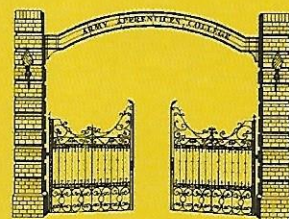


Autumn 2007

Issue 40



O B A N



1957 INTAKES REUNION AT ARBORFIELD JULY 2007

Arborfield Old Boys Association News

www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

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Notices

Please note that the views expressed herein do not necessarily reflect the policy and views, official or otherwise of either the Editor or of the Arborfield Old Boys Association and therefore no responsibility for these will be accepted. All contributions and articles for inclusion in OBAN are most warmly welcomed although text in Microsoft Word format and photos/images in TIFF format are preferred.

Membership of the Arborfield Old Boys Association is open to all those who served at one of the Army Apprentices' Schools or Colleges at Arborfield between 1939 and 2004. There is a joining fee of £15.00 for life membership plus an annual subscription of £10.00. Application forms are available by post from the Membership Secretary whose name and address is shown above.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

At this time of my own life, as with many of you readers, it is sadly not uncommon to hear of comrades falling prey to a terminal illness, or just naturally departing this life. But it is such a shock when someone dies through a tragic accident, such as befell 56B's Rodney Smith towards the end of May. By most normal standards, Rodney had made a small fortune out of his business acumen, but as reported elsewhere, he was able to use his own good fortune for the benefit of others. I would unhesitatingly say that this outlook on life is no rare thing amongst ex-Arborfield boys – and long may it continue.

I'm afraid I had to give this year's Reunion a miss, with family commitments taking precedence. I know that many of the 1957 intakes were in attendance, following strenuous recruiting efforts by the likes of Jim Gardner and Roger Traves – but to the rest of you guys, why wait fifty years before getting things going? Major anniversaries such as the twentieth, thirtieth and fortieth would also attract good attendances, so come on you ex-1988, ex-1978 and ex-1968 lads, start thinking about swelling the ranks of our Association and keeping the dream alive!

Just thinking again about this year's Reunion – I suddenly realised that it was the thirtieth anniversary of the re-birth of the AOBA back in 1977. Our thanks must go once again to all those, such as Barry Keast and Harry Shaw, who were instrumental in getting the Association back on track after many years in the doldrums.

It is quite surprising, but I think this is the first period for a long while that the 'snail mail' system has let me down! By that, I mean that there were hardly any hand-written articles sent in, with just about everything nowadays arriving by either e-mail or on disk. Please let me re-affirm that anything presented in joined-up writing will get the same amount of attention as the electronic stuff! Please keep sending in those letters, articles and photographs – it's the life-blood of your magazine.

Pete Gripton 56B

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Cover Pictures

Front cover picture: **Back row:** Les Fountain, Chris Kemp, Arthur Gibson, Peter Corbett (57B) Mike Carn, Barry Baxter, Keith Allcock, Vince Fuller, Dave Cahill, Peter Mc Guiggan, Tom Webber, Fred Ordynski, Bob Sleep, Les Mungeam

Centre row: Roger Traves, Ray Walker, Peter Drake, Bob Sisson, Mick O'Driscoll, Brad Cockwell, Mick Oulds, Brian Glossop, Ken Wilson

Front row: Jim Woollam, George Vince, Dave Roberts, Tez Cahill, Johnny Glasspool, Herbie Herbert, Derek Wheatland, Jim Gardner, Mick Heslop

Kneeling: Bob Wilcockson, Peter Church, Joe O'Brien **Sitting:** Jim Hynes, Norman Jackson

(40 lads attended the reunion but three are not shown in this photo, they are: Brian Jasper, Robin Coppard and Mike Green)

Back cover picture: The precise ranks of a parade are shown on the old square. On the back of the photograph, written in pencil, is the caption 'Queen's Birthday Parade, Boys' School'. Ray Walker later added 'AAS Arborfield 1958', but it could have been 1959. It was definitely not 1957, as Ray was then at Chepstow. Any observations are welcome!

OFFICERS' REPORTS

Chairman's Message

What an excellent reunion we had - and particularly fortunate in that our invitation to Colonel Richard Bennett, the Corps Regimental Colonel, was accepted. His words after the parade and then his brief talk as the after dinner speaker - updating us on Corps activities - hit the spot with all of us. He has since written to me that he found his participation in our event "enormously enjoyable and an honour and a privilege to speak with so many veterans of the Corps". He particularly enjoyed hearing of the stories of times past in Arborfield and comparing them with the lot of our current junior soldiers. Those of you who were speaking to him after one o'clock on Sunday morning could not doubt his enthusiasm!

Who would have believed that we could be so fortunate with the weather, especially after the torrential downpour that had caused such local flooding, including our own Museum! You may not be aware that Bill Cleasby had been contacting me with updates on his wet-weather plans - constantly changing as the rain cut off parts of the Garrison. As a true and sound ex-apprentice, the last plan of which he spoke was simple, concise and would have been acceptable to us all - "Stay in the Mess and get p-ss-d!" As it was, a record number of us actually got to take part in the parade.

From the Honorary Secretary

Life is slowly getting back to normal, the paperwork has been put away, the 'thank you' letters written and search teams, looking for mislaid items, wound down. Although it is for others to judge, I believe the 2007 Reunion was a great success, despite the weather doing its best to spoil things. It says a lot about the tenacity of the ex-apprentice that so many managed to make it through the floods, with journeys of up to four hours from Wokingham to Arborfield being the norm! I have thanked on your behalf the Regimental Colonel, the RSM for allowing us to use his mess, all of the military volunteers who gave up their weekend leave to help and, of course, the Mess staff. I have also presented Zena, the Mess manageress, with a large bunch of flowers and box of chocolates. I think that you will all agree that they were tremendous. WO2 (AQMS) Graham Robertson needs a special mention, for his quick action in coming to the assistance of Dougie Huxley. However, I think of all the memories that will stay with me was the sight of the 57ers on parade, complete with boaters and anniversary ties. The effort put in by Roger Traves and Jim Gardner, to mark the occasion with a bit of pizzazz, certainly paid off. Just you wait until it is the 61ers turn! Well that's all for now - I have to get back to cleaning up the Prince Philip Hall.

*God Bless
Bill Cleasby 61C*

Recruiting and Membership

As usual, it is good and bad news from the membership desk. The good news is that once again we have over fifty new members joined since the last AGM. Lots of credit go to those 57ers who joined to celebrate their fiftieth anniversary. I hope the 58ers will be just as enthusiastic! On the sad side, we lost twenty-two members, for whom the last post was played at the last reunion. Even so, we still have around eight hundred active members to date. Please remember, if you know the whereabouts of any ex-Arborfield boys, let me know and I will try to contact them.

Best Regards, Fred Mills, 51B

Money Matters

At the AGM in July 2007, it was agreed by those present to raise the annual subscriptions to £15 per year, mainly to cover the increased costs of OBAN production. Those members who pay by Direct Debit need take no further action, as this will be automatically amended. Members paying by Standing Order will receive a replacement form to complete in September 2007. Upon its completion, the necessary action will be taken to complete the link. For those who pay by cheque, please note that subs should arrive at the Treasurer's desk in the month of January 2008.

The good news is that there are no further financial matters rearing their heads! As this will be the last OBAN for the year, may I take this opportunity to wish you all a hearty Christmas and healthy New Year.

All the best, Mike Davis, 60B

Web Developer's Report

Many thanks for all the positive words of encouragement at the reunion, it is very much appreciated. As I write this, our site is back in full operation and I'm now adding new photos and stories. If you have any you wish to add, then send them over. Please remember the 'Awards' and 'A/T RSM' pages - have a look in your copies of Arborfield Apprentice or POP brochures and help fill the gaps. One of the upsides of these pages is that we have been contacted by an ex-A/T RSM who (after his PoP and waiting for a course at SEAE) was on fatigues, dismantling Hazebrook, in 1996. He saw the Award boards being placed in a hanger for storage. This is fresh news to us and is being investigated as I write. So watch this space!

I am delighted to say the AGM confirmed the continuance of the AOBA Forum. Many thanks to the guys who use it - all have shown consideration to each other. There are moderators - but so far they are asleep, as they have no work! Long may that continue.

Over the next few months, it would be a good use of the site to find more ex-boys and to do this it has been suggested each year be listed. This requires someone to visit the Museum, capture each name and provide me with an Excel spreadsheet. Hopefully, by the time you read this, we might have a year or two up so you can get the picture. I am confident this will assist in locating more and more ex-boys. After the show the 57ers gave us at the 2007 reunion, we all have to work hard to maintain their high standard! So come on, get your lists in!

*God Bless,
David (Tich) Schofield, 65A*

2008 OLD BOYS' REUNION

Get your diaries out and make a note that the provisional dates for next year's reunion are from Friday 25th July to Sunday 27th July. Good weather guaranteed!

RECOLLECTIONS OF A GUN FITTER – Part 2

by Barry Baxter (57A)

Post-Arborfield events

January 1960, my first posting – 1 Command Workshop, deepest Catterick. A long overnight train journey with full kit - kitbag, webbing, tin hat and greatcoat. The only thing you didn't carry was a rifle. At the guardroom, I got my first experience of the standard greeting on joining a new unit. (a) "*You should have been here yesterday*". Or (b) "*Who are you? We don't know anything about you*". The CSM liked to interview all new arrivals. Fortunately, I'd been warned about him beforehand. Many of the, shall we say, more mature among you, may remember a TV program called '*The Army Game*', with a character called Sergeant Major Snudge. Well, this CSM didn't just model himself on Snudge - he **was** Snudge! The same voice, the same mannerisms, he even used the catch phrases. Maybe Snudge was modelled on him! All I know is that, when he said, "*I've got my beady eye on you*", if I hadn't been pre-warned, I could have been in serious trouble! He was one of those characters you used to get in the Army.

The accommodation was of the standard spiders, made of corrugated iron. When Snudge was on duty, his idea of Reveille was for the duty driver to drive close to the huts, while he held his stick against the side. Not as musical as a bugle, but very effective! It was a place for first experiences, like being picked up by the RMP for not having my beret on properly. "*Soldier, come here.*" Do they still say that, or has '*Allo 'Allo*' spoiled it for them? One thing puzzles me, what was I doing in uniform? I had a lesson in poker on guard one night, but I couldn't afford to complete the course. My instructor seemed happy though. This was in the days of National Service, when the Army was a past master in the game of 'square pegs in round holes', still is for all I know. At this time, the Army Air Corps was looking for men with aircraft skills. In the workshops we had a *Fairey Aviation* trained airframe fitter, who the Army had, naturally, re-trained as a painter! Thinking about it, the most accurate film on military training I ever saw was '*Carry On Sergeant*'.

I took my fitting test in the Workshops training wing and passed - so now, at last, I was fully qualified. Still learning though! The biggest hole I'd drilled back at the School was about half an inch. Now, I had to drill some flange plates, two-and-a-half inches, on a huge radial drill. Frightened the life out of me! Pay parades were quite a sight at the workshops in those days. The whole unit lined up in a hanger. Even WO2s marched up to the table and 'slung one up' then. Order of pay was by rank, so Craftsmen had quite a wait. Thank goodness my name began with a 'B' or I'd have been going home in the dark in the winter.

They used to run special forces trains then. A forces weekend return, from Catterick Camp to King's Cross, cost 31s 6d in old money. I can remember standing on the platform at King's Cross on a Sunday night, watching the train backing in. If you waited for it to stop, you didn't get a seat.

In June, or maybe July, I was on a detachment to a TA camp at Otterburn, when I was posted to Perham Down near Tidworth on Salisbury Plain. I come from Salisbury, so my thought was "*Great!*" The posting was to 3rd RHA and, when I arrived, I can't remember if I was late or not expected that time, I was told I was going to 'C' Bty, who were off to Aden in September. What did I say on posting from Arborfield? If only I'd known! I had another shock too, when, from an overheard conversation, I found that Eric Granthem, from 'A' Coy in Arborfield, had been killed in a car crash. That shook me, as it was the first close

friend I'd ever lost, made me realise that I wasn't fireproof after all.

Sailing to foreign parts

On September 14th 1960, I sailed from Southampton on the Troopship '*Oxfordshire*'. Well, not just me you understand, there were a few others! It was 14 days to Aden and I was only seasick twice, not too bad I think. The best surprise came three miles out, when fags went down from 3s 9d for 20 to a mere 11d. (*For our younger viewers, that's about 5p!*) To put it into perspective, my pay was then a whopping £7.35 a week. We just missed out on hammocks and had to make do with 3-tier bunks, with at least 2 feet between them. Later on, I would have considered that luxury indeed! Meals were in shifts and we were issued meal tickets in order to prevent 'overeating'. During rough weather, there were always a few hardy souls asking for the tickets of those who, shall we say, had no need of them.

Port Said was an experience not to be missed. Remember, this was only four years after the Suez debacle. A lot of insults were traded back and forth, but the locals didn't let a little thing like a war get in the way of business. The '*Gilli Gilli*' man still came aboard to entertain the troops. Younger readers should ask their Grandfathers, or even Great Grandfathers. The bum-boats still came alongside and threw up their lines with the little bags, to send up their wares and take back the money. The troops responded in their usual friendly way and tied the lines to the ship's rail. Later, on our way down the Canal, one of the Gunners says he saw one of the locals riding a bike along the side, shouting insults at the British - but he didn't watch where he was going. Whoops! He swears it's true but I didn't see it myself. Pity.

Our 14-day cruise was over and we arrived at Aden. I heard a song later, called '*The Barren Rocks of Aden*'. Whoever wrote it had definitely seen the place. Very hot too, but worse was the humidity - it's always 80 or 90. We landed and moved to the transit camp. I looked at a photo of it the other day, but it didn't do it justice, it was much worse than it looked in the photo! Wire fences, standard marquee tents with no sides and iron bed-frames.

All the metal seemed to be rusty. We found a machine that dispensed cold water, but it tasted vile - it's the *Pauldin* they put in to purify it. You got used to it, but at the time you thought, "*I've got to drink this for a year?*"

There were three up-country stations, so the Battery was split into three sections of two guns each. I went to a place called Makieras. We were flown up by *Beverly* transport aircraft, having first drawn weapons. In training, you rarely saw weapons and ammunition in the same place except on the range. Now we were given 50 rounds. Wow! Up-country, if you moved outside the camp area you loaded with a magazine of 10 rounds, real soldiering. Not really, but it kept us happy!

Looking after a pair of 25-pdrs with just a 'B' vehicle driver's toolkit, plus whatever I could borrow from the VM, was a bit of a challenge for a Class III Gun Fitter. Thank goodness for a thorough training at Arborfield. The usual lunatic Army things happen though, to keep us happy. In an attempt to cement relations with the Arab troops, it was decided to fire a gun at the beginning and end of each day during Ramadan. It proved too expensive in ammunition though, not difficult to work out I would have thought. So, by the end, it had degenerated to a 'thunderflash' in a dustbin.

One somewhat spectacular incident was down to me. We'd just come off an op and I was helping to unload one of the gun tractors. I picked up a box of cartridge cases and something started hissing. I mentioned this - and suddenly I was on my own! I was standing near the cab and I can remember hitting the ground behind the tailboard, but I don't remember stepping on the tractor body on the way. I distinctly remember seeing a gunner a 100 yards away, hiding behind a dustbin. When nothing happened, we crept back and found that, when I had picked up the box, I'd turned the valve on my compressed air bottle! They forgave me eventually.

Being the British Army, we had a dog, naturally. I can't remember him as a pup, so we must have inherited him from our predecessors. It was a fair deal. He got fed, a choice of beds to sleep on during the day and, at night, he kept the wild dogs out and went round with the guard on stag. During the day it was very hot - a dry heat - but at night it was freezing, literally 'ice on the fire buckets' cold. We used to have four blankets and our greatcoat on our beds, while on guard you wore all you could get under a greatcoat. The dog used to come round on stag most times but, like us, he used to get bored and expected us to provide entertainment. He had a good life. Mind you, his pension plan wasn't up to much! One of his games was to grab the hem of your greatcoat and expect you to swing him round. I've still got my greatcoat, dollied of course, with the stitching round the hem where I had to repair it after playing with the dog. I can still get my greatcoat on too, but only if I take everything else off - not very practical!

One of the ambitious things our 'Lords and Masters' tried was to get us to challenge in Arabic on guard. We were supposed to say, "*Halt, who goes there?*" three times and then, if the intruder was still around, "*Halt or I'll shoot to kill*". Now, that's a mouthful in English, never mind Arabic. The only time it was used in anger, so to speak, it came out as '**Bang!**' "*Who went there?*" Nobody apparently, no body anyway. The dog, who was off stag, had growled but it may have been a wild dog. He considered them much more important than a human intruder.

Dress in Aden was KD, which had to be starched. I saw the 'dhobi whalla' doing it once. He had a huge iron, with a charcoal fire in it, and a bowl of starch mixture. He took a big mouthful of the mixture and spat it in a fine spray over the KD, following up with the iron. It worked though, you practically had to use a hammer and chisel to open them enough to get them on. One thing we learnt at Makieras was the habits of birds called kites, although they were known to us as 'shite-hawks'. The cookhouse was a small, wriggly tin hut, about twenty yards from the tent we ate in, you could hardly call it a dining room. We were civilised though, as we had plates. Walking from the cookhouse to the tent, there'd be a blur of feathers and talons over your shoulder and hey, you had a vegetarian meal. We soon learnt to walk in pairs, watching each others backs. Good military training - but not the enemy we'd expected! The only time I saw them fooled was with mincemeat. I was left with furrows ploughed through my dinner and a very surprised kite flying away.

One of the few bits of special kit I had was the long-lived air-bottles and those horrible copper air-lines, fortunately not so long-lived. The RAF then helped enormously by deciding that they didn't like high pressure bottles in their aircraft and let most of the air out before they flew them up, very useful! The answer the 'powers that be' came up with was to raid a museum and send up the old hand operated air-pump they used in the war. Although the one I got seemed brand new, just in heavy preservation mode. It brought a smile to the old sweats faces, mainly because the old sweats were now sergeants and wouldn't

have to do the pumping. I got it going but, before we used it in anger, the RAF relented and started flying up full air-bottles.

I was sent back 'down country' with a skin complaint and, because they had nothing for me to do, they hired me out to 52 Cmd Wksp. When I first turned up, there was no-one in the gun shop, so they sent me to the Armourers' shop. There were two Craftsmen repairing SLRs and they invited me to join them, so I did, asking lots of questions and receiving some strange looks. When their sergeant turned up, it came to light that they thought I was an Armourer. When they found I wasn't, the rifle was snatched out of my hand and I was reduced to one stage above tea-boy! I was pleased to note though that the rifles that I'd repaired, although they were carefully inspected, had no further work done on them.

It was about this time that my girlfriend sent me a chocolate Easter egg, sea mail. Now it gets rather hot in the hold of a ship in the Red Sea, so what I ended up with was an odd shaped bar of chocolate. I was sent back up-country, this time to a place called Ataque. (*I've no idea if that's the correct spelling.*) From there, we used to go to a place we called 'QBM', for live firing. I must set the scene for this next adventure. Picture a pair of 25-pdrs, the two No.1s are a Sergeant and a Bombardier. An old sergeant is 'gun position officer' and an OP officer is on a hill behind the guns. In the immortal words of Jethro, "*What happened was*" - the sergeant No.1 had an attack of the lunacies and decided that the sight graduations were 10 yards. They were actually 100 yards. This meant his gun was laid at 300 yards instead of 3000 yards, as it should have been. It didn't need an Einstein to work it out, but this is the RHA in 1960, and how can a Bombardier be right and a Sergeant wrong? While they were scratching their heads, the signaller got "*Fire!*" from the OP and told the old sergeant. Unfortunately for him, the sergeant No.1 was ranging gun and first to fire. His brain clicked into gear, or not as the case may be, and he shouted, in one breath, "*Fire! Oh no, stop! F*** me, I'm posted!*" The layer had been looking forward to this and gleefully banged down the firing handle before anyone could stop him and away went the shell. Barnes Wallis would have been proud, as it put the bouncing bomb to shame. But this was a private party, so nothing happened and the old sergeant didn't get posted.

Into Africa

Finally the year was over and it was down to the docks to meet the Troopship '*Navasa*', on its final trip and carrying the rest of the Regt and so on to Mombassa, Kenya. The only thing I remember about that short trip was all those squaddies with lots of notes to spend and the ship's bar having no change. From Mombassa, it was a 24-hour train journey to our new home, a place called Gil Gil. On the train, we found the first curiosity of Africa, African style toilets, which consisted of two foot-shaped tiles on either side of a hole in the floor. Fortunately for our sensitivities, there were also European-style ones. When you think where we'd been the past year, what were we worried about?

Gil Gil turned out to be a small town and the camp quite reasonable. We shared it with the 'Duke of Boots' and we got the best of the deal. They got the mud huts and we got aluminium '*Twynam*' huts with flagstone floors. We also got hordes of insects at no extra cost. One that springs to mind was a large beetle with huge pincers. They wandered around aimlessly during the day but at night they flew. Their navigation was terrible though. You heard one droning along, then a loud clang as it ran into the side of the hut. You found them afterwards, wandering round in circles. It kept us amused for ages, but then

we were simple lads.

The order of dress laid down was KF shirt, PT shorts and socks rolled down. Not long after we'd arrived there, I was talking to one of our sergeants when the T/Q walked by. He'd obviously not read orders and said to me, "*What kind of dress is that for the tropics?*" It would have carried more weight if it hadn't been freezing cold and pouring with rain! The RHA kept our spirits up with such eminently sensible orders as "*Officers will be saluted at all times, even while passengers in cars or aircraft*". Well you can't argue with that can you? So when we were marching back from the LAD one day, and a light aircraft flew over, naturally the Corporal gave the order "*Eyes up!*" – and not a man held back. Monty Python would have been proud, if he had been around then!

We had a very nice Christmas do in the LAD, 1963 I think. Considering how I finished the evening, I think not being sure of the year is perfectly understandable! It started very respectably, with a sit-down meal, but later, once the drinking games had started, well. We had an 'Emlet' at the time and I think his manual must have said, "*You should join the other ranks on festive occasions*". What it obviously didn't say was, "*Make sure your glass isn't bigger than everyone else's*". He didn't last very long! The EME, as befits a more experienced officer, had vanished before things really warmed up. For the rest of evening, I have to rely on second-hand information, but I'm assured that I enjoyed myself! I didn't enjoy the next day quite so much - I was on cookhouse fatigues, not a good day really.

One incident, which showed the skill of the fire crews, was when a hut caught fire outside the fence. The water source was inside so, while some went out, others fed the hose through the fence to them. More hose was called for and another length was fed through and connected. Unfortunately, the two ends were from the same length of hose, which was pulled round in a circle until someone noticed. Luckily, the only casualty was the hut!

The Regiment ran a stable with some ex-polo ponies, which anyone could hire for 3s an hour. That would get you about ten seconds now, but lots of the LAD used to go. Mind you, if you fell off, the horse was off like a rocket and you walked back. A few of us stuck at it and the Farrier took pity on us and taught us to ride properly, well to a certain extent. We even had some riding boots made in the town, but the cobbler, while cheap, wasn't all that good and they looked like leather Wellington boots. They did the job though. I'd managed to go all through this without falling off once, so the Farrier, who wasn't going to let me get away with that, asked, "*How would you like to learn to jump?*" My God, I made up for it then! I seemed to spend most of the time hanging upside down, with hoofs flashing past my head and him shouting, "*Let go! Let go!*" Sod that! I never did get the hang of jumping. I did survive though, so I suppose that was a bonus, and I did have a greater respect for show jumpers.

The Regiment was due to change to the 105mm pack howitzer soon and one of the T/Q staff came to me with a list of parts to see if I could identify them. I'd done a course on them before we left England - course No.1 though and you know how useful they are! His list was a page full of NATO part numbers and every designation was "*Spring*". I resisted the temptation to say, "*They're springs*" - I don't think his sense of humour would have stood up to it.

In May 1962, I was off to Aden again, this time with 'J' Bty. No troopships now, instead we flew in a shiny new *Argosy*. Still *Beverlys* and *Twin Pioneers* in Aden though and once even a *Valetta*. For any younger people who've wandered in, the *Valetta* was old even then. Still 25-pounders as well. I went to Makieras

again, maybe they thought I was the expert. Life was much the same as the first time. Then, just as I thought it was getting boring, the Army came up trumps again. This time, we were on an op when one of the 3-tonners broke a spring. Not an unusual thing in this kind of country and we carried spares, but these had been used, so another was flown up by 'Teeney-weeny Airways', our name for the Army Air Corps. They had a love-hate relationship with the RAF who reckoned, "*They don't land, they have controlled crashes*". Perhaps it was more a hate-hate relationship? I think it was sour grapes actually, because the RAF didn't have such dinky little planes! Anyway, the spring was flown up in a *Beaver* and, wrapped in sacking, was thrown out. The phrase, 'Barren rocks of Aden' is not just poetic licence. We managed to find most of it, but as a spring it was on par with the *Monty Python* parrot! They were requested to deliver the replacement by parachute.

I was at Makieras when the 25-pdrs were replaced by the 105mms. The gunners spent ages cleaning them before they handed them in. Knowing what was to happen to them, I kept quiet. I flew down with them in a *Beverly* and saw them loaded onto a float, to be taken out into the bay and dumped overboard, together with all the other guns, plus all the tools and spares in the colony. Not long after that, 52 Cmd Wksp was lumbered with 20-plus 25-pdrs. "*Can you overhaul these please, we're selling them?*" What with? They'd just thrown all the tools and spares in the sea. Clever!

I went up country again, this time to Dhala, where I watched the gunners trying to fathom out how to move the pack howitzers. You can't tow them with the ¾-ton *Land Rovers*, or anything else for that matter. If you give them a dirty look, they roll over and die. They tried stripping them into their pack loads and putting it all in the *L/Rover*. No go. A *L/Rover's* springs are meant to curve up - not down. They even tried camels, but some of the bits were too much for a camel. One gunner told me that one camel, carrying the load crossways, collapsed between two rocks and was left suspended, and not very happy about it. I can't remember how they solved the problem - in fact I can't remember seeing them moved at all.

While I was at Dhala, the gunners had a young officer (says me, who was at least 21!). I suppose he was the RA equivalent of an Emlet. Anyway, he took it into his head to top up the buffer on one of the guns. You did this by filling a type of screw jack with oil and using it to force the oil in against the buffer spring. (The same system they used on the 60-pdr in the 1st World War, but that's progress for you.) He had a couple of gunners as an audience, who got more than they bargained for. As he unscrewed the end cap, the valve came off with it and he and his audience got a face full of oil! When they looked again, the bit they'd been working on had vanished. Now, as old desert hands will know, and a lot of young ones these days, when you drop something in the sand, it immediately crawls away, under the sand, and is never ever where you saw it fall - and they hadn't even seen it fall. They'd been there ages when I came along and showed them the missing part inside the buffer housing, where it was meant to go when it lost oil. The gunners thought the officer an idiot, not realising they'd been none the wiser themselves.

That was the last of Aden for me, so it was on to the *Argosy* and back to Kenya. We were part of 24 Brigade, an air-portable formation, which seems to mean that you carry three times as much kit as normal. On one parade, an officer told us that they allow over 300lbs for a man and his kit and one giant of a gunner said plaintively, "*But I weigh 240 before I start*".

In 1963, Iraq threatened Kuwait. Sounds familiar? We all went rushing off to Nairobi, staggered on to a *Beverly* with all

our kit, flew round in a circle and landed again. That was our contribution to world peace, and we all went home again. Well, when I say 'home', I mean as in back to Gil Gil. It was on the ranges at a place called Nathanga that we got most fun though. Even getting there was an achievement, as the guns were still averse to being towed on anything except a billiard table. We managed to get most of them there though, so the fun could start.

While I'm on the subject, the 'book of words' for the pack howitzer said, "*Thou shalt not weld the shield*". Not a problem so far, as nobody's wanted to. But now the CO wanted brakes fitted to them, to carry cam net supports, and we found we couldn't drill the shields. So the CO said, "*Weld*". Now, he's the boss - so we did - and they all cracked. So that's why they said don't weld. I don't know if he got the bill!

