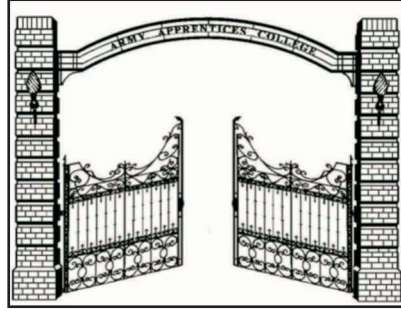


**Dec
2024**



**Issue
89**

Arborfield Old Boys Association Newsletter



www.arborfieldoldboys.co.uk

ARBORFIELD OLD BOYS ASSOCIATION



President

Colonel Iain Wallace OBE ADC

Vice Presidents

All past Commandants

Chairman

Geordie Wright-Rivers
(77C)

Committee Advisor

Bill Cleasby
MBE, IEng, FIET, SQ(W) (61C)

Treasurer

Bob McKeegan-Brown - (69A)

Recruiting Officer

Bruce Leslie (75C)

Remembrance Officer

Ian Scurr (68A)

Cenotaph Officer

Steve Thornes (77C)

General Secretary

Nigel Canning (77C)

Vice Chairman

Mike Tizard
CEng, FIET, (76B2)

Webmaster

Mark Jobes (77C)

Data Base Manager

Jeff Baker (65C)

Membership Secretary

Robert Cassidy (65B)

Editor of the Association Newsletter

Andy Dickson (66B)

Committee Meetings are held at least twice a year in addition to the AGM that is held during the reunion weekend.

If you have any points you would like raised at these meetings, please contact the Secretary at least two weeks prior to the meetings.

The meeting dates and contact details for all Committee members can be found on the AOBA website.

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Front Cover: Father Christmas?

Rear Cover: Tony (TC) Church on parade

Members Passed since OBAN 88

Name	Intake	DOD	Information received from
Dennis Prowse	67B	19-Jun-24	Geordie Wright -Rivers
John Williams	52A	09-Mar-24	CFN MAG
Roger Nickson	56B	26-Feb-24	CFN MAG
Tony Church	55A	10-Jul-24	Wife June
Dave Wayland	58A	30-Jul-24	Wife June
Duncan Chattin	58B	27-Jun-24	REME Association SA
David Hobson	55B	17-Jul-24	Daughter Sophie
Duncan Ronald Liles	71C	26-Aug-24	Wiife Jan
Alan Sharman	56A	01-Oct-24	Daughter Tracy Lee
Willian John McCrae Gibson	52A	12-Oct-24	Son Edwin Gibson
Roy Tyrell	52B	TBA	Direct Debit Cancelled
Williamm Albert Telford	53B	TBA	Son Bill
Peter Church	57B	21-Oct-24	Roger Traves
Geoffrey Twigg	59B	01-Oct-24	Ken Carver
Gordon Hodgson	72B	22-Oct-24	Daughter Michelle
Anthony Strong	53A	22-Nov-24	Brother John Strong
Eddie Edwards	46B	TBA	Bacs Cancelled
Simon Button	62C	TBA	Direct Debit Cancelled

Stand Easy - By TC

No need at last to turn out more than the usual 'five minutes before'
 No final rub with yellow duster assembling for the morning muster,
 Duties now are in the past it's time for you now to 'stand fast',
 You did your time, you gave your best, and now you've more than earned your rest;

AOBA Committee Succession Plan

Appointment	Name	Remarks	Appointment Date
Chairman	Geordie Wright-Rivers	At AGM	Appointed July 9th 2022
Vice Chairman	Mike Tizard	At AGM	Appointed July 9th 2022
Committee Advisor	Bill Cleasby	At AGM	Ages ago
Secretary	Nigel Canning	At AGM	Appointed June 2022
Treasurer	Bob McKeegan-Brown	ASAP	Appointed Jul 2019
Membership Secretary	Robert Cassidy	At AGM	Appointed Feb 2023
OBAN Editor	Andy Dickson	At AGM	Appointed Sep 2016
Webmaster	Mark Jobes	ASAP	Appointed 2020
Database Manager	Jeff Baker	At AGM	Appointed Jul 2022
Recruiting Officer	Bruce Leslie	At AGM	After 2025 Reunion
Bereavement Officer	Ian Scurr	At AGM	Appointed Jun 2023
Standard Bearer	Dave Merrick	At AGM	Appointed Nov 2019
Cenotaph Officer	Steve Thornes	At AGM	Appointed July 2021

The Constitution states:

12.0 Officers of the Committee

12.1 The Chairman shall be an Active Member and be elected by the Membership of the Association and confirmed by those Members eligible to vote at the next AGM.

12.2 The Chairman shall nominate Active Members for the Committee and whose appointments shall be confirmed by those Members eligible to vote at the next AGM.

We are always looking for new Committee members and if you feel inclined to help the Association please get in touch with any committee member via the AOBA website Contacts page or in person.

We urgently have to find a new Treasurer and Webmaster. Bob McKeegan - Brown has been in post for almost 5 years now and it is time we relived him of these duties.

Mark Jobes has had two stints as Webmaster and has given over 6 years to the Association. He plans to do some travelling in the near future and will not have the ability to continue in this role. If we can't find a replacement the website will stagnate and eventually die. There must be someone in our ranks that could take on this role!

Please give this some thought and contact me or any committee member if you would like further information or clarity on what these roles entail.

Geordie Wright-Rivers - AOBA Chairman

AOBA Chairman's Report



Greetings all,

I hope this edition finds you all in fine fettle and enjoying good health.

I'm just back from a visit to Northern Ireland where in my day job, I had the pleasure of attending a civic reception to celebrate the 106th birthday of Norman Irwin, a founder member of the Corps who was born only 6 days after the guns fell silent at the end of the first World War. I'm very pleased to say that he remains in astonishingly good health and retains a sharp and mischievous 'squaddie' sense of humour!

Last year, on the occasion of his 105th birthday, I announced that Norman was REME's oldest founder member only to be contacted by a Lt Col (Retired) Trevor Powell, a former Education Corps officer at the Apprentice College in the 60s (anyone remember him?), who informed me that his father, Hugh Powell living in New Zealand, another founder member, was born in May 2018 and thus becoming our elder!

I'm sure you will all agree that It's hugely important that we continue to remember this fine cohort of founder members and engage with them throughout their lives. After all, they laid the paths we have all walked upon. If any of you are aware of other founder members out there, please do let me know. And who is our senior apprentice and what age they would be – I'd love to know?

Talking of remembrance, I'm also delighted to say that Steve Thornes has continued the movement in ensuring that each of our 35 places at this year's Cenotaph was filled. It's a wonderful and moving experience that I commend to you all to do at least once if you can.

I'm also pleased to say that our own John Preston, assisted by our donations last year, continues to do his amazing stuff in the Ukraine and is heading out there again soon. Another donation made this year went to Eddie Crossan, another ex-Apprentice doing great things through football for displaced children in the Ukraine. You will be able to read of his successes in the next edition of OBAN.

Closer to home, Bill Cleasby and I had the honour of attending the Bohunt School awards in Arborfield, presenting prizes to some incredible young people and achievers. It's a fabulous school which stands directly on our old grounds, and its motto of – Enjoy, Respect, Achieve – resonates nicely with what AOBA stands for as an organisation.

As another new year approaches, I'd like to offer a huge thank you to your committee. The Arborfield Old Boys' Association continues to thrive on the back of their hard work and continued support. Please consider joining the committee if you feel you have the time – we're a happy bunch!

Hot off the press, you will have heard that our reunion venue in Warwick has been re-purposed to house displaced immigrants. That is correct but we are assured that it is a short-term measure, likely 2 or 3 months, and it will be handed back in good time. If for any reason it doesn't, we revert to plan B! So please be patient and await updates. We'll let you know of developments as they occur.

You know that I could go on – but I won't! It only remains for me to wish you all a fabulous festive season and that Santa Nigel brings you all you wish for.

In Health and Happiness - see you all in 2025.

Arte et Marte

Geordie Wright-Rivers 77C
Chair Arborfield Old Boys Association



The Bohunt presentation

Secretary's Report



Autumn greetings from Cornwall!

As the song, "Where does Santa go to after Christmas?" goes, "November is all dark and mostly raining, the nights are drawing in and getting long. While the sleigh gets painted up, Santa sits and has a cup, of his favourite beer and sings a festive song"

I know it happens every year, but I still feel that darkness when the clocks change! Happily, I have the festive season to look forward to and this year I will be on the South Devon Railway's Polar Express in Buckfastleigh once again. Five weeks in the company of young and energetic people which can't fail to lift the spirit.

Of course, not everyone can feel the same and this time of year can be particularly difficult as we remember loved ones lost. One reason why keeping our association going is so important as we can support each other. There are many ways of connecting and a simple phone call check-in can be, quite literally a life saver. May that be our gift to another this year. Recently I found another avenue of pleasure when I signed up with an Extras Agency after a call went out for pirate-looking people in south Cornwall. Two and a half days of dressing up, make up and chatting to all sorts of interesting people (and pay) was wonderful. Very enlightening to see how many people are involved behind the camera, like many things in life it's those behind the scenes who are doing the real work. I was also pleasantly surprised to discover that we got paid extra because it rained on us one afternoon. We were all given large umbrellas which, as we were brought down to earth with a bump, were to protect the costumes not us!

Hopefully you will all have noted the change of date to our reunion in June. It is now Friday 20th to Sunday 22nd June 2025. This has been necessitated by a large event at the NMA and may mean that some people will not be able to attend, as other plans had already been made, myself included. I believe this to be a one-off event and that we will return to our usual weekend in 2026.

Wishing you all Nadelik Lowen!

Nigel Canning 77C

Recruitment Officers Report



Fellow members,

Most of this report relates to next year's reunion in June.

75ers

Planning is now in full swing for the 75ers contingent for the 2025 AOBA Reunion and as we go to press and 8 months out to next year's event, the 75ers already have nearly 70 attendees, (number now includes partners) so we are still on target for the 50 members target I estimated at the last reunion.

Recruitment Officer – Job Advert:

Unfortunately, I have still not heard from our membership regarding the Recruitment Officer's position, but thankfully we do have volunteer(s) from both the 1976ers and 1977ers for members from those intakes to pick up the reins for their respective reunions.

This is the most important area of recruitment for the Association, so hopefully we will see a steady number of new members joining over the next few years.

Final Message:

We are all part of a fantastic Association, which every year provides several opportunities for us all to meet, swing a few lamps and generally keep in touch with each other. None of this can happen without the members who put themselves forward to help run our Association. Please could everyone, especially our younger members, have a think about putting your names forward please?

Many thanks

Bruce Leslie - 75C

Webmaster Report



Hello, All.

There have been some issues with flip books on the website. This app is getting very old and no longer supported by the site/vendor so issues are arising when updates to the core site are made.

I am working my way through in an attempt to correct this and looking at options available for the future but all have an additional cost annually.

There are currently 680 paid members registered with the website.

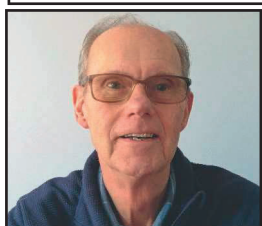
Once again we are looking for members to take over the roles of those that are standing down from committee duties – this includes the role of the webmaster. I am concerned that there are no takers at the moment and that time is fast approaching my end of tenure.

I would still be more than happy to “train up” a new webmaster over the next few months to ensure a smooth transition.

If you are interested in this role then please contact me for further information.

Mark Jobes - 77C
Webmaster

Membership Secretary's Report



Hello fellow members.

There has been quite an influx of new members just lately which is very encouraging. One weekend in October we received a flurry of new members from year 75. This new influx is due to the fact that next year will be the 50th anniversary of those joining in 1975. We should expect quite a gathering at the reunion next year from these fellows. So a warm welcome to all those 'Old Boys' that have joined recently. Spread the word as we are always keen to see new members joining.

By coincidence 1975 was the year I left the REME to ply my trade in civilian life. Not by choice I might add. I had some physical difficulties that meant the activity side of being in the army became really difficult. Like many that leave the service I missed it and found adjustment to Civvy Street difficult. Although I forged a successful career in the emerging computer industry I would still have preferred to remain on active service for the full duration. Sorry to dwell on that. It is funny how a small thing like people joining the AOBA the year I left the army can prompt memories of good times gone by.

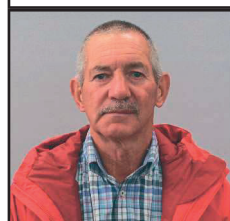
Back in the summer I received a message from the daughter of an AOBA Old Boy who was 93 years young. He joined in 1946. She asked if I could arrange to send him a birthday card on behalf of AOBA. So I gladly knocked one up with the Arborfield gates on the front with birthday greetings, a picture of his good self on the inside in his dress uniform together with the REME badge. Needless to say he was chuffed to bits with the surprise and I was glad to be of help.

Enough of my ramblings. I hope the winter for you is not too severe given the ever worsening weather events that just keep happening.

Keep safe and well.

Bob Cassidy 65B

Treasurer's Report



Hello, Fellow Members

As at the 5th Nov the accounts stand as follows:

Current Account £ 1,082.89

Business Account £50,847.38

Although the current is particularly low at the moment, this should change considerably after we receive Gift Aid (around £2,000) later this month and annual subscriptions (around £8,000) in early January.

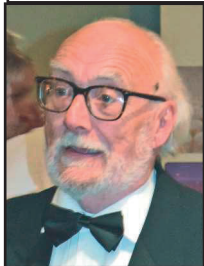
We are still in a much better position than we were two years ago when the business account stood at about £33K, thanks to the bequest from Paul Santco.

Our major expenditure is the Annual Reunion and costs are increasing every year but we have sufficient funds to see us through many years to come, and I am satisfied that there is no requirement for any increase in fees at the moment.

As always I am looking for a willing volunteer to take over the post of Treasurer, so please contact me if you are interested via the AOBA website Contacts Page.

Bob McKeegan-Brown - 69A

Data Protection Officer/Database Officer Report



Hello, to all members.

Welcome to the "behind the scenes" world of AOBA.

DATABASE

All our spreadsheets are up to date and are behaving themselves.
Although like children, you never know when they may have a "hissy fit".
Our collective knowledge grows as we add to them.

DATA PROTECTION

The expected changes to the Data Protection Regulations died 24/5/2024.

To date, I am not aware of any changes to the current position.

I expect we will have to wait until the government decides, what the UK's relationship with the EU is going to be.
I am keeping this under observation.

A WIDER VIEW

Many of you are probably aware of a change being made by Microsoft for **WINDOWS 10** next year.
This affects not only AOBA, but any of your personal computer use for banking, health or general searches.
From 14/10/2025 they will no longer be supporting Windows 10.
They will not be providing routine updates, patches and fixes.

This could make your computer less secure and more open to malware and viruses.
You will find access to some websites blocked because an unsupported system is being used.

Microsoft have offered a (paid for) extension for a maximum of 3 years to business users. £337 over the 3 years.
More recently, they have offered a (paid for) fixed extension of 1 year to other users for £30.
Neither of these options are likely to be extended. You will be back to your current options.
If anyone still using Windows 10 (and there are a lot of us), wants advice on their options.
Please get in touch with me via the "contacts" button on our web page.

Jeff Baker 65C

DBO/DPO

One from TC

AAS Badge

The spurred gearwheel of industry, for faith, a simple cross,
The torch of learning on crossed swords, above the words embossed.
"Army Apprentices School" worn by young boys with pride
Preparing to be artisans to give aid and provide
Support to soldiers everywhere, with skills they learned well spent
Protecting comrades from effects of war's hostile intent.

