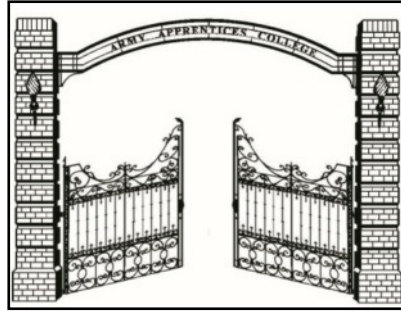


**Apr
2026**



**Issue
93**

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

James Pittick - (93B)

Remembrance Officer

Ian Scurr (68A)

Cenotaph Officer

Steve Thornes (77C)

General Secretary

Nigel Canning (77C)

Vice Chairman

Mike Tizard
CEng, FIET, (76B2)

Webmaster

Zeb Mansfield (77C)

Data Protection Officer

Jeff Baker (65C)

Membership Officer

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: Pete Marsh 65C - Presentation of Trophy by Lt Col J.D. Law

Rear Cover: Aerial view of the school/college - Not sure of the year

Members Passed since OBAN 92

Name	Intake	DOD
Les Cable	45B	12-Jan-26
James Baker	46B	22-Nov-25
Raymond Derrick	48B	24-Nov-25
Harry Dunn	49A	01-Jan-26
Thomas Lennox	50B	01-Jan-26
Clive Hartland	52B	08-Dec-25
Dave Pilcher	52B	
Norman Jackson	57B	04-Nov-25
Robert Hocking	58B	26-Nov-25
Albert Brown	65B	11-Apr-25
Colin Barrow	66C	
Gordon Forsyth	67A	31-Jan-26
Pat Harrison	75B	07-Feb-26
Martin Gilbert	75C	18-Feb-26
Martin Royle	78C	13-Dec-25
John Maund	86A	28-Jan-26

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;
So sleep your sleep Old Soldier - Friend, contented, knowing in the end,
That all your friends will pause awhile and fondly think of you – and smile.

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 Officer	Robert Cassidy	At AGM	Appointed Feb 2023
OBAN Editor	Andy Dickson	At AGM	Appointed Sep 2016
Webmaster	Zeb Mansfield	At AGM	Appointed 21st June 2025
Data Protection Officer	Jeff Baker	At AGM	Appointed Jul 2022
Recruiting Officer	James Pittick	At AGM	Appointed Oct 2025
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.

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



Hi All,

I hope you are all well into your recovery plans to shed those 'winter coats'! Time, as appears to be the norm these days, is rapidly accelerating into the spring and summer, with a lingering feeling of having just got over Christmas – you know what I mean!

Here at the RHQ, we are well into our usual build up to, and preparing for, the flurry of events and activities that accompany the onset of this 'warmer' time of year. Our own AOBA Reunion planning is well underway with 178 of you already booked with 3 months still to go! So, if you haven't already, please get booked before you miss out.

Something exciting that is on our horizon, is the introduction of our new media platform which we will roll-out across the whole REME Family on 1 Jun 2026. It is called the Military App with the Corps' version retaining the name 'REME Connect' and AOBA will have its own area and space to operate in. It really represents a huge technical step forward in how we communicate so watch this space for further details and how to join in the next edition.

Please enjoy the rest of this wonderful magazine and please reach out to our amazing editor, Andy Dickson 66B, who somehow never fails to deliver time and time again in spite of his regular 'trips' to the hospital (I await a stern comment from the Ed!). As ever, Andy needs us all to provide the material, comment and experiences that make this magazine so good. See what you can put together in 5 minutes of your spare time and drop him a note. You can make contact with Andy, and any other committee member via the 'Contacts Page' on the AOBA web page.

And in closing I will shamelessly, and on your behalf, offer our thanks to all of the committee members for their hard work and perseverance in ensuring that we remain the strong and robust organisation that we are. Each of them is a volunteer giving freely of their own time for our benefit and in keeping with our key tenets of:

- **Comradeship**
- **Tradition**
- **Relief and Benevolence**
- **And of course – Fun!**

Stay healthy and happy folks!

Arte et Marte

Geordie Wright-Rivers 77C

Chair

Secretary's Report



Greetings,

Did anyone see the Christmas Carol service hosted by Kate, the Princess of Wales? I watched it because I knew the Fishermen's Friends had been invited to sing but what really hooked me was Kate Winslet's reading and in particular her reference to Henry Drummond's short book, "The Greatest Thing in the World".

She quoted a line from it.

"You will find as you look back upon your life that the moments that stand out, the moments when you have really lived, are the moments when you have done things in a spirit of love".

I was not familiar with Henry Drummond but some after some research I found that he was a world renowned, nineteenth-century writer, biologist, lecturer and evangelist from Stirling. Born in 1851 he wrote this book aged just 23 and it has sold over twelve million copies worldwide. Henry sadly passed away when he was 45 suffering from bone cancer. It's a fascinating read and I'd recommend it.

My new year hope therefore is that we can all approach our interactions with each other in the spirit of love. Which might surely make the world in which we live a better place!