Of the sagas on the gun positions, one I was only told about but, in the light of what I did see, it seems very likely, so I'll pass it on. The guns were ready to fire, waiting only for the order, "*Fire*". On the gun position was an officer named Squires. Somebody called him. Need I say more? A similar incident I can swear to - I was there. Again, the guns were ready to fire, when for some reason they were stopped and given, "*Detachments rear*". This means they move back and wait for the order, "*Take post*". In the Artillery, they don't have crews, they have detachments. They say it's so they don't get mistaken for those common tank people, who do have crews. The order came and five detachments rushed to their guns, but one hadn't heard. So the order was repeated, followed by five bangs and a voice saying, "*He did say fire didn't he?*" "*That wasn't supposed*

to happen", said the gun position officer, or certainly words to that effect anyway.

The luckiest No.1 was on a dry shoot, when they go through the motions but, instead of firing, they all shout "*Bang!*" Well, if they're in the mood anyway. They'd done this all morning, stopped for lunch (they're posh in the RHA), then started again. On the first gun to fire, the No.1 shouted "*Misfire!*" The others laughed, until it dawned. "*You haven't loaded have you? We're still dry shooting*". Lucky or what?

So now our time in Kenya was ending. With National Service still on during most of our tour, there weren't many left who came out with 'C' Bty in 1960, only about half a dozen of the LAD. We came close to having some National Servicemen left when the last intake had an extra six months added to their time. That really cheered them up! They asked each of us if we would like to waive our right to go home and stay with the Regiment. They can't really have been surprised when we all said, in a polite way of course, "*NO WAY!*" So it was a minibus to Nairobi, with a side trip to the MI room first, for 'Medical Supplies'. Then it was off to the airport and onto a *Britannia* for the six-and-a-half hour flight to Blighty. We even cheered when they announced it was raining in England! We landed at Stansted, then consisting of a few Nissen huts staffed by two men and a dog, although it was the dog's day off. The September weather was a shock to the system but, what the hell, we were home.

(Thanks for sharing your memories with us Barry - and in such a humorous fashion too. Readers will no doubt look forward to 'more of the same' in future issues of OBAN. Ed.)

2007 Reunion Roll Call

Dougie Huxley	PS	George Oliver	45A-A	Keith Tilly	51B-A
Gerry Johnson	39A-A	Don Hipkin	45A-B	Alan Morton MBE	51B-B
Wally Footner	39A-B	Eddie Johnston	45A-B	Fred Mills	51B-B
Steve Stephenson	39A-B	Keith Evans	45A-B	George Fleck	51B-B
George Streeter	39B-A	Eddie Broomfield	45A-B	Arthur Fenlon	51B-C
Les Dangerfield	39C-D	Edward Grant	45A-C	Peter Smith	51B-C
George Hougez	42A-C	Doug Kew	45A-C	Percy Thrower	52A-A
Lawrence Nixon	42A-C	Dick Manning	45C-X	Frank Bass	52A-A
Keith Hadaway	42C-A	Peter Horwood	46A-B	Ken Byford	52A-B
Alan Pritchard	42C-C	Les Bax	46A-X	Terry Reddin	52A-C
Ron Ward	42C-E	Neville Kay	46B-C	Eddie Hind	52A-C
Jim Macdonald	43A-A	John Smithson	46B-C	Kaye Gilpin	52B-C
John Dutton	43A-A	Roy Jones	46B-D	Richard Barnett	52B-X
Les Scapens	43A-B	Terence Lackey	47B-A	David Higman	53A-B
Stan Bates	43A-C	John Roden	47B-A	Carl Hayhurst	53A-B
Doug Boucher	43A-D	Gordon Bendall	47B-A	Derek Slocombe	53A-X
George Dixon	43B-A	Tony Hoare	47B-A	Clive Young	53A-X
John Horwood	43C-D	Stan Horne	47B-A	Michael Costanzo	53B-B
Rod Crowder	44A-A	Robin Loader	47B-A	Dennis Elshaw	53B-A
Colin Williams	44A-A	Dudley Wood	47B-C	Arthur Hodgkins	53B-B
Pat Patterson	44A-A	George Byrne	48A-A	Douglas Matthews	53B-C
Ken Jenner	44A-B	Joe Sobolewski	48A-B	Bob Driscoll	53B-D
Alex Bax	44A-B	Ray Derrick	48B-A	Bob Bailey	54A-A
Len Poulton	44A-C	Joe Young	48B-C	Allan Delbridge	54A-A
John Maddox	44B-A	Dick Wright	49B-C	Dick Wales	54A-B
John Brown	44B-A	Max Warwick	49B-C	Donald May	54A-C
Syd Kite	44B-A	Pete Henry	49B-C	John Rainey	54A-D
David Ferns	44B-B	Tony Hughes	50A-B	Roy Durston	54B-B
Bill Tate	44B-B	Tom Lennox	50B-C	Mick Toogood	54B-C

Brian Edminson	54B-C	Jim Fox	57B-D	Byron Hooper	66C-C
Denis Farrell	54B-D	Keith Allcock	57B-X	Frank McKenna	66C-D
Jim Ashworth	54B-D	Marshall Day	58A-A	Nigel Wickenden	67A-B
Dick Glistler	54B-D	Barry Lucas-Carter	58A-C	Lofty Ballard	67A-D
Tony Church	55A-B	Paul Hudson	58A-D	Jack Shram	67C-A
David Naylor	55A-C	John Kelsey	58A-D	Rick Lavis	68B-B
John Lee	55A-C	David Jackson	59C-A	Robby Ware	69A-D
John Howes	55B-A	Alan Harris	59C-C	Mark Plimmer	69C-A
John Harte	55B-B	Trevor Guest	60A-B	Mike Wherton	69C-A
John Reynolds	55B-C	Garry Middleton	60A-D	Dave Mills	69C-C
Geoff Knox	55B-D	Terry Harris	60B-A	John Andrusiak	70B-B
Steve Shaw	55B-D	Mike Davis MBE	60B-A	Phil Graham	71C-A
Sam Beatson	55B-D	John Crowther	60C-D	Bryan Mansfield	77C-D
Russell Dodds	56B-B	Alistair White	61A-A	Steven Thornes	77C-D
Larry Jarvis	56B-B	Chris Rhodes	61A-D	Kim Pullen	77C-D
Syd Urwin	56B-C	Dick Shephard	61B-B	Skunk Tyler	79C-C
Brian Glossop	57A-A	Brian Hutchins	61B-B	Eggy Eggleton	-A/HQ
Bob Sisson	57A-A	Rob Dyer	61B-B	Bill Gibson	A-A/D
Robin Coppard	57A-A	Ray Doughty	61B-B	Mitch Mitchell	A-B/C
Brad Cockwell	57A-B	James Ainslie	61B-C	Michael Grantham	A-B/D
Mick O'Driscoll	57A-B	Laurie Blakley	61B-C	Bill Smith	A-B/D
Jim Gardner	57A-B	Phil Dixon	61C-B	John Moir	A-B/E
Kenneth Wilson	57A-C	Bill Cleasby MBE	61C-D	Tony Guy	A-C/A
Ray Walker	57A-C	Ian McDonald	61C-D	Trevor Stubberfield	A-C/D
Jim Woolam	57A-C	John Swarbrick	62A-A	George Wooley	A-D/C
Roger Traves	57A-C	Ian Tilson	62A-B	Arthur Sainsbury	B-B/E
Pete Drake	57A-C	Davey Stewart	62C-B	Arthur Ward	B-D/A
Vince Fuller	57A-C	Terry O'Sullivan	62C-B	Gordon Bonner	B-D/B
George Vince	57A-D	Ken Reece	63C-C	John Cassells	B-D/C
Bob Sleep	57A-D	Brian Whitbread	63C-D	Mike Funnell	B-E/B
Tom Webber	57A-D	Tony House	64A-A	Fred Brunger	C-C/B
Peter Corbett	57A-X	Peter Howes	64A-A	Larry Le Var	-HQ/C
Arthur Gibson	57A-X	Andy Knowles	64A-D	Erington Keen	-HQ/C
Les Fountain	57A-X	Ray Stevens	64C-B		
Chris Kemp	57A-X	Alec Powell	64C-B	<i>Apologies for non-attendance were</i>	
Barry Baxter	57A-X	Eric Senior	64C-D	<i>received from:</i>	
Dave Cahill	57A-X	David Schofield	65A-A	Bob Dougall	39A
George Timms	57A-X	Chris Patton	65B-B	Bert Kelly	39A
Mike Green	57A-X	Bernie Humphreys	65C-A	Peter Spargo	39A
Jim Hynes	57B-A	George Henderson	65C-B	John Wintle	39C
Derek Wheatland	57B-A	Dave Cosway	65C-B	Charles Pepper	43B
Robert Wilcockson	57B-A	Peat Marsh	65C-D	Eddie Edwards	46B
David Roberts	57B-A	Bev John	66A-D	Harvey Liddell	46B
Fred Ordynski	57B-A	Bob Preston	66A-D	Charley Ayre	50B
Tez Cahill	57B-A	Rob Southcott	66B-A	Graham Goodwin	51B
John Glasspool	57B-A	Ray Younger	66B-A	John Williams	52A
Mike Oulds	57B-B	Don McCulloch	66B-A	Ben Hebden	54A
Eric Broomhall	57B-B	Andy Dickson	66B-A	Pete Gripton	56B
Mike Heslop	57B-B	Herbie Coles	66B-A	Paul Wiggins	58A
Peter Church	57B-B	Tony Higgins	66B-D	Mike Cheeseman	62C
Brian Jasper	57B-C	John Wright	66B-D	Robin Cooper	64B
Peter McGuiggan	57B-C	Brian Greenhorn	66C-A	Peter Chetwynd	64C
Mike Carn	57B-C	Bob James	66C-A	Gazza Chapman	78C
Jacko Jackson	57B-C	Alina Wicks	66C-C	Gary Cooper	85A
Les Mungeam	57B-D	Lyle Shore	66C-C	Wayne Cooper	87B
Herbie Herbert	57B-D	Egon Taska	66C-C	Nigel Moore	PS
Peter Corbett	57B-D	Bill Everett	66C-C	Hugh McCutcheon	PS

THE 1957 INTAKES 50th ANNIVERSARY

by Roger (Trixie) Traves (57A)

On Friday 20th July 2007, the heavens opened up with a deluge of rain, whilst hundreds of Arborfield Old Boys were making their way to Arborfield Garrison for the 44th AOBA Reunion, including forty from the 57A and 57B intakes. The lads had travelled from all four corners of the world, only to find that all roads leading into Arborfield were cut off by floodwaters! Many also got caught up in the UK's road, rail and airports infrastructure failures. I phoned Bill Cleasby from Wokingham and got the bad news that the Prince Philip Hall at the REME Museum of Technology was under two feet of water and that a wheelie-bin had just floated past his window! Bill's advice was to 'stay where you are, have a cup of tea and try to get in later'. Why do we always solve our problems with a cup of tea? Mick Heslop and I decided to leave Wokingham and drive through two to three feet of water on the Barkham Road. Thankfully we made



Mick Heslop trying to get to Arborfield past the floods on the Barkham Road

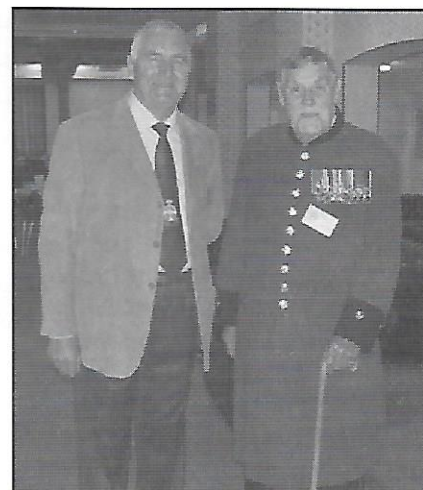
it and eventually arrived in a water drenched Garrison. It was now too late for us to visit the *Bramshill Hunt*, our agreed meeting point, before booking into camp. However, we found out later that quite a few managed to get there on time. Those stalwarts with water wings were Peter Corbett (57B), Fred Ordynski, Jim Woollam and I believe a few others.

I must report that Eric Broomhall was the only 57er who was AWOL because of the floods. Eric was driving for ten hours attempting to get into Arborfield, he even tried to get to his sister's place, close to Arborfield, to stop the night and arrive Saturday morning. No luck, so he headed back to Kent, totally dejected (and that's putting it politely!). The rest passed their initiative test and got into Arborfield, albeit some arrived late or got in on the Saturday. Chris Kemp, who travelled in from Germany, asked for transport from Wokingham station. "Sorry, no chance" was the answer, so what did he do? Yes he walked in and, when he got to the floods on the Barkham Road, he politely took off his shoes and socks, rolled up his trousers and waded across to a waiting taxi, which delivered him to the Guardroom. What a sham - I thought he could walk on water! The Sgt's Mess Annex, where most of the 57ers had booked their accommodation, was flooded, so hastily they were transferred into the transit accommodation. It was like old times as the lads were allocated bed spaces in ten and four men rooms. After getting unpacked, beds made up i.e. duvets and pillows into covers (what no blankets and bed blocks?) and block jobs done, it was time to literally paddle across to the Mess.

It was surprising to find it already reasonably busy,

considering that the Garrison seemed marooned from the rest of civilisation! Once the drinks were ordered, the albums and odd photos appeared, jogging memories into yesteryear. It was soon noticed that these strange men in scarlet tunics were sat next to us - yes, Chelsea Pensioners. "Bloody hell, that's Dougie Huxley, Grenadier Guards, our CSM of 'C' Coy!" Needless to say, much time was spent reminiscing with Doug about drill and Company life.

In the photo, two 'C' Coy CSMs were reunited - A/CSM Dave Cahill (57A) and CSM Dougie Huxley. Later on in the evening, after most had just about recognised their ageing buddies and the drink had loosened their tongues, the lamps never stopped swinging. During all this, Jim Gardner and I were trying to kit the 57ers out with their



50th anniversary ties and Panama hats, ready for the Saturday parade. Before we knew it, it was 1a.m. and time for bed. In our ten-man room, we couldn't get to sleep because of the noise coming from the other side of the room. I went to investigate, with the intention of shutting them up, but when I saw Johnny Glasspool, Derek Wheatland and Tez Cahill dancing around virtually naked with just T-shirts on, I couldn't stop laughing! 'Lugs' Roberts had just given the T-shirts to them. On the front was '1957 50th Anniversary Reunion 2007', also the AAS badge and 57B. On the back, was a photo of the lad when he was fifteen, with his name, trade, Coy and 57B. Herbie Herbert and I got one as well, but mine had Jim Woollam's photo on the back, with the name 'Trixie'. Reluctantly I gave my T-shirt to Jim, because it was his photo on it - and it was him that got me the nickname of Trixie in the first place! So it's not 'Mary Woollam' anymore, it's now Trixie Woollam. Got my revenge at last! Well done, Lugs, for designing the T-shirt and surprising the lads, we might get some more shirts made for our 50th anniversary with the Hadrians Old Boys (HOB) at Carlisle.

We woke up on Saturday morning to find the floodwaters had



Tez Cahill, Derek Wheatland, Dave Roberts, Johnny Glasspool, Herbie Herbert

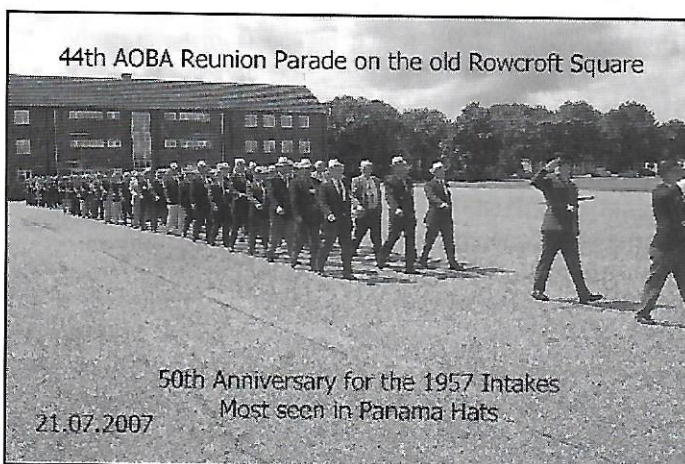
receded enough for us to use the path around the lake, which is a shorter route to get to the Mess for our breakfast. After a good hearty breakfast, it was time to disappear and get dressed ready for parade. During this time, more old boys were arriving, including some of our 57ers - Robin Coppard, Brian Glossop, Keith Allcock and Joe O'Brien. Unfortunately, some of those who said they were attending, couldn't for several reasons - they were George Timms, Jim Fox, Jim Hamill, Peter Corbett (57A) and Johnny Pover. However lads, hope you can manage to get to next year's reunion, love to see you there. Transport was laid on to take some to Rowcroft Barracks for the parade, but unfortunately old Dougie Huxley slipped getting into the minibus and gashed his leg badly. First Aid was soon at hand to stop the bleeding but eventually it was decided that he would have to go to hospital. What some people will do just to miss a parade never ceases to surprise me! You never taught us that one Dougie, when you were CSM of 'C' Coy. Joking apart, Dougie got back to us nicely patched up in time for the dinner evening. The rest of us managed to negotiate the footbridge, avoid several large puddles and the mud-laden paths, walking into Rowcroft Barracks. We congregated behind the old HQ Coy block at the top end of the old square, which we use to pound daily in the late fifties - and maybe on Saturday afternoons for *Rodeo* if you were found to be idle. Our reminiscing soon stopped when we heard what we thought were two very nice REME Warrant Officers, CSM David Williams and RQMS Richard Dickson barking out "*Get fell into three ranks!*" That sounded a bit familiar! Before we knew it, we were marching onto the square behind the

the two minutes silence. The service continued with The Lord's my Shepherd, Prayers, the National Anthem and concluded with the Blessing.

Fortunately the weather held just long enough for everyone to get to the barbecue, again held in the School of Electronic and Aeronautical Engineering (SEAE) Regimental Restaurant. Everyone by this time was gasping for a drink and the beers were soon flowing well. The barbecue had just started when Paul Tyrell the photographer decided that he needed to get all the 57ers together outside on the steps for a group photograph while the weather held. Some had to be pulled out of the food queues and others from their meals they had already started. After a bit of moaning (in a joking manner of course!) "*Do we have to?*", thirty seven of us 57ers assembled for the photo, which turned out to be a series of photos, because everybody brought their own cameras with them. Photos completed, everybody returned to enjoy the barbecue. Recharged with beer, the photo albums came out again and our thoughts switched back to our younger years when the Army practised baby snatching. Whilst the reminiscing continued, nobody noticed that the heavens had opened up again. It continued to rain until 4pm, while most were visiting the SEAE Workshops, REME Museum and Shop. Afternoon tea in the Restaurant was followed by the AGM in the Lecture Theatre. This followed the usual format, with a couple of points to note:

1. No decision has yet been made when the Arborfield Garrison will close. However, it is likely to remain open for several more years, so hopefully our reunions can continue at Arborfield until REME finally move to their new location.

2. It was unanimously voted that the AOBA annual subscription be increased from £10 to £15 starting from next year. After 'any other business', Fred Ordynski (57B) presented a plaque and letter to the Chairman on behalf of the RAEME Association, Western Australia (WA) Branch. Fred some months ago asked his Committee if he could purchase a plaque to present to the AOBA as a memento of his visit. The President, John Klein, said that they "*could do better than that*". The



Reading Pipe Band, some of us in step and swinging our arms, but the pace was a bit slow for us young fit uns of 57 era. The Reviewing Officer this year was Col Richard Bennett MVO, the Regimental Colonel for the Corps of REME and he was accompanied by our AOBA Chairman, Col Brian Hutchings, the parade commander, Col Peter Gibson and the Corps ASM Jim Walker for the review. A relaxed inspection took place, with many a joke and serious accounts of past service. Col Richard addressed the parade before taking the salute for the march past. The Drum Head Service followed at the Memorial Garden and was conducted by the Rev'd A A Coslett CF. Unfortunately, the Lower Earley Salvation Army Band didn't turn up until halfway through the service. However, this didn't spoil the gusto in how we sang "*Guide me O thou great Redeemer*". Bill Cleasby gave the reading from the scriptures and, just after prayers, Fred Mills read out the names of those old boys who had passed away over the previous year. Wooden crosses, with poppies bearing their names and intakes, were planted in the Memorial Garden. The Corps ASM started the Act of Remembrance, followed by the bugler sounding the Last

Post and a piper playing '*Flowers of the Forest Lament*', then



Association would present a plaque to him to present to the AOBA President, as a gesture of the brotherhood that exists between REME and RAEME, especially the AOBA, as they have at least six old boys as members in Perth. He was also to mention that any AOBA member visiting WA would be made most welcome. The presentations were photographed in WA and at Arborfield.

The Chairman throughout the meeting kept a tight rein on questions - no more than five per item - so the meeting was soon over, giving more time for rest and suit change in time to assemble in the Mess for the dinner evening. It came to light after the AGM that several AOBs gave up looking for the lecture

theatre and eventually retired to their rooms!

The majority got back to the Mess for a quick pint before dinner call, only to find that Mike Green (57A) had turned up, late as usual. We originally had 43 from the 57 intakes 'sitting down' for dinner, but four of them at the last minute had to cancel. The actual attendance of 57ers over the whole weekend was a total of forty, with thirty-nine attending the dinner. The dining area was again very well laid out, to take approximately 230 AOBs. Tonight, the attending 57ers were on top table, plus our special guest, Dougie Huxley, with Jimmy Gardner, our nominated Guest Speaker, sitting next to the AOBA Chairman and the Chief Guest. Grace was given in verse, gracefully and very amusingly executed by the Reverend Bev John (66A). Before we sat down, the Chairman announced that jackets could be removed (planters order, for the old Far East fellas). As we settled down, the four-course dinner was expertly served and wineglasses filled by the staff, while the Stephen Nye Quintet played a selection of music. After the fourth course, Hon Sec Bill Cleasby announced a 10-minute interval, during which coffee and mints were served and the port glasses charged for the toasts. Mr Vice, Keith Evans, announced the toasts to: The Queen, Our Colonel-in-Chief Prince Philip and Absent Friends. Now the speeches. First, our Chairman Brian Hutchings. This was pretty brief and straight to the point, with a sting in the tail for those that didn't attend the AGM, as he announced the annual subscription increased from £10 to £15 per annum. The second speech was from our Chief Guest, Col



USA, Canada, South Africa, Germany, Holland, Spain, Malta and many other countries. Jim's references to all the instructors giving us initial grounding and shaping for our future careers was very commendable and the same recognition was given directly to Dougie Huxley ex-Grenadier Guards, CSM of 'C' Coy, who was unanimously accepted and applauded by all. On a sad note, the deaths of Ben Allhouse and Hughie Hind were announced. Comments were then made about me for the work in tracing and keeping contact records of our intakes; this was followed with a presentation of a bottle of whisky! Many thanks lads, it was most unexpected but well appreciated. Next came sporting achievements by 57ers, which ranged from boxing, football, rugby and basketball, but a special mention was given to Brian Glossop for representing REME and Army at boxing throughout his career. The pinnacle of sporting excellence is to represent your country at the Olympics. Jim Fox (57B) achieved that in 1976, at the Olympic Games in Montreal, Canada, when he became an Olympic Gold Medallist in the Modern Pentathlon event.

I cannot mention everything that our speaker said, but I will conclude by reiterating Jim's sentiments at the end of his speech, whilst the audience was trying to get him to finish! Our apprentice training here in Arborfield produced the bedrock for us to build on, in the pursuit of our future careers - and it contributed to the success in our civilian lives. So we do have a great deal to be thankful for when it comes to the AAS Arborfield. There was only one thing left to do and at this point Jim started to sing *"The Reds are here"* and the whole room in unison joined in. At the end of the singing, there was applause for Jim and then a rush to get out to the bar.

The evening continued into the early hours. We woke up Sunday morning with bright sunlight shining through the windows and most of us suffering with hangovers. It was time for quick ablutions, strip beds (old habits die hard!), pack ready to vacate rooms and get to breakfast. Some had already left to catch transport, while the majority waited for a relaxed breakfast, during which last farewells were said. A small number of AOBs also attended the church service.

And so, another Reunion weekend has come and gone and this particular weekend nearly became a disaster because of the extreme weather conditions. Bill's wet weather programme was nearly tested, in fact at one point he must have been close to cancelling everything, except of course, to keep the bar open for a two-day piss up - perhaps that wasn't such a bad idea! Looking back now, how the hell everybody got to Arborfield, and how we managed to keep to the programme, was a miracle (well nearly!).



Richard Bennett MVO. He spoke on many an interesting subject, which we could all relate to, especially how REME is coping in the current Gulf and Afghanistan theatres. Our third and last speaker was our very own 57er, Jim Gardner. When Jim produced five pages of A4 paper and said under his breath *"Power at last"*, I thought, *"Hello, we're going to be here for a little while longer!"* True enough it lasted well over half an hour, but to give Jim credit he remembered, relived and reminded us all of our apprenticeship days with great enthusiasm. I certainly could relate to the shock of meeting guys I couldn't understand, eating the cookhouse delights slapped onto our plates, being kicked into shape for drill and turnout, also realising the importance of bonding and camaraderie. The 57 intakes total more than 360 boys and, if we add those transferred from AAS Chepstow and those who were relegated to us, the total would be just short of 400. Most completed their nine years in the colours and many continued for a full service career, progressing up the ranks, some taking commissions and some even transferring to other Corps like the Royal Engineers, Pioneers, Education, Ordnance and Medical Corps etc. It's also surprising how 57ers have colonised the world, they can now be found in Australia,



I know one thing, without the AOBA Committee nothing would be possible, so on behalf of everybody, a big "thank you" for all your hard work and efforts in keeping this merry band of brothers together. The Committee rely on the services of many military and civilian staff in the Garrison. So, Committee, please pass on our grateful thanks to them for their contribution. I would like to personally thank Bill, Keith and Fred for their assistance over the past year, whilst I was co-ordinating the 57 intakes.

The success of the reunion can be measured in the numbers of letters, e-mails and phone calls received. I know I have received a record number and many are still talking to me about the weekend and want to come back again next year.

To conclude just a few points: The 50th anniversary tie, designed and produced by Jim Gardner, has raised some interest, but to answer one negative point raised i.e. why has another tie been produced, when we already have a suitable tie for the AOBA? Answer: This tie is not an AOBA tie; it is a one-off product, designed solely for the 57 intake lads to celebrate their 50th anniversary.

A special mention for those 57ers who travelled in from abroad: from Australia (Fred Ordynski and Peter Drake); USA (Peter Corbett 57B) and those from Europe (Chris Kemp, Mick Oulds, Mike Carn and Norman Jackson). Your attendance was special and much appreciated by us UK residing types. Another mention must be given to namesakes and we have two: the Cahills & Corbetts. To identify common surnames, we often used the individuals last two of their regimental number i.e. Smith 19 or Jones 25. In the case of Cahill and Corbett, luckily we can identify them by 'A' or 'B' intake: Dave Cahill (57A) and Tez Cahill (57B), also Peter (Always known as Harry) Corbett (57A) and Peter Corbett (57B). Apologies were received from the following eighteen 57ers: John Morgan, Geoff Flindall, Jim Hamilton, Robert Lee, David Follett, Jim Stares, Jim Cliff, Ian Forbes, John Higgins, Derek Driver, Bill Tudman, Peter Corbett (57A) Jim Hamill, Rod Newbury, Alan Clasby, Roger Hoskins, Peter Jones and John Pudge. We hope to see some of you at future reunions.

We are now in contact with sixty-two of the 57 *Heinz Variety* breed and we are fully committed to finding many more. Also, with the successful find of Dougie Huxley, we hope to find more permanent staff. We believe this year 2007 that the 57ers have broken a record, by having forty of their intake back in Arborfield to attend their 50th anniversary. So, you other Jeeps out there, the marker is in the sand, forty to beat!