Numbered in their thousands for three score years and more
They formed the solid backbone of the Army's Tradesmen's Corps.
Working in the background, away from fame and glory,
They quietly performed their role, an unassuming story
Of skill and dedication and commitment to their trade,
Without whom many feats of arms would never have been made.

So honour those who wore it in their youth for all to see,
Remembering those who paid the soldiers debt for victory,
It has faded into history's page, no more to glint and shine
On caps and collars brightly, reminding of the time
When these young boys grew up and took their place where they should be,
In the forefront of the British Army's place in history.

OBAN Editors Report



Hello, Gents,

I watched the BBC program, Hell Jumper - Love Under Fire recently. (It is available on iPlayer). I knew it was being shown on the BBC but chose to record it so I could watch it at a more convenient time for me. I had the inclination to watch it last night, (15th Aug), and must say it was one of the most interesting and moving programs I have watched for a long time. It was made more interesting because of the article I published in OBAN 74 from a member of 77C by John Preston who was reluctant to let me publish his name at the time and I even blanked out his face in the photos he provided at his request. Now that the TV program has been aired I feel sure John won't mind me

mentioning him here. The context of his article was put into sharper context having watched Hell Jumper last night. If you didn't or haven't seen this program I would urge to have a look on iPlayer. I don't think you will be disappointed. John Preston is one of my new hero's. (Hero is a much misused words these days but I think John qualifies to be so classified).

I am not embarrassed to mention TC on several pages of this issue. He and I exchanged many texts and e-mails over the years I have been OBAN Editor right up to June 25th, shortly before he passed away. I have a file with many of his poems that I dip into now and again to publish here in OBAN. I also have two of his books of poems, 'Tee Cee's Arborfield Odes'. I think we could auction these off at the next reunion.

A nice photo on the back cover too.

From the turn out at his funeral and the many messages on Facebook He was a very well liked and respected member of our community. He will be greatly missed by us all and especially his mates in the TAAPD (The Army Apprentices Pipes and Drums).

Stand easy TC, Job Well Done.

As I put together each edition of OBAN I often have thoughts that I want to include in my report here. By the time I get to actually typing this report I have forgotten most of them. This annoys me as the thoughts must have been relevant when I had them. I can't decide if this is a result of my stroke, affecting my memory, or just old age. Either way I am planning on leaving myself reminders from today onwards. I can leave notes on my phone which is never far away. That is the plan anyway.

Disaster is always a button press away! I took the decision to buy some professional back-up software after using the free trial version for a few days. I thought I had it all down pat and went for the full back up, firstly with my OBAN folder, which is one of the most important folders for me these days. Somehow I managed to delete data in the OBAN 89 folder, (the current edition I am working on), and even worse, I had already started work on OBAN 90 and 91 and already finished articles in both editions. Sadly, these folders were missing too. What a bummer. I have spent hours this week trying to recover them but had to admit defeat today. The first couple of days after this happened I wasn't pleasant to be around, grumpy and snappy. However, I have come to terms with my error and must move on. I am disappointed that I lost the photos of Mike Tizard handing me the Sancto award but may include the article I wrote. I will see about this later.

I came across a video of 87C on Facebook recently. I got in touch with Gavin Saul who posted it and asked if he would mind if I had it added to the AOBA website. Because of the size of the file it took some time to get it organised but Gavin sent it to me this week (11th November) and Mark Jobes has added it to our website under Latest News. Well worth a look.

Also, You may be aware of the <https://www.arborfield-september49ers.co.uk/> website that I rescued when Trevor Stubberfield passed away. It is also well worth a look and contains lots of information, not only about Arborfield but all things Army.

It is worth mentioning again that we really need to get some replacement committee members on board. Bruce Leslie, Mark Jobes and Bob McKeegan-Brown are all looking to pass the baton onto the next generation. With technology today I dare say that residence in the UK is not a barrier to joining the Committee. We always have at least one or two members attending via video conference, myself included since last year. Don't be shy. Contact any member of the Committee via the Contacts Page of the AOBA website.

Well done to my old mucker, Ray Younger. He has had a hip and knee replacement in the last 6 months and I hear he has signed up for the next London Marathon! Seriously, Keep up the physio, Ray and get back to your golf.

Lastly, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you all.

Best regards,

Andy Dickson - 66B

Boy Soldier - Paul Turner - 76B2

On the 29th June 1976 in the middle of one of the longest heat waves for many years, I packed an old duffel bag with a few changes of clothing, said goodbye to my parents and sister, then walked to the local railway station where I boarded a train taking me to begin my time as a soldier of the Queen.

I was sixteen years old. I started the process when I walked into the Army recruitment office with my dad, some many months before. Then followed a process of medicals and tests all culminating in going to Chippenham for three days where myself and a bunch of other boys spent the time doing more tests and deciding which regiment or corps we would like to join. At the end of which we had individual interviews with an officer who would offer us a place or not, all based on aptitude and intelligence, well that was the theory.

As a boy I needed my parents' permission to join and dad had made it clear that I needed a trade or he would refuse permission. We had to give three choices; my first "Aircraft Technician" was dismissed by said officer almost immediately. My second "Military Policeman" was also thrown back at me. I can't recall the third, but he was equally dismissive of my choice. He paused for a second before asking "Would you like to be a Paratrooper; we have openings in the Parachute Regiment" It seemed exciting to me but remembering dad's words I said, "No. I needed a trade". He rummaged amongst his paperwork briefly before proposing, "How about Vehicle Mechanic" Up till this point I had shown no interest in the workings of any motor vehicle, but hey it was a Trade. "Ok" I said. After which I left his office and met up with the boys already interviewed. Almost all of them had been offered the role of Paratrooper. There must have been a severe shortage that year. It did rather make a mockery of all the aptitude tests we had completed over the past three days.

The train finally pulled into Wokingham station. Situated in the county of Berkshire, Arborfield Garrison, the home of REME or Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers, the corps to which I now belonged, was about three miles away. Standing on the platform was an extremely smart looking Sergeant complete with pace stick, who once half a dozen other boys had alighted wasted no time in getting us outside and loaded into a waiting mini bus. After a relatively short journey we pulled through the gates, drove past the guardroom and stopped outside of what turned out to be J company office. We alighted and almost immediately appeared another Sergeant who started shouting at us. This was going to be the pattern for the immediate future.

Very briefly, the British army is probably unique amongst western nations in that it is the only country that recruits underage boys for its armed forces. Back in the seventies when I joined, every corps and regiment had its own training establishment for these youngsters. The only stipulation being that you could not be sent to an active war zone until you reached 18 years old. The REME training barracks to which I had been sent, had at any one time between four and six hundred boys between the ages of sixteen and eighteen at various stages of training. Split into five companies, Basic Training was undertaken in J Company. After which you passed out into one of the line company's either A, B, C or D company. After initial basic training I moved to A company for the remainder of my training.

But I am jumping ahead of myself. After the initial shouting and moving into a line we followed the same procedure as beloved by film producers in oh so many films. After briefly completing some paperwork, we were marched off to the barbers for haircuts. Then to the stores for equipment issue. Hats, jackets, boots etc. even a small penknife as I remember.

As you left the stores you were overloaded with a mountain of gear. The marching and shouting began again, all the way to J Company accommodation at the far end of the parade ground. There you were allocated a bed space and with aching arms you allowed the pile to ungracefully fall to the bed and took a deep breath.

J Company was a smart, brick-built accommodation block comprising of eight-man rooms and central washing and toilet facilities. This I didn't know at the time was luxury accommodation compared to the line company's living arrangements. There were eight of us in our room. Four from Yorkshire, one from the highlands of Scotland, one from Northern Ireland plus me and another lad whose home was a mere few miles from where I had travelled from.

Little did I know that such were the bonds that were going to be formed that I would still be in touch with most of them via social media some fifty years later. There were some 60 boys in our intake, formed into two separate squads of about 30 each. Each squad was immediately commanded by a sergeant. My squad by a Sergeant of the Royal Hussars. The other squad by a Corporal of Horse from the Life Guards.

The permanent staff were almost all from the regular line units. With a particularly heavy presence from the Guards regiments. Although it was a REME boys training establishment there were actually very few REME staff present, and of those, most were employed within the technical training role. The military training and everyday supervision and discipline was carried out in the main by senior ranked Guards NCO's and Warrant officers. This resulted in an extremely high standard expected in all aspects of daily life. But more on that later.

Basic training was very much as expected. The overall aim being to produce a trained, fit and well-educated soldier. fundamentally versed in the intricacies of modern infantry warfare, able to function on the modern battlefield. For the most part I thoroughly enjoyed it. We spent many hours on the parade ground drilling, an exceptionally large amount of

time learning weapon handling and field tactics. And probably the most exhaustive of all, getting fit under the guidance of the PTI's or Physical Training Instructors.

Free time was almost non-existent. Although towards the end of basic we were allowed out in the evenings or weekends if we had spare time. Mostly we didn't. So called free time was in the main used for cleaning and polishing. Clothes, boots, rooms in fact if it stood still, we cleaned and polished it. We had to, there was an almost daily inspection of one sort or another. Woe betides anyone who failed an inspection. It was at this point I was introduced to the bane of everyone's lives.

The Bedblock. Let me explain, every, and I do mean every morning the bed had to be stripped. The counterpane placed back over the mattress and the remaining sheets and blankets folded individually to form a very precise rectangle. These were then placed one upon the other in the order: blanket, sheet, blanket, sheet, blanket. With the last blanket being folded and wrapped around the block to form what looked like in my eyes to something resembling a giant multi layered sandwich. The measurements of which in all directions needing to be precise to the millimetre. The whole piece was then placed exactly in the centre of the bed at the head end. Get it wrong and you found it pulled apart by the inspecting NCO and most likely flying in its component pieces around the room. The Bedblock was beloved by the army then, but for most adult recruits, only endured for the length of basic training, around three months. As boys however I think it was a daily feature of our lives for the entirety of our stay at Arborfield. A little over two years. So loathed was this feature of life that unless my memory is failing me, I even saw throughout those years some boys sleeping on their mattress only, in order not to disturb the Bedblock they had created the day before.

Getting fit placed us in the hands of the PTI's. Physical Training was carried out not just during basic but throughout the entire period of service, once in the line company's it featured very regularly within the timetabled week. It consisted of a lot of running augmented with sessions in the gym and sports hall. Running was done in a very precise way, not for us the adornment of shorts, vest and running shoes followed by a session of dashing round a running track. No, instead we wore a PT shirt, combat trousers and belt. The feet adorned by combat boots neatly finished off by the placing of puttees between each boot and the bottom of your trousers.

Thus, suitably attired and formed into three ranks we began to run in complete harmony and precision, well that was the theory. Running as a squad ensured we all run at the same speed and in the same manner. I recall many miles of the roads around Arborfield being traversed in such a way. As distances increased those few boys not yet capable of maintaining their stamina would fall out of the squad and begin to lag behind. They were then encouraged by the attending PTI's to keep up.

I think it's fair to say that encouraged was a polite way of explaining it. Just for a bit of variety and fun these running sessions were often augmented by the carrying of a telegraph pole. Split into groups of eight boys of approximately equal height we were then lined up in single file, each boy slightly to the left or right of the person in front of them, down the centre and placed on the appropriate shoulder we carried the pole. Running could then begin. Oh, what fun! Normally, just as the shoulder felt seconds from collapsing, the order was given and gratefully, with both hands, we raised the pole into the air, held it aloft for a brief period. Then we lowered it again onto the opposing shoulder. This was repeated many times as beneath our feet passed mile after endless mile.

It wasn't just running that occupied us in PT, we also had sessions in the gym where we did the usual activities such as press ups, star jumps, sit ups etc. The camp also possessed an indoor swimming pool where occasional periods were spent. Sometimes, normally towards the end of a lesson, we partook of team games such as football, basketball or whatever sport the instructors felt like overseeing. Sports of all types were undertaken throughout the camp, this to the extent that as a unit the college was able to produce teams or individuals in most sports to partake in a variety of outside leagues or competitions. Any boy with a particular sporting skill could thus easily find a place within these teams. Many of our intake after basic later did. I didn't, well not voluntarily anyway.

Drill featured very heavily in Basic training. By the time you reached the line companies it occurred as part of daily life when required, only resorting to formal sessions when preparing for certain parades or occasions when practice was deemed necessary. I think most people have seen enough films or TV programmes of new recruits and the errors made while learning this aspect of army life that no further explanation is necessary. Suffice to say that we all eventually reached the required standard helped along the way by the drill sergeants encouraging shouting sessions and innovative insults.

Military Training: There was and possibly still is a saying "soldier first, tradesman second". Subsequently every recruit into the army must reach, as a minimum, the standard expected of a basic infantryman. Training was undertaken in such topics as: camouflage and concealment, first aid, field tactics, ambushes, being ambushed, patrols, in fact pretty much any situation found on or near a battlefield. Naturally weapons handling and spending time on the firing ranges were an essential requirement. I recall that during basic training we went on a number of exercises in the training areas spread throughout southern England. Lasting over a few days to a week, this was an opportunity to practice and augment those lessons learned back in barracks. (Later in six div we returned to military training for a few weeks prior to our passing out parade.) We also later about four div I believe, went on a shooting camp for a week or so when the entire time was spent on the ranges firing a range of weapons - mainly the SLR but also revolvers and both sub and light machine guns. But getting back to basic, which we were experiencing in the summer of 76, we had one more hurdle to overcome.

The summer of 1976 was a famous heat wave year, very little rain fell. Streams and lakes dried up and even standpipes were erected in some areas due to the shortage of water. It was in these conditions we carried out our basic training. I recall digging trenches while sweat poured off me in torrents. Also, I recall that on one occasion when we were practising skirmishing, which entails running twenty or so yards in full webbing and backpack. With a steel helmet perched on your head, then dropping to the ground and providing covering fire while another group moved forward. The whole process being repeated time and time again until the objective, normally a tree line some hundreds of yards distant had been reached. Our instructors felt we were not good enough, so the whole process was repeated time after time until they were satisfied. We sat down to rest. I took off both boots and poured sweat from them onto the ground forming a small puddle on the baked earth. It was very hot. Drinking water was carried in a plastic container attached to your webbing; these were emptied much quicker than normal that summer as we strove to avoid dehydration. One subject often overlooked when writing was NBC or Nuclear, Biological and Chemical. Essentially lessons on what to do if subject to any attack based upon these abominable weapon systems. In a nutshell it was kiss your arse goodbye. We did have suits to wear that allegedly offered some protection, that plus the respirator we were all issued.

A number of hours were dedicated to training in getting your respirator on quickly and functioning in such an environment. This included one memorable occasion where one by one we entered the gas chamber full of CS gas, removed said item then spoke out loud our name and number and exited. Some to vomit on the ground outside, the others left with streaming eyes and an itch that took hours to go. Never totally sure what this exercise was meant to prove. Clearly removing your respirator in a room full of gas was bad news. Why actually do it? My suspicion was that it gave the instructors a good laugh.

To be Continued.....

64A 'A' Company - October 2024 Mini reunion by Rob Castell

Since 2012 a small group of 64A 'A' Company boys, and wives, have been holding regular mini annual reunions, usually in the southern half of the country as most of those attending live in that area.

Normally held over two nights in a hotel, the get togethers usually follow the same format, we arrive on the first day, settle in and then meet in the bar for drinks to discuss our past year's activities and experiences, both good and bad, before going in for dinner.

Then again after dinner back to the bar for more drinks, reminiscing and deciding what we would all do on the following day and what local attractions there are. Having experienced what can only be described as a 'Fawlty Towers' hotel for our reunion last year, (don't ask) this year I decided we should play it safe and, encouraged by the extensive TV advertising, instead have a Warners Break for the middle of October. As there were eleven of us taking up six rooms there was a good discount given for the group booking, which included dinner bed and breakfast plus entertainment in the evenings. I chose Gunton Hall near Lowestoft in Suffolk for our stay, which turned out to be a good choice as it is in fact a holiday village with extensive grounds & facilities and a lovely indoor pool, plus we all had garden lodges with patios and lakeside views.