See you at the reunion in June!

Nigel Canning 77C

Recruitment Officers Report



Hello members!

A few months in now and striving to identify where potential members may be hiding!

It must have been said before, but I think there comes a time when the association is sought out by former apprentices, who are looking back, reminiscing and seeking a place catch up and converse with like-minded individuals. This may coincide as we look to the future and life admin and work commitments may afford us the time to explore!

Looking to drive membership from any intake remains the overarching priority, but still with a keen focus on the 80's and 90's – seeking out the next generation to bolster the association ranks.

With many of these individuals likely to be digitally savvy, I have started to try and increase our visibility across social platforms and am pleased to say we now have a LinkedIn page up and running. If you have a LinkedIn account, please follow the page and share it to your networks! <https://www.linkedin.com/company/arborfield-old-boys-association/>

Thanks also to Zeb, for adding a link to the page on the AOBA website.

For those attending the reunion and AGM in June, I look forward to seeing you there!

James Pittick - 93B

Webmaster Report



Hello, All.

There are no known issues with the AOBA website. We average 20 visitors a day.

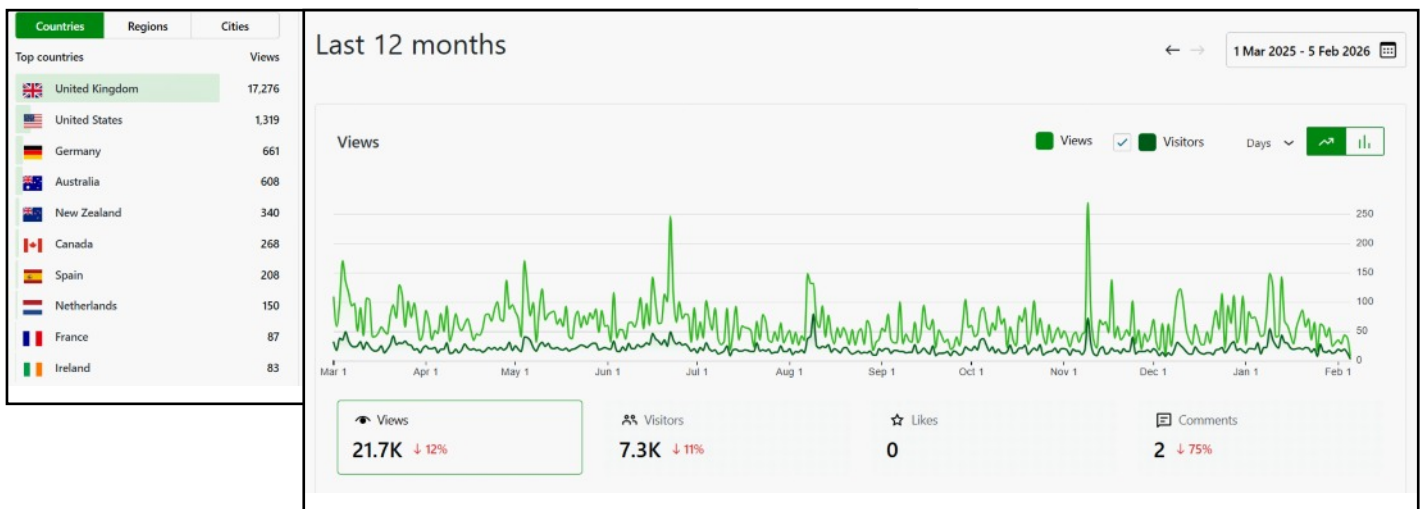
There has been a major clean-up of data, cross checking the web site user details with membership data. Many email addresses have been found to be out of date, and we are working to update the data. If you update your email address or any other personal details please remember to send any changes to the Web Site administrator. I can be contacted through the 'contacts page' on the AOBA website.

Website stats:

In the last 12 months we have had:

- just over 7,300 visitors to the site - down 11% on previous 12 months.
- over 21,600 views - down 12% from last year
- There are 715 users registered on the site, 664 are active.

Best regards,
Zeb Mansfield 77C



Membership Secretary's Report



Greetings.

Now, I live on a hill so have not been in the least bit worried about the daily deluge of rain. But I must admit, after 35 days of it I do tend to look at the River Trent and the Trent & Mersey canal when we venture out and about. And then I got to thinking, might it be an idea to build an Ark? Not you understand for animals and such like. More to do with a 'side hustle' when folks at the bottom start to creep upwards. Of course, pets would be welcome but none of this two-by-two stuff!

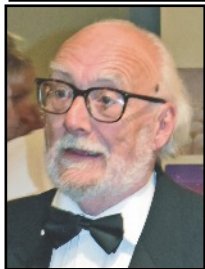
So, it was the other week, on a grey and miserable afternoon, with nothing better to do I Googled 'plans for Noah's Ark'. To my surprise there is one. Including modern day dimensions, materials and overall structure (Genesis 6:14-16). There is even an artist's impression drawing. Reading on I found that they (the Americans of course!) have built one in Kentucky at a cost of some \$150million. It is called the Ark Encounter theme park. Anyway, as dinner was ready, I decided it would cost too much and towns' folk would probably be better off staying on the top floors of the local Premier Inn! Still, it did while away a wet and dreary February afternoon.