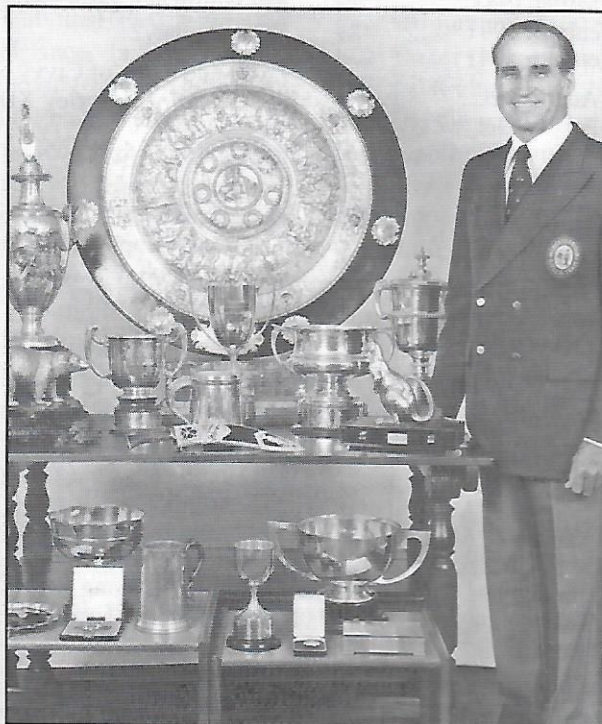
Arthur 'Nobby' Clarke, Hilsea '37

Arthur was born on December 3rd 1922 at Greenock, Scotland. With his father being in the Army, serving at such places as Blackdown (Hants) and Lichfield (Staffs), it was no surprise when young Arthur enlisted as an Apprentice Armourer with the RAOC. This event took place at Hilsea Barracks (Portsmouth), in January 1937, only a few weeks after his fourteenth birthday. He was promoted to Boy Company Sergeant Major in 1939. He served with the Regular Army right up until December 1962, transferring to REME upon its inception in 1942 and achieving the rank of Warrant Officer Class 2. He then became an Instructional Officer, Small Arms, at SEME Bordon. With promotional outlets limited, after six years Arthur quit MoD and went off to East Africa. From 1968 until 1973, he was a Chief Inspector, Small Arms, with the Kenyan Police. He then returned to England and opened his own business, A. E. Clarke and Co., Gunsmiths and kept it running until 1992. Having reached the ripe old age of 70 years, Arthur then handed the business on to his son Michael.

During his long career, Arthur became hooked on shooting, having been introduced to the sport in Egypt, going on to win the Army Rifle, Pistol and Machine gun Championships between 1944 and 1946. In Singapore, he was the Rifle Champion in 1953 and then, in Hong Kong, won the Small-bore and Full-bore Championships in 1958. He became the Army Small-

bore Champion in 1959 and was Army Sub-machine Gun Champion in 1961 and 1962.

Having left the Army, Arthur maintained his interest in shooting and became the Kenya Rifle Champion three times whilst visiting with Great Britain teams, in 1971, 1977 and 1979. He gained third position in the World Rifle Championship in 1980. At Bisley, Arthur gained 3rd place in the Grand Aggregate in 1976, then won the same competition in both 1979 and 1980. At that 1980 meeting, he was winner of a record ten major trophies, and still capable of winning the runners-up slot at the same meeting in 1985.



Arthur Clarke proudly presenting his awards collection

True to his birthright, Arthur represented Scotland at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, where he took the Gold Medal, and subsequently took part in the Commonwealth Games of 1986 and 1990. The list of achievements at his favourite sport goes on and on. Suffice to say that, during his long shooting career, Arthur went on to collect nearly 800 awards – a mixture of cups, spoons, tankards, medals and team badges. He always wished this collection to be kept together and, to this end, approached the REME Museum to see if this was possible at the Museum's Arborfield home. Sadly, with the whole presence of REME at Arborfield now on the wane, this has proved an impossible dream. (This small article is in tribute of Arthur's kind offer. Ed.)

Surplus to requirements

by Jim Cliff (57A)

I remember with vivid clarity the day that my father instructed me to come and see him in his office. This was early September 1956, in Victoria Barracks, Hong Kong. On arrival, he simply said that he 'had had enough' and it was time for me to leave home. He would provide the means to get me into the Army, but if I had any other ideas, it would be entirely up to me to implement them. So that was that! Had I but known what I know now of course, I could have done all sorts of things. But at the age of fifteen, without the benefit of welfare agencies or, dare I say it, social workers to assist, I felt obliged to accept the only terms on offer. The entrance examination for the Army Apprentices' scheme was shortly to be held and I was informed that I had been entered for it. Some weeks later, I was told that I had been accepted for AAS Arborfield. Things were fairly subdued at home during the intervening period. I called into my father's office again, to 'sign on' and to receive some pay *"Apparently I have to give you all of this,"* he said, his voice edged with the usual contempt. I pocketed it with an inward smile and smartly departed.

A few days later, in late January, on a grey and distinctly chilly morning, we assembled as a family for the last time, for a long wait at Kai Tak airport. The aircraft was a four-engined BOAC DC6, and everything was weighed before departure, including passengers. There was a large set of scales on which all were required to sit, like racing jockeys, with hand luggage and all that was to be carried on board. They knew to within a pound or two, exactly what the all-up weight of that plane was before she moved. The goodbyes were said, final admonishments and threats administered, and then I was away from it all, leaving a wide-eyed sister and my father, unbending as a ramrod.

All those claiming to be nervous of flying should have tried it in those days. Preparations for take-off, in a piston-engined aircraft, remain the same to this day, but that was my particular introduction to the whole business, and I have never forgotten. After boarding, we watched as exhaustive attempts were made to start the aircraft alongside us, resulting merely in a few desultory clouds of smoke from the back, and then the passengers disembarking to wait for technical assistance. In the event, our start-up was uneventful and, after moving to the end of the runway, the moment came when, with the engines threatening to tear themselves from the wings, I experienced the exhilaration of a take-off run for the first time. There was a brief glimpse of the island as we turned westward and then just the slow climb into the clouds.

The flight was designated 'night tourist', which meant that we were to arrive in London in the middle of the night. By today's standards, the itinerary was fascinating - Bangkok, Calcutta, Karachi, Bahrain, Baghdad, Istanbul, Rome and, thirty-six hours after departure, London. It was cold in Hong Kong, 38C in Bangkok and snowing in Istanbul! In Karachi, they snagged the plane and took us out to a hotel on the outskirts of the city. In a reception room open to the four winds, on a delightfully warm night, the like of which I was not to experience again till Singapore years later, we were served delicious iced chocolate in tall glasses. Bahrain consisted of scrub, two huts, and a charred wreck at the end of the runway! Baghdad had an indefinable stink, principally I think of oil and, by the time we reached Rome at about ten in the evening, I didn't know and didn't care what day it was any more. I managed to sleep for a short while on the final stretch into London, waking briefly

during the crossing of the Alps, to find a line of hoar-frost around the rim of the escape hatch, which was immediately alongside my seat. As the wheels touched the ground at Heathrow, I gave in to nausea and used the sick-bag for the first time.

Half an hour later, a po-faced, sanctimonious customs officer invited me to hand over £14 duty to a government apparently indignant that I should wish to import my camera into Great Britain. I was fifteen years old, standing more dead than alive, with all that I possessed in one small suitcase. Where do they find these people? He might as well have asked for £14, 000, 000! In the event, I had no choice but to surrender the camera to those bastards, to be impounded until such time as I could produce the required sum. It was a particularly bitter pill to swallow, as the camera had long been my heart's desire and had been purchased with prize-money for an essay awarded annually by the St George's Society of Hong Kong, which I had won that particular year for an essay on the Suez Canal. I have always maintained that I would applaud and even be prepared to assist in the apprehension of the guy with a suitcase full of contraband. But I will never subscribe to a system that employs officialdom to take money from students.

There was a vehicle with driver, waiting to take me to the Air Trooping Centre, which in those days was in Goodge Street. For all I know, perhaps it still is, but in those days it was also used as a holding centre for all the drunken military flotsam removed from the streets of the city during the small hours. I was issued with two blankets and a pillow, but no sheets, a rail warrant for Wokingham. I was admonished to be ready, whatever else happened, to catch the 0900 train on the following morning. I was then taken to a dormitory room lined with bunk beds, extensively inhabited already judging by the chorus of snores, and left in the unsavoury darkness to make the best of it. With the din of aircraft engines still ringing in my ears, something that took a good three days to subside, I was left to my own devices and went out 'like a light'. I was awakened hardly more than an hour later for breakfast, and the task of finding the duty driver to take me to Waterloo. As it happened, he was not to be found and, after ten minutes fruitless effort, and with the admonishment from the previous evening to be ready 'at all costs' ringing in my ears, I felt ultimately obliged to consult the Duty Officer. He promptly despatched a clerk to find the missing driver. I was not very popular.

Shortly afterwards, after muttered advice from the said driver about not pushing my luck like that in future, I was introduced to Waterloo Station and the Southern Electric Railway, soon to become very familiar, for the journey to Berkshire. It was a pleasant enough journey on a bright morning, through commuter-belt towns and villages like Virginia Water, which until then had just been names on the radio or in books. A vehicle was waiting, as arranged, at Wokingham and we drove through the cold, clear sunlight to Arborfield. I then caught my first glimpse of what was to be my home for the next three years.

Welcome to Arborfield

The Regimental Police Sergeant, Fred Silver, I was to discover later, was considered an absolute pig, held in general contempt behind his back, but treated with great respect and deference to his face. On that day however, he took one look at me, put his arm round my shoulders and asked, *"Been on the road long, son?"* - and I loved him for it. One of the policemen was despatched to *"Get one of them HQ Company Apprentice NCOs from out of the Camp Hall"*. It transpired that I had contrived to

arrive in the middle of Church Parade and, a few moments later, I made the acquaintance of A/Cpl Mick Toogood and accompanied him to the Cookhouse for breakfast.

The Cook Sergeant (no names, no pack-drill) proved to be an absolute caricature, florid in complexion, with great jowls and an even greater waistline! He was surrounded by a motley collection of sullen cooks, looking rather like extras from *Les Misérables*. His kitchen, I was to discover subsequently, was abysmally inefficient and its products invariably unappealing and unappetising. On this occasion, he produced an enormous slice of rather fat bacon, which was presented a few moments later on a plate with two fried eggs and a slice of rather stale looking fried bread, together with a mug of very strong, very sweet tea. One did one's best, but the combined effects of the flight (jet-lag was still to be invented) plus lack of sleep, combined to render the rapidly congealing bacon-fat into something to be avoided at all costs. To the ill-concealed astonishment of A/Cpl Toogood, the greater part of that first introduction to AAS cuisine remained where it was, on its plate, forsaken and uneaten.

The following two weeks were to be spent in something approaching a sort of limbo, since I had arrived well ahead of the main intake of entrants. There were one or two others in a similar situation; three Africans from the Gold Coast Regiment, spring to mind. As it was, I was deployed to the Quartermaster's department to assist the Drill Sergeants who, having nothing else to do, were in the process of sorting out various items of kit into neat heaps, shortly to be issued to the new intake. They were permanent staff regulars from a variety of regiments, such as the Durham Light Infantry, Rifle Regiment and Guards - all friendly enough and mildly interested in my time spent in Hong Kong. In the meantime, I had been issued with my own kit and personal number and was beginning to feel distinctly military, although there were many dark hints to the effect that this relaxed atmosphere would mean that I would find things difficult later. I became aware of the daily activities around me, and the comings and goings in and around the Company lines. In the early morning after breakfast, I watched squads of apprentices assemble outside the accommodation blocks, to be marched around by apprentice NCOs. They appeared to wield tremendous authority, bawled their heads off at the slightest pretext, and carried themselves with a distinct swagger.

In retrospect, there can be little doubt that by modern standards at least, the years spent in the Army Apprentices' School Arborfield were a savage introduction to the world when I was at a distinctly impressionable age, and were a major influence on my life and general attitudes. I have heard it said by other ex-boys, perhaps in jest, that time in such an organisation, and there were others like Ganges and Chepstow, was equivalent to a prison sentence and doubly irksome since one was innocent of any crime. Most of us, that is There were, in fact, a number of boys who, as habitual offenders, had been given the option by a magistrates court of either joining the Army or being referred to a correction centre, such as Borstal. I was to make the acquaintance of such a group during these first two weeks in the school. They gathered daily in the games room of HQ Company, played endless snooker, drank and smoked incessantly and generally conducted themselves with the air of men-of-the-world. No-one appeared to bother them. After two weeks, they were suddenly gone. We learned later, much later, that if one refused to put on uniform or take orders during this time, one would be automatically discharged and sent home.

Forty years later, I was to discover that the CEO of an MoD unit that I had been associated with for some years, and who had just been decorated, had joined AAS Arborfield under just this arrangement. He confided quite openly to me that he had spent probably more time with Fred Silver, under close arrest for

absenteeism, than under training and instruction. So much so that his parents were on familiar terms with the good Fred! Since he was a Grade 7 officer at this point, equivalent to a full Colonel, the system would seem, in his case at least, to be vindicated. Perhaps it could be brought to the attention of the modern Social Services

Saved by the Band!

The Military Band at AAS was my introduction to making music and was to be a bolt-hole for the remainder of my stay at Arborfield, providing a welcome escape from the tedium of the daily grind. I still remember with great clarity the electrifying moment when I first held a trombone in my hands during the visit to the Band-room, in response to Fred Backley's invitation to 'interested parties'. It was to be the beginning of an association that was to last many years, ultimately to university in Tasmania, where I took a degree in music as a mature student. At Arborfield, in addition to all else, it was to provide the opportunity for promotion, which would otherwise probably not have been forthcoming, and do much to keep me sane. I was to rise to the rank of Apprentice Band Sergeant, with all the privileges that accrued, plus the greatest perk of all - to move into the glorious solitude and isolation of the bunk in the Band-room, away from the company lines and all of the hassle. Absolute heaven! Within a few weeks of joining, I had mastered enough to be allowed to sit in on rehearsals and, more importantly and much to the disgust of 'HQ' Coy in general, to march on parade as supernumary with the Band. The Military Band, and membership thereof, was widely regarded as a 'Skive' and I revelled in it.

Sgt Fred Backley, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, was definitely one of the old school; a bandsman of long experience, unmarried and a stalwart of the Sgt's Mess. His facial features carried all the signs of a long association with alcohol. He addressed me invariably as 'Sonny Boy', was patient, helpful and generally approachable. I shall always associate him with the first church services that I attended as a bandsman, and particularly his rendering of the intermezzo from *Cavalliera Rusticana*, the theme of which he played as a solo on fiddle, as a compliment to the CO with whom it was a particular favourite. One day, Fred was promoted to WO2; almost immediately it was announced that he was posted to AAS Harrogate and he was gone virtually overnight. Not so very much later, certainly less than a year, we heard that he had in fact died. I shall never forget Fred; he was good to me and an integral part of those early days in Arborfield.

Sgt Parker, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, arrived as Fred departed, fresh from the Army School of Music, Neller Hall. He took the bull by the horns and breathed real life into the Band. Fully three-quarters of the repertoire was ditched without comment and suddenly we realised that this was a man bent on change. From this point, the Band never looked back. He was instrumental (!) in obtaining finance for new instruments and new music. We soon found ourselves rehearsing arrangements from the latest shows, such as *West Side Story* and the like, in contrast to *Chu Chin Chow*, *Maid of the Mountains* and *The Desert Song*, of which Fred had been so fond. Our standing within the School was transformed overnight, although we never achieved the universal popularity of the Pipe Band.

A number of milestones mark my progress through the establishment of the Apprentices' School, some of them now shadowy, but others are still very sharp and clear. The torpid monotony of the Basic Electronics theory classes being one! On seemingly endless summer afternoons in the Tels Shop, in the warm sunlight and with the drone of insects clearly audible through the open window, I fought to stay awake and reasonably alert, as we were introduced to the Physics of all things electrical.

I freely confess that I must have been an absolute trial to all the instructors such as Fred Hall.

Games afternoons, for me, were a weekly imposition. Never having been a devotee of anything involving the pursuit of a ball of any shape, saving perhaps a cricket ball, these periods constituted a major threat. It rapidly became essential to find some kind of alternative to the fate awaiting all those unwise enough to be bored by sport. Members of the School rugby team were permitted to remove themselves to the playing fields, together with the soccer team and the hockey team, to spend the afternoon in pursuit of each other. Pugilists went to the Gymnasium to assault each other, while the hapless remainder were invariably placed in the care of one of life's less attractive species, a PTI, and taken on the infamous road-run. It was both during and after one of these excursions, when the search for an alternative had become a burning pre-occupation, that an inspired solution presented itself. I joined the Small-Bore shooting team.

This was an elegant and unexpectedly double-edged stroke of near-genius. It ensured not only virtual immunity from further mindless exercise, but additionally, and in my case against all the odds, entry to the ranks of the sporting elite, providing 'Brownie Points' and kudos. From this point onwards, in addition to remarks indicating my regrettable pre-occupation with music and the Band (couched in reproachful terms that subtly implied that in this I was somehow involved in clandestine activities!), my reports now contained grudging and mitigating accounts of success with the rifle in Company competitions. I smiled inwardly at the subterfuge.

There are a number of things for which I have occasion to be grateful to Arborfield, but it was music that became a major part of my life. Toby Parker was very complimentary from time to time, and offered to obtain a transfer to a line band for me, to abandon my training and become a professional musician - as did at least one other apprentice, who transferred to The Blues and Royals mounted band of the Household Division. It was a tempting offer, with great appeal, but the thought of my father's reaction to the mere suggestion was enough to put anyone off. I can still imagine the contemptuous cross-questioning and biting sarcasm that would have been the inevitable consequence. I quickly put the idea out of my head.

Miscellaneous activities

Additionally, I joined a camping club, run by two or three members of the permanent staff, and spent weekends hiking to places like Hurley and Henley-on-Thames. We were granted exceptional weekend leave to do this, on condition that a member of staff was part of the project and that we attended Church on Sunday. Thus the somewhat bemused incumbent of the local Parish Church would be confronted with the sudden appearance of a motley collection of roughs and toughs within his congregation, clad in singularly original pseudo-military oddments, calculated to keep out the weather, earnestly clutching hymn book and psalter. Campsites in those days, I recall, were simple affairs. 'Facilities' usually consisted of a tap on a standpipe. It was rare to find toilets, while arrangements for personal hygiene were unheard of. Charges however, were modest, typically sixpence (just over 2p) per night. It was unusual to find more than one or two other tents on the site, and it is undoubtedly true to say that the camping fraternity was quite small and widely regarded as distinctly odd by the public at large. Needless to say, I loved the whole scene!

At this point, my father was stationed in Cyprus and I had promised to join the family in Famagusta for the duration of my annual summer leave of six weeks. However, despite the fact that I was entitled to travel on 'student rates', it was not going to be cheap. In fact, just getting there was going to more-or-less

exhaust my accrued savings. I waited in vain for an indication that some financial assistance would be forthcoming from my father. Ultimately, in the face of the lack of any offer of help, I decided to abandon the idea and shelved it permanently. The camping club was arranging a tempting tour of the West Country and North Wales, in an enormous and ancient vehicle, obtained specifically for that purpose and I decided to opt for that instead. I was still wondering how to broach this with my father, when events took the lead. The OC, it transpired, had already told him of the change of plan. I received a short note of arctic chill from Cyprus, revealing this. It came with a copy of the letter sent by my father in reply to OC 'A' Coy, couched in the usual and by now familiar terms. This indicated total lack of surprise at my failure to stand by the arrangements, and hinted at a future for me to be probably terminated by the gallows! I still have that letter.

In preparation for the summer expedition, I also joined 'The Camping Club of 1901 of Great Britain and Northern Ireland'. An unpretentious organisation, with premises on The Old Kent Road, the Club provided, amongst other things, a handbook containing a comprehensive list of participating campsites throughout the length and breadth of the British Isles. This book included one feature that I have never forgotten. Inside the flyleaf was a faded photograph of a gentleman in bowler hat and shirtsleeves, of distinctly dated appearance, arms akimbo, staring fixedly at the camera. The caption below read "*The Founder (whose name alas, escapes me) with all items of his camping equipment concealed about his person*". The mind still boggles! In the event, the trip was a great success and confirmed me as a committed camper forever after. At Bude, in Devon, we were to witness a party erecting an incredible construction that proved to be an enormous family tent. It was, in fact, the first frame tent that any one of us had ever seen. We travelled to North Wales, to stay at the National Forest site at Beddgelert, which we have visited frequently since, and which offered incredibly elaborate facilities such as warm showers, unheard of at the time. The expedition came to a sad and sudden end, when the noise emerging from under the bonnet could no longer be ignored, and we were advised that at least one 'Big End' had decided to call it a day. There was thus nothing for it but to head for the station.

On returning from that particular spell of leave, we were electrified to learn that all of the electronics students of my particular division had been chosen to attend an Outward Bound Course of three weeks duration, at the Army Mountain School of that name in Towyn, in Wales. We were, it seemed, to enjoy another spell of leave. With the benefit of hindsight however, I am now sure that if I had taken the trouble to listen carefully, I would have heard faint, hollow laughter in the ether, the sound of destiny enjoying itself at my expense. Some 'holiday' it turned out to be!

The Outward Bound School, or at least the Army's version of it, had been set up and its terms of reference dictated, by a sadistic monster of the stature of Caligula. Of course, I was not immediately aware of this. Any similarity between it and similarly named venues of the current era, however, are figments of the imagination. It began to dawn on me during the first twenty-four hours or so that this was to be no picnic. We were introduced to the rope, the sling, the caribiner shackle, the assault course and mountains - in roughly that order. The assault course consisted of a series of obstacles constructed over water, with others requiring clearance from local Air-traffic Control before attempting. I am not at home in such venues and this became rapidly apparent. My clothing spent most of its time drying out and the invigilators most of their time shaking their heads sadly whenever I appeared! As for the mountains, they just went on, and on, and on and on. At least, with forty pounds on

your back, they seemed to. At the briefing for the final exercise, which was to involve walking up mountains till you dropped, it was announced that successful completion, within the limits specified, would entitle one to the Duke of Edinburgh's Award; also to a month in hospital, but that was not mentioned. I would welcome the chance to have a word with Prince Philip about that. My final report from that school was not very good.

The day ultimately came when my time at Arborfield was complete. I had managed to survive the daily routine, but really succeeded thanks only to a judicious mixture of subterfuge and downright luck. I confess that I departed from its halls with some relief and without a backward glance. I freely admit that I did not fit well into the general organisation, or later for that matter, into the Army itself. With hindsight, I have to admit that I was not a good soldier. I don't think I was actually a *bad* soldier, but there it is.

A fair selection of room F1 boarders in 1957:



L to R: Keith Brown, Bob Luck, Pete Hays, Barry Baxter, Roger Clapcott, Tom Webber (with hair), Les Fountain and Phil Mellor.

First time for everything!

A girl asks her boyfriend to come over Friday night, to meet and have dinner with her parents. She also announces that, after dinner, she would like to go out and make love for the first time.

The boy is ecstatic but, as he has never had sex before, he takes a trip to the local chemist's shop to get some condoms. He tells the pharmacist it's his first time and the pharmacist helps the boy for about an hour. He tells the boy everything there is to know about condoms and safe sex. At the cash register, the pharmacist asks the boy how many condoms he'd like to buy – "A 3-pack, 10-pack or family pack?" The boy insists on the family pack because he hopes he will be rather busy, it being his first time and all.

That night, the boy shows up at his girlfriend's house and meets her at the door. "Oh, I'm so excited for you to meet my parents, come on in!" She takes him to the table where her parents are seated. Quite to her surprise, the boy immediately offers to say 'Grace' and bows his head. A minute passes and the boy is still deep in prayer, with his head down. Ten minutes pass and still no movement. Finally, after twenty minutes with his head down, the girl leans over and whispers to him, "I had no idea you were this religious". The boy turns and whispers back, "I had no idea your father was a pharmacist!"

Some thoughts and stories upon 'Getting older'

Just before the funeral service, the undertaker comes up to the very elderly widow and asks, "How old was your husband?" "98", she replies, "two years older than me". "So you're 96", the undertaker comments. "Yes", she responded, "hardly worth going home, is it?"

Reporters are interviewing a 104-year-old woman. "And what do you think is the best thing about being 104?" one reporter asked. She simply replied, "Well, there's definitely not much peer pressure!"

"I've sure gotten old! I've had two bypass surgeries, a hip replacement and new knees. I fought off prostate cancer and diabetes. I'm half-blind and can't hear anything quieter than a jet engine. I take 40 different medications, which make me dizzy, full of wind and subject to blackouts. I suffer bouts of dementia and have poor circulation – in fact I can hardly feel my hands and feet anymore. I can't remember if I'm 85 or 92 and have lost all my friends. But, thank the good Lord, I still have my driver's license!"

"I felt like my body had gotten totally out of shape, so I got my doctor's permission to join a fitness club and started exercising. I decided to take an aerobics class for seniors. So I bent, twisted, gyrated, jumped up and down, and perspired for a whole hour. But, by the time I got my vest and shorts on, the class was already over."

An elderly woman decides to prepare her will and tells her preacher she has two final requests. First, she wants to be cremated and second, she wants her ashes scattered inside the local ASDA store. "ASDA?" the preacher exclaims, "why ASDA?" "That way", the old lady replies, "at least I'll be sure my daughters visit me twice a week".

"My memory's not as sharp as it used to be. Also, my memory's not as sharp as it used to be."

Know how to prevent sagging? Just eat till the wrinkles fill out.

It's really scary when you start making the same noises as your coffeemaker.

These days, about half the stuff in my shopping trolley is labelled "For fast relief".

Remember: You don't stop laughing because you grow old, you grow old because you stop laughing.

THE SENILITY PRAYER: Grant me the senility to forget the people I never liked anyway; the good fortune to run into the ones that I do; and the eyesight to tell the difference.

Another fifty years

by Jimmy Gardner 57A

It all started on a wet, windy and miserable day, 7th February 1957. Our initial intake for that year began at Reading and Wokingham stations, where newly-arrived boys were met by a very damp and unhappy member of HQ Company permanent staff, then herded onto the back of an old bull-nosed *Bedford* (standing room only) to be transported to Arborfield. Not a sound came from the occupants in the back of the truck but, looking at the faces, one could see the anguish and almost read their thoughts – “*Oh Hell!*” or “*Mum, why did you let me do this?*” In April came what was commonly known as the ‘Easter Bunny’ intake, which became an integral part of 57A and then, in August, similar events took place with the 57B intake. Their forlorn faces shared the same feelings of trepidation as 57A intake had suffered just a few months before. So now, together, the ‘57’ intakes totalled over 380 boys.

The first few days must go down in all new apprentices’ minds as one of the biggest events of their young lives and probably remains so to this day. I myself remember those first few days as if it was yesterday, never mind fifty years ago. Just try to remember how I and everyone in the room felt – was it an adventure or was it a nightmare beginning to unfold – and we would all wake up very soon to Mum’s call upstairs – an invitation to breakfast? Well it certainly wasn’t Mum’s call we got! In ‘D’ Squad it was Sgt ‘Granny’ Smith, of the Royal Rifle Brigade, shouting “*Hands off cocks and on with socks*”, with no doubt a similar rendition from the other Squad Sergeants to their bands of merry new recruits in the other rooms. And didn’t we move when we heard that voice, feet on the deck in a flash? Well mostly – my legs certainly swung off the edge of the bed – but I had to jump a fair way to the floor! I was only 5’ 3” the day I joined and 5’ 6” when I finished square bashing!

When we look back on it all, those first few days were an immense experience for all of us. It started with being plonked into a barrack room with perhaps fourteen or fifteen other lads, who had arrived from anywhere between John O’Groats and Land’s End, not forgetting N Ireland and the Channel Islands. They didn’t know one another from Adam and, in many cases, couldn’t even understand one another because of the diverse number of dialects of ‘Queen’s English’ spoken by those assembled. Imagine it, a lad from the centre of Birmingham, which he had never ever left until yesterday, and another from deepest Cornwall, trying to have a conversation! They both turn round to the Jock from Aberdeen, who’s in the bedspace between them, and say, “*Do you know what he’s saying?*” He replies, “*Fit are ye speakin’?*” (That means “What did you say?”) So now all three stand looking agog in total amazement. The best episode of this I can think of was trying to listen to Derek (Screwy) Driver from Whitley Bay in the N East, trying to chat with Groggy Orme from deepest Dorset! The answers were pure guesswork from both of them most of the time!