Those attending this year were myself, Jeff Bendall, Dave Grint, Bob Hambly, Geoff Hatt and Pete Howes, plus wives. After our first night, the next day we all dispersed for our various activities, the East Anglia Transport Museum is close as are the glorious sandy beaches of Southwold and Gorleston. The weather gods were kind to us for whole of our time there as the days were warm and sunny. On our second

evening we met in the bar before dinner as usual to recount our day's activities and sample lots of drink before we went into dinner, after which it was back to the bar to watch the entertainment and have more refreshment.

The next day, after a hearty breakfast we said our goodbyes and went on our various ways home, some journeys being longer than others. It was great to see all the lads again, not all of us can go to the annual AOBA reunion so these mini reunions are always a good way to stay in touch with old friends.

If there are any other Boys of 64 who would like to join us next year, then please get in touch with me.



Ed's Comments: Great to see you guys keeping in touch, Rob. If any 64A Out there want to get in touch with Rob, Contact me on the AOBA website and I will put you in touch. Andy 66B

CONSEQUENCES

By Adrian Lacamp, B Coy, 64A

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Acknowledgements

I really do have to thank Hazel, my long-suffering wife, for putting up with my little (and many) idiosyncrasies, and even my bigger ones, too. This story was started during a transitional time in our lives, between my retiring early, due to the increasing severity of my tinnitus and Hazel's retirement problems, due mainly to governmental 'age-of-retirement' shuffling (putting hers back) and stress (helping to bring mine forward).

My thanks also to Julia, you know who you are, and your contribution is very much appreciated.

Adrian Lacamp 2017

Chapter 1 Morning

In The Beginning

To say that, by the time his mid-morning break came around, Davey Hepscott was in a bad mood would have been more than just a slight understatement.

In fact, to put it a bit more accurately, he was just about spitting feathers! He was, to put it mildly, in a fuming, steam-coming-out-his-ears, blood-vessel-bursting, incoherently-mad, raging fury.

And, yes, he knew exactly what state he was in, and he did not like it one little bit; but he couldn't help it, that was just the way it was that particular morning.

The morning had not started like one of his normal mornings at all, in fact it had started quite badly and had just gone downhill from there. And, of course, it just happened to be the thirteenth of the month, but at least it was a Monday. If it had been a Friday, he may well have been tempted to pull the first duvet day of his working life.

That morning had built itself up into one of those utterly frustrating beginnings. you know the ones! The ones where, if something can go wrong, it will, and usually in the most inconvenient manner, and at the most inconvenient time, too.

Yep! That's right, Murphy's Laws (often referred to by us minions as Sod's Law), the first three of them at least, all together, had kicked in with a vengeance

For those of you who may not know of the first three of Murphy's Laws, let me remind you of them:

Murphy's 1st Law states that if something CAN go wrong, it probably WILL go wrong.

Murphy's 2nd Law states that when something goes wrong, it will happen at the most INCONVENIENT TIME.

Murphy's 3rd Law states that when it does happen, it will happen in the WORST possible PLACE.

Oh, and... **Murphy's 4th Law states that it will also happen in FRONT of other people, thus embarrassing you to the max!** (just thought I'd throw that one in for your edification!) .

But, back to our subject, the unhappy Mr Davey Hepscott. No, that's Davey not David, or Davy, his birth certificate shows his name as **Davey**, thank you very much.

Our subject, Davey, is twenty-six years old. He is physically quite fit, and mentally quite resilient (usually). He is single, but that state of affairs is definitely by design and not because of any bad relationships, though he has had one or two of those as well. And he is a school teacher, which he considers is more of a privilege than a job. He teaches his two favourite subjects, English and Geography, to six- to twelve-year-olds at one of the few elementary schools still under Council control in the County.

He often feels that, if he could only get a teaching position at one of those new Academies that are springing up

all over the place, he would probably leave a dust cloud a mile high behind him getting there. Davey has ambitions. It wasn't that he hates being a teacher, just the opposite in fact, all he had ever wanted to do, and still wants to do, was teach, he loves to teach, he lives to teach.

But his present school just seemed to be full of the off-spring of *Commuters from the Big Cities* (in italics and capitals, even).

The school felt like a dumping ground for the sons and daughters of penny-pinching, pound-wasting Yuppies and Nimbys who just sent the brats, er children, to school to get them out of the way.

Kids from all of the local new housing estates, though they call them Granges or Groves or something equally silly nowadays, filled with the newly rich families, with their newly rich credit cards, their new must-have gadgets and super-toys, and their phony airs and graces. All mixed in with the local kids, all in the one, the only, local elementary school

This particular morning fate was not looking kindly on Davey, she probably wasn't looking at all. Davey's faithful radio alarm clock had failed to rouse him from the depths of a deep and dreamless sleep. His trusty old mains electric alarm clock had somehow reset itself, it showed a flashing, green '12:00' display, probably as a result one of the power outages that had occurred during the thunderstorm that Davey had slept right through.

Having realised just how late he really was, Davey had had a very quick scrape with a wet razor, while he was in the shower, before throwing his clothes on for the day.

He had managed to throw a peanut butter sandwich and a glass of peach nectar down his neck before dashing out of his end of terrace, two-up two-down humble home, ready to drive to work.

Only to find that fate had further stacked the deck against him. Eric, the yuppie nerd from next door to the right, had left his car parked right across Davey's driveway.

Therefore, Davey's old and battered, rust-n-red coloured Morris Mini, affectionately nicknamed 'hunka-junka', was very firmly blocked in by Eric's beautifully restored, immaculate, and equally old, E Type Jaguar.

Eric was married to Hannalora, another typical yuppie, and also a complete nerdette. He had come into his money through an inheritance shortly before their marriage, and Hannalora just had to try to spend it all, on herself of course.

Together they owned the sparkling new detached mansion that sat next to the end of Davey's terrace, and Hannalora just loved to rub Eric's money in everybody else's nose.

Not long after building their manse and moving in, Eric, for some inexplicable reason, had become a complete workaholic, he was also fast turning into an alcoholic. It seems that he used work to get away from Hannalora during the day, and the drink to do the same when not at work. But he was completely under Hannalora's thumb, so much so that he dared not block his own driveway, oh no, he didn't dare block in Hannalora's equally beautifully VeeDub Karmann Ghia, his life would almost certainly be complete hell if he did.

Therefore, that morning, Eric, knowing that he was still well over the drink-drive limit, had taken the early bus to work that morning. The fact that his only set of car keys were with him was completely deliberate. Or so Hannalora claimed as she drove, unhindered, out of her drive, waving two fingers at Davey as she disappeared up the road in the opposite direction to Eric's bus.

Davey's problem, however, remained the same, how to get to work on time.

There was no way that Davey was going to take a taxi to work, not again. The last time he had done so it had cost him a staggering twenty-seven quid, and that was just to get *to work*. And the only bus that would have got him to work on time was currently being overtaken by Hannalora's car up the road, and out of the village. Its next stop was nearly five miles away, in the next village. Which left Davey to consider his somewhat limited options; a) bus, gone; b) next bus, not soon enough; c) taxi, too costly; d) bicycle, ain't got one; e) walk, no way Jose, it's nearly twenty miles. So, what next?

With a shake of his head a sudden memory popped into his head, and a smirk starting to grow on his lips, Davey began to consider option f) a game of street chess!

His neighbours on the other side, the lovely Sarah and her partner, Adam, had been in a similar situation a couple of months ago. Eric had left his Jag parked right across their drive that time, blocking Sarah's Skoda Favia, but they had possessed both the means and the opportunity to solve the problem. Ergo, similar situation, similar solution.

It only had only taken a minute for Adam to walk down the street to get Loony-bot, his battered old ex-army, camouflage painted, Mark I Land Rover out of their rented garage. Sarah had then helped Adam hook it up to the Jaguar's rear tow point and they literally dragged it, but very gently of course, backwards away from their drive.

This time, however, they were right next to Eric's own, now totally empty, drive, so that's exactly where they left it, right across the front gates of Eric and Hannalora's drive.

The co-conspirators shared a brief moment of joy at the knowledge that Hannalora would, as usual, be home long before Eric. However, that slight moment of joy did very little to lighten Davey's mood. That morning's traffic on the way to school did its very best to further increase the depth of his already worsening mood.

So, you can understand that it had certainly not been the best of starts to the day for Mr Davey Hepscott. Could the day get it any worse? Davey really and sincerely hoped not, because he could feel a tight knot of anger building up in his chest, and he knew that it would take very little more to make that knot become unravelled, and dangerously so at that.

Meeting Missed

Despite all that had happened that morning, Davey actually made it to school in time for the first bell, in time for morning Assembly, but only just. However, he did miss the now mandatory Monday morning meeting, where the latest updates to the school's 'Policy' document had been handed out by the headmaster.

This large and ever-expanding set of rules and regulations was not just this school's Policy, but the County Council's Policy for all the schools under its strict and some would say over-powering control.

School Policy, (yes, that's with a capital 'P'), was never to be disobeyed, never to be contradicted, and, quite probably, would never even to be read in full by most teachers. But the Council's Education Department considered their Policy to be the 'Law'! Breaking, or even slightly bending, any of the sections of the Policy was deemed to be an offence worthy of, at least, an official written reprimand, as far as County were concerned.

It was very much doubted that the authors of Policy had ever even been parents, let alone teachers.

Plus, it was also quite evident that Policy was the work of several different authors because, as a whole, Policy was obviously uncoordinated at best and peppered with contradictions at worst.

Policy went far beyond setting the curriculum, it not only set out each year group's timetable, but it also detailed the subjects, or 'themes', to be taught each and every half term. Many teachers wondered what the next step would be; issuing individual lesson plans, reading lists, or even scripts of what to say in each lesson?

Policies also went so far as to lay down very strict prescribed rules of conduct and punishment. It itemised what to do when dealing with each and every type of mishap, misdemeanour, local catastrophe or international disaster that the authors could imagine might happen in one of its schools.

Policy also listed who should, or could, do what in each and every case or scenario listed. Even to what could and could not be told to the parents or guardian of any child or children involved in such situations.

It also laid down that the newly instituted, and recently appointed, school counsellors were to be involved, or at the least consulted, in every single case itemised.

The brand-new post of Counsellor at Davey's school, was currently held by someone who worshipped Policy. Someone who considered it the single, most wonderful and politically correct document in the whole wide world: Ms Angela Jones, a recently graduated Peace Studies student. Unfortunately, Ms Jones couldn't understand why the teachers shunned her. It was almost as if they saw her as a spy for County which was, of course, exactly what she was!

To anyone with an ounce of common sense, there was no doubt about it, Policy was micro-management gone completely crazy, yet Ms Jones was totally oblivious to this.

Davey had eventually found his copies of that day's Policy updates, another dozen or so sheets of A4, shoved deep in his pigeonhole in the staff room. Of course, he hadn't had time to even glance at the subject headings, he just left them where they were, and would do the necessary updates at the weekend.

1st Lesson

Davey's first lesson that Monday morning had been a double period of Geography with Class 4C, the lower stream of fourth years, mainly nine-year-olds.

He doubted that any child in 4C could even point out the location of their own county on a blank UK map. So, you can understand his frustration at having to try to explain why certain areas of the UK were better suited to certain industries than others.

The curriculum, as laid down in School Policy, said that this was just one of the 'themes' for this half term, at least for this year group. And who was he to argue? County knew best!

That particular lesson actually had gone reasonably well. Only two minor swear words heard and three pulled ponytails - all easily ignored. Policy mentioned somewhere in its depths that teachers may allow some 'individualistic expression', well, didn't it?

Davey was still wound up pretty tight, but managing to hide it, just, when he went to take his break prior to the next lesson of the morning. That little knot of anger that had built up in his chest was not quite so hot and tight by now, but it was still there.

But his next lesson was the one lesson of the week that Davey dreaded the most; English with the infamous 6C.

Those forgiving, do-good types, would probably classify 6C as the most 'academically challenged' class of the sixth year, if not the whole of the school.

To Davey they weren't just rich kids who didn't want to learn, they were brats (spelt m-o-n-s-t-e-r-s) who knew that their parents wouldn't care if they didn't learn, wouldn't give a damn. They were also the group who seemed to know their

human rights better than any lawyer; and they certainly knew how to best exploit them!
His mid-morning caffeine-booster break over, self-preservation routine began to take over.

He took three deep breaths, each held for a count of 'don't make me cough or laugh'. He set his mind to Defcon level 5, just short of starting a nuclear holocaust.

He unclenched his fists then shook them out and tried to relax his arms.

Finally, with dogged determination that this would be a better day, he left the staff room and headed off in the general direction of Room Seven.

It was exactly two seconds before the half past ten bell when he entered the mayhem and cacophony that was class 6C in full spate.

To be continued....

Membership Analysis

With a quiet few moments available to me, I thought I would take a look at our membership spreadsheet and specifically how many years members have been members, if you see what I mean.

Looking at the tables below you can see that 44% of our members have been with us less than 10 years, 38% have been members for between 11 and 29 years and 17% between 30 and 73 years. (It is remarkable that we have somebody still with us that joined the AOBA in 1951! He joined the AOBA just a month after I was born.

Congratulations to G.W. (William) Butler 51B for being our longest serving member.

The last group will diminish over time as natural attrition takes place but it is encouraging to see a high number in the less than 10 years grouping.

I am going to look at birthdays next with a view to publishing birthday wishes in OBAN. This is a little more complicated and may take me a while to work how to extract the data in a reliable and repeatable way.

Andy Dickson - 66B

Years as a Member	Qty of Members	
Less than 1	23	
1 year	23	
2 years	35	
3 years	41	
4 years	19	
5 years	22	
6 years	41	
7 years	19	
8 years	26	
9 years	37	
10 years	26	
Total	312	44%

Years as a Member	Qty of Members	
11 years	5	
12 years	5	
13 years	14	
14 years	28	
15 years	35	
16 years	14	
17 years	14	
18 years	18	
19 years	11	
20 years	7	
21 years	18	
22 years	16	
23 years	11	
24 years	23	
25 years	8	
26 years	6	
27 years	11	
28 years	13	
29 years	13	
Total	270	38%

Years as a Member	Qty of Members	
30 years	8	
31 years	3	
32 years	13	
33 years	2	
34 years	2	
35 years	5	
36 years	2	
37 years	1	
38 years	5	
39 years	4	
40 years	3	
41 years	3	
42 years	4	
43 years	2	
44 years	8	
45 years	3	
46 years	1	
47 years	7	
61 years	1	
62 years	1	
64 years	1	
65 years	7	
66 years	7	
67 years	10	
68 years	15	
69 years	2	
73 years	1	
Total	121	17%

Op Crown - John Swarbrick - 62A

Background. *'The airfield is a gift from Britain to the Thai people and for them to decide what it should be used for.'* That was the official British answer to any question raised about Op Crown. However, as is usual with official statements, that was not the full story! In the early 60's the British economy was on the rise and there was more disposable income, but despite the words of the Prime Minister of the day, Harold Macmillan, from a few years earlier, "You've never had it so good," the national finances were still recovering from WW2, so why would Britain commit to spend approximately £2m (a lot of money in the 60's and probably equal to some £35m today), to a country with which it had no strategic interest and little economic, historical or political ties? The answer is probably more complex. During the early 60's Britain was a signatory to the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO). The USA (also a signatory to SEATO) became increasingly concerned with the progressive spread of communism throughout SE Asia, indeed they were already committed to providing military advisors to South Vietnam (and we all know where that ended up)! These concerns resulted in a request that other SEATO signatories become involved in some way to arrest this creeping march (the domino theory). In February 1963 it was proposed that the UK commit, as part of the American Special Logistic Aid to Thailand (SLAT) to construct an airfield in Loeng Nok Tha district, near Mukdahan in NE Thailand. This proposal was accepted, but it was made clear that it would be as a gift to the Thais from the UK. The project was then designated as CRE Operation Crown, (CRE being Commander Royal Engineers).