Our membership took a bit of a hit this winter with quite a few of our older members sadly passing away. If I could ask you to just pause a while and remember those that have finally left this exclusive club. But we still have a fairly healthy membership of over 700.

I hear tell of a few grumbles about the membership fee going up this year but, as with everything else, our costs are ever increasing. So a big thank you to those that have stuck with us and don't forget to spread the word about the association. All are welcome
Cheers,

Bob Cassidy 65B

Data Protection Officer/Database Officer Report



Hello to all members.

At the risk of being considered boring and repetitive. I can again report that we have no issues with our database. Nor have we had any issues from a Data protection viewpoint.

Back in 2017, AOBA started compiling a roll call of Arborfield Apprentices.

This was started by Ian Clark and continued by Andy Dickson.

This aimed to have at least the Intake number, Service No, Surname and Initials of all apprentices attending Arborfield between 1939 and 2004 irrespective of the name of the training establishment.

The information was obtained by going through the RSM's clerks AT record cards (primary source).

While sitting "chaperoned" in the temperature controlled archive.

This approach has almost completed 1939 to 1980.

I decided to try a different approach 6 months ago.

As I became aware of the depth of records in the REME Museum archives.

I was able to identify J Coy PoP's and Senior PoP's of interest (secondary source), held in the archives.

In an hour, I could mark the name lists for some 38 intakes between 1981 & 2004.

The ever helpful Archive staff photographed these pages and sent them to me. This allowed me to grow the list in the relative comfort of home.

While not as complete as the pre 1980 records, the only thing missing is the service Number.

And of course those that failed to pass out for any reason.

My idea is to use hard copies of what I have. to add the missing numbers and names on a future visit.

This should be a quick task as long as I get the archive storage format correct.

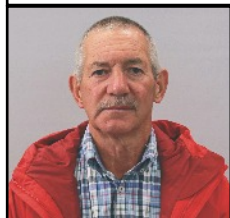
This different approach has "ballooned" the list to over 20,000 names (almost double), at the time you read this.

It's interesting for me to see the way Arborfield as we know it, has been in continual change since the 80's.

I hope to have an article in OBAN 94 about these changes. (OBAN editor permitting).

Jeff Baker 65C

Treasurer's Report



Gents,

The current state of finances is as follows:

Current Account £15,094.84

Business Account £37,501.75

This shows a sustainable decrease from our opening funds on 1 Jan 25 which were:

Current Account £10377.09

Business Account £48,960.17

The largest spends in 2025 were:

Reunion £9,865.40

OBAN £6,301.92

Donations £2,100.00

Our only income, now that we are no longer supported by the REME Charity, is from subscriptions and the Gift Aid which this accrues. We are about £6.5K down on our Jan 25 figures; the increase in subscriptions to £25 has increased our income by about the same £6.5K and will negate this drop in funds over the next few years and leave the Association in a good place financially.

Finally, after a number of years as the Treasurer I shall be handing over to Alistair Weir at the AGM and I would like to thank him for volunteering for the post.

Bob McKeegan-Brown - 69A

Ed's comments: Bob thanks very much for all your hard work. We all appreciate what you have done for us.

Andy Dickson 66B

OBAN Editors Report



Hello, Gents.

I had a very pleasant visit from Owen Kavanagh on January 10th. Owen was over from New York visiting his sister who lives in Lymington, 10 minutes drive from where I live. It was kind of him to take time out from his family to come and chat with Sue and I for a few hours. We must have bored Sue to tears with all the talk of Arborfield and afterwards. I checked my files afterwards and have to include the photo below which shows Owen in his prime along with a few other guys I remember very well.