Then there was that first experience of seeing some 800 boys on morning muster parade with the School Band, before they went off to training. Looking out of room G4, which was on the edge of the Square by the Cookhouse, we were all in total amazement at this spectacle of precision before our eyes, all moving together as if by second nature. I remember the comments from the other lads watching, and thinking to ourselves, “*Will we really be able to do that?*”

The next few days were daunting, fascinating and intriguing, call it what you may. Visits to the barbershop, where ‘Jack the Barber’ (also a black belt judo expert) took immense pleasure in destroying the DA and ‘Tony Curtis’ hairstyles. There was a look of total pleasure when he drew his cutters right up the middle of Screwy Driver’s DA, only stopping when he came to the curvature at the top of his head. It was then that you realized just

how much hair was there and, when Jack had finished, you saw the real size of a person’s head! The kit issues, the bed-blocks, Roly Wells (our room NCO) and the famous floor bumper – these were all experiences in themselves. But best of all was the first visit to the Cookhouse! It was bad enough being homesick but, boy oh boy, this really was an experience! When you opened the door and got a whiff of what was cooking, well, that was something else! No-one dared to hazard a guess at what the sweet fragrance could be. But don’t you all remember the first meal? Isn’t it amazing how hunger overcomes an aversion to some foods?

The next six weeks were spent on the Square learning drill, cleaning kit, getting to know your fellow apprentices, about their home lives, their likes and dislikes, their fears and worries and their many other mannerisms. It was a very new experience for all of us. Especially interpreting those distant dialects, which eventually became second nature to us all. And then the climax of it all – the drill competition! Us little fellows in D Squad looked up at all those bigger lads, how smart and precise they looked on the Square. “*How are we gonna beat that lot?*” we asked ourselves! But we ‘wee fellas’ did beat them, all to the great pleasure of Sgt Granny Smith. Everything we’d gone through over those first six weeks had a mission, to forge the different personalities of those twenty or so lads in a Squad into a bonded team. And I’m sure that we will all say, “*Mission accomplished*” by our illustrious drill Sergeants. But no sooner had those twenty separate lives bonded, than we were off to a new Company, to start all over again. But it was easier this time, we were wiser, more outward looking and now part of a team – the Army Apprentices’ School at Arborfield.

Our progression, to the Company selected for us, set the path we would now take over the next two-and-a-half years – in trade, education and sport, plus the many other activities we became involved in (like cleaning Senior Div’s kit!). And of course the new friendships we made. Looking back, it is clear that the experiences we gained over this period were immense. Everything was geared to giving individual identity and self-confidence, as well as forging a team spirit at Company and School level. It became the basis for our future careers in the Army, whether it was a 9, 15, 22 or 35-year career that any of us completed, firmly set out here at Arborfield. Even those soldiers who left after only a 9-year period with ‘the colours’, or even less, still talk about the training, the guidance and especially the comradeship we experienced during our ‘boys’ school’ days. Proof of the pudding is in the number from those 1957 intakes here for the reunion this weekend from all over the world – and indeed the lads from many other intakes who are also in attendance.

There are many from the ‘57 intakes not here this weekend for various reasons, ranging from sickness, work and previous commitments. Many of them have not been members for many years because they’d either forgotten or not known the AOBA existed. But that’s not the case anymore and that’s due to the tremendous amount of work and effort put into this, our 50th anniversary, by Roger ‘Trixie’ Traves. Roger has for over a year, with a good deal of success and self-expense, been attempting to trace the members of both intakes. The turn-out we have is terrific and I’m very sure that all those who are here for the first time, or the first time for many years, will be grateful for Roger’s efforts in bringing them into the AOBA fold.

I did mention earlier that our Squad Sergeants in HQ Coy played a big part in the initial grounding we were given during those first six weeks of square bashing. Well, there were other people who played a prominent part in the shaping of our future careers. The technical instructors, the education instructors, the

officers - in fact all the permanent staff we came into contact on a daily basis. (Even Provost Sgt Fred Silver and his band of men had an effect!) But there was a certain person in each Company who had greater contact on a daily basis than most other members of staff - and played a greater part in the shaping of our future careers than most. They were the men who had certain names given to them by the apprentices themselves and they were our CSMs

In the 1957 intakes era they were: 'Daddy' Dunning 'B' Coy, Joe Cosgrove 'D' Coy, BSM Wallace 'A' Coy, and I'm sure that we of the '57 intakes will all remember 'the singing Sergeant Major', as his lads in 'C' Coy called him. Through our research, we have found out that RCM John Sallis and CSM Joe Cosgrove have passed on to the regimental square above and are dishing out 'rodeos' to St Peter. 'Daddy' Dunning and BSM Wallace we haven't been able to trace at all. But, watching a series on television about the Chelsea Pensioners a few weeks ago, the name WO1 'Dougie' Huxley came across loud and clear. Well, that stopped me in my tracks - there he was, on screen giving a report, and 'smart as a button' as ever he was. I said to the wife, "Fantastic, Dougie was one of the CSMs at brat school during my time there". I saw the remainder of the programme with great interest and next morning I was on to the C-in-C of the Royal Hospital just to make sure that it was the same Dougie Huxley, the singing CSM of 'C' Coy. I was eventually put on to him and we had a great chat on the phone. E-mails went out to as many of the 57ers I had e-mail addresses for. "Get him to the AOBA weekend", came back the replies - and I'm very pleased to say that Dougie is here with us tonight.

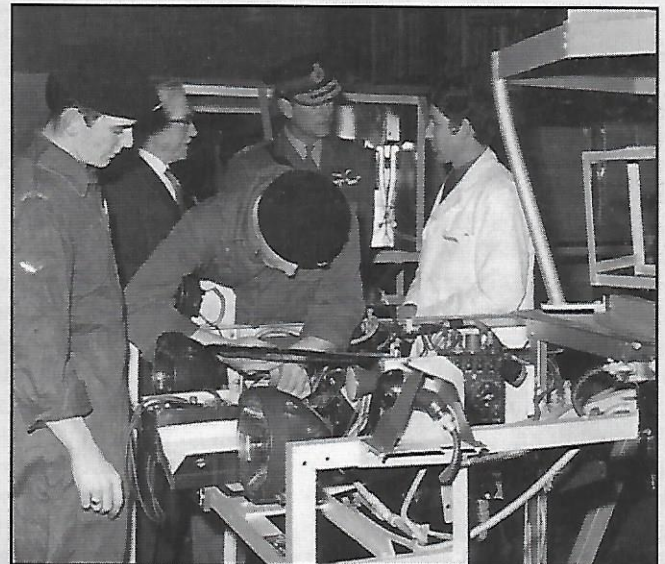
On another happy note to finish off with, I would like to record some of the achievements of 1957 intakes and look at what we've put back into the system in return for what we all got out of it. In the sporting field we have several champions. In boxing we can boast three Army champions, three Southern Command champions and four ISBA champions. Brian Glossop went on to continue representing REME and the Army throughout his career. The school rugby, football and basketball teams had an excellent representation from 57rs from 2 Div onwards. But the pinnacle of sporting excellence must be to represent your country at the Olympics and achieve success by becoming an Olympic champion. Our very own Jim Fox, who is sadly unable to make this weekend, but we all took great pleasure in following that fantastic achievement.

Now finally, what else have we achieved as 57 intakes? Well, it looks as if we've attempted to populate the globe! There are ex-57rs in Australia, Germany, Holland, Spain, the USA, Canada, South Africa and many other countries. What a fantastic effort you have made to get here tonight lads, it's very much appreciated. Also, we've spread ourselves round the other Corps of the Army - just to make sure, of course, that they were up to standard! Royal Engineers, Pioneer Corps, Education Corps, RAOC and even 'the Medics! The expertise we were taught here at AAS, developed further in our Army careers, has been a contributing factor to the success of our later lives in the civilian world. The comradeship developed between so many of us is a credit to the system that we knew. It's a great pity that our political masters didn't have the vision to ensure that what we had continued for future generations. Many members of 1957 sitting here this evening have their own businesses, are working as directors of companies and everyone here tonight has been able to pass on skills initiated here, to the younger generations. All this has added to the wealth and prosperity of Great Britain. So we do have a great deal to be thankful for when it comes to the AAS Arborfield.

(The above item was extracted from the notes that Jim gave to me, put together for his 'after dinner speech' at the 2007 Reunion. As I missed the event myself, I thought it fitting that most of Jim's speech be reproduced in this OBAN, for those others who were unable to attend. Ed.)

Pete Gripton (56B) tells of a 'Magic Moment':

When I left the Army in the summer of 1967, it was to take up an instructional post at SEME Bordon. I was probably, at that time anyway, the youngest Instructional Officer with any REME unit, a fact of which I was quite proud. A couple of years later, having settled into the job and mainly teaching 'A' Vehicle electrics to VMs, I was tasked with being one of the 'practical' instructors, teaching fault finding on CIMs (Classroom Instructional Modules), as they were known in those days. These were metal frames, mock-ups of real vehicles and built to scale, with all the electrical boxes and cables hung in the same place as they would be on the actual vehicle. Cables would be cleverly run behind panels, which could be opened up by the instructor, so that 'faults' could be incorporated into the circuitry, which the student then had to find by following the recommended procedures. Some CIMs were actually fitted with the actual vehicle engines, adding a touch of reality.



During 1969, SEME was honoured by a visit by Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, and the attached photograph shows the Duke chatting with me, while students work on the 'Saladin' Armoured Car CIM. He had certainly been well briefed and asked some interesting and searching questions about the way that vehicle electrics was being taught. To him, it was no doubt one of many such interviews during a long day, but to me it was a '**Magic Moment**' - one doesn't often chat to the husband of HM the Queen! Note the pristine condition of the white coverall that I am wearing in the photo - I don't think that lasted for too long after that official visit! Also shown in the photo is Mr Tommy Groves, Supervising Instructor, and definitely my 'mentor' in my early years. I am sure that many readers will recognise him, he gave SEME many years of noble service and was one of nature's gentlemen.

Perhaps other old boys have a treasured photograph of a '**Magic Moment**' in their life or career that they would like to share?

The life of an Imperialist Warmonger (Part 2)

By Peter Simpson, 56B

(Peter has already told the tale of his epic journey to Iran (OBAN 36) and here he continues his story of how it was to serve in Iran during the reign of the Shah, before he was eventually overthrown by Muslim fundamentalists. Ed.)

Iran - 1975 to 1977 (or 1356)

Introduction to Ahwaz

When we sat down at a table with our food, a man and a woman walked over to us and they introduced themselves as Jim and Carol Black. They were with the Commissioning and Advisory Team (CAAT) and thought they would pop in to meet the new arrivals. Jim was heavily built, with a moustache that would not have looked out of place in the 'Village People' – remember them? His wife Carol was heavily built as well, and had rather a plain face with a constantly miserable expression on it. We later found out that this couple turned up regularly to visit new arrivals while they stayed in the hotel; they knew that we could charge anything to our room bill and so they could turn up for a free meal! Carol's miserable expression was not just a front - she **was** bloody miserable! She straightaway started her tale of woe, firstly about the house that we were going to move into. It appears that we would not be moving into our predecessor's house; the reason for this was that the supply Captain from the RAOC, a Capt Harriman, wanted to move from his present accommodation into a brand new house, so we would be then moved into his house. Of course, this instantly raised the question "Why?" Well, Carol could not wait to tell us why. She was one of those people who delighted in telling other people bad news, this was the highlight of the week and she would sleep well that night.

It appears that there was a myriad of reasons why he wanted to move; I believe it would be more comprehensible if I just listed them as Carol did:

The house was not part of the estate of other CAAT houses, it was in a street with one other CAAT member; the other CAAT members were mainly together in one location and he preferred to be close to the others

The street was not metalled, the street in front of the other houses was

The house leaked during winter

His was the only house with a telephone and he was pig sick of fielding calls for other people at all times of the day and night

During the winter months, his car was stuck in his house and he couldn't move it out

We sat there a bit stunned at this litany of doom and gloom; finally Margaret turned to me and shrugged. "Not much we can do about it", she said, "this is the only house available, so we shall have to manage". I don't think that this was quite the response that Carol was expecting. "One thing however", said Margaret, "why couldn't he move his car all winter?" "Ah!" said Carol triumphantly, glad to have struck home with at least one piece of bad news, "it's the puddle, you see". "Puddle?" I said, "what puddle?" "A huge deep puddle, right outside your front gate", she replied. "It's so big that nothing can drive through it, all the cars get stuck there".

Well, this seemed like a bit of a disaster. Having just driven nearly 7,000 km to ensure we had a car available, we now found out that we couldn't use it unless we parked down the road. In fact when it did start raining, about two months later, it was not the disaster so enthusiastically predicted by Carol, the harbinger

of doom. There were in fact two huge deep potholes in front of our house, one slightly to the left of the road and one to the right as you travelled along. Subsequently, when the rains came (I shall explain in more detail later on the peculiarities of the rainy season and the dry season), the water filled both puddles until they became linked and looked like one huge puddle. Carol was right, if you attempted to drive down the middle of the road you would swamp your engine, as both puddles were over two feet deep. In the two years we were there, I must have assisted at least twenty unwary drivers to pull their cars out and then give them a jump-start with my starter leads. Even four-wheel drives ('Heavy Chevies', as we used to call them) used to come to grief in the wet. However, as I said, there were two puddles and, if you drove in a figure of eight round to the right, smack bang through the centre to the left of the puddle and the along the left until you got out, it was a piece of cake! The water along that course was no more than one foot deep. (I got quite blasé about this until one day when I got my comeuppance, but that is a later story.)

We signed the bill for our food (and of course both Jim's and Carol's) and thanked them for coming to welcome us; secretly, we both struck them off our list of future dinner guests and hoped that the rest of the team would be better company.

CAAT – What is it? What do we do?

The next day I went down to see the CO, a Maj Richard Wellings-Thomas. (I'll refer to him as W-T as I go along!) He was a REME Major and the next in command was Capt Harriman, whose house we would be taking over. Maj W-T then gave me a detailed brief on the composition of the CAAT team, our role, and how we fitted into the diplomatic structure. CAAT is an abbreviation for 'Commissioning And Advisory Team'. The team was set up when Britain negotiated a contract with Iran to sell them a large number of *Chieftain* Main Battle Tanks (MBTs). The agreement was worth over £625 million and part of the deal was that Britain would supply a team of specialists to firstly, commission the tanks; that is, to unload them from the ship, inspect them and then hand them over. Secondly, to provide technical advice to the Iranian mechanics on any problem areas they subsequently encountered.

The team consisted of sixteen personnel, all based in Ahwaz; there were thirteen REME, covering the trades of Vehicle Mechanic, Weapons, Armourers, Instrument Technician, and ECE (Electronic Communication Equipment) - and three RAOC personnel to cover all the stores aspects. Although we were part of the Tehran diplomatic staff, we did not have diplomatic immunity; but we were entitled to all the other privileges such as duty-free purchases, use of the Tehran holiday units and the diplomatic bag for all our mail. Our tour of duty was for two years; this was not extendable and we received one free flight a year to the destination of our choice. We had a 'team house' for use by all CAAT personnel, staffed by two Iranian Army orderlies, to cook and clean. The Sergeants on the team ran the bar on a roster system, while the Warrant Officers provided another roster, for the entertainments committee. The team house concept was common to all the ex-patriate (or just ex-pat) personnel working in Iran; I shall elaborate on both ex-pats and

the team house later.

Our working day during the summer months was from 6:00am to 1:00pm, five days a week. The reason for this was that summer temperatures could reach 131°F (55°C). By 10:00am, it was too hot to go out and any tools left out would give you a second degree burn if you were foolish enough to pick them up. To elaborate more on the weather, it was the strangest climate I have ever encountered. I have lived in ten different countries around the world and visited another twenty or so, but nothing is even close to the extremes in Iran. You have a rainy period and a dry period and, when I say 'dry', I mean quite literally **dry**. The dry season begins in March and, from then to the wet season in November, you do not get one single drop of rain; in fact you do not even have any clouds, every day is hot, dry and cloudless.

As I mentioned before, the road in front of our house was not metalled, just hard mud. During the summer dry season, the road slowly begins to crack, and these cracks then get wider and wider until you have a gigantic jigsaw puzzle effect. Some of these cracks, you could drop a tennis ball down and not reach it. What you may also get in summer is a dust storm; this can suddenly arise, with a wind that blows as if it has come straight from the mouth of a furnace. In the wet season, the rain is just a drizzle, but very, very persistent. I have rarely seen a storm or heavy rain but, after a couple of weeks of this endless drizzle, the cracks in the road slowly start to close, like a strange healing process in cinematic slow motion. Then you get the puddles and mud forming everywhere. I always used to carry, in the back of the car, two pairs of Wellingtons, a shovel, a tow-rope and jumper leads. Luckily, being a station wagon, if we did get bogged I could crawl to the back of the car without getting out and put on my Wellies.

The working week starts on a Saturday in Iran, because Friday is a Holy Day in Islam, the equivalent of our Sunday. This takes a bit of getting used to, but eventually it just becomes the norm, as in any other job. We received about twenty tanks a month; these arrived at the port of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf. A team from CAAT went down and unloaded them from the ship onto railway flats; then we picked them up and drove them to our workshop. Our workshop was in a huge Army base; every morning a minibus came round all the houses to pick us up, the whole trip taking about forty minutes. So I used to rise at 4:15am every morning, to be picked up at 5:00am. All CAAT personnel were issued with a special ID card, as in the letter I had had sent to me. (*If you recall, this basically stated that we were in Iran carrying out work on the behalf of the Shah en Shah and requested they provide us with their assistance.*) This pass was pretty good to show at restaurants, shops etc., where Iranians were proving to be a wee bit recalcitrant - that is, of course, assuming that the individual could read!

Every morning, when we entered the barracks for work, a guard used to come aboard and check every pass. Inevitably, at least once a month, somebody would forget his pass. This would mean the individual would have to get an Iranian driver to take him home to get it, which could take half the morning. Consequently we used to try it on with the 'minibus shuffle'. One of the front members, after he had shown his ID card, would pass it under the seat, from hand to hand, until it reached the pleb who had forgotten his card. We usually got away with it, but occasionally they would catch us passing the card; funnily enough, they never twigged that it was not the correct photo in the pass, maybe we all looked alike to them.

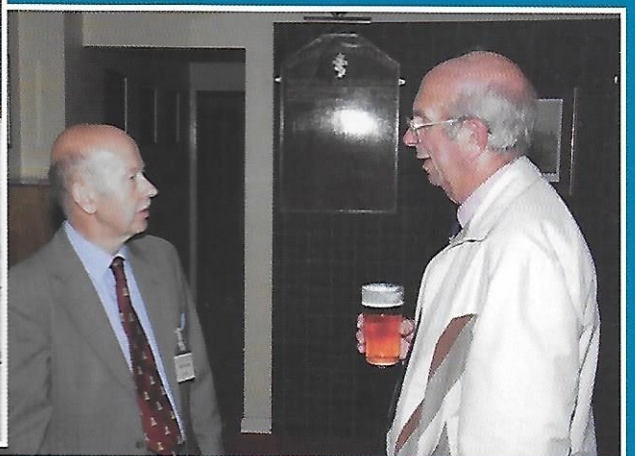
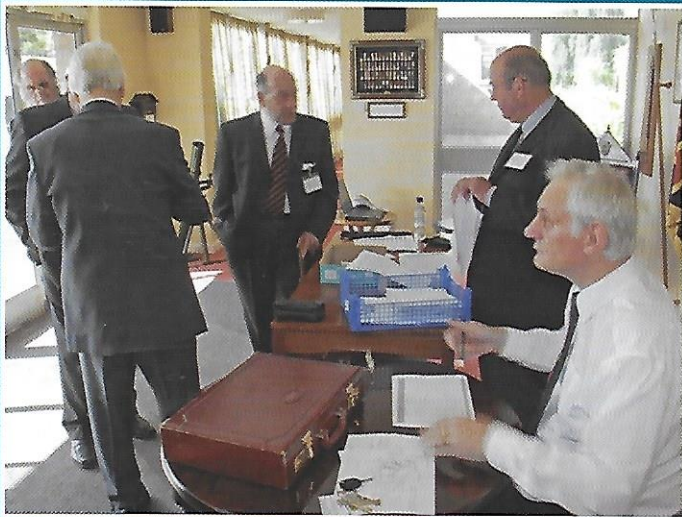
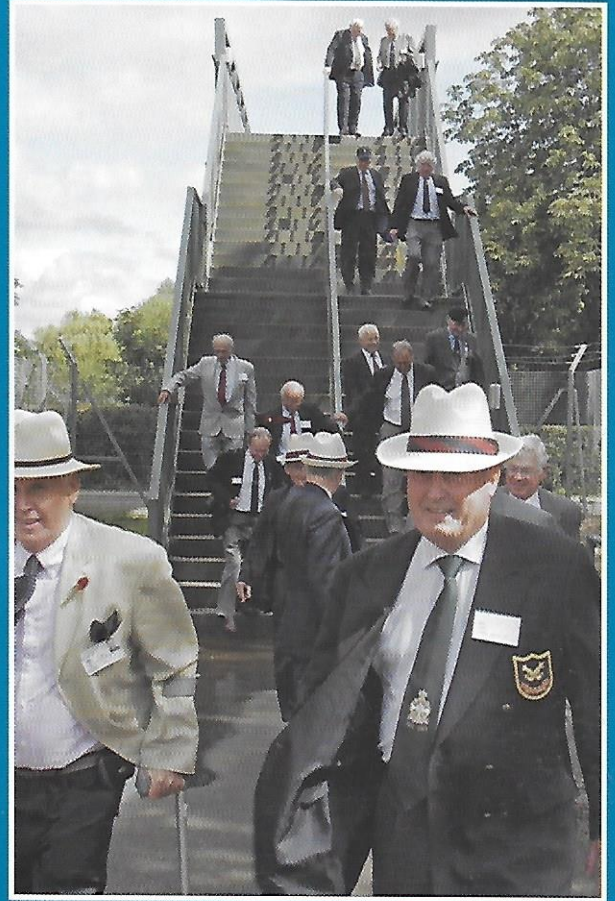
Some thoughts on 'the Army wife'

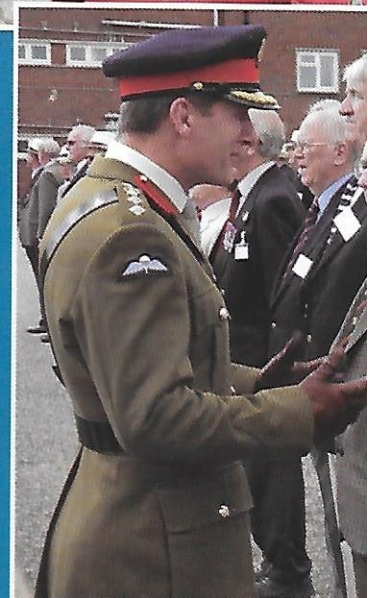
I was up bright and early on my first day; we had room service deliver breakfast, as the dining room was not open that early in the morning and the euphoria of just picking up the phone and ordering anything we wanted was still with us. The minibus picked me up; I was the last pick-up in the hotel, so I had a chance to lie in a bit longer than the others. It is always strange on the first day of a new posting, those not in the services would probably change jobs, on average, four to five times in their lifetime; as a soldier, I was posted approximately every two years, and this was my ninth new posting. This sort of life does make it stressful for some, but it places a far worse strain on your wife and children. I must digress for a moment and tell you about my wife, courtship and my opinions of 'Army wives'.

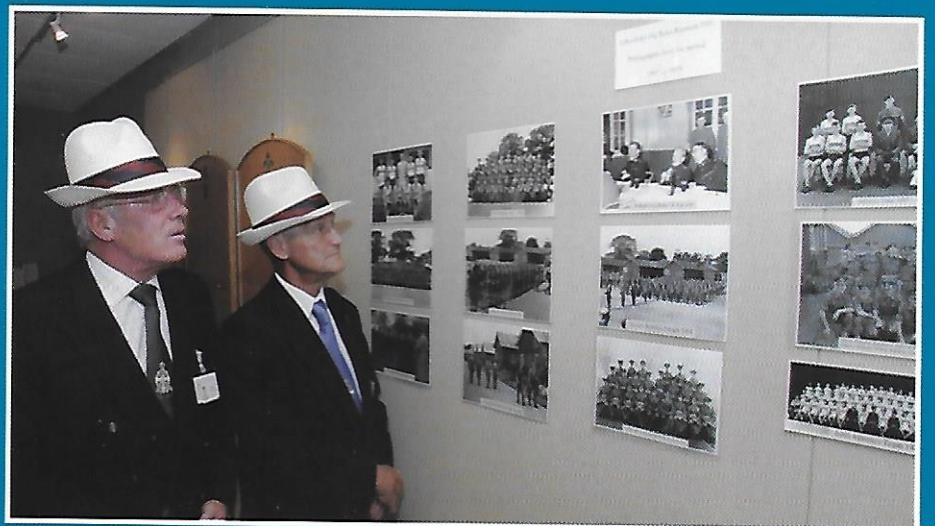
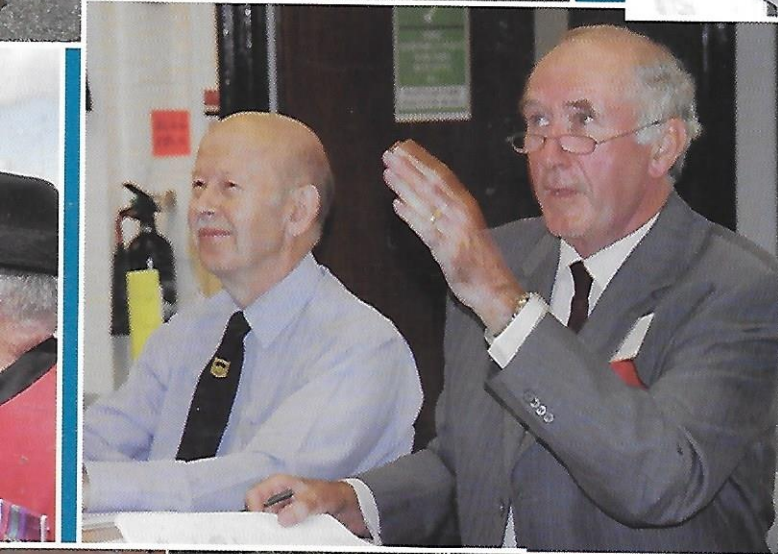
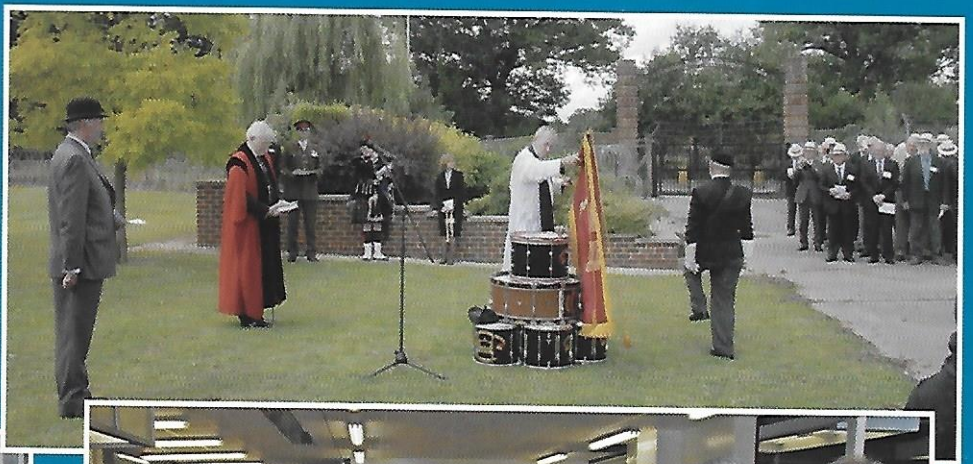
I met Margaret, my wife, on my second posting after I had served my apprenticeship at the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School. I was then attached to the 1st Battalion Middlesex Regiment as a Corporal Armourer. I had been stationed in Hameln in Germany (known as Hamelin in the folk tale, the place where the Pied Piper plied his trade) and was then posted to a sleepy village called Lydd in Kent. Lydd was not only sleepy but very small, there was only one café in the village and no night life. Consequently, I did not even bother going into the village, but went to either Folkestone or Romney if I wanted an evening out. At weekends, the camp used to turn into a 'ghost town', as all the single soldiers used to go home to their girlfriends or parents. I was looking forward to the Easter Weekend in 1962, so that I could travel up to Lancaster and stay with my parents. Unlike some of the lads, who lived locally, I could not travel home unless it was a long weekend, as it took me six hours on the train and cost more than I could afford at that time. There were only three long weekends in the year and Easter was one of them.