Our Barrack Room

Units and Timeline. The airfield was constructed by the Royal Engineers over a three-year period from late 1963 to December 1966. The initial survey was carried out by 513 Specialist Team (Airfield Construction) based at Deverell Barracks Ripon. Initially 11 Ind Field Sqn based at Terendak Camp Malaysia, moved by air, sea, train and road to establish a camp and start preparatory work. With them went 2 Field Troop RAE (Royal Australian Engineers) who were serving with 11 Ind Field Sqn at the time, (part of 28 Commonwealth Brigade). There were diplomatic concerns about the Australians being deployed to Thailand, but eventually these were all overcome, and the RAE played their full part in what was to follow.

From the very early days 54 Field Support Sqn served at Crown although only in small numbers. They were attached to Crown (Works), working alongside plant operators from 59 Field Sqn and 5001 Airfield Construction Sqn RAF, together with a contingent of Royal New Zealand Engineers. They worked on the camp layout, road system and airfield almost immediately on arrival. (The RAF squadron was disbanded on 1 April 1966, but eventually became 51 Field Sqn Airfields RE). The Royal Engineers were not alone in this enterprise. As with all operations other Corps were represented and provided essential support, the RCT, R.Sigs (elements of 249 Sig Sqn), RAMC, and ACC all had an input. There were others.



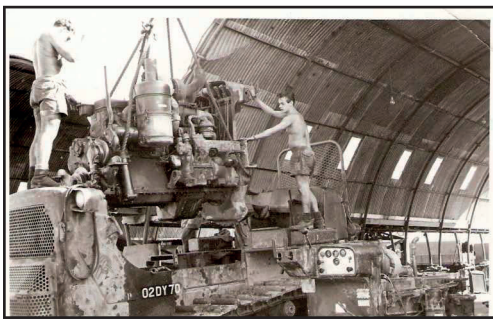
Workshop Area

REME Involvement. The largest supporting element was by far the REME Workshop with its RAOC stores section. This was a somewhat cosmopolitan unit, as it comprised not only the tradesmen attached to the relevant RE Sqn at the time, but also 'attached' personnel from units throughout Malaysia and Singapore as well as a few direct postings from the UK. Also, at times there were Australians, New Zealanders and even at one point RAF personnel (presumably from 5001 Sqn). During my six months tour the workshop was commanded by a Major with a Lieutenant, ASM, AQMS and numerous SNCO's. The RAOC was commanded by a WO1 Conductor. REME of course made a significant contribution to Op Crown.

From the start of the project REME supported a variety of equipment. From D8 Caterpillar dozers, and the complete range of engineer plant, to Scammell Constructor low loaders and other 'B' vehicles, the fitters and VMs kept everything working, somehow. Spares were always a problem so there was a certain amount of 'improvisation,' I believe the modern term is 'repair by repair.' Recovery Scammell's accompanied the RCT low loaders on convoys to and from Bangkok to collect plant and essential stores. This was a three-day journey both ways, mainly on dirt roads and crossing rickety wooden bridges, more of which later.

Work was always varied, and great experience was gained by all. There was little demarcation of trades, and everyone chipped in to help wherever needed. I was once buried under the bonnet of a 20-ton Scammell Constructor doing something and voicing my irritation in the usual Anglo-Saxon way, when a voice said. "Can I help." "Yes" I replied, "pass me that blankety blank spanner." It was placed in my hand and the job completed. I emerged only to be confronted by the Padre! After much apology and touching of forelock he simply said no apology was needed, as he just wanted to know what everyone did, as he had little else to do. I'm not religious, but I've always held military Padres in high regard. The workshop even had a cloth patch made for wear on





D8 Engine Change

whatever one desired, but quite unofficial (see pic) and now regarded as a collector's item!

The REME workshop had the largest covered 'hangers' on the camp, and as such was deemed to be the ideal location for a CSE (Combined Services Entertainment) show. I remember having to, with others, prepare the venue.



Op Crown Wksp 1966

A suitable space was provided, and a Scammell trailer positioned as the stage. I can't remember who the artistes were, but I take my hat off to them for performing where they did, it must have been 'an experience' for them. Work was suspended on the airstrip that night and as I remember a very entertaining evening was had by all, especially by those soldiers' extrovert enough to volunteer their talents with the performers!

The Journey North. "Come in Swarbrick. I'm sending you up to Thailand for six months". So said my OC, 3 Sqn RCT Wksp REME, at Terendak Camp, Malaysia. "Thank you, Sir, I'm sure I'll enjoy every minute." I made that bit up as all I remember was getting on the train at Tampin and travelling down to Singapore. I knew what to expect though, as 3 Sqn RCT had a commitment to provide manpower for Crown, and I had been given the 'heads up' by those who had proceeded me. On arrival at Singapore, I somehow found my way to Gillman Barracks, the RE stronghold on the island. Accommodated in one of those huge pre-war concrete barrack blocks, my compatriots and I awaited instructions. Basically, there was only one flight a week to Thailand, so we were left to our own resources during the day but had to do some guard duties at night. Naturally, wanting to spend as much time in Singapore as possible, I plied the movements clerk with several Tiger beers to 'delay' my onward journey. My ultimate guard duty was the protection of a consignment of rockets destined for the RAF, and their Hawker Hunter aircraft. We, the guard arrived fully dressed complete with webbing and SLR, to find a lone Aircraftsman in shorts and shoes armed with a Lee Enfield .303 and reading a newspaper! We boarded a small craft which took us out to a barge in Kepple harbour, on which the rockets were stored. After a while, the Sergeant guard commander said, "I need someone to row ashore to collect the night rations." Silence. The first rule of soldering – never volunteer! "You'll do," pointing at me. I consequently found myself in a rowing boat. Fortunately, as a child, I had rowed before, albeit in a seaside boating lake, so I had 'experience.' Off I set. The shore was only maybe a couple of hundred yards, but as anyone who has sailing experience will know, looking from ship to shore is completely different from shore to ship. Eventually I found the landing only to be greeted by a Corporal saying, "Where the hell have you been"? We loaded a metal haybox onboard, and off I set for the return journey. A haybox doesn't make a rowing boat inherently stable, and with me with no life jacket or other safety aids, (things were different in the 60's), I must have rowed halfway around Kepple harbour (slight exaggeration), but eventually found the barge. "Where the hell have you been?"

I think I was in my third week at Gillman and knew I couldn't evade the inevitable much longer. How true. My friendly movements clerk approached me and said, "We've had a signal from Crown asking where you are." Nice to know you are missed, so I was booked onto the next flight. The night before leaving I went one last time into Singapore for a few beers. Needing to 'ease springs' I was doing so stood next to a chap who was RAF. "I'm going on one of your aircraft tomorrow," I said. "Oh, where too?" says he. "Thailand" says I. He chuckled, zipped up his fly and left. Next morning, I was stood gazing at a rather tired looking Handley Page Hastings. However, knowing that the RAF had never lost a 'passenger' (and still haven't as far as I know, making it the safest 'airline' in the world), I boarded with full confidence. The flight to Ubon took four hours, and on arrival we were briefed not to talk to anyone and to move swiftly to our waiting transport. Ubon being a civilian as well as a USAF flying base was apparently frequented by press or other undesirables eager to gain any information about the Vietnam war or why British troops were in Thailand.



That Road!

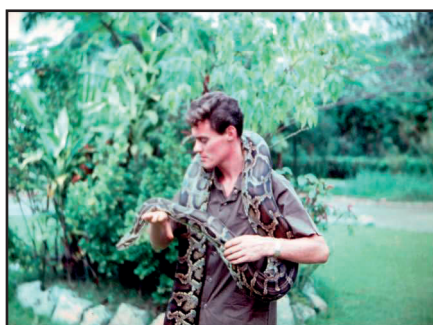
The trip to Crown was a nightmare. It started well enough on metalled roads, but this ended abruptly, and we were onto laterite. During my army career I have travelled many miles in the back of trucks, but that trip (approx. 70 miles) was a true boneshaker! On arrival at Crown, we were greeted by the Orderly Officer, who happened to be the REME AQMS. He proceeded to give a lecture about the potency of Thai whisky (White Kok whisky, lethal stuff and only one grade lower than rocket fuel), and loose women etc. etc. more for the benefit of those who had come from the UK, than those of us up from Malaysia. Having found my bedspace and stowed my kit, I was all set for my six-month tour.

Construction. Originally the surface of the airstrip and aircraft parking apron was to be of tarmacadam, and 59 Field Sqn were the resident squadron for the whole of that phase. (Tarmac was thought to be the most cost-effective material, as constraints imposed by the UK Treasury restricted otherwise!) The runway length was 5000 feet with 500 feet runoffs (not surfaced) at each end making 6000 feet, and the parking area was 1800 x 300 feet. The airfield was opened on 17th

June 1965 by the then Prime Minister of Thailand, Thanom Kittakachorn, and 59 Sqn left for Singapore in July. Unfortunately, little thought had been given to the effect of the weather, and during the 'wet season' water penetrated the tarmac degrading the laterite foundation. This compromised all the effort so far; indeed, an aircraft did land but 'pushed' the tarmac like a 'bow wave' and machinery had to be used to flatten out the damage just for the aircraft to take off again. In October of 1965, at the end of the rainy season, 59 Field Sqn returned from Singapore to strip the tarmac surface from the airfield. In December of that year, 59 Field Sqn were relieved by 11 Ind Field Sqn, who were to start the concreting of the airfield with Pavement Quality Concrete (PQC) and they worked on this until May of 1966 when 59 Sqn returned again. The engineers had to work a shift system to reach targets. These were from 5am to 1pm and then from 3pm to 11pm and they were assisted by around 250 local Thai labourers. They worked solidly until October when they were replaced by the sappers of 34 Field Sqn, who came in from the UK, and in December of that year they laid the last batch of concrete to complete the construction.

Infrastructure. NW Thailand during the 1960's was a very underdeveloped area and was very much the same as it had been during the war, and earlier. It was very rural, and the local Thais were dependent upon farming for a living, so the landscape was very flat (ideal for an airstrip) and covered by a patchwork of fields. There was a small village close by called Ban Kok Talat but today is called Kut Kho Kan, but for all at Op Crown it was simply known as Loeng Nok Tha. Initially, accommodation was tented, but this was soon replaced by a wooden hutted camp, the accommodation of which was built on stilts (there are a lot of undesirable creepy crawly beasts in Thailand) Each accommodation hut housed about sixteen people, with a mix of bed types and small wooden lockers for kit. One saving grace was that there was no sign of either floor polish or a bumper, much to the relief of ex-apprentices! This was purely functional accommodation to fulfil a need. I will always remember the World Cup final of 30 July 1966. Thailand is six hours ahead of the UK, so there we all were huddled around a bed in the middle of the night listening to a radio that could receive the BBC world service. When that third goal went in someone simply said. 'They'll score again' and they did. 'They think it's all over. It is now.' The room erupted!

In the beginning it was soon realised that water and the supply thereof was going to be a problem. At first, water was transported by bowser from Mukdahan, some 30 miles away. It was obvious that this would not sustain the needs of normal camp usage let alone what would be required for the airstrip construction. Also, the local villagers were none too pleased to find their meagre supply dwindling at an alarming rate. Step forward one LCpl John Armitage RAE from 2 Troop who was an 'Aussie' water diviner. Now all who have served with Australians will know their rather more relaxed approach to discipline and authority, so Armitage wagered with the British CRE (a Lt Col) that he could solve the problem. With much scepticism the bet was accepted, with a case of beer and other 'perks' as the stake. Much to the dismay of the CRE and civilian Thai engineers, who had been drilling all over the place to no avail, they watched as this man, armed with a forked Hazel wood divining 'rod' promptly found a source. Not only that, he found another, and the two together not only provided enough water for camp needs, and the project, but a handsome surplus for the locals. Armitage collected his prize, but it was rumoured that he had already found these sources before he made the wager!



Pete the Python

As far as possible military protocols were maintained, so there was both an Officers and Sergeants Mess of sorts, a central cook house, NAAFI and 'Cha Wallah.' A swimming pool was built later, and films could be watched outdoors on a large screen with local kids watching wide eyed from the other side of the wire perimeter. Sanitation was basic with urinals being oil drums being cut in half, a pipe welded on and then buried to the correct height in the ground as per 'desert rose.' Solid waste went via a basic 'thunder box' system with several 'stalls', no flush, no doors, no privacy.

A laundry (more like a wash house) was built, but we at least used to roll up our items into a bundle, just like at Arborfield, and throw it over the wire to the girls from the village. No need for a label, the girls wouldn't be able to read it anyway. They

did an excellent job and all for a few Bhat (Thai currency). I was stood by the wire one day chatting to 'my girl' when I saw something move out of the corner of my eye. Before I could blink, a snake came out of the long grass growing in the wire, it only wanting to escape to somewhere safe and passed over my foot at a high rate of knots. It was so close I felt its body hitting my leg. I was only wearing flip flops. No idea what kind it was as it happened so quickly. The girls vanished!

By and large the locals were honest and helpful with a number being employed on the camp other than those on the airstrip construction, all of whom were paid by the army. There was also a thriving 'private enterprise.' Apart from the 'dhobi' girls already mentioned (who were not permitted on the camp) there were young lads (who were) acting as 'boot boys' and 'gofers'. The little money they all earned from us must have gone a long way to improving their lifestyle. They, as well as the village also benefited from medical care, and the doctor held daily clinics, a high proportion of which was to treat certain unsociable diseases! Not while I was there, but one night a small number of the local 'mafia' raided the Sgts Mess living quarters stealing various items. This led to a ban on all medical assistance unless the thieves were identified and handed over. The ban did not last long!



The Kwai Bridge

Photos from John that I couldn't find a place for in the story of Op Crown.



JS & Ian Matyear



Kanchanaburi War Cemetary



Noi The Bootboy



Marvin, Tim & Ian



Workshop sign - Note the kangaroo



Google Earth screen shot

AOBA Membership Analysis - Jeff Baker 65C

At the last AGM, there was some discussion about AOBA membership composition. I decided to have a trawl through our database to see what the current situation was. The current active consenting membership is **704**.

We do have a number of former Commissioned officers in the AOBA membership.

Major general	1	Lt Colonel	16
Brigadier	1	Major	53
Colonel	4	Captain	18
		<u>Total</u>	93 (13%)

The fact that we have so many Ex-apprentices who have worked their way through the ranks. Accepted a commission and progressed up through the ranks is a testament to the qualities that were required in selecting 15-year-old boys for apprentice training.

We have a number of former senior NCOs in the AOBA membership.

WO 1	110	S/SGT	93
WO 2	38	SGT	148
		<u>Total</u>	389 (55 %)

Again, the qualities required in selection and the quality of their training can be seen by the number of Ex-Apprentice who became ASMs and AQMSs. Many others reached SNCO status.

We also have a number of former Junior NCOs and Craftsmen in the AOBA membership.

Cpl	98	L/Bdr	1
L/Sgt	1	Craftsman	34
L/Cpl	33		
		<u>Total</u>	167 (24%)

While these Ex-apprentices did not rise to the dizzying heights of Brigadier or Major general. There are many reasons why not, none of them reflect on the individual apprentice. If it wasn't for the timed promotion afforded Air techs I would probably have done my 12 years and left as a Craftsman. Air Techs were supposed to get timed promotion to Sgt 5 years after leaving Arborfield. I even managed to screw this up as it took me 6.