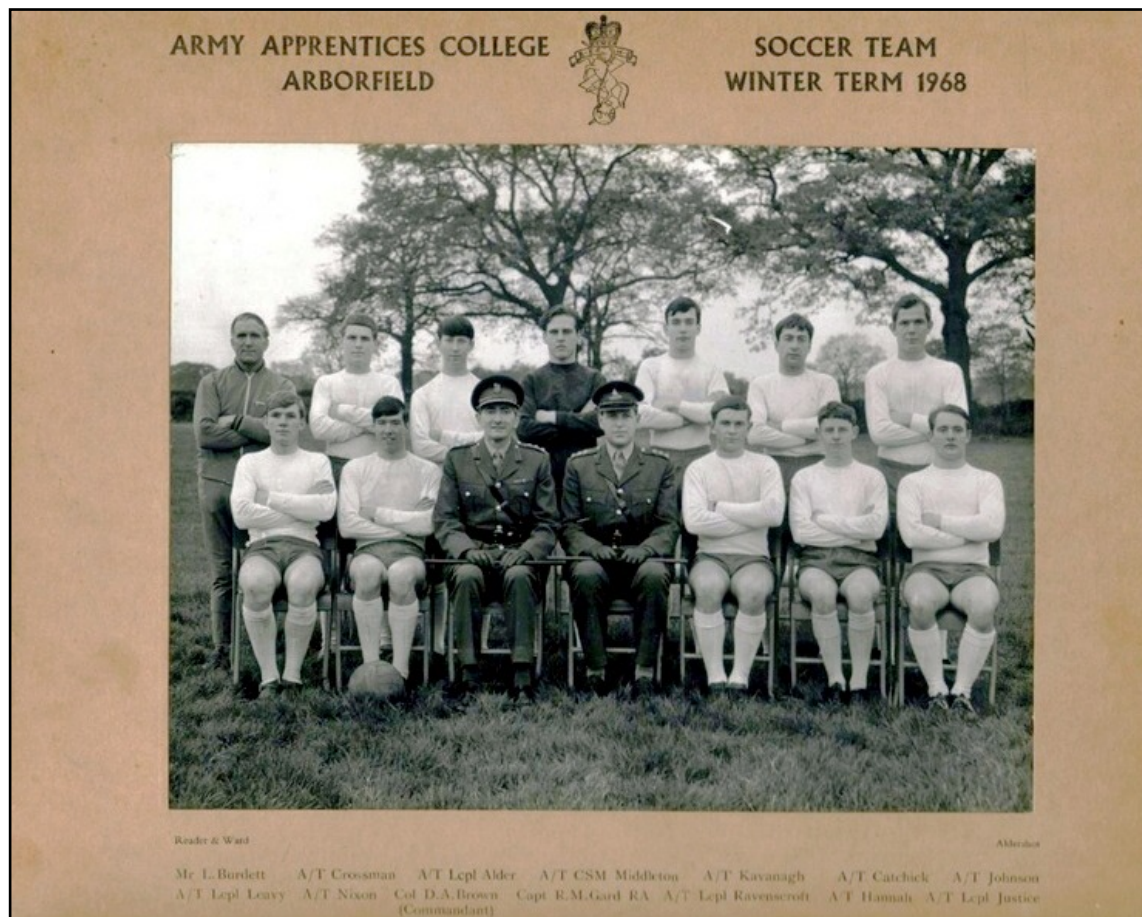
Another 2 and a half weeks in hospital at the end of January/beginning of February. I had an infection and a temperature of 40c so was taken into Southampton and pumped full of antibiotics, x-rayed and CT scanned. They treated me for pneumonia and an infection in my blood. Goodness knows where that came from. I must admit I am getting fed up with my hospital visits. As usual, I didn't eat much and consequently lost some more weight so I am down to 98 kgs.

I am still short of stories for OBAN. I still have my regular contributors for which I am very grateful. I could do with some new stories. Lynn Coping comes up with some suggestions on page 36.

The news from The Gulf is not pleasant. Thankfully, we are in touch with Chalky White who lives in Dubai. A lot of the locations mentioned in the news are familiar to me. I lived and worked in Dammam for 5 years from 1978 to 1982 and I travelled throughout The Gulf. I realise it is a lot different from when I was there but it does get my memory working overtime.

A nice photo of Peter Marsh on the front cover receiving a trophy for his sporting achievements. A belated well done, Pete. You were a bit of a legend at Arborfield.

Andy Dickson 66B
Editor of the Association Newsletter



A Brief Historical Survey

1939 – 1992

by Capt. (Retd.) D.B. Richards Dip. Ed. Tech.
with additional material by Major M.V. Costanzo R.E.M.E.

On Saturday 17th November 1964 the School presented a ten-minute impression of the life of an Army Apprentice as part of the Army display in the Festival of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall. Her Majesty the Queen, the Queen Mother, the Prime Minister and many other distinguished guests were amongst the audience of 7,000. More than 30 million people watched the performance on television. This was the first time that the apprentices had performed at the festival and their enthusiasm and precision were a credit to their generation and a fine tribute to the memory of those to whom the festival was dedicated.

During the same year the school obtained authority to teach an O.N.C. (*Ordinary National Certificate*) Course in Electrical and Mechanical Engineering. As a result, the Commandant was able to report at the Passing-Out Parade in December 1964 that of the previous September (1964) intake about half had begun a course which, if they were successful, would enable them to begin a 01 Course for O.N.C. in September 1965. This course was a three-term General Engineering (G) course in English, Mathematics, Engineering Science, Workshop Processes and Materials, and Engineering Drawing. Those apprentices who achieved a high enough standard in the senior test examination, taken at the end of the (G) course in those subjects, could embark on O.N.C.

Those who failed to reach this standard would start an appropriate City and Guilds course. In addition, a number of apprentices entering the school were already qualified to enter the O.N.C. course by virtue of passes in G.C.E. (*General Certificate of Education*). Also, a number of well-qualified apprentices were accelerated one term, and completed the General Engineering Course in two terms instead of the usual three terms.