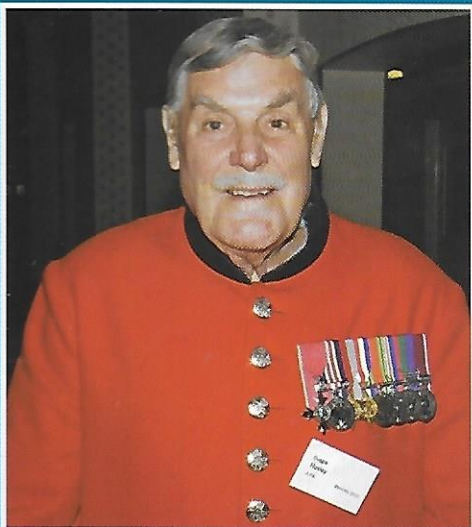
I was devastated to find out that I had been appointed Guard Commander for the Friday night of the weekend, thus destroying any hopes I entertained of going home, a real disaster at the time. On the Thursday night, all my friends hit the road and, when I awoke on Friday morning, I was at a loose end; it was no fun going into Folkestone on my own. At lunchtime, I thought I would go down to the only café, called 'Jane's', and get a cup of coffee and a snack. The cafe was about ten minutes walk away and, when I got there, it was full of local youngsters. I bought a coffee and sat down at a table. I noticed two girls at the table in the corner near the jukebox, so I walked over to the jukebox and slotted a shilling in for three records. One of the girls gave me a smile, so I smiled back and asked if I could join them. We exchanged names; one was Valerie and the other Margaret. As we chatted, I was attracted to Margaret; she was bubbly, vivacious and had a mass of freckles on her face and arms. She was attractive in a manner that was not immediately 'stunningly beautiful', but had that elusive attractiveness that grew on you the more you got to know her; she also seemed interested in what I had to say and I spent the next hour or so talking. When I told I had to leave because I was on duty that night, she sympathised, and then said she was going to Folkestone the following night with some friends - and would I like to come along?

That was the start of our courtship. This was in April and, in the first week of May, I received news that I was to be posted to Malaya in August. I proposed in June, I had known her for ten weeks and that was sufficient to realise that I could not be away for three years without seeing her. Margaret was just sixteen when I met her, and only seventeen when we married. Life is









indeed strange; what may seem a disaster can sometimes lead to an opportunity that can change your life forever and for the better - it certainly happened to me.

The Army places great pressure on marriages and particularly on wives and families. In my view, the 'Army wife' who can make a success of the marriage, and cope with the vagaries of life with a soldier, is indeed a special type of woman. She has to cope on her own for long periods while the husband is away - in our case, I was in Canada for three months. She has to learn to carry out the tasks that her husband would normally handle, such as changing a light bulb, mending a fuse etc. The British Army does not make life any easier with its rigid regulations. If you are serving in Germany, and the husband has to serve a tour in Northern Ireland, the wife is deprived of her husband (with the added worry that he is serving in an area where he may be killed or injured). She also loses a substantial amount of money, because the husband is no longer entitled to the Local Overseas Allowance and ration allowance, as the Army is now feeding him.

In the first few moves after we were married, I was on the advance party; this meant that I had to leave about three weeks before Margaret. We were staying in married quarters at the time. Now a married quarter is a real bonus if you have one as a soldier. The quarter is completely equipped with every single item you need to have as a householder, from all the large furniture items right down to the smallest items, such as a corkscrew and bottle opener. The problem is that all this equipment has to be accounted for and checked to be in good condition, both when you move in and also when you move out. There is a comprehensive inventory book and, when you hand

the quarter over, every single piece of equipment has to be laid out in exactly the same order as the inventory. This is something that Margaret had to do on her own on all these moves; not an easy task.

The work and workplace

As I was saying, the first day is always full of new names and faces. Over the months, these gradually begin to assume their own individual personalities and you form your likes and dislikes. There were two main differences with this posting from all the other postings I had; firstly was the size of the detachment, only sixteen, which meant that you had to have some interaction with all the members, whether you liked them or not. The second big difference was that there were no military amenities. In all my other postings to foreign countries, whether in Malaya or Germany, you had a complete infrastructure set up inside or near your camp. Shops, schools, hospitals, swimming pools, bowling alley and all the other amenities - you never even needed to venture outside the camp if you didn't wish to do so. In fact, I have known some Army wives in Germany who had never been outside their camp in the two years they were there; it's hard to believe that anybody could be so parochial, but it's true.

Here in Ahwaz, there were no special British Army facilities at all, other than the team house - and that was purely a house that we rented. Consequently, you had to shop at local shops, eat at local restaurants and mingle with the locals, in order to share the other amenities. We made it into camp on that first day without any great dramas and I had my first look at the Iranian facilities. We had a huge hangar to work in, with plenty of room to drive the tanks inside if we wished. However, the preferred option was to initially inspect them in the big tank parking area

The CAAT members



Rear rank, l-r: Eddie Wilson RAOC, Phil Hollister REME, John Spiers Infantry Clerk, Ian Cresswell REME, John Gregory RAOC, John Brant REME.

Front rank l-r: Dave Tanner REME, Peter Simpson REME, Capt Harriman RTC, Maj Richard Wellings-Thomas REME, Dougie Cannon REME, Bill Gray REME, Pete Hewitson REME.

and then, if there was a requirement to repair, we could drive them undercover. This was now early November, but the heat was still extreme if you were in direct sunlight.

There was an interesting exercise we had to carry out later at the height of summer. There was found to be a recurring fault with the water pumps. These were similar to the windscreen-washer pumps on your car and supplied a water mixture to the Commander's periscope and episcopes. The pumps were tending to seize up and the theory was that this may have possibly been due to the extreme heat during summer. We were requested to monitor the temperature in the turrets, by taking readings at the coolest period, when we first got to work, and then again at the hottest part of the day at 1:00pm. As the peak temperature was about 46°C at this time, a lot of bets were made prior to the tests as to what the maximum and minimum temperatures would be. It was quite a surprise that the max was 35°C and the min 33.8°C, not really a lot of difference and certainly not enough to cause a malfunction in the pumps. We later had a modification released in EMERs, which replaced the rotary wheel with a different type of plastic.

The most time-consuming part of the whole inspection process was stripping the .50" *Browning* machine gun of its manufacturer's protective coating; this consisted of a thick fabric, impregnated with heavy grease. This was a messy and laborious to remove and, once removed, you then had to clean all the excess grease off the working parts. The other machine gun, a 7.62mm GPMG, was a piece of duff, as it consisted of a very lightly oiled paper, which came off easily and left a thin film of oil that could be left on. This was actually a task for my Armourer Sergeant to carry out, but it was so irksome that I used

to occasionally give him a hand. The actual work was neither taxing nor time-consuming; I could inspect the complete armaments and turret components of a tank in about 1½ hours. In the two years of inspections, that would be approximately 490 tanks, I only ever found one that I could not hand over after minor repairs.

The war with Iraq began exactly three years after I had left Iran. I often wondered how many of those tanks were actually 'battle worthy' at that time; my scepticism was based on the Iranian concept of tank maintenance while I was there. The Iranians sent a great number of their maintenance corps to SEME in Bordon, where they attended an excellent two-month course on the *Chieftain*; however they only considered potential officers as suitable for this form of training. I could empathise with this policy, having seen the very low standard of the average recruit - some of them having been goat herders or small-holding farmers and being barely able to read. However, when the would-be officers returned, they were then eligible for promotion. Unfortunately, a lot of them then thought that they shouldn't be getting their hands dirty and left the maintenance to the soldiers under them, whose knowledge of a *Chieftain* MBT was less than zero. The result was a very low standard of maintenance and *Chieftain*, regrettably, was not designed as a low maintenance vehicle. You could get away with sub-standard maintenance on the gun and its components, but the automotive power pack was extremely temperamental. (*When I was with the 15/19th KRH, we would assume losing 5% of our Chieftains to minor mechanical breakdown on the ten-mile drive to the Soltan tank ranges.*)

(Peter's article about working with the CAAT in Iran will be continued in a later issue. Ed.)

Photo caption competition

Come on readers, see if you can come up with a suitable caption to set the scene as shown in the accompanying photograph.



Photo competition - OBAN 39

Well, it was quite a surprise for me to get a nil response to the most recent photo competition. The two girls shown tobogganing in the snow are, of course, members of the ATS (Auxiliary Territorial Service), who's initials caused some embarrassment for boys who joined the Army Technical School - also ATS - see the comments made by Peter Baldwin on page 51 of 'The Arborfield Apprentice'.

Young and Old

by Charles Kingsley

"When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a queen;
Then hey for boot and horse, lad,
And round the world away;
Young blood must have its course, lad,
And every dog its day.

When all the world is old, lad,
And all the trees are brown;
And all the sport is stale, lad,
And all the wheels run down;
Creep home and take your place there,
The spent and maimed among;
God grant you find one face there,
You loved when all was young."

(This poem appeared in the classic children's novel 'The Water Babies', and I just thought it fitted well into the ethos of Arborfield Old Boys. Ed.)

Aplaudit on the old School Badge

by Ron Janes, Oct '42

Quite a lot has been written about the School badge, but I cannot recall having seen anything about its first concepts. This is my own personal version of events, which of course is open to argument – as is the wont of ex-boys!

In the late autumn of 1944, the entire school was assembled in the Camp Hall; everybody, it seems, except the RPs and cooks. Boys were sat on the hardwood gym floor, while the staff members stood on the famous slope; I also remember seeing civilian staff standing along the wall-bars. The stage curtains were partly drawn aside. We had been told that we were to be addressed by the Commandant, but were surprised to have all the staff turn up. Colonel White duly appeared and waived the usual formalities at his introduction. He thanked all for attending and announced that it was his first opportunity to address the School, following the return from that year's well-remembered 'dispersal'. He thanked the civilian staff for their hard work and forbearance during that hiatus, regretting that he had been unable to thank staff who had departed over the same period. He wished well to all those apprentices who had been mustered into service during the dispersal, remarking upon the loss to the School of senior apprentices, with their leadership and sporting attributes. He had received favourable reports on the discipline and work-skills from the various workshops hosting the apprentices, as well as from the College at Bury.

With all these things in mind, the Colonel had been savouring those reports and appraising the strengths of the School. He now, both figuratively and literally wanted to 'wave the flag', and had given quite some thought to the design of such a flag, the design of which he thought could also be used as a letterhead. From behind the curtain he dragged a blackboard and easel. He then used the board to explain his consideration of the School's main strengths and how he visualised their representation: education, sporting activities, the discipline of a clean life and the comradeship of the Army. Referring to the blackboard, he explained the significance of the four symbols, which were arranged in a square, with an upright rectangular shield above a scroll i.e. a basic 'coat of arms'.

The top left symbol was a simple Latin cross, indicative of the Christian ethos and moral behaviour encouraged within the School. At top right was an open book (a straight crib from the Army Education Corps badge) representing the formal education necessary for growing minds. At bottom left was a discobolus, symbolising the physical training and fellowship of the sports field. Then, at bottom right, was a symbol for technical training; it would be true to form if this had been the calipers from the REME badge, but it may have been a micrometer. The motto on the scroll was yet to be decided. There is a good chance that the faint chalk image presented on the blackboard could not be seen from the back of the hall, or not even from the foot of the slope! Remember that this was before the days of flipcharts and marker pens. (Afterthought: due to clothes rationing, it was also before the days of blazer badges. Blazers were not mentioned, nor for that matter was a badge!)

The Commandant now announced that he was initiating a competition for the design of such a potent symbol, open to all staff and apprentices. The competition was to be formally described in Part 1 orders; there would be prizes and he wanted everyone to take part. This was eventually published before the Christmas break, with one immense development – the competition was now for a badge!

Was I the only one to think, "*A piece of cake*"? All one had to do was to arrange the preferred symbols, symmetrically balanced or superimposed – and the twenty-five shillings could

be pocketed. Entries were to be received some time during January 1945 and, with the break fast approaching, it could be expected that, all over the United Kingdom, brains would be wracked and robbed. Nobody wanted to wear an effete badge – and there was a danger of just that, given the Colonel's symbolism. One of the considerations amongst competitors was the question of a Crown, and whether it would be authorised. Some Army Corps were yet without a Crown – Catering, Education, Pioneers and Police among them – so what chance the Apprentices' School?

Anyway, that's so much for the memories – now comes my fantasy on the selection of the badge's eventual design! Firstly, the Adjutant screens all submissions for abusive or scurrilous content. The Commandant retires to his office to appreciate the responses to his ground-breaking idea. (It is tempting to imagine many 'back of envelope' sketches, but I dimly recall a requirement for white paper submissions.) He selects those elements that appeal from among the entries, then asks for a presentation from the Staff Sergeant draughtsman. With Col White looking over his shoulder, the draughtsman redraws the elements to suit scale and badge configuration, simplifying the sword design for instance, and the gearwheel tooth form and pitch to aid manufacture. Somewhere along the line the lightning flash – so desired by the sparks' department – is lost, and (thankfully) a Greek cross takes the place of the Commandant's Latin cross. I've always imagined the above process to have taken place in the Clerk of Works' office, attached to the HQ office. End of fantasy!

Later, the new Royal Army Education Corps would also use the torch – from the road sign 'Caution – School'. Perhaps it should also have been kept as its motto? There is a history of Army schools using 'crossed swords' in their badges, but I don't know where we stand in the chronology. But there can only be one nomination for badge designer. He was initiator, sponsor, judge, selector and guide, through the maze of bureaucracy from design to approval – our very own Col White. He had the help of a talented draughtsman and a wealth of ideas from his contestants, and would be modest enough to credit such help – but what an effort he made!

The work of Mr Williams, the whitesmith instructor and incidentally the competition prize-winner, has been acknowledged and is still evident. It was recorded that his prototype large-scale badge was swiped from the notice board on the main road, not by a trophy-hunting, visiting rugby team – but by a boy in his last term. It was obviously admired by the boys. I have no argument with the badge design or the competition result. The tree in a field, the book, the lightning flash, the laurel wreath, the calipers, the lamp of learning, the crossed rifles, the fist of thunderbolts, hammer and tongs – these were all set aside in favour of a simple design, without the necessity of a motto.

(Ron came back to the School as an instructor in the Instrument Section between 1953-59. A letter and photograph that Ron sent, along with his above article, indicate that he was largely instrumental (Ha! Ha!) in setting up the 1956 Old Boys' Reunion! By the way, how many dictionaries today will include the term 'discobolus'? Fortunately, I have an old 1933 dictionary, weighing a ton, which defines the term as 'a Greek quoit-thrower'! Nice one Ron! Ed.)

The WRVS Club

'The Women's Royal Voluntary Service manage alcohol-free recreation clubs with leisure facilities, providing a relaxed, friendly and homely atmosphere for soldiers to spend their free time. There are lounges, quiet rooms and even cyber cafes in many WRVS Clubs, helping them to maintain a vital e-mail link to friends and relatives far away, especially when posted abroad.'

Thus says the blurb recently published in 'Target', official magazine of the Army Foundation College, Harrogate. Apart from the input of modern technology as mentioned, the description will stir memories of many ex-boys, for whom the WRVS Room was a welcome haven of rest, a place to read the newspaper, listen to the radiogram or play one of the games so thoughtfully provided. Let the following contribution, compiled by two modern-day Junior Soldiers (JS), describe their own thoughts on today's WRVS Club:

"The WRVS Club is one of the best places on camp; me and my mates go in every evening to play pool and watch television and DVDs. There are more activities, like playing on the internet, Xbox and Playstation, also you can play darts and table tennis. It's not just games, there is also the chance to socialise and make new friends within the College.

It's not all fun and games, it is also a place where JS come if they have welfare problems and need to speak to the kind and understanding ladies of the WRVS. On special occasions, such as Christmas and Halloween, they throw discos for all JS of the College, with games, a DJ and many more activities. Me and a few of the lads from the Platoon recently went on a day out to Manchester's Trafford Centre and watched a film, went for a meal and had a game of Laser Quest. The ladies also arrange competitions against the military officers, who win by cheating!

We recently had a pool competition between JS, it lasted two nights. The ladies are great to be with, they're very funny and are always laughing at our jokes; it's great that we have a place like the WRVS to go to."

(The above is published with the permission of AFC Harrogate and brings back memories of the WRVS lady of my own era – Miss Gunning. Does anyone have a tale to tell about their own 'leisure activities' in the WRVS Room? Ed.)

Went the day well?

*When you go home, tell them of us and say
For your tomorrow, these gave their today.
Went the day well? We died and never knew,
But, well or ill, freedom, we died for you.*

Known as the Kohima Epitaph, this was written by John Maxwell Edmonds and inscribed on a memorial stone in Kohima Cemetery in India to Commonwealth Forces who served in Burma during the Second World War. It is based upon one of the oldest war poems, a fragment written around the sixth century BC by the Greek poet Simonides. It originally celebrated King Leonidas and 300 Spartan soldiers, who kept a large army of Persians at bay, by fighting to the last man at the Battle of Thermopylae. This epic tale has just recently been the subject of a new film.

From Schoolboy to Soldier

by Walter Jobber (Oct'43)

The time had finally arrived! Leaving the recruiting office, which was located at Holloway, London (no – not the prison!), having signed my attestation papers, committing me to the Army for eight years 'with the colours' and four on reserve, to count from my eighteenth birthday. I had sworn the oath of allegiance to the King, his heirs and successors, taken the 'King's shilling' and, having been given a travel warrant to a place called Wokingham. I was instructed to get to Waterloo station and proceed by train to the aforementioned place. Having a rough idea where Waterloo station was, but absolutely no knowledge of Wokingham, I eventually got onto the right train and settled down for the journey, wondering just what I had let myself in for.

On arriving at Wokingham, I alighted from the train and proceeded out through the booking office, to be met by a sergeant who politely enquired if I was for the Army Technical School (ATS). On being informed that I was, his manner towards me underwent a slight change and I was ordered, in no uncertain terms, to "join those others over there". On looking around, I saw a bunch of lads, about a dozen strong, waiting in the station car park. After waiting for one more train, the sergeant decided that we should board a 3-ton lorry that was at one side of the car park, waiting to convey us to the School at Arborfield. Before we moved off however, the sergeant asked if any of us "happened to smoke". Several of us admitted to the practice, only to be told that smoking was forbidden to boys under seventeen – and that he was therefore confiscating our cigarettes! Of course, knowing no better, we obligingly handed them over. I had thus had my first contact with Army life and with the man who, over my three years at Arborfield, I was to be in contact with the most. He was Sgt 'Taff' Evans of the South Wales Borderers (SWB).

On arrival at Arborfield, we in the lorry proceeded to Regimental Headquarters (RHQ), where we were indoctrinated into the ATS. When I departed that RHQ office, I did so with three items that were to stay with me for ever more – my Army number, my Company allocation (though this did change later) and my designated religion! I learned that this was Church of England - or C of E. Up until this point, my religious beliefs had been somewhat nefarious! Living in London, my schoolmates and I tended to follow the religion that 'gave out the goodies'. Consequently, I had attended churches of various faiths, such as Presbyterian, Baptist, Salvation Army, Welsh Chapel and several other lesser denominations. Especially at Christmas, when all the parties were laid on! On no occasion though had I embraced the C of E, so how I became a member of that Church has always remained a mystery.

I was taken over to 'F' Block, 'C' Company and escorted into Room F4. Here there were numerous empty beds, one of which I was invited to select. In the room were a number of other boys in various types of dress, some in denim overalls, some (like me) in civilian clothes and others in uniforms that had short trousers. It was at this point that I learned that there were three Army schools in existence, from which recruits were taken – namely the Duke of Yorks, Queen Victoria (a Scottish school) and Gordon Boys (at Woking). Next day, more boys were allocated to 'C' Coy and Room F4 was eventually filled. These boys, then, were to be my comrades for the next three years, though not necessarily in the same barrack room or Company.

As regards my first day at the School, shortly after being allocated my bedspace, we newcomers were taken to the

Cookhouse for our first Army meal. I cannot remember what the sweet was or, in fact, whether there was one – but I will never forget that first dollop of sausages and mash! We returned to F4 and were then directed to draw our kit, get our bedding, label our kit, learn how to make a bed ‘up’ – and later how to make a bed ‘down’! We put our kit into our lockers and hung certain items under our lockers, all to precise instructions. The whole of this was directed by two boy soldiers – A/L/Cpl George Taylor and Senior Boy Soldier ‘Chesty’ Kellow.

Of course, being new boys at the School, although we were on parade the next day, with our drill instructor Sgt Taff Evans, we were not allowed to take part in the ceremony of ‘Getting on Parade’. At this stage, we had received no drill instruction whatsoever. Sgt Evans had yet to impart this knowledge and make us into proficient soldiers. This he later proceeded to do with complete success; except for one boy who could only co-ordinate a left-arm swing with left-foot forward, and right-arm swing with right-leg forward. No matter what, he could not be made to swing his right arm forward when stepping off with the left foot – and so on. He was eventually discharged from the School.

Along with Sgt Evans, we in ‘C’ Coy had another regimental instructor, Sgt ‘Jock’ Hunter of the King’s Own Scottish Borderers (KOSB) – and woe betide anyone who referred to his regiment as the ‘Kosbees’! Jock also sported a red and white checked Glengarry and wore a Service Dress (SD) with rounded cutaways. But it was Sgt Evans who was to be my instructor for the rest of my period at Arborfield – and continued to be so when we spent a short interval at Bury in Lancashire. Although I transferred Companies three times (being put in ‘B’ Coy on return to Arborfield), he was always in the Company to which I was allocated. Other regimental instructors come to mind, but none are so vividly remembered. My first Company Commander, in ‘C’ Coy, was Capt Ingram, who had as his CSM ‘Ticker’ Pryor of the Rifle Brigade. Funnily enough, I remember very little of our sojourn at Bury, with no recollection of who were Company Commander and CSM.

On arriving back at Arborfield, after our August leave of 1944, I joined ‘B’ Coy, which was commanded by Capt Pete Gardiner and SSM ‘Trumpy’ Towler. During this time, our regimental requirements were still being cared for, in that all the necessary ‘bull’ was taking place. Boots continued to be ‘spit and polished’, webbing blanched to the correct shade, white belt meticulously whitened, brasses polished front and back, chinstrap highly ‘bulled’ and SD neatly pressed (under the ‘biscuits’ in cardboard at first, then by electric iron in later days). Whilst all this was going on, and we were being taught in our trade, we were also being instructed in other regimental subjects, such as TOETs, field-craft, map reading, tactics, rifle drill, stripping rifles and machine-guns. All this in addition to physical training, games and general education – one wonders how there were enough hours in the day to do it all!

One day towards the end of my stay at Arborfield (around 5 Div), I was idly looking out of the barrack-room window, when I observed across the other side of the Square, three ram-rod-backed figures, who seemed about seven feet tall, marching across the hallowed ground. By this time I had been joined by some of the other lads, but none of us knew who these characters were. But we soon found out – the Guards had arrived! Up to this time, the only Guardsman at the School was the Regimental Sergeant Major, WO1 (RSM) McNally, Scots Guards. Ben Cokk had now been transferred from the Guards. One of these three

newcomers was posted to ‘B’ Coy and placed in charge of 6 Platoon, of which I was a member. Against all expectations, the experience was not too earth-shattering, as he rapidly adjusted to the ways of the School.

Eventually came the day when, having completed our trade and regimental training, we were considered fit to ‘pass out’. Much ‘bulling’ and parading was carried out, until we were finally mustered for our Passing-out Parade. This was to be a grand effort, because we were to parade in front of no less than Field Marshall Montgomery, who was taking the salute. My recollection of the parade is a bit hazy. However, I do remember that we were on parade at 1100 hours, but it seems that someone must have forgotten to tell the Field Marshall, as he did not arrive until around an hour later. This wait, plus the fact that there was a continuous drizzle falling, on a none-too-warm November day, did not put us in the best of spirits. But eventually, all went ‘according to plan’ and we duly marched past the famous man. I believe at that time he was also Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), so this Passing-out Parade was a most distinguished affair – has it ever been bettered I wonder?

At the end of the day, we said our farewells to the School and passed through its gates for the last time as boys. We were bussed to Reading Station and proceeded by troop train to Maidstone in Kent, for a period of infantry training with the Royal West Kent Regiment. This was one of life’s ironies, for this happened to be the very Depot and Regiment, where an uncle of mine had served with the colours in the 1920s. I must admit that I, for one, was not exactly enamoured with having to learn new sorts of drill movements, totally different to those we had been practising for the past three years! Still, the field-craft was enjoyable and, for the first time since putting on the uniform in 1943, I could go outside the gate to the nearest pub and drink a pint, without looking over my shoulder to see if I was being observed by any of the permanent staff.

At last, in the middle of December, we had our first taste of REME. We arrived at a holding camp at Otley, Leeds, up in Yorkshire. As with all things in the Army at that time, they didn’t know what to do with us – so sent us home on Christmas leave! The leave period meant that we had to return on New Year’s Eve – which was spent riotously in the village of Otley. The following day - New Year’s Day 1947 – we were on a troop train, going from Leeds to Wokingham, complete with the necessary refreshments for forward transportation to Blackdown, for a course designated to complete our training as Regular REME Craftsmen. We did the rounds of Arborfield Garrison in those days, but I never did find out why we had to revise all of our previous trade training! However, we were taught to drive and the weather around June/July was good enough to make the recovery and waterproofing courses most enjoyable. After completing this extra six months, it was deemed that, at long last, we were now suitably proficient to join the Corps.

And so, in July 1947, it could be said that the October 1943 intake was finally dispersed to take its part in the annals of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. After nearly three years and ten months we had achieved our ambition – we had made it – fully paid up members of REME!

(This completed Walter’s three-part tale of his first Arborfield days, first published in OBAN11, 1997. It is included here as a continuing series of previously published anecdotes, to enable new readers of the magazine to have access to some of the wonderful material that has graced the pages of OBAN in recent years. Ed.)

To Arborfield – and beyond Part 1

by Brian Atkins (43A)

Author's note: Having re-read my own tale of life after the Army (see OBAN 37), I thought I might now write about life after Arborfield!

After finishing basic Infantry training down at Maidstone, I returned to Arborfield along with several others, where we were employed in the stripping and assembling of major units on the *Centurion* tank. From the methods we used to accomplish these tasks, the EMER (Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Regulation) regarding such methods was subsequently written. We also attended a waterproofing course, after which we did our own practical assessment of what we'd learned – by driving the 'waterproofed' vehicles through a large static water tank that was there for that very purpose. We soon found out that, if the vehicle had not been properly waterproofed – and subsequently stalled in the water tank – then the driver had to get out and go down underwater to affix the towrope!

I then went on to a workshop just outside of Shrivenham, where I was employed as a vehicle inspector. On one *Austin 16HP* staff car, I saw something that I've never seen since – stamped on its chassis was the phrase "*Not fit for export*". We lived in Nissen huts, where the only heating was provided by a coke-fired stove. For those whose beds were near to the stove, things weren't too bad, but for the rest of the guys it was pretty damn cold. The powers-that-be may well have taken pity on me, for they decided that my next posting would be to the Middle East! But first I had to go to Corsham for all the jabs that were required – including an anti-cholera needle, as there was an epidemic of this in Egypt at that time. Then it was 'up north' to Catterick for kitting-out, followed by a trip across to the docks at Liverpool. One of the guys in my group was actually seasick while the ship was still moored at the dock. He was taken off the ship before we set off into the Irish Sea and I later heard that he only ever went overseas when air-trooping was introduced. It was a great sight when we woke up that first morning on board, to see all the hammocks swaying in unison as we made good headway.