The fact that these Ex-apprentices have chosen to join AOBA shows how much they value their time at Arborfield.

We have **55** members who declined to provide their rank on discharge when they completed their AOBA application.
Total **55** (8%)

I would expect these would likely be spread in accordance with the % figures above if we knew their ranks.

These figures show that far from being an "Officers club" AOBA with only 13% Ex Officers is anything but that. With at least 79% of AOBA members being Non-Commissioned ranks, it's more of a combined Sgts/Cpls mess. Without the more rigid mess rules.

I have been on the committee for 3 years now and have seen no evidence of rank retention at the annual reunion or indeed on the AOBA committee.

The annual reunion is an enjoyable weekend, mostly very informal. The only nods to military formalities are the Gala dinner night, the parade and the drumhead service. While the formal dinner follows army procedure in terms of composition, etiquette and speeches. It did feel informal at the individual table level. Horror of horrors, members took their jackets off before the Chairman. Doing that before the RSM in a Sgts mess would mean big trouble.

The parade marching to the Pipes and Drums is nostalgic. Even that would make our junior company drill Sgts quiver with rage. In deference to our age, we no longer lift the right leg thigh parallel to the ground then slam our foot to the floor. An impossible act now for many.

The drumhead service is a formal muted affair as you would expect given its nature. All the expected respect is paid to our departed Ex apprentices. Family members of those recently departed who are invited to attend, seem to really appreciate our efforts on their loved one's behalf. Even when like last June when it was conducted in the pouring rain.

The current AOBA committee and other officers consist of

Lt Colonel	3	Sgt	3
Major	1	Cpl	1
WO1	3		

As can be seen from these figures the current committee is split between commissioned officers (4 - 36%) and non-commissioned officers (7 - 64%). While the split is slightly different to the general make-up of the membership, it does encompass the range of members' former ranks. Of necessity we rely on members stepping up and volunteering to serve.

The commissioned officers on the committee are very important to the functioning of AOBA. They bring with them experience, knowledge and a wealth of contacts which are like golden oil for the smooth running of AOBA. During committee meetings and at the AGM, every committee member is allowed to speak. I have found that irrespective of who they are, they are listened to, and action is taken as appropriate.

The statistics shown are from our Active members spreadsheet.

The comments are my personal opinions.

These come from an Ex REME Sgt perspective.

R J Baker

AOBA DBO

AAS 65C

Ex Sgt Aircraft TECH A&E

Sancto Award 2024 - Andy Dickson 66B

I mentioned in OBAN 88 that the committee seemed I deserved the Sancto Award. (This award was introduced a couple of years ago after the AOBA was gifted a large donation bequeathed by Paul Sancto of 59A). I am not sure what I did above and beyond the call of duty to deserve this award. I produce OBAN a few times a year and it is my pleasure to be the editor. Thanks to the committee, I feel very humble.

Anyway, Mike Tizard and Geordie Wright-Phillips mentioned they might make trip to Milford on Sea to present the award to me when circumstances presented.

Mike called me early in August and told me he was coming down to the New Forest on a motorcycle rally and could he pop in and present the award to me. Not a problem and so on the 11th Aug, the peace in this sleepy part of Milford on Sea was shattered by the sound of a loud motorcycle exhaust noise. My wife thought it might be a helicopter flying low and I thought the washing machine had got a wobble on and was making the noise. A Knock on the door followed and in walked Mike dressed in his period outfit befitting his participation of the rally and his 1928 Raleigh Model 26, (One of only 5 surviving models).

The bike started off as a wreck and a bit of a project. I need to digress here for a bit as I think this is a remarkable job Mike has done on this bike. I think it is fair to say that skills learned at Arborfield would have played a large part in this restoration project.

Mike could only spend a short time visiting as he had detoured from his rally and so we chatted briefly and he handed over the award still dressed in his period costume including plus fours and the sunglasses etc.

(Sadly, I have lost the photographs of Mike handing over the award and of him in his period costume and of his ancient motorbike. I do frustrate myself at times)

Andy Dickson 66B

74C Mini Reunion - Bob Broadhead 74C

On the 10th September 1974, 300 teenage boys passed through the gates of the Army Apprentices College in Arborfield to become intake 74C, the largest intake that the college had ever seen. Formed into 10 squads in Junior Company (Jeepland) they embarked on a two-year engineering apprenticeship of unprecedented quality.

As the 50th anniversary of this intake loomed into view, Bob Broadhead, a member of 5 squad of that intake, decided that this momentous occasion should not pass uncelebrated.

Hoping to locate at least 10% of the intake, Bob set to work to contact as many ex 74C members as he could find and bring them together for a reunion in Reading. Having eventually rounded up 23 ex 74C apprentices by word of mouth and social media, the reunion took the form of a meal at Bill's restaurant in Reading over the weekend of 20/21 September.

Many beers were quaffed and reminiscences of college life and subsequent careers were recounted by old soldiers now in their 60's. Naturally, polo shirts were produced to mark the occasion and after dinner toasts were made to absent friends, some of whom are no longer with us, and to Her Majesty the Queen whom we all served with great pride.

Many members of 74C went on to have successful careers, forming the backbone of Sgts' messes, becoming artificers, warrant officers and in some cases achieving commissions. In the case of one former A/T of the intake, having achieved the rank of Colonel, he returned as Commandant of the very college at which he began his career.

It was a great reunion which it is hoped can be repeated and with many more old friends having been tracked down next time around. If you were an ex 74C member and would like to get in touch for the next reunion you can contact: rhbroadhead@aol.com



Front row: Ian Houghton, Rab Wells, Malcolm Paul, Ian Garden, Vaughan Marx, Richard Powesland

Second row: Ian Fountaine, Bob Broadhead, Phil Tearney, Paul Foden, Mike Crabb, Pete Longmore, Ross Watt, Mike Key

Rear row: John Chapman, Graham Deakin, Alan Lynch, Steve Bennett, Jim Cunningham, Glyn Bottomley, Rob Ames, Paul Roney, Ray Bailey

A few photos from this years Remembrance Day parade



REME Association and AOBA Nov 10th 2024



Bill Cleasby and Natalie



Jim Griffiths



76B2 - Andy Langwith, Mike Tizard, Dave Sparrow and Steve Myers



Garden of Remembrance



Geordie Wright-Rivers and friends



Bruce Leslie and friends



Colin Jamieson



BBC 1 Screenshot of the AOBA



AOBA Cenotaph March Past

Feet first - Or, Some Shock Treatment - Arthur Ward - 50B

At the risk of seeming like a tourist guide, I must first explain the reason for ending up as a thirteen-year-old in front of the Army Doctor in Dover Castle.

After escaping Singapore, to live in South Australia until returning to England in late 1945, we again joined my father who as a P.O.W. was released to return to duty as the D.O. with the 47th Coastal Regiment. R.A. at South Foreland on the south Kent coast between Dover and St. Margaret's Bay. That location was where all the 15" guns, together with other defences were used when guarding the Channel and firing into France during WW2. These were decommissioned during the 1950's.

We lived in the valley called the Broadlees where nearby there is a large sized shaped flat stone Aeroplane monument to commemorate the landing of Louis Bleriot's first flight from France to England in 1909. This has a French flag flying close to a minor road behind the Castle.

There were many married Quarters in this great open area below the Radar Towers and the army camps were both inside and outside of the Dover Castle. This great Castle with its high Keep and church also contained the large Roman Pharos (light house). The distant Langdon fort had been used to keep German prisoners awaiting repatriation. That place is now another stop for tourists.

All bungalows were named after WW1 battles. Ours was called the Somme. Sadly, this whole area of Married quarters would eventually be flattened to build the motorway leading from the East cliff top down to the Dover, Cross Channel Ferry docks near the harbour Eastern Arm. Our schools were in Dover below the Castle hill which overlooks the town.

In those days much of the harbour sea front had suffered war damage and the wreck of the small HMS Codrington was on the beach.

The Western Arm entrance to the harbour had been blocked in defence of Dover but the dredger ship was at work to clear it. I found that this all made it a great area to live while exploring the cliffs. The surrounding hills were ideal for snow sledging when it arrived. We could even explore, unnoticed, many of the empty underground chalk tunnels and large now empty barrack rooms below the castle by carrying some large long Perspex sticks found at the remains of the 1914 Langdon air strip. These we lit as torches and they would last a good long time.

Well, so now, back to the subject of feet first. It was then the latest fashion to have a pair of what was the predecessor of the Trainers, called Baseball boots. These were a flat arched Plimsoll boot being laced high up the ankle in white with added colours. You could see them a mile away and quite sporty. After school, I would live in them until my mother noticed that I had begun to walk with a wobble and limp. I had to explain that my ankle and foot arches were painful.

That day I was taken to the Castle and into the army underground M.I. Room hospital where now a days Tourist may visit this underground area because it still contains the hospital and war time operation areas on many levels with maximum views overlooking the harbour and channel.

Originally above this entrance stood a large but ornamental Cannon. Known as Queen Elizabeth 1st - pocket pistol-1544. Today this is now on display within what was our 1947, Families, NAAFI shop.

I should mention that there is also on higher ground within the Castle near to the Constable of the Castle Residence at the main gate, there is another small entrance to a tunnel, known as the, 'Underground works'. This leads down from inside of the walls and finish below in one of the outer deep dry moats. This had been a prison area which was used to hold some French and Spanish prisoners during the wars with France and Spain. It has a small entrance and requires you to climb down some steps. That is also open to the public and does not require a Guide because you really can't get lost in it.

As a foot note, I must brag a bit by mentioning that I once entered the Constables Residence by invitation to his daughter's birthday party.

To continue. When I arrived at the M.I. Room near to the lower of the three gates, the army medical officer told me to walk up and down in my bare feet until he explained that there was nothing really wrong with me apart from my having flat feet. I felt quite insulted!

He recommended that I stop wearing my flashy baseball boots and start wearing proper arch supporting shoes. I was then given instructions to take further treatment by attending at the then new Dover, NHS clinic where they would administer the Electric treatment. I wondered what that could be and hoped that no one would ever attach the wires to my ears to shock the rest my nervous system into getting better quickly.

At the Clinic I was shown the procedure which I thought was pretty close to that. I must first place one foot at a time into a bowl of water on top of the two metal plates which were attached by wires to a small 'black box' The box had dials governing the strength of the electric current to my foot. It functioned by pushing the plunger button to move in and out. This, when pressed would cause my arch to rise and my toes to curl without any of my intentions being involved. Its purpose was to operate the sinew which is a tissue uniting muscle to the bone. This would strengthen and exercise the arches on each foot.

My friendly nurse was always at pains to suggest that if I were to fool around, she would put the power up. For good behaviour I would be left to operate the magic box myself. After the treatment to each foot, I was made to do some further horizontal exercises by lying flat on my back and trying to push the wall away.

Following many weekly appointments for this shocking treatment which seemed to be showing a good result, I was released to live happily ever after, apart from never finding my basketball boots again.

In recent times I have mentioned this 1947 NHS electric treatment for feet to our local Doctors and nurses but they had never heard of it! So much has progressed that I wonder what treatment is used now.?

My Father was to bring home some army boots for me to wear.

I can only suppose that they were good practice allowing me to put my best foot (feet) forward when entering the camp gate at Arborfield!

Arthur Ward - 50B

From TeeCee - 55A

THE FINAL PARADE

He'll always be there, laughing, young and full of fun,
With all his mates around him, true friends, every one.
The things they've done together, bind them closer still,
Friendships born at tender age, endure, and always will.

Though life moves on, down well worn roads, and people come and go,
He'll cherish those whose time he shared, the ones he came to know
so well, when life was rich, the future still unread,
And boldly looking forward to the challenges ahead.

And through the intervening years, till mortal life's span ends,
He'll know that still, above all else, he had the gift of friends
who knew his faults, endearing ways, his strengths and foibles too,
As no one else could, in his time, workmates or colleagues new.

So at last, the Passing Out, when goodbyes must be said,
He's reached his final goal, to join the pals who've gone ahead
To make a place for him, amongst all those on Heaven's Square,
Prepared to welcome those to come, their comradeship to share.

Outsiders never understand the bond that holds us tight,
It's difficult to put in words, it's like a shining light
that guides us through life's tortuous path until the final end,
But sums it up in six small words - "He was my Pal, my Friend."

RIP TeeCee

Courage

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

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

Stroke Recovery - Andy Dickson - 66B

I have been wearing the FES (Functional Electric Stimulation) electrodes on my leg for 6 weeks now. It was strange at first but I soon got used to it. With a pressure switch under my heel every time I pick my foot up I get a jolt that stimulates the muscles in my lower leg. These muscles haven't been used very much for over a year so need some coaxing to get moving. The device I wear to control the pulses also has an 'exercise' mode so I can turn it on while I am just sitting and 'relaxing' and it operates for 15 minutes without intervention from me. I often sit at my desk, as I am now, with it in 'exercise' mode.

I had my 6 week review on 27th Aug at the FES clinic at Salisbury hospital. The people there are very nice and helpful and we get treated well. The physio looking after me was pleased with my progress. I did a timed walk over a set distance and I was 10 seconds quicker than I was the last time so I must be making progress. The danger is that I get too confident and the next thing I will measure my length on the floor. I have to make sure I exercise carefully.

I do just under 320 paces a day currently and my goal is to get to 500 by Christmas. I know this doesn't sound many but to me it is a lot.

We have discussed getting an electric wheelchair. Not the cheapest piece of kit. They can cost more than a small car. However, it is difficult for Sue to push me around and I think it would get me out more. There are several things to consider:

- Weight - it needs to be light enough for Sue to lift in and out of the car.
- Battery life - I need to be able to travel a decent distance. Some can go for 40kms +.
- Cost - Of course.
- Comfort - I spend a lot of time sitting these days and need to make sure I don't get a numb bum.

I don't want to make it easy for myself and give up all my walking exercises and eventually I want to be able to do away with it altogether.

The physio that still visits me at home is giving me more and more exercises to do for my arm movement. I sometimes forget which ones I have to do. I am getting better controlling it, my arm I mean.

Sue and I went for lunch in Stockbridge with friends. I elected not to take my wheelchair with us. (It is such a palaver getting into the car and out again). Needless to say this meant I had to walk everywhere. Fortunately, the hotel car park was reasonably close to the restaurant. It still took quite some effort back and forth and when we got home all I wanted to do was sit down and rest. I really don't have the stamina these days. I guess it will come back in time. The next day my knees complained about all the walking I had done the previous day. There is no let-up on all the things I used to be able to do and now can't. Very frustrating.

I had an e-mail from Ian Clark's partner, Chris. Ian is still making progress. He doesn't get the support I get from physio's or the FES treatment I get. It is a shame as I know he is as determined as me, but without help everything takes so much longer to improve. He is getting about in his electric wheelchair which will help his state of mind. If anyone wants to drop Ian an e-mail, let me know via the AOBA contacts page and I will send you his address. He gets his OBAN delivered so keeps up to date on Old Boys matters that way.

Sleeping is still a challenge for me. I have to sleep on my back which has a few drawbacks; I snore quite a bit as a result. I was given a pillow lifter by my council support which is great in helping me to get out of bed but it is not the most comfortable thing to sleep on. If I can sleep for over 4 hours in a stretch I see it as a bonus. Unfortunately, because of the weakness on my left side I can't read while in bed as I can't hold the book, turn pages etc. Believe me I have tried all possibilities and more than once the book has gone flying across the room when I get really frustrated.