TRANSFER TO REME

In 1965 Colonel G.W. Paris, MBE, A.M.I.Mech.E., succeeded as Commandant at a time of great importance in the history of the School. In August (1965) the control and sponsorship of the School was transferred from the Inspector of Boys' Training (Army) to the Director of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (DEME). The following message (extract) from Major General L.H. (later Sir Leonard) Atkinson, the then DEME, appeared in the November edition of *The Craftsman (magazine)*: "On 3rd August 1965, the Army Apprentices Schools at Arborfield and Carlisle were transferred to my control. I take this opportunity of welcoming to the Corps the apprentices and members of the permanent staffs of these Schools... The ties between these Apprentices' Schools and the Corps are of long standing and have become progressively closer in recent years. Formal transfer of control will allow this process of integration to continue, to the material benefit, I am sure, of the Schools, the Corps and the students."

It was fitting that the first Passing-Out Parade in the Spring of 1966, when all apprentices were members of REME, should be reviewed by Major General Atkinson. After a ten-year respite it was also the second wet weather routine Passing-Out Parade as snow lay thick on the parade ground. Later that year it was decided that Vehicle Mechanics would no longer be trained at the School. Additionally, arrangements were completed for the final phase of equipment training in other intakes would take place in the appropriate adult REME Schools. Aircraft Technicians would go to Aircraft Engineering Training Wing, School of Army Aviation, Middle Wallop, for their final two terms of equipment training, while Electronic Technicians would go to the School of Electronic Engineering at Arborfield.

Two more important changes took place on 1st September 1966. The School changed its name to the Army Apprentices' College in order to bring it more into line with that of colleges of further education in civilian life, and all apprentices were to wear the REME. cap badge. To celebrate the later decision a re-badging ceremony took place on Saturday 8th October.

In the Arborfield Apprentice (*magazine*) of Summer 1966 there appeared an article entitled "Arrive derci Sierra". The title may sound like an Italian pop song but, in fact, referred to the pending disbandment of Senior Company. 'S' Company had been formed in September 1960

to provide a transition phase from boy service to adult service. All apprentices were transferred (less a few NCO's in each Company) at the end of their seventh term to 'S' Company, to complete their training in the 8 and 9 Senior Division. The idea was a sound one, particularly in view of the fact that the apprentices in 'S' Company were in many cases older than adult soldiers in neighbouring units. In spite of this logic, a visit from the Inspectorate of Establishments resulted in 'S' Company disbanding at the end of 1966. The last Company Commander was Major D.D. Lister REME

In March 1967, the College changed Commandants again. Colonel D.A. Brown C.Eng., M.I.E.E., F.I.E.R.E., A.M.B.I.M. was no stranger, having been Chief Instructor and Deputy Commandant since September 1966. In April, the first apprentices to complete the O.N.C. passed-out, having been taught the whole course in the College. Thirteen out of 15 were successful, one being referred in mathematics. In December, the Carr Memorial Trophy was presented for the first time to Apprentice Sergeant C.H. Richardson for the best all-round Aircraft Technician (Airframes and Engines).

Lance Corporal John Kirton Carr had been an Apprentice Aircraft Technician at the College from January 1964 to December 1966. On completion of training, he was posted to 10 Flight Army Air Corps, Bulford Camp, Wiltshire. He was tragically killed in a helicopter accident on 6th June 1967 and shortly after his death a fund was started by his friends and colleagues who presented a trophy to the College in his memory. It was to be used as an award for their future responsibilities and the contribution they would be required to make to flight safety. His parents attended the first presentation.

One memento of REME occupation of the Dockyard at Woolwich was the acquisition of the old Toll Bell tower (common to all Royal dockyards), which had stood by the dockyard gates, and the bell used to be tolled for the commencement and finish of work. It was removed to the Army Apprentices' School in 1966 and re-erected at the road junction opposite the College chapel.

During the dismantling of the Bell Tower in 1982 it toppled over (the base of the main support was under attack from dry rot) and incurred considerable damage to the superstructure. However, plans were put forward to have it reconstructed by the Army Apprentices' College, Chepstow and it was finally re-erected between the present College Headquarters and the Corps Secretariat building in 1985. On 9th April 1968 the Workshop Practice Department said farewell to two stalwart friends, Mr. Ernie Flear and Mr. D. 'Tex' Rickard. Between them they had over 50 years service in the College having been Instructors in the Army Technical School in 1939. Among those leaving were two apprentices who were the first ever to be advanced one term; completing their apprenticeship in eight terms instead of nine.

CLOSURE OF CARLISLE

One of the economies of the 1968 Defence Review was to be the closure of the Army Apprentices' College, Carlisle in 1969. This College was to be amalgamated with Arborfield and in future, all REME apprentice training would be concentrated at the one College. The overall total of apprentices in the two Colleges was to be reduced from 1,296 to 850 to meet REME long-term requirements. Protests from local people in the Carlisle area and their two Members of Parliament were of no avail and transfer arrangements were set in motion. The first of the two-year Vehicle Mechanic apprentices who arrived in Arborfield in the winter term of 1968 were joined by 45 apprentices from Carlisle. There was a considerable reorganization in Vehicle Wing, where all additional equipment, engines, assemblies and vehicles from Carlisle had to be set up. The last of the three-year trained Vehicle Mechanics passed-out from the College in the spring of 1969. Up to this time they too had been eligible to take the O.N.C. Course.