Middle East landfall

We were eventually landed at Port Said and taken by train to the other end of the Suez Canal. We had been warned to take particular care of our equipment, as the Arab was reckoned to be the world's worst (best?) thief! This was probably proved true by an incident that followed. We were proceeding down the route, with a road running alongside us on one side and the Canal on the other, when a wily Arab climbed through a window, grabbed someone's kitbag, threw it out of the train and dived into the water after it! This all happened so fast that it took a while to sink in. After reaching Port Suez, I was sent on to the Base Workshop at Tel El Kebir (TEK) and had to spend a month on vehicle inspections, while waiting to go to Palestine to join 52 Observation Regiment RA. They had been '2nd Survey Regt' in India, then re-named on their move to Palestine.

52 Regt was equipped with trailer-mounted radar sets, their power coming from generators, driven by twin-cylinder, horizontally-opposed, sleeve-valved engines. The main task was to keep watch for any ships illegally approaching the coast and to pass any such information on to the Royal Navy. I was at RHQ in Isdud, while there was a Battery located at Latrun, whose job was to run a prison camp for those members of the 'Irgun Zvei Leume' and 'Joe Stern' gangs that had been caught

and put under arrest. I was once sent over there to inspect their vehicles and, fifteen minutes after my arrival, an escape tunnel that had been discovered that very day was blown up. After that little adventure, I was sent to Jerusalem to inspect vehicles belonging to another Battery. Then the Regiment went into barracks just north of Acre, sharing the camp with 1st Royal Horse Artillery. There had been a lot of fighting between Arab and Jew, between Acre and Haifa, so the RHA Colonel lined up his tanks, Cromwells and Comets. He then brought in the mayor of Acre and told him, most forcibly, that unless the shooting ceased when Army vehicles were in the area, then he would order his tanks to level the town. We had no more trouble after that.

We were one of the last units to leave Palestine after the ending of the Mandate and we sailed from Haifa on the SS '*Tripolitania*'. As we left harbour, we were fired upon from Mount Carmel, so we were ordered to fire at anything that moved. The side of the ship was lined with people with rifles and Bren guns and we gave them a right going over. We were told that, during World War II, the ship had been sunk three times – twice by the Germans, then again by the British. It had a top speed of only eight knots – and the worst infestation of cockroaches that I've ever seen!

A narrow escape?

We eventually got to the port of Tripoli (Libya), but had to wait until it was 'dead calm' before entering. The reason for this was that the Germans had sunk two mine-carrying vessels in the harbour entrance, leaving us with only a four-foot clearance on either side. Life-jackets were worn by one and all, while a lot of prayers were being said during the delicate operation! Once disembarked, we picked up our vehicles, which had arrived earlier, and moved out to Gharyan, some fifty miles south of Tripoli. On the way, we passed through the village of El Azzizia, known as 'the hottest town on earth'. During the 1930s, the temperature there had reached an astonishing 58 degs C.

The last part of the journey was a nightmare. We had to drive through a mountain pass and it was only just wide enough for one vehicle. What would have happened if we met someone coming the other way, goodness knows. Gharyan was a strange village, in that most of the inhabitants were 'troglodytes' – or cave dwellers. They would dig a hole some 20' by 20' and of the same depth, then cut rooms into the sides at the bottom. There was no fencing around the top, so woe betide anyone who got too close to the edge. After some time spent there, we finally went back to Tripoli, to Keren Barracks, on the outskirts of the town.

When visiting the town, and going into a café to eat, the majority of the troops would insist on steak, egg and chips – good old British squaddie grub! However, there were a few of us who always went to the lovely Italian restaurants and their renowned food. I was as thin as a rake in those days and was given a chit from the Medical Officer, certifying that I was to receive double rations. This caused some discontent amongst some of the other guys, but I didn't let myself be bothered by it. I also got the chance to visit Leptis Magna, the largest Roman city outside of Rome itself. It was absolutely magnificent, everything on a huge scale and it was hard to

imagine how they could have built such a place so many years ago.

I then applied to go on an Arm Art Vehs course, but first I had to return to TEK, in order to attend a preliminary course, to see if I was good enough to go on the main one! I sailed from Tripoli on a Naval frigate and its skipper didn't have to worry about speed restrictions or anything like that - it was a case of 'pedal to the metal' and away we went. Whilst on board, I developed a taste for the daily issue of Navy Rum!

There were fourteen of us on that course, but only seven of us passed. Feeling pretty pleased with myself, I returned to the Regiment - but this time on a Tank Landing Ship, a much slower and more sedate type of transport! Along the North African coast, we stopped of at both Benghazi and Tobruk, still containing large numbers of sunken ships in their harbours. Then it was time to return to England and I caught a packet boat across to Malta, before boarding a Troopship for the long haul back to Liverpool. Just thinking back, there had been a recent attempt to clear the two mined ships in Tripoli harbour entrance, an attempt that had ended with a massive explosion. The workmen and their boat were never found again, but at least there was now a large harbour entrance.

And so, I now joined 36 Arm Art course and, once again, there were fourteen who turned up for it. Seven of us were ex-boys and there were seven direct entrants. But by the end of the course, only half had gone 'all the way' - and it was the seven ex-boys who made it! At the end of it all, I received my follow-up posting and was on my way to Malaya, sometime during 1951.

(We shall leave Brian there and hope to continue his story about his Far East ventures in a future issue. Ed.)

New AOB Members

Good news in that the following have joined since the list published in OBAN 38:

Dougie Huxley	PS	London
Milton Evans	39B	S Wales
Ken Bennett	45A	Portsmouth
Don May	54A	Australia
Peter Drake	57A	Australia
Vince Fuller	57A	Scotland
Bob Sleep	57A	Devon
Bill Tudman	57A	Scotland
Ray Walker	57A	Oxford
Terry Cahill	57B	Wareham
Peter Corbett	57B	USA
Ian Forbes	57B	Spain
Jim Fox	57B	
Dennis Herbert	57B	Lancing
Mike Heslop	57B	Bournemouth
Brian Jasper	57B	York
Les Mungeam	57B	Leicester
Joe O'Brien	57B	Warminster
Rob Wilcockson	57B	York
Mike Green	58B	Devon
Mal Tanner	58B	Reigate
Phil Dixon	61C	Reading
Terry O'Sullivan	62C	Amesbury
Ken Reece	63C	France
John Owen	64A	Swindon
Bob Preston	66A	Preston
Alina Wicks	66C	Oxford
Lofty Ballard	67A	Crowthorne
Pete Brennan	67A	Horley
Peter Ritchie	67C	Winchester

MY APPRENTICESHIP YEARS – Part 2 of a series

by Trevor O'Callaghan, 42C

MY APPRENTICESHIP YEARS

My career started when I joined the Army Apprentices School at Arborfield in October 1942, to train as a vehicle mechanic. Those early days of my apprentice training I found very boring, fitting and filing seemed to go on forever. I always looked forward to sporting activities as a means of relaxation. When I left the School, I met members of the 4/7th Dragoon Guard Band, who were a part of the Permanent Staff when I was at Arborfield. Also some civilian instructors who had transferred to other Army establishments from the School and a member of the committee who had reviewed apprentice training. They were all of the opinion that the standard of training left a lot to be desired. Whilst I am critical of the technical training, it did give me an interest that served me very well during the rest of my career. Also, it instilled discipline and the ability to take the 'rough and tumble of life'. Several times in my career, these qualities were commented on. Gradually, training became more interesting, but my real interest was aroused when, in 1944, the camp became a staging area for 'D-Day' and the School was evacuated. I was in a group of apprentices posted to a REME Workshop at Ashford, Kent.

Before going to Ashford, we went on several weeks' leave. My hometown of Gosport, Hampshire, became a huge staging camp for D-Day. The Solent, Spithead, Southampton Waters and the harbour were all crammed with boats, from large warships to

amphibious vehicles. This had a lasting impression on me, a sight never to be forgotten. Vehicles of all types were parked along the roadside, with soldiers living alongside their vehicles. Toilets and washing facilities were very primitive. One Canadian soldier, who could shave with a piece of broken glass, intrigued me. Many roads were reinforced, because the extra traffic was causing large potholes. A friend of mine lived on a 'sharp corner' and, within a short space of time, the front garden disappeared - as he watched a convoy of tanks drive through it early one morning! The family was promised compensation after the war!

One day, I was nearly covered in smoke from a smoke canister. To explain the use of smoke canisters, I will go back to 'the Blitz', in which Portsmouth and Gosport suffered badly. A part of the defence system was mobile Ack-Ack guns and smoke generators, which could be parked outside your house. The smoke generators were oil burners, mounted on trailers, and producing filthy black, repugnant smoke. When the generators were operating, it requires little imagination to visualise the state of properties in the vicinity. Windows, doors etc. had to be sealed with newspaper, to stop the ingress of smoke into the house. We preferred an A-A gun to be parked outside! I think the smoke generators upset people more than the bombing. Gradually, these generators were replaced by chemical canisters, electrically operated by wires trailing from lampposts etc. The canisters were withdrawn with the decrease in bombing, but were installed again

for D-Day. To return to how I was nearly covered in smoke, I was walking past the canisters when there was a hiss and smoke started to bellow forth. Several other people and I had to crouch down in the centre of the road to avoid the smoke and, later, I learned that it was a 'trial run'.

There must have been a thousand or more vessels around the shores and I remember an oily film covering the sea - the residue was still there long after the war. Part of 'Mulberry Harbour' was built on the coast and I watched several times as the large caissons were launched into the sea. An object that intrigued me was a large drum, with what looked like a very thick cable wrapped around it. I later learnt that the device was part of 'PLUTO' (pipeline under the ocean) - the pumping station was further along the coast. It must be remembered that, in the last war, battles were often curtailed or lost due to the lack of fuel - and PLUTO was an assurance against ship losses. PLUTO was a success, it vindicated the designers, who worked against quite considerable odds.

There was a contingent of USA navy personnel with DUCW'S (amphibious vehicles). I became quite friendly with them and they explained the vehicle operation to me. I mention this because, when I was recalled for the Suez emergency, I was posted to an amphibious unit and my fitter's vehicle was a DUCW. No one had served in an amphibious unit before, but at least I had a little knowledge! One end of the beach was where 'strange vehicles' were assembled. I learned afterwards that they were known as '*Hobart's funny vehicles*' - used for special tasks. I will give a brief background of how these vehicles were so named because, later in my career, I became involved in the design of specialised armoured vehicles.

General Hobart was considered by many people to be a brilliant armoured tactician. His ideas on armoured vehicle design were contrary to British Army thinking at the time and so he was 'side-tracked'. But when it was realised that British armoured vehicle design left a lot to be desired, he was recalled; his main task was to design special vehicles for D-Day. The amphibious *Sherman* tank and the beach-armoured recovery vehicle (BARV) are just two examples. He had his critics, especially from the USA. He always pointed out that, in his opinion, the disaster at Dieppe (the raid by British forces on French coast) was mainly due to the fact that the tanks could not advance off the beach.

Most days, a flotilla of motor torpedo boats (MTB) was on stand-by, with engines running, to repulse any attack by the German Navy. The MTB had twin *Packard Merlin* engines (similar to *Spitfire* engines) and the noise could be heard over a considerable area. The *Rolls-Royce Merlin* engines were built by *Packard* in the USA, under licence from *Rolls-Royce*. During the war, they powered several boats and aircraft. My interest in possible attacks by the German Navy is that I now live in Devon, not far from Slapton Sands, where German E-boats (similar to MTB) attacked the US Navy and Army, rehearsing for D-Day. In the confusion, there were over 700 USA servicemen killed, mainly by 'friendly fire'. The civilian population had been evacuated from the area and the area handed over to US forces.

A story I will relate about MTB shows how technology changes. A friend of the family served on MTB and often talked about operations at the beginning of the war, before sea-borne radar was used. The MTB would cruise off the enemy coast, with its exhaust discharge deflected into the sea for low noise. The main detection of E-boats was by listening and smell; the E-boats had diesel engines and smoked badly. The MTB had petrol engines, which were considerably quieter. When an attack was launched, 'all hell was let loose'; the exhaust baffles came off, the

engines went under full power and the boat virtually leapt out of the water - speed was their saviour. The noise was deafening. The boats being of wooden construction and carrying petrol, fire was their biggest fear. When radar came into use, they were told where to patrol and what objects to investigate, so all personal initiative was lost.

My lasting memory of my leave was from a cycle ride I and several friends took early one morning, just as it was getting light around the hills above Gosport and Portsmouth. It must be remembered that we were used to 'the blackout' and low vehicle traffic. The noise was the first thing we noticed, from vehicles, boats, trains, generators, aircraft and human noise. There was a glow in the sky from all this activity that we couldn't remember seeing before. As we cycled around the country lanes, we met hundreds of troops marching in full kit. This we later learned was to keep the troops fit. Many will remember the slogan '*Fighting fit and fit to fight*'. I doubt whether anyone will see so many troops on the march again and you certainly wouldn't hear them with the modern Army boot! I must mention the Army boot of this period, with its regulation number of studs and steel protectors and the fight one had to break them in! A company of troops marching could literally 'wake the dead'. When I worked on the design of Army equipment, one of the first things I learned was that the Army boot was nearly as destructive as the enemy. When it got light, it was a lovely clear day and we could see Langstone and Portsmouth Harbours, the Solent, Spithead and Southampton Water, with the vast invasion fleet assembled - a sight never to be forgotten. I wasn't at home when D-Day occurred, but my parents' description was that Gosport had virtually emptied afterwards.

My interest in design and development started at Ashford and the events and work had a profound influence on my career. I started to take a great interest in all things mechanical and some of the books and journals I collected in the early part of my career I still have stored in the attic! Life at Ashford was 'free and easy' when compared to Arborfield. We worked with men and women in the workshop. It was summer time and, like many memories, the weather always seemed sunny. Scrumping apples, catching rabbits and the ability to roam over the countryside seemed a world away from Arborfield.

Many REME personnel were unfit for active service and many were excused marching. Parades were amusing when non-marchers 'fell out'. The Apprentices and the ATS were virtually the only personnel left on parade! On one occasion, the REME mechanic I was assisting had damaged his back and was in plaster from neck to hips. He came to work with a box of powder supplied by the Army, to stop itching under the plaster. Cosmetic powder was in short supply, so he was a favourite amongst the women. Why he had to always disappear to supply the women with powder I do not know, but he always looked pleased with himself when he returned!

The work included British and US 'B' (soft-skin) vehicles and 'A' (armoured) vehicles. There were many types of British vehicles, some designs dating back to about 1927, with petrol or diesel engines. The US combat vehicles (built to USA Army design) had 'gas guzzling' petrol engines, except for vehicles supplied to British specifications, which invariably had diesel engines. The USA word for petrol is 'gasoline' and is now accepted as standard throughout the world. Hence the word 'gas' is used as an abbreviation. The USA did not consider fuel consumption to be a prime consideration in design. But the British were very conscious of fuel consumption, due to the fact that all fuel and oil would have to be imported. Fuel supply was one of the major problems for the British armed forces during

the war. A decision was taken before the war, that British vehicles would run 'weak' of the optimum air/fuel ratio (OAFR).

An engine carburettor was designed to the MoD specification. The USA policy was to run 'rich' of the OAFR and their carburation and ignition systems were best described as 'adequate'.

The British specification vehicles were ordered from the USA before the Americans entered the war. I learned later that the US combat vehicles were the result of a massive re-armament programme at very great cost. I was never quite certain of why there was such a high cost. Was it due to the USA practice of throwing a lot of money at a problem or was it due to the extra equipment, e.g. winches etc.? The US combat vehicles were of a modern design, '4x4' or '6x 6' and were very rugged and in general were reliable. (n.b. The number of wheels and driven wheels designates wheeled vehicles. Therefore a four-wheeled vehicle with two wheels driven is a '4x2', and if all four wheels are driven it is a '4x 4'.)

I first encountered the Willey's 'Jeep' at Ashford and several other vehicles, *Diamond T*, *Mack*, *White* and *Four Wheeled Trucking (FWD)*. All these vehicles I encountered later in my Army service and it gave me a good insight into the difference between US and British design criteria. The British vehicles of modern design were 4x 4, a few were 6x6. The majority had petrol engines, in keeping with the fuel supply policy, that petrol would be the main source of fuel in combat. The difference in petrol and diesel engines intrigued me and gave me an interest that lasted throughout my career. Forty years later, I wrote a technical paper comparing them, which was published and I presented it to several technical societies. The difference in chassis layout between the US and British vehicles was quite marked. Later in my career, when I investigated losses in transmission etc., which would affect vehicle performance, I remembered these differences. It is a very complex subject.

A vehicle I encountered at Ashford was the *Scammell* recovery vehicle. This vehicle, and the later version, I became familiar with throughout my Army career. The *Scammell* was a 6x 4 of unique design; the front axle was centrally pivoted with a transverse leaf spring and no braking on the front wheels. A single rear-driving axle with rocking balance beams drove four rear wheels. The beams were in fact two oscillating gear cases, with a driven wheel at each end. Top speed 26 mph, a gate-change gearbox, horizontal winch with guided rewind system, and a *Gardner* diesel engine with excellent fuel consumption. Many people will remember the early *Scammells*, with two men on the steering wheel! (After driving a *Scammell*, you discover muscles you didn't know you had.) The later version was 6x6 and had a *Meadows* petrol engine, power assisted steering, a higher road speed and several modern design features. With the type of rear axle drive used by *Scammell*, the equalisation of torque to the road wheels may present problems. The advantage with this type of drive, plus the type of front axle mounting, gave good articulation 'cross country'; the wheels could rise to a height of two feet. With a conventional vehicle layout of two driven rear axles, the torque equalisation is achieved by a third differential between the axles. Another unique feature on the *Gardner* engine was a decompression lever for starting the engine by hand. This required three men on the starting handle and it was a very exhausting job.

My first encounter with *Scammell* was when I was told to adjust the clutch brake. I looked in the cab and thought one of the many levers was the clutch brake, until I discovered that the brake was operated by the last 2" travel of the clutch pedal. The clutch brake is used for changing up only. A driver had to be

aware of this, otherwise driving a *Scammell* could be more than a little difficult!

I will digress to when I was stationed at Bovington workshop. An amusing incident occurred with the early *Scammell*. It was agreed three ATS girls could operate this vehicle. The *Scammell* was being driven on the training ground when, unfortunately, the driver could not turn the steering wheel quick enough on a tight bend. The vehicle went down in the gully and ended up on another track without any harm. The officer who had been driving the vehicle in front suddenly found the *Scammell* in front of him, but he never did find out how this happened. Later in the day, one of the tyres had a puncture. To change a wheel off-road is no mean feat. The girls couldn't change the wheel and had to get the assistance of the men. The girls were convinced that someone had sabotaged the vehicle but they did agree that operating a *Scammell* was not for them.

When, many years later, I investigated vehicle fuel consumption, I reviewed the *Scammell* and *Gardner* direct injection diesel engine of that period. I came to the conclusion that it was a superb engine. It was a low loss engine i.e. low pumping, churning and friction loss. Good fuel injection equipment, good combustion and a high quality of manufacture. The *Gardner* diesel engine would have been a very expensive engine, but would have been offset by its low running cost.

An interesting problem occurred when I was working on a British vehicle at Ashford and I didn't find the answer until about twenty-five years later, when I carried out combustion research.

A vehicle engine would not run correctly, because the wiring to the coil was incorrect. Positive was connected to the '-' terminal and negative was connected to the '+' terminal. I will first describe the background to this problem, because I encountered it several times in my career. US vehicles were invariably 6 volt positive earth, while British vehicles were invariably 12 volt negative earth - and this occasionally caused problems, if this was not realised when rewiring an ignition system. If a connection was made to an ignition system incorrectly, so that the spark-plug centre electrode became an anode and not a cathode, engine performance was affected, often causing a misfire. The terminals were invariably marked on the ignition systems, but errors did occur between British and USA vehicles. I encountered this problem on a vintage car - every time the car went around a bend in the road the engine misfired! The wires on the coil were wired the wrong way round. I never did find out exactly why the engine misfired, but I assumed that the carburation was marginal and, when going around a bend, the carburation was affected by centrifugal force and, along with poor spark-plug performance, misfiring occurred. (*This electrical phenomenon is caused by the primary and secondary coil windings either assisting each other - to the good - or opposing each other. Well, that's what we were taught at SEME! Ed.*)

Some of the vehicles I worked on were waterproofed for wading ashore for the invasion of France. The engine, gearbox, electrical system etc. were sealed with a sealant. This sealant was like thick grease on a waxed linen cloth and, if required removing, it was a very messy job. Several types of vehicles had a snorkel device fitted, to allow the engine to breathe under water, and some had the fans removed. It was found that some fans would distort or break when the blades hit the water, and consequently damage the radiator. When I was involved in wading trials, at Instow in Devon and at other locations, I remembered some of the techniques I had learned at Ashford.

My first work on armoured vehicles was at Ashford. The new *Centaur* tanks, straight from the production line, were being

scrapped. The *Cromwell* and *Centaur* tank was very similar; the main difference was that *Cromwell* had the new *Meteor* engine and *Centaur* had the old *Nuffield Liberty* engine, which was completely outclassed by the *Meteor*. Some of the equipment on the *Centaurs* we removed, for fitting on *Cromwell* and one lasting memory of the *Nuffield* engine was the 'back firing' of the engine, with the occasional flame out of the exhaust. The *Nuffield* engine was used in the earlier 'cruiser' tanks and I later learned that the exhaust flame was a 'dead give away' in battle. When I served with tank regiments, we often had *Centaur* bulldozers (tanks with the turret removed and fitted with a dozer blade) and we could often hear the engine backfiring above the noise of other tanks.

We had a rude awakening when the Germans launched their V1 ('doodlebugs') against London. The V1 would come over in batches, with that characteristic 'pop-pop' sound from the pulsating jet engine. The defence against the V1 was a line of A-A guns on the coast, a fighter screen roughly over the Ashford area, and a barrage balloon screen nearer London. The conventional fighters of that period, *Spitfires*, *Tempests*, *US Thunderbolts* and *Mustangs*, had great difficulty in catching the V1 in level flight. These fighters would circle at high altitude and use the high speed of a dive to catch the V1. One day, we saw twin-engined fighters flying very fast and easily overtaking the V1 - this I believe was the first action of the latest *Meteor* jet fighters. When the fighters fired at the V1 and made a hit, one of two things normally happened. One, the V1 would explode, showering debris over a wide area and, two, the engine would cut out and the V1 would circle and suddenly dive to the ground and explode. When the engine cut out, it was a question of either 'getting your head down' or watching the V1, hoping it was not coming your way. One V1 crashed in the camp but, fortunately, no one was injured.

The amusing story about this was that CSM 'Ernie Depper was as wide as he was high, and couldn't get into his slit trench! After the explosion, when the dust and leaves cleared, 'Ernie was standing by the slit trench, flapping his hat to clear the dust from his face. We thought this was very amusing. The result was that we had to widen the slit trench, with steps outside of his billet, so that, as he put it, he could walk serenely into his slit trench! We did not like to point out that he could be anywhere in the camp if another V1 crashed on the camp, otherwise we would have had to alter all the other slit trenches.

Having mentioned the *Meteor* jet aircraft it would be appropriate to show how I took an interest in gas turbines from my days at Ashford. I had read about an Italian jet aircraft that had flown in 1941 (I have kept the book on this aircraft); the compressor was driven by a radial petrol engine. This showed that jet propulsion was feasible, but the project was abandoned because it was not a practical solution. When I studied thermodynamics early in my career, it was always based upon the steam engine. My advanced thermodynamics studies were based on the gas turbine and my early interest in gas turbines was a great help.

My interest in gas turbines became essential to my career; as one of my first projects was the installation and maintenance of the *Parsons* gas turbine in a *Conqueror* tank. Later I was involved in installing a *Rover* gas turbine in a FV 432 Armoured Personnel Carrier and the last project, just before retirement, was to initiate the installation of a gas turbine in a *Chieftain* tank. I also kept a watching brief on the USA development of gas turbines for tank propulsion and I was a member of a liaison committee at the National Gas Turbine Establishment (NGTE), Farnborough, on tribology, fuels, energy and engine condition monitoring. This committee also covered the Naval section at NGTE, which

included marine diesel engines.

When I first worked at Chobham, I was involved with the *Rover Meteor* and M120 tank engines, as well as the *Land Rover* engine. During the war, *Rover* worked in co-operation with *Power Jet* (Sir Frank Whittle's company) on the development of gas turbine engines. Sir Frank was the instigator of such development. I met several engineers who had worked on the early jet engines at *Rover*. It was interesting to listen to their side of the story on gas turbine development. On one occasion, I was present when *Rover* engineers met *Power Jet* engineers. It was a fascinating discussion and they agreed that, if only the two companies had co-operated more fully, the gas turbine would have been developed considerably quicker. The discussion was of interest to me, because of my later interest in the turbo-charging of diesel engines. The operating environment of the diesel engine inlet and exhaust manifold is different to gas turbine. However, the problems experienced in the early days of gas turbine development, such as gas flow, bearings, heat transfer etc. were very similar to the problems of the early days of turbo-chargers.

Having jumped forward a few years for continuity of the subject of gas turbines, I shall now return to the original track! I regretted having to return to Arborfield, but I did find my apprenticeship more interesting, as I moved on to studying all aspects of vehicles. One incident I remember was going to Reading on VE day and having to walk back to camp from Reading - and then being charged with being late back to camp. I was just eighteen and, at that age, should have been allowed to stop out much later than a young apprentice. The OC of the Company let me off with a lecture. I passed my trade test for Vehicle Mechanic in May 1945 and left Arborfield in October for infantry training at Canterbury. That training at Canterbury was no great hardship; we often knew more than the instructors did! I won't go into any fine detail of my apprenticeship, because so much has already been written of those years.

(Although Trevor hasn't covered his Arborfield apprenticeship in detail, the preceding article is full of the thoughts that were running through his head during that period. We hope that readers will agree that his recollections of development and design make an interesting subject. Ed.)

Magazine snippets

The monthly magazine 'Operations Engineer' recently paid tribute to the work carried out by REME in overseas stations. In fact the August issue, to quote, was 'a bit of a REME special'. One announcement was that Helen West was the first female REME Artificer to receive IEng status, having served in Croatia, Canada, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, Germany, Kuwait and Iraq. Another major item covered the REME involvement in Iraq - calling it a 'difficult - and at times - thankless job'.

The September issue of 'Craftsman' magazine had much pleasure in announcing the award of honours to certain REME members. Amongst those were the often unsung heroes to whom the Army owes such a large debt - the REME 'Reccy Mechs'. Both S/Sgt Christopher Brian Lyndhurst and L/Cpl Paul Christopher Wilson were awarded the Military Cross for their inspirational efforts, under sustained enemy fire, during the recovery of vital vehicles - a Challenger 2 on Operation Telic and a Warrior at Basra Palace.

The motto 'Arte et Marte' is still in operation!

I had a dream! (Part 1)

by West Robertson, 50B

The little luminous 'Bambi' still wandered aimlessly across the mantelpiece, even occasionally taking to the air, but now I hardly noticed! Having been confined to bed for the last few months, firstly with pneumonia and then, before being fully recovered, some sort of muscle and joint problem, the doctor had decided that my heart had been strained. So, for the foreseeable future, my bed and bedroom would be as far as I was allowed to travel. It was during those long dark, sleepless nights that I would watch that glowing ornament take nocturnal strolls and occasional flights about the room.

These problems had arrived just after my thirteenth birthday, having completed about a year of secondary schooling. In an attempt to keep abreast with those more fortunate pupils, schoolwork was delivered weekly and there were programmes on the radio. One programme talked about Sir Ernest Shackleton and his epic small boat journey from Elephant Island to South Georgia. I was intrigued and requested more information about this man, with the result that a book on his expedition to the Antarctic duly arrived. It was still difficult to sleep at night, but now I was, in my imagination, sharing the trepidation of a South Atlantic storm, watching a ship, the only home I knew, being crushed by ice or, more often, trekking across the glacier island of South Georgia. Weeks became months, the book became dog-eared - and somewhere deep inside myself, a longing for trekking those icy wastes was born. I had a dream!