Update on the electric wheelchair: We bit the bullet and purchased an electric wheelchair. We are entitled to one from the NHS but the wait is over 35 weeks to get assessed even though my physio tells me I qualify.

The chair we have is not portable and is mainly for use in getting around outside and into the village. Apparently it has a 15 mile radius but I suspect it is somewhat less than that. Anyway, it will allow me to get out more. It is a shame we didn't buy it sooner when the warmer weather was here. Lesson learned.

I hope it is not permanent. My walking is improving but any distance over 30 meters gets me very tired and there is always a risk of stumbling and I don't want to break my shoulder again.

We went back to Odstock at Salisbury hospital yesterday, (18 Nov) and I got all my arm FES equipment for my arm. Getting dressed in the morning has become more complicated with now 8 electrodes to place and make sure they are working. I feel like the \$6m man!

I will keep you updated - Andy Dickson 66B

The life of an Army Brat - Eric L Davies - 65C

Continued from OBAN 88

The Maghull Hostels down on Deyes Lane were termed "Substandard Accommodation" they were used as temporary means of housing families that the Army couldn't fit in anywhere else. Families moved so often and whilst the Army did try and balance things out they could fail miserably. Maghull Hostels were a fun place for kids. The "huts" we were housed in were made of wood with metal sides and roofs; if it rained you needed cotton wool in your ears. There was no hot water supply unless you boiled a kettle, there was no bathroom as such but the toilet block in our hut had four or more lavatories in a row and the same amount of sinks in a row, but no shower or bath.

My brother David somehow managed to escape the first part of our eight month stint by going to our aunts and uncles "Real House" in Speke Liverpool. Uncle had a Factory in the middle of Liverpool not far from Lime Street Station. Uncle Laurie Hall's factory produced high quality wooden "Cigar Boxes" The downside of Liverpool for David would be it was full of rough tough "Scousers" though I never heard him complain. Uncle Laurie had got religion and was a "Lay Preacher" it's always handy to have God connections if you are running a factory. The Beatles had not yet been invented. David would miss the joys of summer in Maghull during the first four months but rejoined the family on Sunday 23rd December 1956 just in time to spend Christmas with us all.

Ivor had also escaped the doldrums of life in a tin hut in Maghull he had been farmed off to our Granny and Grandad's house in Clay Street Gorton when we moved in September and would return back the same time as David two days before Christmas 56. I don't think I would have liked to live in Gorton myself being so young; the backyard outside toilet in the dark cold months leading up to Christmas would have terrified me. Speke Liverpool might have been OK though, Uncle had an indoor toilet upstairs. It was quite novel to watch his dog Laddie rush into the toilet whenever you flushed the system to drink from the rushing water

Summer in Maghull was brilliant. I can't remember learning anything in the school up the road I went to, or in fact the two schools I attended before that. I suppose most of my memory revolved around long summer holidays. We had the best central play area in Maghull Hostels called "The Wash Houses". It was from our "Tin Hut" that mum sent us for buckets of hot water for her washing machine; I am almost sure the washing machine had a built in heater but you had to switch the heater on and that electric cost money. The machine was quite a new contraption with electric rollers through which mum would get us to feed the clothes to squeeze out most of the water before she pegged them on the washing line outside.

The wash house had rows of bathes and an ample supply of children and women using them. Adult men had their own washrooms in another part of the camp. The wash house was where the women folk would go to complain and shout at each other. Who didn't clean the bath after they used it? Whose kids were climbing or peeping over the partitions while they were having a bath? I think most husbands were away for days or weeks at a time leaving the women and kids to fight among themselves in the not very pleasant sub standard accommodations. It was always a break for the kids when adults were shouting at each other if it meant they were not on the receiving end. Up the road there was a category 'A' mental unit called Ashworth which over the years has housed a number of infamous criminals including (later on) moors murderer Ian Brady. I am sure any passers-by outside our camp would think it was the "Spillover" accommodations for Ashworth.

We spent Christmas 1956 in Maghull. My eldest brother Jack who was by now 16 had found a job in a chemical producing company. My sister Beryl was just 15 and about to leave school they must both have been wondering about work prospects with being moved around from pillar to post so often. My only concern was the new bike I had ordered from Santa for Christmas, I could not yet ride a bike and it was wet and snowy outside. There was always plenty of stuff for us to do, even in 1956 when "Television" was in its infancy, maybe I should say "I had little interest in the TV in our house" not that I could ever remember it back then. I could hardly even read a book after attending three different schools by the time I was six years old. I was however quite handy at getting under mums feet therefore it was in mums own interest to keep me fully employed. Well dare anyone even remotely look bored for there was always lots of housework to do.

When Christmas came it was nice all the family were together again to celebrate it. I mentioned earlier that my mother was a "Machinist" I remember mum having a black and Gold Singer Sewing machine at home, it was driven by a foot pedal. She could certainly make that machine whiz round. Mum made Christmas decorations by cutting long strips of different colour crepe paper and "Gathering or Bunching" it up as she sewed. We had yards upon yards of Christmas decorations that would all be rolled up like fire hoses and stored neatly away till Christmas. Ceilings in our houses would be peppered with "Drawing Pin Holes" where dad and the older boys had hung all the Christmas Decorations. It was always a sad occasion when the decorations had to come down, the house would look bare but worse still you knew it was a whole year to go before next Christmas and more presents.

Christmas was always a massive event in the "Davies Household" There were so many kids of different ages to cater for. No one dared question the existence of Father Christmas because if he was proved to be false then it followed there would be no presents. Of course we always knew the "Father Christmas" at the Army Children's Party was a Fake but then he always gave us a toy and that was even before Christmas. It was wonderful that the Army always tried so hard to look after their brats; we had Mum, Dad and the Army as Parents.

We still had no car and when the day arrived to move to Blaenau camp on 1st May 1957 it would be by public transport. Beryl and Jack owned their own bicycles that didn't sort of fit in the MFO Boxes; they duly took on the challenge of cycling from Maghull to Blaenau camp Chester on the same day we moved. Not sure if they took the "Ferry Cross the Mersey" or could ride through the Mersey Tunnel back then.

Now at six years old, I owned my own bicycle and could ride it. Watch out Chester the Davies's are coming. It would be "Out of a Tin Hut to Blaenau Camp"

Watch out Chester we are Back

Willan Road, Blaenau Camp, Chester.

Wed 1 May 21 1957 to Tue 1 Oct 1957

Following the move to 21 Willan Road Blaenau Camp in Chester we waited for the more permanent quarters in Saighon Camp, we would have to wait for 5 months. This would be my 10th place to live and 4th new school; being honest I can hardly remember which school it was but most likely Blaenau School. This area was not the poshest place to live in Chester but we were in an Army Camp and at long last in a "Real House" after living in those tin roofed huts in Maghull.

The quarters themselves were in fact quite spectacular; they were all smartly painted in an off white colour, had nice big gardens and thankfully proper bathrooms. They were tall and impressive houses neatly laid out to form a huge crescent with a playing field in the centre. I would recall (as any young boy should) the joys of a long summer there.

Willan Road still exists in its splendour today just off Western Avenue, the avenue leads down to Sealand Road. At the junction of Western Avenue and Sealand Road if you turn right you will see the sign "Welcome to Wales" this would be the closest I would ever get to actually living in Wales.

I love Chester with all the Victorian Buildings in the town surrounded by a Roman wall with the splendid River Dee gliding by. Its bandstand, parks, rowing boats and the world's seventh wonder Chester Clock. They are all well known landmarks for what is one of the prettiest towns in the world. Chester must have made an impression on me back then because I would later buy a bungalow at **13 Robin Gardens, Saughall**. The number 13 proved to be unlucky for me because although I was able to let my mum, dad, two younger brothers and a sister live in it I was abroad serving in the REME and would never get to live in it myself. I sent tulips and daffodil bulbs back from Amsterdam to be planted and dad kept the gardens in pristine condition. The current owner has removed the 13 and it is now number 14.

Chester Clock, how many would have passed by that lovely erection gazed up and seen the VR 1897 and of course the time of day? Fun for us kids was running along "The Rows" foul or fine weather it was always dry up there. Chester was certainly a wonderful place with all its "Roman History" as a seven year old boy nowhere could be better.

My brother Ivor, barely five years older than me, had got himself a part time job with "Ernie" the milkman on his electric milk float. Ivor had to be up at "Sparrows Fart" to race back and forwards with all those milk bottles before getting back home to get ready for school. I don't know how much money he got or even if he got the odd bottle of cream. Back then we had no fridge so fresh milk in the morning was vital. Can you just imagine the wives in housecoats or nightdresses, curlers still in their hair cigarette between fingers or dangling from the lip, waiting for Ivor to come to the door so they could prepare the old man's cuppa?

Another story from an old mate "No names no pack drill" sorry John Legg, reminded me of the concrete shed and coal bunker to the side of the houses, just below the bathroom window. Legg's dad had been stationed at Blaenau Camp too. But first the reason for these sheds.

Mostly the Army Quarters we had occupied were heated by "Coal Fires" Who hasn't got up on a freezing morning to get ready for school only to find their dad bent over the fireplace cleaning it out from the night before, separating the old "good bits of coke" from the ashes and putting them on top of yesterday's newspaper crumpled up with the minimum quantity of sticks on top that would catch the old cinders alight transferring the heat to a few lumps of new coal and hopefully ignite it. Who hasn't seen the poker balanced in the front of the fire with a broadsheet paper (the only type that would fit height and width) to draw the fire and make it roar up the chimney. If you are lucky dad is an expert and it "catches on" Who hasn't then been sent outside in the freezing cold to fill the coal bucket because some lazy a'hole who was the last one to bed last night left it empty. It was they who let the fire go out in the first place even when you had an overnight burner; they could have tamped it down with "Slack" and closed it off.

The Army issued you with everything you could possibly need from dishcloths to dusters from toilet brushes to sink and bath plugs, I mean everything, even down to meat mincing machine, the wooden tongues for the water boiler that boiled the issued white sheets and the hand operated roller mangles to squeeze the water out of your washing before hanging it on the Army Issued washing line. Every last knife fork and spoon, tables, chairs sofas curtains curtain lines. No fridge at that time but some houses had pantries with cold slabs and meat lockers. The outside shed was to store the issued garden tools; Fork Spade trowels even a push along lawn mower, they didn't belong inside the living accommodation.

The smelly issued "Rubbish Bin" had to be kept round the back until Bin Day.

So there you have it, a nice practical concrete shed. We really needed that shed and John Legg had found an additional use for it. Remember I said it was under the bathroom window? Well John was quite a "Tall Brat" and had discovered if you climbed up on top of the roof you could look in the bathroom window. This apparently saved him from having to go into the house to see if the toilet was free should you need a Pee, which I would have accepted if it was indeed his own shed.

I was old enough at seven to know that if you were out of sight you were less likely to get selected to do any of the various tasks that in dads absence mum would dish out at random. If mum couldn't see you however she would call out in a "Fishmongers Voice" from the side door hoping you would "Just turn up to be tasked" hehehe that was before she would walk round the front to see where you had actually got to. I had become rather proficient on my little bicycle so when one day I heard mums cry of EEE RRR III CCCCCC I knew to pedal as fast as my little legs would carry me while looking back at the house. If mum saw me I was doomed. I was doomed anyway because I didn't see the lamppost that I was racing towards and near knocked myself out on. I blamed mum telling her when she yelled I looked round and that is why I ran into the post. Of course it didn't change matters one iota. It was still my fault and the yelling from the side door would continue.

Life in an Army Spider October 1957 to June 1959

121/1 MSQ, Saighton Camp Chester.



If you came out of Chester Town eastwards along Broughton Road and turned right down Sandy Lane where the River Dee changed course sweeping round and heading south you would eventually pass the Red and the White house and come down onto Dee Banks. One of my favourite places was by Sandy Lane Ferry watching the boats on the river. Continuing south through Huntington where after Aldford School closed its doors to "Primary Kids" I would attend Huntington Primary School, then less than half a mile further down Sandy Lane you would be at the Rake and Pikel and just a bit further on you would be at the front of Saighton Camp.

Saighton Camp was far too big for the troops that occupied it, our own part of the camp at the most northerly end had pretty much been abandoned and probably earmarked for demolition should it not fall down all by itself in the meantime. It is probably fair to say that despite our attempts to assist with any demolition in that part of the camp it probably looked no different

from the start to finish of the twenty months we spent there. With the exception of one disused OR's "Other Ranks" toilet block that we burnt down, it would have been an impossible task for us kids to shoot it, burn it, or knock it all down.

Brother David did put out rather more lights than the rest of us with his Air-Rifle. When David had finished targeting every light in the abandoned area he moved over to the rows of street lamps leading down to our quarters.

My older sister and brothers were my mentors. Yes, mum fed me, often far too well and dad took me on those long Bicycle rides and taught me "No Fear" but at the end of the day if me and my little friends were to learn anything really important it would be from the big kids. They were far more articulate in having fun than anything my parents could ever teach me.

We wanted very little, our house was massive, we lived in the best place in the world and there was always something to do or somewhere to go. I would learn a new word in Saighton Camp "Mithering" It was pronounced Mi-Ver-Ing and referred to any general questions we would ask mum. The reply would often be "Stop mithering me go out and play" The older kids probably thought much the same about us younger sprogs, they had far craftier ways of evading our attention though often we were part of any plot.



To be continued.....

John Johnson's early years at AAS... (56B)

Continued from OBAN 88



The initial training phase, which came as no surprise or difficulty to me, was completed without having once been bawled out or corrected for drill, dress or bearing. That alone was enough to get me noticed, not by the drill staff but by certain fellow pupils who thought it wrong that this skinny, short (5ft 4in) gawky underweight (124lbs) toad should be better at this new game than they were. In fact anyone who had been an army cadet fared well, as can be expected, as we had the advantage of experience at foot and weapon drill.

Having chosen the trade of Armourer, the authorities were not about to let me loose among weapons until certain basic engineering skills were learned. This involved much filing of raw pieces of metal into what were at best useless end products. However, a little thought could determine that the end product if diligently done, would teach us some essential hand fitting skills. For example, the filing up of a simple rectangular plate was to teach us the use of various files and the engineering tri square. The finishing of a cube comprising four filed flat sides, one scraped and one hacksaw surface was to impart the skills required to file, scrape and hacksaw. Naturally none of us ever achieved perfection or even came remotely close in those early days.

And so from August 1956 until June 1959, I was at AAS Arborfield, learning the theory and practise of becoming an Armourer. At the beginning there were 23 aspiring Armourers and by the time I passed out as an Armourer 3rd Class, there were nine of us left. The remainder had been discharged as incompatible with the trade or Army life, or relegated to repeat a particular term's work, changed trade or simply had their parents purchase their discharge. As for me, despite the threat that I was unlikely to make the grade, I finished an overall third in my class. I must admit that I took to the trade like a duck to water. I will admit struggling with the academic side of things.

There were good times and bad times throughout the term of the apprenticeship. We weren't paid a lot of money, but then no one in government service ever is. To me it was money I'd never had. We were only permitted to draw so much a week. The upper limit was determined by the division in which you were in, so that when I was in 1 Division I got 3/6d from the 31/6d wage. Some being tax, some being an allotment to parents and some to a Post Office Savings Book account. The last two were encouraged to the point of being an order. Of the remaining, you drew your 3/6d and the rest stayed in 'credits' and were paid out in full when one went on leave. This meant that there was a pocketful of money available at these times.

This method of forced saving had its downside. There were loan sharks in the AAS who charged anything up to 50% per week for a loan. It has been known for some poor sod to pay all his leave pay over to the loan shark. Bullyboys heavily enforced repayment. However, over a period of time we learnt to blend in with the prevailing culture at the AAS. Anyone who lived outside the 'code' was given the silent treatment or beaten up or both.