At the December 1968 Passing-Out Parade, the Commandant made mention of two presentations to the College. Mrs. Williams, whose husband was until his death earlier in the year a lecturer in Electronics Department, had very generously presented a silver salver, to commemorate his long service to the College which was to be known as the Williams Prize and awarded to an Electronic Technician. Lieutenant Colonel M.W. Hall, O.B.E., one-time O.C. of 44 Command Workshop, had also presented, on behalf of his unit, a very handsome cup to replace the Commandant's Cup.

To mark the amalgamation of the College with Carlisle, a set of wrought-iron gates were erected near the main entrance to the College. The gates, which were designed by the late Major (Retired) Percy Chivers, incorporated the famous Hadrian eagles and the regimental badges of the members of the staff at Carlisle. The gates were formally opened by Brigadier G.V. Hayward, the Commandant of the REME Training Centre, on 31st July 1969, the day on which Carlisle held its final Passing-Out Parade. The Standard flown at that parade is now held on permanent display in the present College.

H.R.H. the Duke of Edinburgh visited Arborfield in July 1966 and six senior apprentices were presented to him. The summer term of 1969 also saw a number of changes in the organisation of the College, particularly in the field of military and physical training. The existing establishment was re-arranged into a Military Training Wing so that all military training was handled centrally under the Military Training Officer, rather than under Company arrangements. This was in order to make the most economical and efficient use of the resources and manpower available. There was also a change concerning physical training, the aim being in future, to instruct this subject in a way which enabled each apprentice received physical education according to his own individual needs. The system consisted of carefully measuring and recording the physical condition of each boy on his arrival and then plotting his progress throughout his time at the College.

The system was researched and instituted by Major J.A.T. Brown, R.A., the Military Training Officer, and Q.M.S.I. Duncan and aroused great interest in the Army Physical Training Corps. At the Christmas Passing-Out Parade of 1969 the Commandant welcomed as a guest Mrs. G. Phelan, who had originally given to the College at Carlisle a trophy in memory of her son Apprentice Corporal Philip Phelan, an Apprentice Vehicle Mechanic who was tragically killed in a cycle accident the previous year. The first novice cyclist to receive the award at the Arborfield College was Apprentice Tradesman Clive Hosking. Also on parade for the first time was a Shetland pony, Midge, the College's new mascot. It was also pleasing to note that the 1969 New Year Honours List included the award of the British Empire Medal to Corporal David Giles, R.E.M.E., an ex-Aircraft Apprentice from 1966 for his outstanding devotion to duty.

The first of the two-year trained Vehicle Mechanics passed out in April 1970 having, in fact, spent one year at the College (their first year was at Carlisle). In 1970 also, the technicians' courses were reduced from nine to eight terms in the College. Those apprentices from 8 Division who had reached Class III standard in their trade passed straight to adult service. Those who had completed their O.N.C., but not taken the Class III trade test (because their eighth term was devoted to education

for O.N.C.), were attached to the School of Electronic Engineering or Aircraft Engineering Training Wing, to pass their trade test, before going to adult service. That same year, on a different subject from training, two apprentices, Paul Mackie and Pat Knowles of 'A' Company, broke the existing world record by playing chess non-stop for 52 hours 46 minutes, and in doing so raised a sum of over £500 to buy a computerized typewriter for a disabled boy at the nearby Hephaistos School. Support for their efforts came not only from local well-wishers, but from as far afield as India, South Africa and Australia.

The College's obsession with gates continued. Yet another set was made for Tweseldown race course and, of more local interest, the College acquired replacement main-entrance gates from Carlisle. Both sets were made by the late Major (Retired) Percy Chivers. St. James's Palace also requested the making of three new colour mounts for the Queen's Colours at Windsor Castle.

During the period 1968-1970 a College hovercraft project had been under way and, after many long hours of work by apprentices and interested staff, it made its first public flight on 1st June 1970. Another project was also initiated by the Electronics Department; to build a weather satellite tracking station. On 30th May 1970 this too became operational and the first facsimile weather pictures were received and recorded.

In July 1970 Colonel E.G. Bailey C.Eng., F.I.E.E., M.B.I.M., took command of the College. Notable amongst the developments during his tour were the implementation of the Donaldson Report which changed, and made more liberal, the conditions of service of the apprentice. Despite the greater ease with which the young entrant was able to leave the College in his first six months of service and subsequently was able to shorten his engagement, statistics show that, in fact, the overall effect on retention is not much changed. After an initial rush to serve for three years only, as adults, the proportions opting for the three, six and nine year engagements have been fairly constant. Another development was the establishment of an Evaluation and Quality Control cell, which set up a computer-aided test analysis system, to assist with course design and in the promotion of up-to-date instructional technology. The City and Guilds examination was also introduced for all disciplines to match the tri-annual training programme, bringing about a closer relationship with the adult training schools; while the revised education scheme for apprentices and junior soldiers focused greater attention on the educational support of training. The introduction of a General Engineering Certificate precisely matching its civilian counterpart, together with the decision to raise the school leaving age to 16 years, resulted in much discussion on the anticipated effect on numbers and quality.