For about a year, as nature took whatever steps were necessary for me to be pronounced fit enough to return to school, my imagination would often whisk me away to that bleak southern shore and I would share and suffer the rigours of that ill-fated crew. I marvelled at the enormity of the task ahead but, as an outside observer and always aware of the outcome, there was still something missing. The challenge to match myself with and alongside those brave but simple men was no longer possible, but I resolved that one day I would at least, 'walk in their footsteps'. My dream began to take shape!

But life goes on. My medical, prior to joining the Army, consisted of checking whether or not I had flat feet! Those first six months in 'HQ' Coy at Arborfield left little time for dreaming, but again, in the stillness of the night, I could escape the tribulations of the day and return to the silence of the ice. South Georgia became a refuge from the daily grind, a place where I could be me, a sort of imaginative security blanket I suppose. Then the rest of the world beckoned.

Life going on!

Two tours in the Far East and a couple of years at home, followed by a rather prolonged 'Tiffany course', did little to get me any closer to my dream. Over the years, I had applied to the Falkland Island Dependency Survey (now renamed the British Antarctic Survey), offering my services in any position from technician to general dogsbody, subject to Army approval. But whether the Army applied a veto, or FIDS/BAS could find no use for me, I do not know; but now, with a wife and daughter to consider, it appeared that my dream was going to remain just that - a dream.

As Inspector of Instruments, Middle East Command, I had a lot of ground to cover. The more I suffered these sandy desert wastes, the stronger became the longing for the different world of southern solitude, the poverty and filth starkly contrasting with my imagined pristine purity of that alternative desert. Families had been returned to the UK, troops became concentrated in fortress Khormaksa and, as I waited in that sweltering heat for my

turn to fly home, I still dreamed my dream - but was almost resigned to seeing my ambition fail.

As chief of the Radiac Section at 35 Central Wksp, Old Dalby, I was finally getting some sense and production out of life. After some eight months of enforced separation, we were together again as a family, we had a nice quarter and it was reasonable to expect a couple of years without upheaval. Then I was called to the telephone! The caller was a Major from REME Records, who explained that he knew that I was only six months returned from Aden. He was aware that this had been, in part, unaccompanied, that it was wrong to expect me to accept what he was about to offer - but he would do so anyway! Then he gave me half a day to consider. The job on offer was an attachment as technical support to 512 Specialist Team, Royal Engineers. I would be based at Moses Lake, Washington State, USA, but would be required to make regular visits and give support to two other units, one in Surinam and one in Hawaii. While this was to be an unaccompanied tour, there would be no objection to my family joining me, providing I made the necessary arrangements.

We had the usual discussion at home and, since my daughter was not yet of school age, it was decided that I should accept. I called Records and accepted the position and, as a reward, was informed that I could have my choice of posting when I returned. From that moment I became the property of the REs. *(In later years I sometimes wished I had remained so!)*

Within a week or so I was contacted by a Major in the RE and arranged to meet him at his parents' house in Melton Mowbray. I then received a letter from a retired Admiral, employed by US Coast and Geodetic, explaining both the set-up and the job. '512' was initially attached to the American Army Map Service, who in turn seconded them to US C&G, a Government organisation, staffed mainly by retired Generals and Admirals. The task was to carry out a geodetic survey of the world - in other words, to measure it! To this end, satellites had been placed in orbit, which, when tracked by a camera and recorded on film, could measure the positions of stars relative to positions on the ground, at a given instant. Triangulation could then be used to calculate the distance between the units on the ground. There would be a month or so in Maryland, with a unit that was in operation there, where we could get to know the equipment and operating procedures. Almost as an afterthought, the Admiral mentioned that he had managed to acquire some steel-edged skis!

It was a Friday night at Brize Norton when I met my fellow members of 512 - or rather half of them. Two RE Corporal surveyors and a L/Cpl cook had flown to the States the previous night, on the regular RAF *Comet* flight. The second half of the team, comprising the RE Major and a WO2, both surveyors, plus of course myself, were to travel in the comparative luxury of the newer *VC10*. I believe there were a couple of other passengers, but I cannot be sure! We flew initially to New York, then by internal airline to Washington DC, where the British Embassy had arranged a hotel for us, until the US military took over.

The accommodation, with the unit to which we were temporarily attached, made even the old days at Arborfield appear wonderfully luxurious! Barrack rooms, all three concrete floors of them, piled one upon each other, held about fifty personnel. All ranks, from Sergeant down, shared this vast space, while the ablutions at the end of each comprised of showers protruding from one wall, sinks along a second and W/C pans along the third - with a complete lack of privacy walls! While

this was deemed suitable for the three junior ranks, the more senior half of the team were to be housed in the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQs). Due to a conference taking place within the camp, the BOQs were full, so we eventually moved into a motel in a little town called Laurel, about an hour's drive from Washington and about the same from Camp Mead, where we would do our training.

The next couple of days saw us visit the Pentagon for security clearance and the issue of driving licences. These came as a result of a local driving test, which almost turned the huge black examiner white with our interpretation of his rules, and the offer of a car apiece, which of course, we accepted. Although I finished up with a beast called a 'Carryall', more truck than car, which had a nasty habit of falling out of gear. We were also informed about a destination change! Understandably, in that six-strong team, the majority was a touch disappointed at the news, but for myself, it couldn't have been more welcome. Perhaps the fact that we carried tropical 'olive green' worried some. We were now bound for the sub-Antarctic island of South Georgia and could expect to spend about a year there. About this time I received a letter from Mick Moon (50A), himself an Instrument 'Tiffy' already doing the job - and whom I would replace. The unit had moved there from Surinam, they had roughly surveyed by camera, and he described remarkably well the location - and gave a potted history. (*My secret dream remained a secret, for I could not bear the thought that some careless word might shatter it, or another change could happen.*)

The month in Maryland passed and, although we worked most nights, the hospitality of those gentlemen and families from US C&G could not have been bettered. They seemed to compete with each other to produce a more spectacular evening than the last. When the time came to move, we flew first to the West Coast, where I was to collect a clock and arrange for it to get some sort of power supply as we journeyed south to Montevideo. As it turned out, the clock was already installed on the Boeing 747, reclining across two first-class seats and sipping contentedly at a 24-volt supply! My seat was back with the cattle! The clock, one of the first portable atomic editions, was a multi-million dollar investment, so perhaps it required a bit of pampering. I did my bit by helping it to consume much of the free alcohol and such, so generously offered to first-class passengers.

Off to the South Atlantic

Montevideo was a city of narrow streets with choking air, heavy with the smoke from steam powered buses, model 'T' Fords and De Soto saloons chugging across dilapidated plazas. Poverty seemed obligatory, with many sad faces, but each ready to smile a welcome. And last but not least, of course, the harbour. Painted grey and showing her age, the little Fleet Supply ship looked hardly capable of braving the world-circumnavigating waves of the South Atlantic. I learned that she had seen service in the Pacific during the last war, then been de-commissioned, only to be resurrected for use during the Korean campaign of the early Fifties. Again, she had had the indignity of being declared of no further use, but when transport was required to move the survey teams around the world, from somewhere in someone's distant memory she appeared. Her bows, although still shapely, carried the wrinkles and buckles of age, and large black letters identified her as 'FS216'. She did not even have a name!

When you are living a dream, it is inevitable that characters larger than life should appear. During one of the many parties we had attended in the States, I was avoiding the general melee in the company of one Gus Papalous, a retired Admiral. We had taken refuge behind the kitchen door, sitting on the floor and drinking from a pitcher of beer placed conveniently between us. Soon we

were joined by his wife, a charmingly elegant lady, who spoke with just a touch of a southern drawl - and who knew just where to look when her husband was missing. The talk turned to the wartime exploits of a particular individual, then delved deeper into his life.

Running away from home at thirteen, he had first come to the attention of the authorities aged fifteen, when he was returned to the States from 'south of the border', charged with running a house of ill-repute. Later, he was forced to leave the country, when at least three states wanted to speak to him regarding wives he had in each! This was not too much of a problem because, when the war started, he was already a merchant seaman, and all hands were called to the mast. There followed tales of derring-do, escapades of either incredible bravery or sheer stupidity, and a complete defiance of authority. There was another story by the lady of a time, just after the Japanese surrender, when she and some other wives had asked to be taken out for a few days, to which he agreed, in spite of a direct order not to. During that trip, he placed his ship into the centre of a whirlpool, to rescue some fishermen who had been trapped there for days. His name was 'Skipper King'.

Skipper King had retired with his ship. When Korea had started, he was found with yet another wife on an island in Japan and cajoled into returning in command - to retire again when the troubles were resolved. Escaping to a different island, with of course another wife in tow, he was harder to find when required later. But here he was, now over seventy and at sea again - and still the Skipper of FS216. Moreover, most of his Philippino crew had survived with him!

There was an air of quiet efficiency about the ship, contrasting sharply with the actions of we passengers as we tried to get our kit aboard and the expensive clock catered for. But late afternoon saw us gently motoring down the River Plate, past the superstructure of the sunk and bottomed *Graf Spee*, towards the deep waters of the Atlantic. Midnight saw us reaching for security straps, to stop us being tossed from our bunks, as the ocean tested the ability of that little ship to withstand its ominous majesty. For the next four days, the weather gave no respite. Only the crew had any appetite and they seemed to live on 'Clam Chowder' - which may or not be delicious! But the smell of cooking fish, which managed to get everywhere, did little to improve our sea-going abilities. Then the Falkland Islands loomed, a welcoming sight through the drifting mist.

For a couple of days we felt the ground, still and steady below our feet. I found the local baker and learned to make bread; we drank turpentine (which was labelled as Argentinian Brandy), and went to parties. We watched a film of a politician (Lord Chalfont, representing Harold Wilson's government), telling the locals how much better it would be for them when the islands were handed over to Argentina, then the about-turn when they threatened to revolt during a Royal visit. All in all, we had a good time but, as with all good times, it had to end and soon we were at sea again, bows turning east and south, into the turbulent world of the South Atlantic.

For the first day-and-a-half the seas were big, but valiant FS216 met them and we cruised on. Then, towards the end of the second day, a storm blew up with such ferocity that we were forced to run before it. For three days it was a case of being strapped into your bunk - or hanging on to any fixture available. Steam hoses blasted off ice, as it grew on the stays and wires, a dangerous job under the prevailing conditions. Sitting, chatting with Skipper King, what was happening outside did not seem to matter, as he recounted tales of what his beloved ship had conquered in the past. And, when mentioning our present course,

he suggested we might even hit South Africa before we met South Georgia!

Something was wrong! The ship was strangely silent, only the rhythmical rumble of the engine and a gentle vibration gave any indication of life. Then a gentle bump on the hull, now another, louder. I scrambled for the door and deck. Deep, deep, clear blue sky, a shining sun already climbing from the horizon and the sea an oily calm, still tinted green in that early dawn. Ice plates, in various sizes, floated as far as the eye could see, the smaller ones being silently swept aside as we passed, but the larger, holding their ground to strike us, sometimes gently, but occasionally with a resounding crash. For the first time since we had joined the ship, the whole team sat together for breakfast, which must have been a shock for the cook, having to produce so much bacon and eggs, rather than his usual fish stew!

There was time to make up, or rather distance, due to our scarper north, but fortunately the weather held good. Soon we had an albatross in tow, then petrels and the occasional skua. A couple of times, whales were spotted, but too far away to determine the species; then, amazingly, like corks popping from a bottle, penguins were everywhere - only to leave as suddenly as they had appeared. Distant clouds sat grouped and still in the distance. As I stood alone at the bows of the ship, a feeling of 'what, I did not know', was about to overwhelm me. For, below those clouds, was the target of so many of my desires and dreams - South Georgia.

(We shall leave West's tale there for the present, as his dream of following in Shackleton's footsteps looks like becoming real at last. Ed.)

In Memoriam

It is sadly reported that the following ex-boys departed to that 'great bedspace in the sky' since the last published list:

Dougie Cresswell, 42A, member no.1016 has died, no other details given

David Cross, 42C, member no.1479 died 18 December 2006

Edwin Easter, April 1943, member no.2211, died July 2007

Mick Geeves, 48B, member no.2485, has died, no other information given

Dave Hayter, 43B, member no.1808 died 21 February 2007

Ray Jenkinson, 48B, member no.2213 died in hospital 22 January 2007

Bob Lambert, 43A, member no.2172 died in Australia 7 July 2007

Gerald Parker, 42A, member no.2058 in hospital has died, no other details given

Klaus Pennington, 56B, died 11 March 2007 after a protracted illness

John Roden, 47B, died 17 August 2007 following severe illness

Peter Shinn, 44A, member no.1370 passed away in hospital 30 December 2006

Rodney Smith, 56B, member no.664, killed in a road accident, USA, 25 May 2007

Charlie Thornton, 50B, member no.1842 has died, no other details given

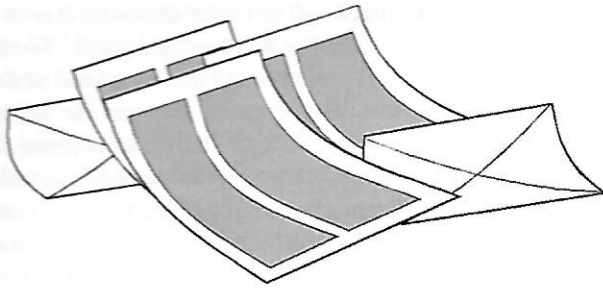
Arthur Tomlinson, 42A, member no.1999 died 7 January 2007

Allan Tucker, 39B, member no.1674 died October 2005

Brian Wells, 54A, member no.150 has died, no other details given

Danny Wing, 55B, member no.532 has died, date and cause unknown

DF 'John' Adams, 45A, member no.1976 died 11 July 2007



OBAN LETTERS

✉ Brian Atkins (43A) e-mails:

Realising that I was in arrears with my 'subs', I have posted a cheque to the Association, you should get it fairly soon. I might have missed it as we were in England from March to mid-April this year. We caught up with Tony Guy and other reprobates at his place, some I had not seen since 1946 and we had a ball, it was as though we had just come out of Arborfield. Others there were Jim McDonald, Kevin Mitchell, John Dutton, Ginger Mills and Doug Boucher - 43A the best as usual! John and I both joined from Bedford and were the only two to pass the test. Then Ginger Mills and I were on the same Arm Art Course together (No. 36 Vehicle), so we had plenty to talk about.

(Brian - it's easy to get distracted, living in Australia! Hope you are soon back 'on net' and receiving your OBANs. Ed.)

✉ Brian Jasper, 57B 'C' Coy, e-mails:

I have just finished reading your article "50 years of planning" in the latest OBAN, good read actually. You mention those members of your intake that managed to make it to your 50th get together, including Tony Strong. Last time I saw him was when we were with 45 Field Regt RA, Dortmund, in 1963 - and he swanned off to a holiday camp called Belize, leaving me to defend the Weser! If you have any contact details of him, I'd love to get in touch.

(It's always good to try and put old mates back in touch - over to you Tony! Ed.)

✉ Chas Pepper (43B) writes - 'No disrespect, Sir!'

My son recently made a visit to France, where he saw the remnants of a V1 launching ramp in a museum. For those not familiar with this precursor of the *Cruise* missile, the V1 was an unmanned aircraft, described as a 'flying bomb', carrying about one ton of explosives. The long ramp was aligned with the target city and the V1 was launched into the air by means of its ram-jet motor, assisted by a form of steam-powered catapult. In flight, a gyroscope kept the missile on course, with sufficient fuel to reach the target city. Once the fuel ran out, the motor cut out and the missile would nose-dive into the ground and explode with devastating effect. The V1 got the nickname 'buzz-bomb', due to the unforgettable purr of its engine.

In the Summer of 1944, young A/T Pepper was waiting for a train at one of London's minor stations. The platform was empty, except for one Army Captain and myself, while any reveries we may have been enjoying were interrupted by the wailing of an air-raid siren. But so what? These had become an everyday experience. But this time the unmistakable faint purring of a V1 could be heard, getting louder by the minute. The thing with the

buzz-bomb was to listen very carefully to the motor noise and hope that it kept going until it had passed you by! But in this case the motor spluttered and then cut to a pregnant silence.

The Captain and I frantically looked for shelter; the only thing to be seen was a shoulder-width 'I-section' girder supporting the station roof. The pair of us made a dash for it; being a fairly fit young lad, I got there first, with the officer trying to squeeze in beside me. In desperation, he shot around to the other side of the girder and there we were, like a couple of sardines in a can and hoping that the girder could save us from whatever was going to happen. There was a long tense silence, followed by a hefty CRUMP, and things shook a little. Realising our escape, we stepped out from our temporary shelter and, with a nod to each other, resumed our places on the platform to await the incoming train. As the title says - "No disrespect, Sir" - but there are some circumstances when survival comes ahead of military deference!

✉ Chas Pepper (43B) writes another!

I add just a remark or two on OBAN39, particularly on Barry Baxter's reference to 'beezeing'. This term and custom was brought to Arborfield by 'Dukies', who used the term to describe any form of polishing. It comes from 'bees wax' and I'm sure all old Dukies will remember this one! The cover picture, showing the 'volunteers' for the RASC, has one wearing a plastic cap badge. Some time in the early Fifties, the whole of my unit (54 Coy RASC) was ordered to replace its metal badges with a chocolate-brown plastic type. This was actually quite well made, with the Royal Cipher pierced right through, so that it stood out. No reason was given for this replacement, but it wasn't long before we laid hands on the smarter looking metal badge!

✉ David Barrett (52B) e-mails from Bali:

Thank you for sending my copy of OBAN 39. It broke all known records, only took 10 days to reach here - also nobody opened or stole it! I feel a bit bad that the postal charges are much higher than the norm in the UK - if I could donate the costs I will be very happy to do so, how much would be fair? (The stamp had been obliterated). The news of the closure of Arborfield has been a bit tardy in reaching me here, I've been away for quite a while. Like most who were there, it has left me with a great many good and not-so-good memories, and all pictorial as always. I have not met any other 'ex-brats' on the island, but live in hope that there are other lunatics around, we seem to have bred a few in the AAS! If you would be so good as to pass on my regrets that I will not be at the next reunion. Thanks again, the spelling of the address was immaculate!

✉ 'Eggy' Egleton (52B) writes:

Like Ken Anderson (see OBAN 31), I was also in the Army Cadets before joining the AAS in 1952. I started in the Royal Artillery at Cowley, Middlesex. We were trained on *Bofors* Anti-Aircraft guns. I was 'number 4' in the crew, facing the rear on the left-hand jack and loader. Even in those days, camps closed down and we were transferred to the Drill Hall in Uxbridge. We became RASC Paras and trained by jumping off the office inside the Drill Hall, under instruction by TA Sergeants. We were not allowed to jump for real, being under seventeen and a half. I took Certificate 'A', parts 1 and 2, at the Middlesex Regiment depot, Mill Hill, tested by regular NCOs and Officers. I also took Cert 'T', that was on vehicle repair. We trained at the local *Ford*

garage. At this garage, they repaired Bren-gun carriers in WW2. I remember watching them being tested, fording a local river. I rose to the dizzy heights of 'Cadet Sergeant'. The RSM, who was a regular attached to the TA, lived in a flat in the Drill Hall; he taught us how to drill a squad and give words of command. We fired .22" rifles, .303 short Lee Enfield rifles, Bren and Sten guns. I think the Stens were Mk5s, as they had a wooden butt and pistol grip. I later used Stens in the Army, but never any like those.

Reference Mike Jackson's article in OBAN 39: I was a founder-member of 24 Corps Troop Workshops. There were ten Craftsmen, one L/Cpl and an Officer who formed the Unit. The camp was derelict and the billets full of used rounds that we had to clean out ready for the reservists. Lots of them arrived as Sgts, Staff Sgts & WOs - then on the next parade they were all down to Corporals! Some were TA, who had been transferred to the reserve against their wishes. We eleven received three jabs each, all stood in a line, while only one needle was used. The doctor was a civilian, who had to be lifted out of his car by the L/Cpl in the Medical Room. His hand was shaking and he had to jab hard to get a steady needle. Needless to say, several of us got 'jab fever' and were confined to bed. We became over-strength in Tels Mechs and I was asked if I minded being sent to the Depot, as I did not want to be a Tels Mech. So it was back to dear old Arborfield and the Depot REME - but that's another story! (And one that I'm sure you'll share with us one day Eggy! Ed.)

✍ **Graham 'Ginger' Chilton (53B) writes:**

Mine is not a name you will remember, but we have met at a couple of past reunions, (afraid the 'ginger' left me some years ago!). The arrival of OBAN39 yesterday reminded me that I had intended to write regarding the article by West Robertson on pp 8-10 of OBAN38. It was not just the article itself, but the inclusion of the photograph at the corner of page 8. I have either the original or a very similar photo in my possession. The motley crew was, if I remember correctly, captured after a Sunday morning church service. They were pictured outside E6 at the top of the square and were members of 'D' Coy, again if memory serves, at the time 4 Div. But as far as who was taking part, there the memory has left some blanks. Kneeling at the front is Pennington, seen at several reunions, next row from the left are Hornsey (?) Webb, Champ, Parkinson and yours truly; standing in the doorway are Turberville, (?) (?) and Boone. I think it is likely that Ben Hebden, John Rainey or Stringer Ives will be able to fill in the gaps. In OBANs 35 and 36, there were articles about 27 and 47 Regiments RA. I have been intending to write a rider to the second - 'what happened next?' I will hopefully bother you again sometime soon!

(We look forward to hearing from you Graham! Ed.)

✍ **James 'Jim' McGuire (52A) e-mails:**

I am the Chairman of the REME Association, New Zealand Branch, which includes ex-boys from RE, REME, RAOC etc. I recently obtained the *OBAN Issue 39* from one of our members here in New Zealand. It was great to read and I must admit it brought back many fond memories of my time at Arborfield, and a few tears. The reason I am in touch with you is, I receive regular e-mails from Trevor Stubberfield, from the Arborfield 49ers, which I am sure you are familiar with. This news is mostly about the lads from my intake, but little about the other intakes, who I've come across over the years. There are a number of our members here in New Zealand, stretching back to 1939 and

through the years since. I would therefore like some information regarding joining up with the AOBA and receiving your magazine on a regular basis.

A couple of other things I would like to mention. Firstly I would like to purchase a copy of your book, *'The Arborfield Apprentice'*, on behalf of myself and our Association. Is this possible? The other thing is, I've heard from Ken Brown (Scotland Branch), who is visiting New Zealand in November, and I am looking forward to meeting up with him. I also have heard from Andy Anderson, who is visiting us in November 2008. New Zealand is definitely the place to visit (during your winter months) and I would look forward to meeting any other ex-Arborfield boys. Please extend an invitation and make contact with me for a very warm welcome from the 'Land of the long white cloud'.

By the way Peter, I note your reference to watching the World Cup while sitting in your armchair in Bordon in July 1966. I too sat down to watch it, in the Sgts' Mess at Bordon, while on my Artificer Course, with the rest of the lads. Then I got a call from the Portsmouth Maternity Hospital to say my wife had gone into early labour, so I never got to see the game live. I have never forgiven her or my son James, but he will never forget that the only time England won the World Cup was on his birthday!

(I passed Jim's requests on to the recruiting side of life and I'm sure he will soon be roped in! Ed.)

✍ **George Wooley (April '43) stands corrected!**

Having read my own bit about the MEDLOC in this month's OBAN, I would like to offer an amendment to the name of that blasted ship! From the 1999 AA Big Road Atlas Britain, I've noted that there is a suburb or village near Harwich - and a quay - both named "*Parkeston*" - of course I should have looked it up rather than relying on a failing memory! The prize goes to Keith Mitchell (pp 25/26) for getting it right. All the best for the future, both for you and OBAN.

(I'm hoping that my own memory is now 'on song' with that news. Cheers George! Ed.)

✍ **Jim Slaven (59C) writes from Western Australia:**

In response to John Holman's letter (OBAN 39) - good to get a letter from another of the intake. Keep it up - we could rival 56B with our numbers. I do remember John from 'C' Coy, but being in 'A' Coy, I only seemed to go past 'C' and 'D' Coy lines going to the workshop, sports field or hospital. I did eventually end up over that side of the square, in good old Senior Coy. 'A' Coy A/T CSM Robert Norbury was a good friend of mine. Come on 'Daz' Ingle - need some input from your good self! I'm still on course for the 2009 reunion, but with a little bit of luck could do a recce run for 2008, I should be fully retired by then.

Great to get the latest edition of OBAN, it always make's a compelling reading. I am in progress of replying to Pete Gripton from OBAN 38 and his experience in BAOR 1961-1963. It was my first posting between 1962-1964. What great memories, speaking of which, OBAN 39 was full of them. Trevor O'Callaghan 42C - I was also brought up in Gosport and lived there until the big move to Arborfield in 1959. I have great memories of the old airfield and playing in the aircraft graveyard, which had dozens of old planes parked ready for the scrap-yard. By the time I joined up, most of the old airfield had been built on

with married quarters for the Navy. Then Stokes Bay and Lee-on-the-Solent, which had the RNAS airfield (which I think was *HMS Daudulus* and the airfield was *HMS Siskin*) The slip-way for the original Hovercraft (SRN1 I think it was designated) was also at Lee. Watching all the great transatlantic liners, *Queen Mary*, *Queen Elizabeth* and the *France*, among others, rounding the Isle of Wight and up the Solent to Southampton. The Solent had two high and two low tides a day, which gave the large ships plenty of time to reach the Ocean Terminal.

Then came the article 'Jersey Boys' - my mother was born and raised in Jersey, leaving on one of the last mail ships to sail from the Island before the German Occupation in 1940, the boys and permanent staff may well have been on the same boat. As a young teenager, I spent many a happy summer holiday on the Island - and still visit 'rellies' there when I manage to get back to the UK. Bill Pusey's story of the World Cup Final in 1966 was great. I was stationed in Aden then, no forces or local TV in those days, only the good old BBC world service radio. They carried a full commentary of the game up until full-time (90 minutes), then everything stopped for the world service news, so we had to wait the full 15-minute news broadcast. But they did promise not to give out the score during the news and would replay the full 30 minutes of extra time after the news - so had to wait an extra 15 minutes before we knew the great result. How times change! Enough of my memories for now, it's always good to read OBAN - keep up the good work, and come on you 59ers, let's have a good show in two years time.

Glad to have stirred up a few memories Jim! Look forward to your BAOR contribution. Ed.)

✉ Len Keetley (56B) e-mails:

What sad and shocking news about Rodney Smith, to have had such a successful life and enjoying a peaceful retirement. Although he was a Radar Tech and me a Tels Tech, our paths crossed via Arborfield many times until he left the Army. I also remember we were Corporals at Larkhill, then Sergeants at SEE.

✉ Kevin Mitchell (43A) writes:

How quickly time gallops away, the reunion looming close, promising to be as good as always, with welcome thoughts of parading on 'The Square'. The marching always stirring the dust of memories, the magic of which will hardly fade as we sigh our homeward way. Trevor O'Callaghan's article (OBAN39) was of interest to me, being an ex-Gosport by myself. His experience of Grange Airfield I shared, well remembering the *Vickers 'Wildebeest'* and *Fairey 'Swordfish'* torpedo bombers (Wow!). Old seat pilots who skimmed their wheels on hanger roof-tops, to create a spin for facilitating good landings; days before aircraft tyres had flutes to allow air-generated rotation. My dubious 'claim to fame' in those days was falling off Grange Fort, where I had no business to be, into the dry moat. I am now living proof that a thump on the head has no lasting effect — well maybe?

As usual, Chas Pepper jogs my memory, with a wry chuckle at his 'shorts' saga. We self-tailored ours, reducing the length at pocket-lining level, which of course made sitting in company a tactful exercise! This tailoring practice was rapidly curtailed, after complaints by some older married families about certain drivers of the NAAFI transport. Whilst with 14 Inf Wksp LAD (Kluang), attached 1st/10th Gurkhas, we would admire their drill expertise at Light Infantry pace. Their legs would move rapidly

beneath those traditionally heavily starched shorts, which themselves hardly moved, giving the appearance of the Company either gliding or skating across the ground.