In those days we were issued with a minimum of three of everything, meaning pairs of socks, underwear, shirts, etc. This meant that on any given day there was one set in the locker, one set at the laundry and one set on your body. When I think about it I could shudder. Today we are used to changing every day. In those days we didn't because you were only allowed to send so many articles into the laundry. I think it was ten items. If you wanted to submit extra underwear, then you sacrificed something else. Ten items was the inviolable rule.

Most of us had nothing more than the clothes issued to us. We were not permitted to wear civilian clothing for the first six months and thereafter only Mufti, comprising grey flannel trousers with a minimum width of the trouser bottoms of 18 inches and with turn-ups. A navy blue blazer with the AAS pocket badge, black shoes and 'sober' socks. All this was zealously inspected by the regular soldier guards assigned to the camp. If the socks were considered too gaudy, one was sent back to change them. The trouser bottoms were often measured to make sure that they were of the proper size. Anything smaller and you were considered of an antisocial persuasion, akin to being a teddy boy or tearaway with no respect for authority.

When we were assigned to companies, following the necessary passing out parade after basic training and the initial six months in 1 Div, I was assigned to B Company where I remained for the rest of my apprenticeship. Our CSM was Sgt Maj Dunning (Devon & Dorset Regiment), whom we referred to as 'Daddy Dunning'. Daddy wasn't given to the normal run of bad language that we were subjected to on a daily basis. This was because, as far as we could ascertain, Daddy had come to us from a stint at Sandhurst, where of course it was not on to use bad language to the young gentlemen.

Regularly throughout the term we were given progress tests, the results of which were posted on a special board situated next to the chief instructor's office door, so that individual progress could be seen. I'm pleased to say that it was a rare time when I didn't figure in the first half dozen and then often in the first four. This was due to a genuine interest in the subject more than academic ability. After all, it was a memory feat, and yet that same memory so often let me down in maths and other subjects. It paid off, because in 1990 I was appointed South Africa's theory examiner for Gunsmiths.

We progressed through rifles, pistols, submachine guns, machine guns, Mortars and so on. At the time of my apprenticeship we were still taking lessons in the old .38m No2 Enfield revolver, the .303in No 1 and No 4 rifles, the

Vickers machine gun, the Bren light machine gun and the Sten submachine gun. The mortars were 2in and 3in models. All very well, one would think, but the problem was that the army was changing over to newer weapons of which we saw none, to speak of. Still the repair skills didn't go to waste as some units remained with older equipment for some time. Meanwhile, we were still working our way through the old and tried syllabus.

I cannot remember with any accuracy all of the small arms instructors involved in my training at Arborfield. The Officer in charge of the Armourers workshop was a Major Viney, something of a champion pistol shot. Mr Morris(Jr) was the senior instructor and his elder brother Mr Morris(Sr) taught us all about the Lee Enfield rifles. A Mr Riley had the machine gun section and apart from Sgt John Downes, I can remember no others. Sgt Downes figured later in my career as my boss. At the time of my apprenticeship he was in charge of the support weapons section and took us through the Mobat recoilless rifle, Mortars, the Vickers tripod and other items I cannot recall. John Downes became a firm friend in later years. He is retired now and living in Canberra, Australia.

One of the small pleasures during my apprenticeship was the morning tea break at 1000 hours. I still enjoy the same break at the same time seven thousand miles away, in a different country, in a different uniform. During summer months it was always tea, in the winter it was cocoa, which we fetched in a large urn, picked up at the cookhouse and hauled back on a four-wheeled trolley. This was a duty that nobody tried to wriggle out of. The reason for this was that there was invariably some uneaten fried bread left over from breakfast.

The fact of gaining good marks in one's chosen trade could lead to the unjustifiable charge of 'Juicing'. This term derived from 'sucking up to teacher'. So, as can be seen, the culture of the times deemed it unmanly to be good at anything other than sports. I suppose this stems from the fact that most there were not of the highest academic standards in school and all from working class backgrounds where academic ability was considered as suspect, not quite respectable in a working class family.

Of course, there were apprentices of good education and ability. One could not, for example, hope to master the requirements of an Instrument Mechanic without some mathematical skills or the syllabus of the Radar Mechanics or electronic Control Equipment Mechanics (Ecce Mechs, to us) as early electro/mechanical computer personnel were called, as they were trained to service and repair machinery such as the artillery predictors.

Trades were grouped according to the degree of academic ability required, whether mechanical, electro/mechanical or purely mathematical for electronic work. Thus the top trades were X trades, followed by A, B and C. The pay scales (once qualified) were thus different. An Armourer was an A trade and so at the very least I was considered potentially capable of mastering the necessary skills. As it turned out, I did.

Try as I might, I couldn't always divorce myself from the undercurrent of bullying and victimisation that was prevalent. I understood then as now, that at that kind of institution such things could never be entirely eradicated. At sometime during the three years of apprenticeship, every boy would be subjected to some form of bullying or intimidation. We accepted it as the norm and it readied us for life in the regular army, as men.

My sporting life was of no great note. Having taken a dislike to contact sports during my boarding school days, I opted for solitary sports like cross-country running. Naturally there were times when one was detailed off to participate in Company activities. In these events I showed my incompetence at football, rugby and cricket. Although I liked all of the games as a spectator, I was certainly not cut out to be a player.

Running as an activity, meant that I set my own pace and had time to think as I padded along. I got fairly proficient and ran as a team member for B Company. The activity in which I excelled the most was shooting. I held my own with the best. Indoor .22in target shooting was my forte. I shot for the company and in postal shoots for the school against AAS Chepstow and AAS Harrogate.

We were allowed out of the camp at weekends, though there was a curfew for all. The more senior the later the curfew. Time away from camp was valuable. Mostly it began after lunch on a Saturday as most Saturday mornings were taken up with one parade or another. To leave camp one had to conform to the dress code mentioned.

One went to Reading, a relatively large town, but a bit dearer in bus fares. It was cheaper to go to Wokingham, about four miles away. There were dance halls and a cinema. As I was no dancer, a good scoff at a reasonable cafe, followed by a browse around a bookshop or two and then 'pictures', followed in turn by some window-shopping and girl spotting, was the general routine.

Wokingham left no particular lasting impressions. Reading will always be associated with Ma Beasley's, a small quiet cafe near the centre of town. It was almost like a converted front room, and probably was, but the food was good and plentiful. For 2/6d we got two fried eggs, chips, beans, sausages, a cup of tea and two slices of buttered bread. After the hard fare of the cookhouse, this home cooking was wonderful and as I write I can taste it again.

At some time or other I was talked into joining the Arborfield Youth Club. At a small hall in the village there was a weekly dance where we could play our favourite records without adults complaining of the noise. There we met several of the village girls and made friends with one or two non-apprentices. On the whole we were well behaved and the group of us were together over a two-year period or so. Some paired off but none were of a permanent nature.

Leave was a subject close to the heart of all of us. So I believed, until I heard tales of orphans who had nothing much to look forward to in this respect. Nevertheless, great excitement could be felt as the term breaks came closer. We all estimated our pay out from credits and made many verbal plans on how best to spend it. Clothes were an important thing to us all, probably because of the restrictions to Mufti.

When the day came to be paid, usually the day before proceeding on leave, we were all warned to guard our cash carefully. Despite this someone sooner or later got robbed of all or most of his money.

The 'debt collectors' would be round that evening, asking or demanding their money. To see colleagues near to tears, as they were relieved of their cash was not a pleasant sight. We were philosophical about this. We didn't borrow from the sharks, but rather amongst ourselves so we did not have to pay the exorbitant interest rates, or promise to repay at leave time. Our attitude was that if you were stupid enough to play their game, then you must be prepared to take the consequences.

Having to travel in uniform meant that once we were home, we put it away until the end of leave. I recall the day before the end of some leave when in two or three Div; I hauled out my uniform to press it for the return to Arborfield. We were living at the time with my grandmother, whose house was gas lit. As I normally used an electric iron, my expertise with the gas iron was limited and I burnt the sleeve of my uniform jacket. Panic set in, what was I to do? I couldn't travel with a burnt sleeve. Even worse, I would be for it once back at camp. I didn't give a thought to the fact that I might have received a sympathetic hearing from the CSM or the QM, etc. I simply panicked. Fortunately, my mother's sister was a seamstress and to hand was my father's uniforms and my uncle's, he being a WO in the TA, at the time. A shade cheek revealed that one of Uncle George's battle dress blouses was a very close match in shade. So using her magic, my aunt Bet removed the two sleeves and made me a new one from the sleeve of George's battle dress blouse. When finished, there was a slightly noticeable difference in the shade. For the next two years, no one ever remarked on it.

Leave was always enjoyed, but returning to camp was not. Although it was easy to slip back into the routine, a few days at home always brought back the realities of the rough and often crude conditions in which we lived when in barracks.

January 1959 saw the start of 56B's final term as apprentices. In this period I turned eighteen and was put onto regular army pay. I had best explain. There were special rates of pay for 'boy soldiers' that were applicable to us. However, on reaching the age of 17, or 18 (I forget which), you were put on Regular Army pay.

Despite the pay scale a member was on, he was only allowed to draw a certain amount per week as explained earlier. Naturally it meant that ones credits were quite high come leave time.

When July 1959 came round I had passed the Class 3 Armourers practical test and passed the theory to Class 2. Not that it helped any; because some time later, in Duisburg, Germany, I had to sit the whole of the Class 2 test anyway, both theory and practical.

Having successfully passed out of the Army Apprentices School, the first Regular Army unit we went to was the REME Depot just up the road. The Depot was the holding place for us until we were assigned a workshop. We kept our figurative fingers crossed in the hope of a plum posting like Singapore, Hong Kong, Kenya, etc. We all knew that the chances were slim, but we hoped. In the end most of us were posted to the British Army of the Rhine.

But that's another story....



Letters to the Editor

From: Lionel Eccleston - 63A

Hello Andy.

Trust that you found some enjoyment in the Olympics, GB had some surprises, good and bad.

Seldom do I see any mention or correspondence from members from Intake 63A.

So, I have written this to maybe jog a few memories.

The Big freeze started on Boxing Day '62 and lasted well into Mar '63.

Consequently, when we recruits arrived at Arborfield things were to be somewhat different to the normal Jeepland programme.

I was in C squad, Ray Pittendreigh was our squad Sgt. He had the unenviable task of teaching us to march when the parade square was iced over, and the outside temps was minus most of the time. We spent a lot of time in bitterly cold hangers learning to march and salute.

That first term saw the QM stores go up in flames, with canisters of floor polish exploding into the air.

Our second term was notable for a very national scandal, as John Profumo was scheduled to take the salute at the end of term passing out parade, (for 60C). Unfortunately, his liaisons with Christine Keeler put a stop to that.

It was rumoured that Christine's Mum lived on the Nine Mile Ride, who knows.

I hope that this has jogged some memories with those 63A recruits.

These are the names of some of the guys I joined up with in C squad, clearly, I have forgotten some as there were at least 30 of us.

Alexander Kearney

Bray Lewis

Cox Loughlin

Daniel Roach

Doyle Rogers

Ellison Shreeves

Godden Sylvester

Hitchin Smith

Illingworth Taylor

Ingram Watson

Jenkins Weale

Lionel Eccleston 63A C squad.

Ed's Comments: Anyone from 63A who want to contact Lionel, drop me a line via the AOBA website contacts page

From: Andy Dickson 66B to June Church.

Firstly, I am sorry for your loss.

I have been using TC's poems since I took over the editor role for the Old Boys Association Newsletter (OBAN). We had lots of correspondence back and forth and I had a text message from him on June 25th.

Please see the attached obituary. (See page 37). One of our Old Boys has written this and I don't want to publish it until I get approval from you. If you want to change it in any way please do and send me any amendments you would like to make.

The Committee had high regard for Tony and we want to do him justice.

From: June (TC's widow) and son Paul.

Thank you for your kind words Andrew. The obit is excellent, and I look forward to seeing it published.

Paul and myself have not come to terms with his passing yet, as there are so many memories, for the 63 years we had. He was very proud of his army years, and enjoyed writing his odes, which are now safely in a file. Thank You again to all concerned.

Best wishes from June and Paul.



From: Robert (Bob) Cownie 66B

Andy,

By coincidence both our newsletter and The Craftsman Magazine arrived in the same post and it made me think of yet another method of trying to locate old friends and colleagues.

For many years now I have been trying to locate a number of friends that I have lost contact with. On the odd occasion I have been successful as my recent renewed contact with Pat Mewton has been really good. I now have contact with him through various means, including a visit with my wife and daughters family, to see him at the Chelsea Hospital where he is a Chelsea Pensioner with all the advantages and care that he has at his disposal.

Over the past few months I have again been attempting to contact an old friend of mine, Robert (Bob) Littlewood through various forces agencies. I noted that in a Craftsman Magazine in April/May the editor had included a new, to me, subject called "Where Are They Now".

After a few emails with Sarah Eden the Editor she was good enough to include an article on my behalf in the July issue where any feedback would be forwarded to me!

Unfortunately to date there has no response, however not to be defeated I thought it would be worthwhile contacting you to see if a similar subject could be a regular feature in our Newsletter, hence this email.

Let me know what you think and anyone else who may need to be involved in agreeing to my suggestion.

Just in case it might be readily adopted I have included the detail that I provided to Sarah, viz:

Dear Sarah,

I read with interest the April edition of The Craftsman and was pleasantly surprised to read the subject article on page 43. What a brilliant way to keep in touch with friends and colleagues, particularly those who are now retired and wonder what has happened to those that we had a close connection with during our service in REME.

My name is Bob (Robert) Cownie and I have been trying to locate a number of Arborfield Old Boys, particularly those from 66b. I have been fairly successful with the help of a number of friends, especially those who are members of the Arborfield Old Boys Association (AOBA) and I have contacted a few REME organisations, and others such as Army Pensions etc. without any luck.

I have been searching for an old and dear colleague of mine from our Army Apprentice College (AAC) days at Arborfield. The person I am looking for is Bob (Robert) Littlewood, we spent 3 years together at AAC and during that time his parents looked after me as a second son. After Arborfield we went our different ways. Some years later in 1975/76 we bumped into each other at SEE, Arborfield on our Tiffy courses. Occasionally I heard from friends that had met him, and my last meeting with Bob was in 1986/7 when he was serving as an ASM at the Army Scaling Authority in Woolwich. I have searched with no luck so far and have renewed my search having read the article in the April edition of The Craftsman. I would be grateful to hear from anyone who knows of Bob's whereabouts or his current situation.

Thank you for this opportunity and I hope this new addition to The Craftsman will be used by lots of others who want to renew friendships or be made aware of their situation!

If you require an addition information please let me know, otherwise I assume you will pass on any replies to my email address.

Yours in appreciation and anticipation!

Bob Cownie (Capt. Rtd.)

Ed's Comments : Excellent idea Bob. Here is a call to all ex Arborfield Apprentice Old Boys to contact me if anyone would like me to post a message in OBAN in regard to finding lost inmates.

Hello, Andy.

Recently I read a small news item online. A woman had reported a mother to the CPA.

Her crime-- She had allowed her 15-year-old son to travel unaccompanied on the train.

It made me think back to getting on a bus unaccompanied to travel to Newark in 1965.

Changing a travel warrant for a ticket at the station. As I was quite small, the ticket office questioned its validity. A lengthy explanation was needed.

Boarding a train (first time) unaccompanied to travel to Kings Cross.

Using the tube (first time) unaccompanied to travel to Waterloo.

Finding my train unaccompanied and getting on the right half.

Getting off at Wokingham and finding the transport to Arborfield.

Getting off at Arborfield and reporting to the guardroom.

This sequence of events will be similar for the majority of ex-apprentices.