In the winter term of 1972 the College had its largest intake ever, which brought up the population to 966. The quality of this intake, despite its size, was as good as the previous one. Also that year, a revival of the Arborfield Old Boys Association took place after a lapse of nearly nine years since 1964.

It is always with regret that one records the death of a member or former member of the College, be he apprentice or at the time, in 1972, it was sad to have to record the death of Mr. McNally in a traffic accident. As the R.S.M. for 15 years until 1956, he had been the corner-stone upon which the standards of drill and the traditions of smartness in the College were built.

How to get a driving licence - Arthur Ward 50B

The year was 1966 and I was to join the Libyan Army as an Advisor based in Benghazi. It would be five weeks before my family would arrive to the villa on the ring road close to the British WW2 Cemetery. Each morning, at that time, the OC's land rover would take me to the Libyan Workshops.

I was only qualified to ride a motor bike, but I needed my own transport quickly. I bought an ancient VW. Beetle from another Advisor who was returning to U.K. This would sit outside of MQ villa until I could get a UK Driving licence.

It would later become a very useful vehicle when moving about after local rain and flood periods, by floating mostly and moving in desert areas if the tyre pressures were set to twelve. Now I would need a U.K. Army driving Licence which would be agreed by the Libyan police.

I was taken out on a test by a WO2 and drove into Benghazi city which on a Friday being always a religious holiday would have next to no traffic because as usually happened, the traffic lights didn't work so that upon approaching them, I was advised to do what I liked with caution avoiding all donkey carts.

We couldn't find a hill to stop, start, anywhere because the area is flat until reaching the Pass at Benina Airport near the Jebel Akhdar Mountains so it was impossible to do an incline brake stop. After some more stop, starts, together with the brake and gear change drill, I was instructed to return to the Sgt's Mess area and reverse and park inside a garage.

I would then await the three questions.

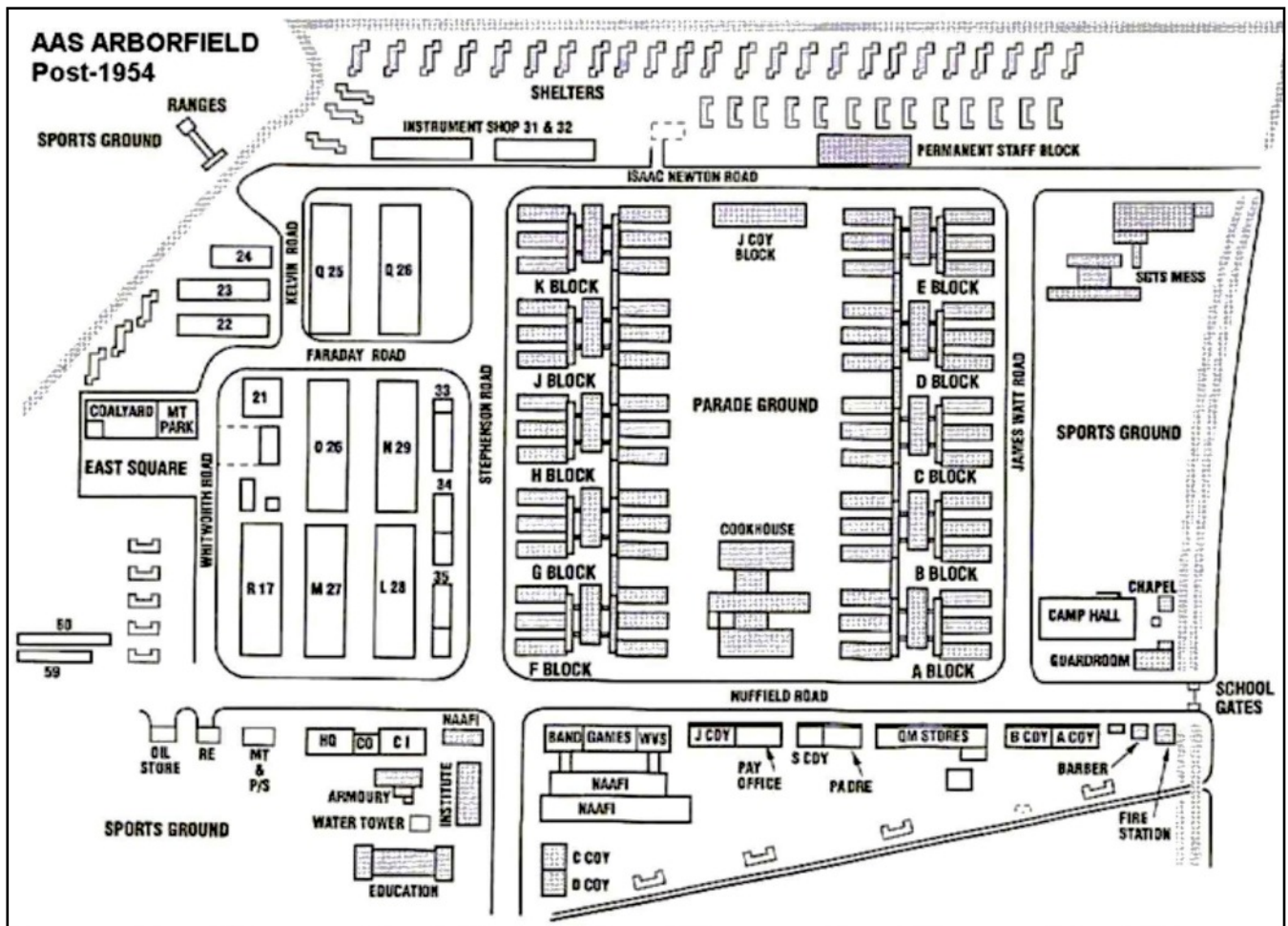
Two of which, I cannot remember!

