934, the eldest son of Eric Cornelius and Catherine Mary. Due to his father's career in the Army, he started travelling at a very young age when the family went to India in 1936 and from that point on, travelling the world became one of his passions. In 1950, at the age of 16, he joined the Army Apprentices School at Arborfield, his chosen trade being in telecommunications, passing out in August 1953 to join the Corps of REME in the regular Army - regimental no. 22309030. In 1955, he married Elfriede, whom he had met in Bude, Cornwall and together they spent the next 20 years serving in Hong Kong, the Malay Peninsular & Borneo (*where Clem developed a lifelong respect for the Ghurkhas*), Singapore, Cyprus, with the UN, and in BAOR, Germany. Having attained WO I (ASM), he completed the circle by returning to Arborfield as an instructor for a period of about 12 months before finally getting demobbed.

Throughout his Army career, Clem was awarded the General Service Medal 1962 with Borneo and



Malay Peninsular clasps, the Pingat Jasa Malaysia medal, the Long Service & Good Conduct medal, with Gratuity, and the UN Cyprus medal. His military conduct was graded as "exemplary" upon his discharge and in his final assessment, he was described as diligent, loyal and an active supporter of all sporting and social activities.

Once in Civvy Street, Clem decided to channel his love of sports by creating, playing for and managing a football team in the local Northampton town league; Brenor Blades. The choice of team name was an amalgam of Breloh (Elfriede's home town in Germany)) and Northampton (his home town) reflecting the most important thing in his life; his marriage. The love for the family ran throughout the team; apart from being player/manager himself, involved too were his brother Noel and his sons Eric and Pete, whilst daughter Carol was the Team Physio. Elfriede was in charge of laundry !

His other sporting interest, golf, was a constant thread running throughout his life, playing whenever and wherever he got the opportunity. He managed to achieve a hole-in-one on four separate occasions and entered numerous golfing competitions, the highlights of which were coming 3rd in the Tobago Pro-Am in 2000, and winning the Millennium Tobago Pro Am Team Event, also in 2000. In 2001, he won the Weston Golf Day Team Event and came 3rd in the Tobago International Pro Am in 2006.

Initially employed by Radio Mobile in Northampton, he then changed jobs to join Satellite Communications in Daventry and finally for The Electricity Company, until his early retirement due to a back injury.

After retirement, he and Elfriede continued their mutual interest of travel and together visited every part of the planet, taking thousands of photographs which have left a fine legacy for their family. As each grandchild was born, Clem also started using a video camera to record their early years. His joy at the birth of each new child into the family was immense, if only because it gave him someone new to play with!

Clem was also one of the founding members of The Old Grey Horse Club. This small organisation was set up in Northampton in 1986 and was open to all retired ex-REME senior NNCO's, including officers, who had progressed through the ranks. The Club was run along the lines of a Warrant Officer & Sergeants Mess, with a

fa Warrant Officer & Sergeants Mess, with a committee of Chairman, Secretary and Treasurer, of which he served well in all three posts.

His sense of fun was contagious and it was a rare day when he didn't find something to laugh at.

Clem died peacefully in his sleep on 4th September 2014 at his home, after a courageous two year battle against oesophageal cancer. He leaves his widow, Elfriede, four children (*Helene, Eric, Peter & Carol*), and seven grandchildren (*Alison, Louise, Mark, Adam, Ashleigh, Sian & Francesca*) and five great-

grandchildren (*Niamh, Keion, Stefan, Korey & Rafe*).

The funeral was held at The Counties Crematorium, Milton Malsor, near Northampton, and his ashes scattered in the grounds of Northampton Golf Club.

He will be sorely missed by all who knew him.

Kaye Gilpin 52B

Trevor 'Ginge' Walker.

Former Sergeant Trevor (Ginge) Walker died on 4 June 2014, aged 83. Trevor, the third of four children, enlisted in the Army Apprentice College, Arborfield in 1946 at the age of 15, on the advice of his father. In 1949, he transferred to REME and served in East Africa, the Gold Coast as well as within the UK. He became a skilled marksman, as well as a keen athlete who excelled at sprint and hurdles.



He learned Swahili which he took pleasure in sharing with his grandchildren. Trevor always spoke fondly of his time in the Army and of the friendships he made. He was very proud to have been a Sergeant within REME and regretted that he had chosen not to continue with his Army career. He worked in insurance and ran his own successful business for many years. Ginge was also an inventor and had one of his inventions patented in both the UK and America. He sold his business several years ago and it continues to thrive to this day. In 1984, Ginge and his family joined the REME Caravan and Camping Club and had attended over 70 rallies; he would regularly be seen on the field talking with the rally marshals. He will be sadly missed within the Shropshire Branch REME Association as well as the REME Association Caravan and Camping Club. He is survived by his wife, Barbara, children and grand children and our thoughts are with them at this sad time.

By Jim Keen, Chairman Shropshire Branch

Reproduced with kind permission of the Editor of the Craftsman Magazine. Allison Woodley.

Deaths Notified since last OBAN

1400	Richardson	A Alan	44A	18/07/2014
n/k	Lines	T Trevor	60A	29/04/2014
n/a	Mills	RA Reginald	43B	29/07/2014
1406	George MBE	BW Barry	63C	02/07/2014
n/a	Johnson	J Jimmy	86A	02/09/2014
1564	Clements	BR Clem	50B	04/09/2014
2590	Marston	JL	42A	03/09/2014
2517	Mungeam	LM Lesley	57B	10/09/2014
1357	Ward	RH Ronald	42C	14/09/2014
2222	Deane	J Dixie	52B	07/09/2014
1835	Atkins	ER Tommy	42B	n/k
1890	Peers	GH Lofty	44A	18/09/2014
1987	Bowen	R RIP	45B	19/09/2014
n/a	Clarke	A Arthur	37	04/07/2014
1291	Moir	J John	39B	n/k
n/a	Orchard	CA Cyril	51B	31/10/2014
n/a	Osborne	DG David	54B	06/11/2014
1657	Walker	TE Ginge	46A	04/06/2014
n/a	Jones	AC Joe	39C	28/07/2014
2107	West	R Bob	50B	14/11/2014
2486	Clarke	A Arthur	40A	n/k
1026	Gardiner	RA Ronald	46A	22/05/2014
2316	Brown	NM Norman	52A	25/11/2014