Bob Ward's letter regarding 45 intake A/T RSM leading the 44 intake PoP — someone must know why — a little intrigue here? Colin (aka 'Sam') Salter was certainly on that parade, and was an A/T CSM, but has no recollection of being right-hand marker! Still, that's what happens when exiled in Whitmore Vale, Grayshott! Like John Hermon, a good crop of we 'Hampshire Hogs' will be presented with the Pingat Jasa Malaysian Medal on June 15th, so no doubt there will be a few on parade at the coming reunion.

✉ Kevin Mitchell (43A) writes once more:

The events of the 2007 Reunion must enter the annals of AOBA dedication and tenacity. Despite adverse weather, submerged public transport and impassable roads, a large contingent of Old Boys made it once again to Arborfield. The golden thread that binds us all had the strength to guide us safely through narrow twisty lanes, deep in water. It must be recorded that most 'Sat-navs' don't appear to be fitted with sonar! A special vote of thanks is due to the Committee, who coped remarkably well with the flooding effects, rearranging accommodation and pacifying late arrivals. We most certainly appreciate the help and consideration of Mess members and staff, who allowed us to use their facilities; and the always considerate Manageress, who had to deal with her own staff problems due to the flooding.

All in all, a good Reunion — parade on the old Square and Drum Head Service, paying our respects to those members on their final postings. The Garden of Remembrance, with its poignant crosses, was much photographed for old friends and relatives at home and abroad. The AGM deserves merit — informative, amusing, concise and nicely controlled — welcome to the new Chairman. As for the after-dinner speeches, well, to coin a phrase, they were small but beautifully formed! It was pleasing to see the ex-boy Chelsea Pensioners at the meeting and at all the functions — one taking his medicine bravely to avert gangrene from the mini-bus episode.

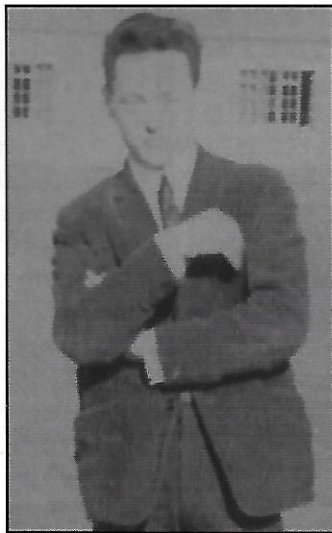
In conclusion, for the 'old sweats', perhaps a little ode!
*Youth never was so beautiful as now when we are old,
 In apprenticeships, tomorrow seemed so far away,
 The future yet untold.
 But now, when nature's clock has turned,
 There is no going back;
 Most everything we knew has gone,
 And yesterday too far away, alack.*

✉ Frank Webb (63C) e-mails:

I read with interest all the OBANs sent to me, but have noticed that not many '63 era people seem to submit articles. I have only ever made contact with one other person from my intake since leaving Arborfield, so I wonder where they all are. I have often considered sending in an article but never seem to get time, so I have decided once and for all to get off my butt and get it done! I have attached an article and some bad old photographs that you may like to use, but not to worry if you don't. The longer I have left things, seems to have made it harder to recall everything; however, once started, it was difficult to stop! Therefore my effort has concentrated on my life after Arborfield but whilst still in the Army. This gives me the option in the future to continue where I left off - after demob and through my civilian career.

Unfortunately, I have never managed to attend a re-union, as

I have spent all my time since becoming a member of AOBA working in Africa (still in aviation) and my vacation dates never seem to match up. I hope one day, in the not too distant future, I will make it. I have only one thing to add and that is I will be forever grateful for having had the opportunity to pass through Arborfield. It set me up for life and, had I not enlisted, I hate to think where I would be today. With the closures of the Apprentice Colleges, I pity those who don't now have that chance.



(Good to hear from you Frank – hope to publish your article soon. In the meantime, here's a photo of Frank, newly arrived at Arborfield, to jog the memories of any of his old mates. Ed.)

Paul Hudson (58A) writes:

Memories brought to life while reading OBAN issue 39

Pete Gripton (56B) "Fifty years in the planning!", page 14 para 2:

Pete, your remark about the *Sainsbury* store and your being sure it was *Crimpy Crisps* factory in the old days was absolutely correct. The location was at the main Reading to Wokingham A329 / Twyford to Arborfield B3030 crossroad, Arborfield on the south side, at Winnersh. If I had a pound for each time I passed *Crimpy Crisps* between 1958 and 1961, I would be a rich man (mind you, I would probably have spent it - assisted by mates - in various hostelrys in Reading!).

My parents lived at High Wycombe, funny so did I, just twenty miles away. Each Sunday I could always be seen doing a rapid exit via the gate after church parade, no prizes for guessing I was 'OD', who finished just as the C of E started. While all else were enjoying (?) their Sunday roast (?) and tea in the cookhouse, I was wallowing in the pleasure of a real home-cooked roast and slap-up tea. I always returned with a hoard of food (weren't parents good?) to see me through the week, but eventually was found out by the rest of our room, who would assist me in devouring the lot by Tuesday at the latest.

For the first two years I cycled to home and back, being a keen cyclist in the Cycling Club (who all enjoyed being authorised to book out for training every evening - well it was thirsty work!). Then, during my last year, I purchased a car, naughty naughty, but kept it at home with my Dad, who used it during the week and drove it to Arborfield to pick me up. Once out of Guardroom sight, I would take over the wheel and likewise Dad jumped into the driving seat at the same point on return. Never did get caught!

My remembrance of the *Crimpy Crisps* factory has never left my mind, as I must have passed it twice on at least 150 days, plus 54 times on my journeys to/from 27 (continuous) reunions since 1980. What happened, like all others, to the vow "never to go back to that forsaken camp" again?

Bill Pusey (46A) "My World Cup Final 1966", page 15:

I found Bill's story of his role of steward at the 1966 World Cup very interesting. At the time I was slightly further away than him from Wembley stadium, being somewhere in the 'middle of

nowhere' on Luneberg Heath. I did however enjoy all the English matches bar one as much as he did and, like him, it didn't cost me a penny. I was with 1st RHA 'E' Battery on the annual six-week firing camp and we REME guys were very popular with that regiment. Under the command of Lt Col M Janes MBE RHA, instructions to the regiment were that we were to be left alone to run ourselves and not be interfered with, so that we could get on with our role - best years of my service.

Well, there we were, getting on with it, plenty to do once guns, tanks et al returned at end of day. One day I was approached by the Battery Captain, who asked if I would do him a big favour? Of course, who was I to refuse a Captain when I was only a Corporal? But I knew it was something worthwhile, as he always called me Paul when things were good. To cut a long story short, he had approached the *Globe* cinema manager at Hohne Barracks for the loan of a television, including aerial, and the Royal Signals CO, also in Hohne, for a trailer-mounted generator. He had to press the *Globe* manager, as the minimum time limit for a telly loan was 3 months (he won the day). The Signals CO insisted he could only have the generator if it was signed for and maintained by a REME chap (who turned out to be me!).

Well he damn well knew that I was a footie fanatic and would not let him down. So there we were, middle of nowhere - but we had an aerial up a tree, the generator parked outside the mess tent, television in the mess tent and bar, with plenty of chairs. The only rule I laid down was that the front row was exclusively for us LAD guys, plus himself and the OC Major of course, which was readily agreed. So we managed to watch the complete World Cup series matches in comfort, with plenty of ale and not costing a penny.

My only drawback was that for the first match, England v Uruguay (1-1 I seem to recall), myself and 'Skin' Hirons (plus driver) were tied up with a *Centurion*, which had been knackered by a plankie on the range, from about 1800 till about 0600 next morning. However, all the Battery fellas were very sympathetic to us and kept plying us with bottles and sarnies, to avoid us dehydrating and getting hungry I guess. Early next morning, we completed the job and were in the process of putting tools away when Skin remarked, "Have you seen how many bottles (empty) there are on this tank?" They were standing up, side to side on the track guard all around the engine and gearbox area and most of you will know how much overall length that is! Believe it or not, we didn't feel even a teeny bit tipsy, just shows how to avoid such a feeling - work hard while you imbibe, but don't upset the 'boys in blue'. And, of course, it just shows what REME can manage when needed and away from civilisation.

(Yeah, it was a great year, 1966 - it also produced my first ever visit to Wembley, to watch my beloved Everton come back from 0-2 down to beat Sheffield Wednesday at the FA Cup Final. Tanks for the memory? Ed.)

✍ Pete Gripton (56B) writes:

It was great to recently meet up with a couple of old pals, Alastair McHardy (53B) and George Vince (57A). We had all served together at the same REME Workshop in BAOR in the very early Sixties, so it was an occasion to swap tales and recall memories of those long-gone days. George in particular has a vivid recollection of characters and events, so it was mainly he that kept the entertainment going for the best part of three hours. Mac has been suffering from MS for a number of years now, but he bears it all stoically, determined to enjoy life to the full for as long as he is able. Of course, 2007 is the 'Big 5-oh' for George,

and I know that Jimmy Gardner of his Div, along with others, have been very busy trying to get as many 1957 lads as possible to the reunion. Amongst those should be Pete Drake, who lives in Perth, Western Australia – and who used to give me ‘unofficial’ haircuts at boys’ school! I won’t be attending the reunion this year – so may I take this opportunity to hope that, by the time you all read this, you 57ers have had a great time together.

✂ Ray ‘Fred’ Walker (57A) e-mails:

Have just seen Jim Gardner’s note in OBAN39. Presumably you have his e-mail address, so could you forward this to him please? I have tried to find out how many 57A ‘C’ Coy are members, but no joy (even after sending in intake 6 Div Company photo).

(Glad to have been of service Ray! Hope you made it to your 50th anniversary reunion. Ed.)

✂ Ron Janes, Oct ‘42, writes:

The accompanying photograph was taken at the 1956 Old Boys’ Reunion, which was organised by Lawrence Nixon (right of centre), assisted by myself (with the inevitable cigarette!). The rest of the photo is dominated by Euan(?) Claydon. Euan had not been an Instrument Section or School success, but made an unexpected and pleasant appearance. The truth was that he was visiting his brother and taking advantage of free lodgings! I would be pushing my luck to name any others in the photo – but perhaps our readership out there could help with this?



P.S. I well remember Trevor O’Callaghan’s brother as Workshop Officer at 10 Inf Wksp, he was a nice bloke.

(I cannot recall any personalities, but being a ‘Jeep’, I was on duty as a waiter for that 1956 reunion! Can anyone help with names? Ed.)

✂ Malcolm Hay 53A Harrogate e-mails:

My complimentary copy of OBAN for BOBA arrived last Saturday. I immediately set to reading it, after which I filed it for display at our ‘Heritage Trail’ on the Saturday morning of our annual Sept reunion in Chepstow. Although, of course, I know hardly any of the names from that more junior AAS (joke) in your articles, and the need to understand the terminology (e.g. at Chep we talk about terms or Junior Group and Senior Group, not Divs), it is still a good read and excellent presentation. I hope you do not object to comment by an ‘outsider’ on the latest issue, but two things caught my eye:

Page 21, MEDLOC saga: I was brought up in Mistley, a village about 10 miles up the line from Harwich. When using the Harwich - Hook of Holland Troopship, one gained in two ways. Firstly, your leave didn’t start until the day after arriving in UK, to allow for travelling time. It also finished the day before returning to BAOR, so one had two extra days. Also I had an Uncle who was Captain of one of the troopships and another who ran the NAAFI canteen, so with luck I didn’t have to partake in the ‘pleasures’ of the lower decks! However, the main point of all this is spelling. The troopships sailed from **Parkeston Quay**, which also had its own station and was where those who had come on the troop train from London’s Liverpool Street station disembarked. The troopship was spelt the same, so George has it wrong. *(See George’s letter! Ed.)* Harwich, by the way, was for the train ferry.

Page 25, Sept 44 Intake: I cannot answer authoritatively on the wearing of trade badges, but in mine and your service they denoted that you had Class 2 Trade and, as a Sergeant was expected to be a Class 1 tradesman, therefore had no requirement to sport a trade badge. Of interest, when I was ASM of 9/12 Lancers in Detmold in the 70s, confusion reigned in Lothian Barracks, with the Life Guards / Blues and Royals. You see, their Corporals (including REME attached) wore three stripes, so you had a REME VM Cpl wearing 3 up plus Hammer & Tongs – with a REME Sgt having only his 3 up! The Household Cavalry therefore assumed the person with most on his arm must be the true Sgt!

P.S. We now have placed our newsletter, the ‘Beachley Echoes’, on our web-site at www.boba-beachley.org.uk. *(Always nice to hear from the runners-up in old sporting fixtures! Ed.)*

✂ Pete Gripton (56B) writes again:

“Wotton-under-Hedge? Never heard of it!” I’m fairly sure that was my response to Dave Howlett, when he announced the proposed venue of 56B’s next annual get-together. Since we started ‘getting together’ over the last few years, I have always taken it upon myself to do the organisational side of these events, leaving the choice of venue to ‘someone on the spot’ in whatever location they lived. Thus, in previous years, it has been close to David Braithwaite at Diss, Gerry Hincks at Rutland and Dick Morris at Redditch. But this year, Dave had kindly volunteered to give me a break and organise the whole shebang himself – where to stay, letters of invitation and liaison with a hotel. With Dave living on the outskirts of London, I was expecting somewhere in maybe Kingston or Surbiton – but *where?* Well, having checked the trusty atlas, it turns out that Wotton-under-Edge (not Hedge!) is in Gloucestershire and not too distant from the M4/M5 interchange, so getting there is hopefully not going to cause a problem.

The proposed date is Saturday 8th September, but there will also be a good turnout on the Friday night, with many prepared to have a nice two-night stopover away in the countryside. Having so tragically lost Rodney Smith from our ranks a few months ago, it is nice to know that we have recruited Roger Brooker to attend this time – welcome back into the 56B fold mate! In the meantime, Dave has also taken it upon himself to personally ‘suss out’ the hotel, dropping in on his way to the West Country earlier in the summer. So here we are, enjoying something of an Indian summer after a wet holiday season, with our reunion just a few days away now – and raring to go!

(A report on this function should appear in the next OBAN. Ed.)

A brief record of service

by B 'Eggy' Egleton, 52B

Unlike many ex-boys, I served for only 10 years and 183 days. It was on September 9th 1952 that I joined the Army Apprentices' School (AAS) at Arborfield, my regimental number being 22821157, as a member of the General Service Corps, for an engagement of 8 years with 'the colours' and 4 years on reserve. (I later changed this to 9 years and no reserve, to gain a pay rise to 24/6d a week).

AAS service:

First six months: Headquarters Company, Barrack Room F1
2 Div 'A' Coy (Army career as good as ended, forced into a trade I did not want)
3 Div 'A' Coy, attached HQ, A/L/Cpl & A/Cpl Barrack Room G6 & Bunk F1
4 Div 'A' Coy, attached HQ, A/Cpl Bunk F3
5 Div 'A' Coy, attached HQ, A/Cpl Bunk F3
6 Div 'A' Coy, attached HQ, A/Sgt Bunk F3

Other units served in:

July 1955: transferred to REME as a Tels Mech and posted to Felixstowe, The Kings Regt., on a recruitment drive at an Army Cadet Camp (tented). At the camp's end, I reported to 5 Training Battalion REME Arborfield
Queen Alexandra's Hospital, Millbank, London (knee injury received in boys' school)
Royal Herbert Hospital, Woolwich, London
Medical Rehabilitation Unit, RAF Chessington
3 Training Battalion REME, Arborfield (student and permanent staff)
34 Base Workshop (Wksp), Donnington, Salop
27 Command (Cmd) Wksp, to form new unit 24 Corps Troop Wksp (Suez crisis - derelict camp, billets full of used rounds) at Sutton Veny
Depot REME (left out of battle squad), Arborfield.
18 Cmd Wksp (changed trade to Recovery Mechanic, November 1956) at Bovington, Dorset
6 Training Battalion, Bordon - Class 3 Recovery Mech
Depot REME, Arborfield
5 Armoured Wksp, Hamm, Germany (holding unit) 1957
LAD 17th/21st Lancers (Fitters troop & main LAD), Munster and Paderborn
Parachute Training Coy, Aldershot (arrived late, being on leave, placed on open arrest and then failed medical due to knee operation)
Depot REME, Arborfield
26 Cmd Wksp, Stirling, Scotland (supposed to be a Far East posting!). Made up to L/Cpl (against my wishes) and forced to take 2nd-Class trade test
6 Training Battalion, REME, Bordon - Class 2 Recovery Mech
26 Cmd Wksp - Sub Cpl came through (big deal, had to cut two service stripes off!)

Depot REME, Arborfield, March 1959
2 Special Engineering Wksp, Christmas Island (Major Ost i/c - good bloke)
10 Cmd Wksp, Mill Hill, London (Army's compassionate posting to the Midlands!)
LAD 3rd Carabiniers (Prince of Wales's Dragoon Guards), at Tidworth, Hants (Army's idea of Midlands), C Squadron fitters troop & LAD
6 Training Battalion REME, Bordon - Class 1 Recovery Mech
B Squadron 3rd Carabiniers, attachment in Cyprus
Main LAD 3rd Carabiniers in Aden and Kuwait
Main LAD Tidworth and (1962) Detmold, Germany (my original 8-year engagement would have ended now - sick as a pig, still in Germany and full of regrets, extra money not worth it, wife still in England)
Demob course at Aldershot, January 1963
Depot REME: demobbed by a female German clerk and retired Military Policeman!
(REME storeman was quite upset, as I had no kit, all left in Germany. I pointed out that I had no reserve to serve, I was finished with the Army)

Footnote to all readers: I am trying to compile a list of non-REME uniforms we were forced to wear when attached to other units i.e. different coloured webbing, badges, etc. If anyone could let me know what they wore, along with an approximate date, I will collate a list and send it to the OBAN for future inclusion. (These will be items of which the 'dress committee' has no knowledge of.) My details are:
B Egleton, 21 Thackeray Close, Hillingdon, Middlesex, UB8 3DW. Tel: 01895 447017

Bomb disposal

With the recent rise in car bomb incidents and 'controlled explosions', I add this poem as a tribute to the men who have to deal with such dangerous activities. I found it in a book of poetry by Michael Hoyland, first published in 1984, but still very much relevant today.

Down a culvert, wet, cold and prone,
Under the sump of a primed car
Or curled on tarmac in steeping rain;
He would pick at nuts, puzzle out bolts
Or blind slips of deadly wire.
For a week-long day or a day-long hour;
And all the time his eyes and hands seemed calm.

When will the snap come,
The snick-click begin?

He slept distrestfully at night,
The clock's tick and its fiery hands
Burning his dreams; the poised alarm
Blew like bugles round his mind.

One dawn, at the cold time,
In silence, alone,
He rose to scream.

BENEVOLENCE

Please remember that the AOBA maintains a Benevolence Fund for the benefit of any old boy who may be in distress. If you know of any case where the fund can be of assistance, please contact the Honorary Secretary at the earliest possible opportunity.

IN MEMORIAM

Rodney Smith (56B), 1940 - 2007

What a strange and convoluted set of circumstances had to come together, to inform me of the tragic passing of old pal Rodney. My wife and I had been in New York for a couple of days, and awaiting the arrival of my daughter and her husband, who were driving across from Chicago to meet us. Just prior to that, my sister and her husband (Des) had also been visiting the USA and stopped over at my daughter's place. Now it so happens that Des is headmaster of a school in Oldham, Lancs and, whilst in the States, had been browsing the web-site of the *Oldham Chronicle*, where he came across an item about a 'Rodney Smith' being killed in a road accident near his home in California. The item also reported on Rodney's *Altera Corporation* background, which Des recalled me mentioning, and so he made the connection that this could be the same Rodney Smith who had served at Arborfield with me. Thus, on June 2nd, when my daughter arrived at our hotel on Times Square, she was able to pass on this rather bizarre information.

At the end of our holiday, when I arrived back home on June 15th, none of my e-mails referred to the incident, so obviously this 'news' hadn't reached any of my 56B colleagues. So I used the Internet to browse and, sure enough, the sad tale of Rodney's demise had been published in the *Los Angeles (LA) Times* and *San Jose Mercury*, amongst others. They reported that, on May 25th, Rodney had been cycling near his home, when a collision took place with a vehicle driven by an 87-year old man and Rodney's injuries proved fatal. He will be sadly missed by all who knew him, particularly those members of 56B who benefited from his generosity, firstly back in 1999, then again last year, when he hosted two reunions on our behalf, well documented in previous OBANs. Rodney also kindly paid me from his own pocket, covering the expenses incurred in researching and writing my book *'The Arborfield Apprentice'*. As he said to me at the time, "You provide the sweat and I'll provide the equity". All who have read the book will surely appreciate his support on that project.

Rodney – or 'Smudge' as we knew him back in 1956 – arrived at Arborfield from his hometown of Oldham on the same train as Alan 'Aldo' Hadfield. He eventually became an A/T Sergeant in 'A' Coy and, along with a few others of our 56B intake, went on to train for his ONC Electrical Engineering at Reading Technical College. Personally, I have to admit to not stretching myself enough at that point, when 'having a good time' seemed to be the more prevalent mood! But Rodney must have committed himself to becoming a high achiever, because the *LA Times* reported that "he earned an engineering degree at Southampton College of Advanced Technology in England". That must have happened later of course, but shows that, at an early stage in his career, Rodney really did intend to make the grade.

When our small band of 56B Radar Technicians finally left Arborfield in March 1961, following an extension of our boys' school training at both 3 Btn and 5 Btn REME, Rodney and I,

along with Dave Howlett, found ourselves posted to 94 Locating Regt RA, Wksp REME, at Celle, BAOR. It wasn't too long before Dave and myself were off to set up a similar workshop for 21 Regt RA at Fallingbommel, and that is where we lost track of Rodney, as he remained at Celle. He must have subsequently left the Army at his 9-year point in 1967 and I think I recall him later telling me that he had gone to live in the USA around 1971. But it was many years later, in 1999, that I was both astonished and delighted to hear his voice on the phone from California, offering to host a 56B reunion to celebrate our 40th year since leaving boys' school. Written confirmation of his kind offer soon followed and a great time was had by all who attended.

I later found out that Rodney had first worked for *General Electric* and *Fairchild Semi-conductor*, before bringing his entrepreneurial skills into play with the founding of the *Altera Corporation*, during 1983. A report in the *Electronics Weekly* magazine in 1996 stated that he was "the greatest Lancastrian since Cyril Washbrook" – though you'd have to be a cricket fan of a certain era to understand that one! The magazine went on to explain that "he pioneered a new chip technology, steered *Altera* from start-up to a half-billion run rate, and invented that most effective modern chip company genre – the fab-less semi-conductor company". I'm not too sure of what all that means, but I do know that *Altera* produced 'programmable logic modules' (or systems on a chip) and that Rodney was either Managing Director, Chairman of the Board or Chief Executive Officer of the company for twenty years, until his retirement in 2003.

The local newspaper near his home in Portola Valley described Rodney as a "philanthropist" and both he and his wife Mary were passionate about a clean environment. Between them, they had sponsored the town's volunteer clean-up days and donated \$1million to the local Open Space

Fund, but otherwise maintained a low-key image. Rodney also liked to race vintage cars and would often be over in England during events at such places as Brooklands and Goodwood. I believe that he also owned his own collection of classic racing cars, so it is ironic that he was killed whilst riding his bicycle. (Even as I pen these words, Rodney would no doubt have been over in England this weekend, at the Goodwood Festival of Speed.)

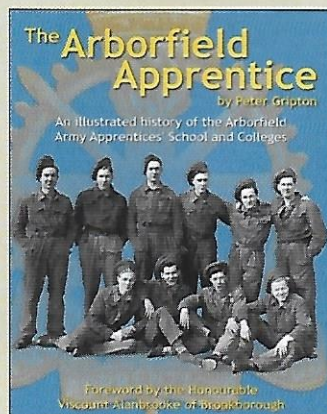
Despite becoming such a successful businessman, Rodney never forgot his Arborfield roots and was an enthusiastic ex-boy. It is ironic that, during the last couple of years of his life, one of his fairly close neighbours was none other than Alan Hadfield, although he has now returned to the Manchester area. Our deepest sympathy goes to Mary from all of Rodney's ex-56B colleagues, who will never forget his kindness to us. The last time we all met was at our 50th anniversary reunion in September 2006. It was great knowing you Rodney, and I hope you won't mind if we call you 'Smudge' one last time?

Pete Gripton



L/Cpl Rodney Smith at 94 Locating Regt, Celle, 1962

THE ARBORFIELD APPRENTICE



An illustrated history of the Arborfield Army Apprentices' School and Colleges
By Peter Gripton

This important historical record written by ex-boy Peter Gripton was published in September 2003. With an introductory foreword by the Honourable Viscount Alanbrooke of Brookborough the book chronicles junior soldier tradesman training over a period of 60 years. Starting with the Army Technical School in 1939 and culminating with the Army Technical Foundation College today the book is an important archive for all those who served an Army Apprenticeship or served at Arborfield. The book is published in hard back form and contains over 500 pages and more than 200 photographs. Peter Gripton has done a great service to all Arborfield Apprentices and staff members in writing the history and he certainly deserves the accolades of the many Old Boys who will welcome this rendering of their story. His light and readable style gives all the appearance that he enjoyed writing this history. But, bearing in mind the fiction, that which is written without pain will be read without pleasure' – there is ample evidence that Peter took great pains to ensure that his readers will enjoy his book. Many of his readers will have actually made the history that he has so faithfully recorded. The author has been meticulous in awarding an equal balance to each period

of time. The Army Apprentice system has been an outstanding success from its foundation. It is excellent that this chapter of a great tradition has now been recorded for posterity.

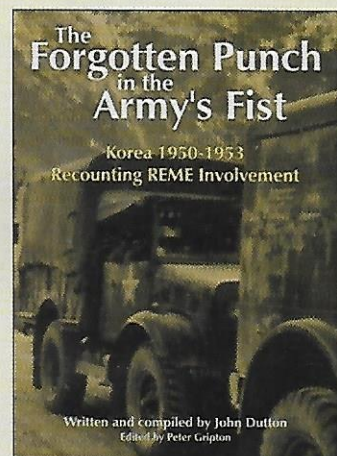
SUPPLEMENT - THE FINAL CHAPTER

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

THE FORGOTTEN PUNCH IN THE ARMY'S FIST

written and compiled by John Dutton 43A and edited by Peter Gripton 56B.

The story of the War in Korea and of the part played by the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, REME, from 1950 to 1953 as told by various individuals of that Corps, makes fascinating reading. The support and devotion to their colleagues is most apparent, but typical of the British soldier, these experiences are balanced with a sense of sympathy for the unfortunate Korean civilian population caught up in the conflict, and it wouldn't be a true story of the British soldier without its sprinkling of 'squaddie' humour. John Dutton has provided an excellent compilation of personal accounts in this comprehensive story of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers at war where the positioning of Light Aid Detachments and Field Workshops was just as important to senior commanders in their tactical planning as was the medical back-up of a Regimental Aid Post or a Field Ambulance.

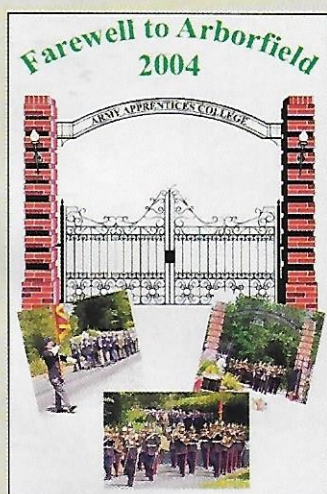


Both of these books are available from the REME Museum Association Shop at Arborfield telephone 0118-976-3223.

'The Arborfield Apprentice' is available for just £18.50 + £7.30 p&p whilst 'The Forgotten Punch in the Army's Fist' is £12.50 + £3.00 p&p. Cheques should be made payable 'REME Corps Account No2'.

FAREWELL TO ARBORFIELD 2004 VIDEO

narrated by John Smithson.



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

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

ASSOCIATION TIES

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



LAPEL BADGE

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