Some indeed travelled unaccompanied from Malasia, Singapore and Hong Kong.

With flights, connections and airport systems before beginning the above.

If you couple this with the fact our mothers allowed us to join the ARMY at 15. Under modern dogma, it would seem that our mothers should have been severely punished. The heinous nature of their crime would make punishment anything from being "hung drawn and quartered" to life imprisonment.

Just an example of how life, society and the nanny state have changed in 60 years. I am glad that I'm now 75, I would not want to be a 15-year-old now.

Jeff Baker 65C - DBO/DPO

From: Ian Scott - 67C

Hi Andy,

Read your articles and was especially interested in the FES part. I have never heard of it before but looking on their website it looks like a fantastic compliment of different types of tools that can give unbelievable assistance in many ways.

I'm really sorry to hear that you have been put through the wringer again after your initial stroke and it's right that you should be awarded and despite you saying that you enjoy doing this, it is obviously a tiring job for you.

I would like your thoughts on the following with regards to using the newsletter as a conduit to try and locate people who served at 73 Ac Workshops

Celle - BFPO 23.

September 2026 will be the 50th Anniversary of the Workshop close down as it was then amalgamated with 71 Wksps in Detmold and I am trying to get a reunion arranged during that month in Celle 2026. I currently have only eight souls and I was hoping that putting some info in the newsletter would enable me to find some more contacts. I'm not sure where I stand on the data protection issue.

I have recently joined the RAA Association Celle as they meet once a month in the actual German camp that 73 was operating in. I explained what I was hoping to do and they immediately said that they would give me as much assistance as possible. They often have visits from other RAA groups and have special hotel rates in Celle and also have a lot of experience in arranging such things. All in all a great set of blokes.

Could you please let me know if this would be feasible regarding the newsletter. As I don't want to put you to any unnecessary trouble in answering, it might be easier if I just give you a bell.

I would appreciate a very short reply and please don't worry about capitals letters.

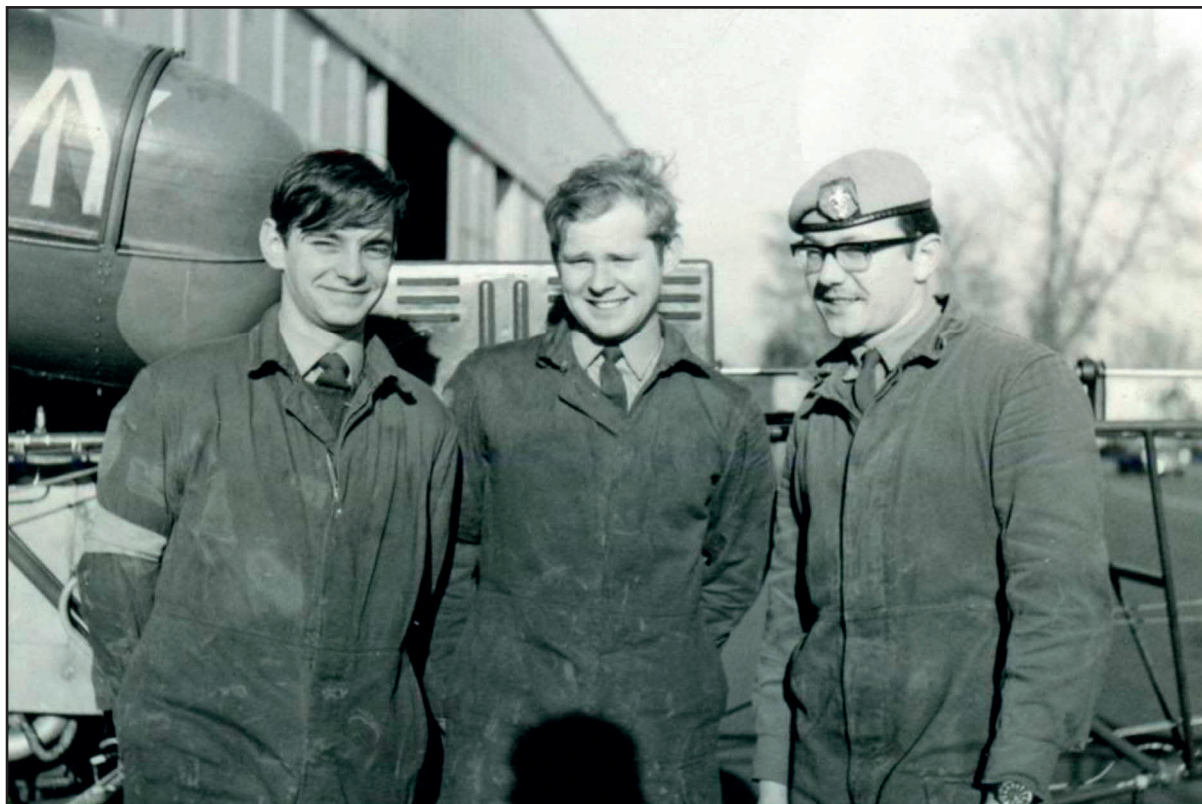
Bi for now and good luck with the FES and hand glove.

Take care

Scotty (67C)

Ed's comments: I did some research on Facebook but could not find a 73 A/C Wksps group. There was one post from Gunter Webster some time ago and one from Ray Wheat (Photo below) but it seems about time somebody got started on a Facebook group for 73 Wksps. There are 70 and 71 Wksps groups so come on you ex 73 guys. If you want to contact Scotty contact me via the AOBA contact page. There has now been a Facebook page created by Lynn Copping.

Andy Dickson 66B



Tony Church (TeeCee) - 55A

AAS Bard



In June 1960, Tony had an emergency posting to the Command Workshop at Dhekalia in Cyprus, working at the VDRI (Vehicle Depot Repair Increment) – NOT the Venereal Disease Research Institution, as some claimed! This was an outlying unit, located on the beach near the 'Key' Cinema, which employed eight REME

personnel and forty to fifty Greek and Turkish Cypriots on vehicle repairs. His job was to read vehicle inspection reports, order parts and progress them from stores to job completion. At tea breaks, he would step through the barbed wire, have a 10-minute swim in the Med, then carry on working! Tony was occasionally called out on riot squads, but things were until, after independence in October, he was posted back to the UK, travelling back on the soon-to-be redundant troopship 'MV Dunera'.

In November, Tony was posted to 4 Trg Btn RAOC, Deepcut, Surrey, where he maintained all sorts of weird and wonderful RAOC equipment - Oxygen and Acetylene producing plant, Mobile Laundry and Shower units, cobbling machines and a fleet of ninety or so vehicles. When he arrived, the REME unit consisted of a Major, three WOs, six NCOs and approximately forty men. Upon leaving, three years later, the same work was being done by one ASM, himself (now promoted to Corporal) and six civilians. National Service had been phased out over the intervening years and this was the birth of the new, modern Army.

Having been married for 18 months, he was posted to 13 Field Survey Squadron RE, at Fernhurst, Haslemere. It was a lovely posting, set amid fir trees in deepest Surrey, a unit of sixty or so surveyors, printers and allied trades. Unfortunately, upon arrival, the first question he was asked was, "Are you coming to Aden with us in a month's time?" – illusions shattered!



So, in January 1961, Tony and his unit flew from Gatwick, enroute to his new posting, at Falaise Lines, Little Aden. In March, the CO announced that Aden had ceased to be an active service area, but the next month all hell broke loose up in the Radfan, with the war finally ending in July.

The unit was working flat out to survey and supply maps to Commanders in the field; the survey troops were regularly ambushed and eventually had to enlist the support of the Royal Marines as escort. Tony was with the survey troops 'up country', riding 'Tail End Charlie', carrying out repairs to the unit's four Land Rovers and two Bedford RLs, as they negotiated soft sand, flooded wadis and big boulders. He lost count of the clutches he changed and broken springs he fixed – all in a temperature of well over 100°C. Eventually the war died down and June, his wife, joined him, living in a married quarter in Crater, opposite the local jail and Armed Police Barracks.

One interesting aspect of this location was that, when a full moon appeared, the noise in the jail reached horrendous proportions. Upon enquiring of their 'dhobi wallah' (laundry boy), he remarked that this was 'Macnoon'. Tony was trying to figure out who this mythical Scotsman was, when it was explained to him that the jail was also the mental home and 'Macnoon' was allegedly Arabic for 'nutty as a fruitcake!' Shortly after this, the terrorism began, with both soldiers and civilians being shot in the streets, so reluctantly he had to send his wife home. The following January, Tony's tour ended, and he returned to the REME Depot at Arborfield. As he was due for demob in April, and having one month's resettlement leave, he handed in his kit at the Depot and entered civilian life once again.

Before being posted to Aden, June and Tony had taken out a mortgage on a house in Kirk Hallam, near Ilkeston, Derbyshire, which at the time had not been built. Now they were able to move in immediately, which was just as well, as son Paul was born one week after their return. With a new baby and a mortgage, Tony worked shifts as a maintenance fitter for British Celanese in Derby, eventually returning to Wokingham, his wife's home town, in 1970 - by then the proud father of a baby girl, Michaela. After two years, working at the Fighting Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (FVRDE) on Chobham Common, he eventually became a forklift Field Service Engineer, then eventually moving into management, a career he pursued until retirement.

Tony lived with June in a bungalow looking down over the Solent the panoramic view from Portsmouth to Cowes. They also owned a chalet on the Solent at the end of Southampton Water, giving a grandstand view of the ocean liners, yachts, and all the activity that this busy stretch of water contains. Tony is perhaps best known for writing the odd piece of verse as a contribution to the Arborfield Old Boys' website which he found kept him out of trouble although in more recent years his big interest was The Army Apprentice Pipes and Drums band TAAPAD where was always to be found on Annual Reunions.



Jim Stanyer - 54B (Belated Obituary)

Message to Ian Scurr - Bereavement Secretary via the AOBA Website from Lofty Russell 54B:

Regarding the death of Jim Stanyer recorded in your 'Up to 2006' obits.

I reported details at the time but no doubt lost in the shadow of time. His date of demise is shown as 'unknown' Jim died in horrible circumstances aboard the Herald of Free Enterprise, a Townsend Thoresen car ferry that sank in Zeebrugge Harbour, Belgium, On 6 March 1987. Jim was aged 49 years. He was one of the 193 who perished.



Photo from Nick Metcalf

Jim had been doing a favour for a neighbour involving collecting a special order BMW from the factory. He intended doing it all in a day.

Getting on board, apparently absolutely tired out, he went straight to his cabin to catch some sleep and never escaped when the ferry sank and he perished. Tremendous shock to us all and still is.

Lofty Russell 54B, D Coy

Obituary - Dave Wayland 58A



Many Arborfield Old Boys would have been saddened to learn of the recent death of Dave Wayland.

Dave joined the Army Apprentices School as an Easter Bunny in April 1958 and after the usual single term in HQ Company joined D Company for the remainder of his three year Army Apprenticeship training to be a Vehicle Mechanic.

After Arborfield he spent a relatively short period at Borden before joining his first Regiment where he really learnt the skills of his trade.

He spent the majority of his man's service in BAOR where the most enjoyable years were served with Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders. His wife June recollects the number of times he returned to their married quarter for lunch often arriving in a 10 tonner!

At the end of his 9 year stint he retired to live in Southend with his wife June and daughter. However memories of BAOR were always there so in the 2000's they upped sticks and moved to live Southern Germany where they still lived until his death in July 2024.

Dave was an ardent member the Arborfield Old Boys Association and was a regular attendee at many Reunions through the late 1900's and early 2000's. He could always be spotted on the parades and never shy of being in a prominent position for the photographs. At the Dinners he was one of the most vocal in joining in with singing of 'The Reds'. He also had a terrific sense of humour and managed relate many fascinating tales over a few pints in the Sgts Mess after the Reunion dinner.

Dave unfortunately started to suffer with Alzheimer's disease a few years ago. June, in an attempt to help his recollection managed to regularly obtain photos of activities and people from time spent at Arborfield. She also received an Argyle and Sutherland Highlanders glengarry complete with REME cap badge.

Ken Anderson - 58A

Colonel Barrie George Keast - (45A)



Thank you all for coming today, this is not a day of sadness, but a day to celebrate the life of a truly great and inspirational man, husband and father.

Born into a working-class family on 6th April 1930 to Ivy & Earnest Keast in St Austell my Dad was to be an only child. His father was a bus driver, and his mother did various office and cleaning jobs.

At age 5 he attended the Lawn School in St Austell, a fee-paying school that was completely out of reach financially, but the fees were paid by a local doctor, his mother's employer at the time, who had recognised his tremendous potential.



Dad did extremely well in his early education and won a scholarship to St Austell County School for Boys, without which, his attendance would have been impossible as the annual fees put secondary education at the time beyond the reach of most working-class children.

With the 2nd World War in its fifth year, he decided he would like to pursue a career in the Army and duly sat the Entrance Exam for the Army Apprentices College at Arborfield.

He of course passed and at 15 commenced three years of military and electronic technician training.

He then was then sent with other apprentices to Woolwich Polytechnic for four years to do an HND in Telecommunications. They had a daily allowance of a penny ha'penny for the tram fare to and from college but often shared a bicycle and then hunted at the tram stop for a discarded clean ticket to claim the allowance.

In 1949 he met, my mother, Margaret, his future wife at a Hall Dance in South London, she then returned to Yorkshire so for the next 3 years he travelled almost every weekend by train to Doncaster to meet up.

In 1953 as a newly promoted Sergeant they married and honeymooned at the Great Western Hotel in Paddington for 2 days, then set up home in Camberley on £8 per week. A year later John was born, the first of four sons.

At this time, he sat an Officer Selection Board and failed, his mother, fiercely protective as all mothers are, was incensed and immediately went to see her local MP, Geoffrey Wilson, who wrote to the War Office on her behalf.

A reply was received from the Under-Secretary of State for War, stating that his progress was actually very good and that his Other Rank prospects were excellent and that he should be very satisfied.



Not the first time the Civil Service has got things spectacularly wrong!

Never one to give up he applied again for Officer Selection in 1955 and this time was successful.

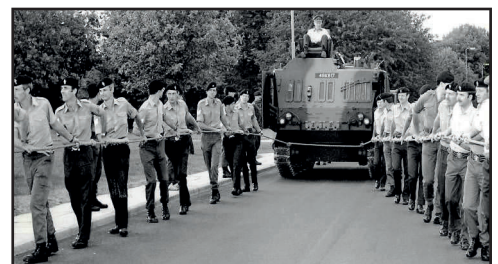
The ensuing years involved many overseas postings which included Australia, Germany, Aden (Yemen), Outer Hebrides

Over time he was regularly promoted culminating in reaching the rank of Colonel in 1976 and taking command of the Army Apprentice College where his military career had started in 1945. His great success was due to hard work and

determination, he had a great talent to lead, inspiring loyalty from those around him, he always found the good in everyone and was selfless in helping others through organisations such as the Samaritans, RNIB and later in life SSAFA, the forces charity.



Tony was born in Kingston-upon-Hull and evacuated to a farm on the Yorkshire Wolds to escape 'the blitz'. He was educated at Endyke Lane Secondary School, leaving in 1954 at the age of fifteen, to work as an apprentice at Blackburn and General Aircraft, making the Blackburn Beverley transport aircraft. He then left civilian life to join the Army Apprentices School, Arborfield, training as a General Fitter. While there, Tony joined the Pipe Band as a learner drummer, rising to Apprentice Drum Major in 1957. In 1958, he passed out into REME and was first posted to 14 Command Workshop, Ashford, Kent, where he passed his 2nd-class Trade Test. Then in 1959, he was posted to the Junior Leaders Regt



RA, Hereford, before moving on to Bramcote, Nuneaton, when the unit was relocated.