The third question, I will never forget, "Who's buying the beer.?" "Pass"!

Arthur Ward - 50B

Camp Layout

I can't remember where I got these from. Somebody would have sent them to me but I can't remember who.



REME Breakfast Club Listing

REME COUNTY DURHAM BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME BREAKFAST CLUB FOR COUNTY DURHAM
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/f1L3GzbqeH42enrz/>

REME GLOUCESTERSHIRE BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME Breakfast Club for the Gloucestershire area
Website
https://www.facebook.com/groups/8051262654937765/?ref=share_group_link&rdid=5jek3KQJbyw0tz8H

REME LANCASHIRE BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME Breakfast Club for Lancashire
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/stJ8kkoNfLmK7Zi7/>

REME LINCOLNSHIRE BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME Breakfast Club for the Lincs area
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/ToFTPoVzbXCsjDG3/>

REME MERSEYSIDE BREAKFAST CLUB
Merseyside's REME Breakfast Club
Website
https://www.facebook.com/groups/711028933816823/?ref=share_group_link&rdid=cyGlcNIMjWwqEqOV

REME NORTH STAFFORDSHIRE
The REME Breakfast Club for N Staffs
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/19w6a9RbZj/>

REME NORTH WEST NORFOLK BREAKFAST CLUB
The Breakfast Club for the NW Norfolk area
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/qECFrZx8g58Dqfce/>

REME NORTH WILTSHIRE BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME Breakfast Club for the North Wiltshire area
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/mMCn9QeZZ9hntLD9/>

REME RUTLAND BREAKFAST CLUB
The REME Breakfast Club for Rutland
Website <https://www.facebook.com/share/g/1btjDnHmWHQf2Fkm/>

Lessons in Life No 6 - Tony Moogan 66B

Ewe 'Dock Boys are rubbish

So it was that on a mild autumnal Saturday evening 1965, my best mate and me went to a dance in our local youth club.

I was 15 and Ossie my mate was 16 – and a little more worldly wise than yours truly! As we entered we both noticed a trio of female strangers ensconced in a corner of said club.....curious, I said to Ossie, “who are they?” He replied immediately.. “Tenby girls, watch ‘um Moog they can be a tad forward!!”

Anyway I went to the loo (skip, skip to the loo) and had to go past these girls and a very tall, attractive piece caught my eye....I thanked her profusely and put ‘im back in its rightful socket.

(I know, I know it's a sad old 'un but they are the best).

On my return I said hi, she responded and a little later I asked her to dance, she said yes and into the cavorting melee we went.

Now this girl was the same height as me (5' 10") but had legs right up to her shoulders, and....she knew how to use them, which was just as well because I was clueless!

My sister Lyn taught me to jive, but that was as far as it went!

Any halfway through our entanglement I asked her if she would like to “go round the back” which is “Dock boy” speak for having a grope and a snog! She agreed so out we went.

Now it was at this point that I rather failed my first test, in as much as I, ever the gentleman, tried to act all cool and casual and tried to make conversation, at which point she rolled her eyes muttered something and next second her tongue was halfway down my throat trying to play tonsil hockey with mine.....

(Please dear readers x 3,Pete Moran has also admitted to reading and almost stifling a little titter?)

Understand that up to now I had only just got to the “open mouth” bit of the process and consequently recoiled, almost puking and calling her all sorts of names for doing it!! She called me a few choice names and accused us Dock bois of being useless and stormed back into the club.

I waited awhile and tried to sneak back in unnoticed...fat chance. There she was telling mates what a tosser I was and laughing their tights off.

Thankfully Ossie was sat by the bar and I quickly joined him:

“You'll never guess what that Tenby bint just done to me Os?’ says I all indignant and a tad off-balance.....romantically.

He replied “I should have warned you Moog, they do that sort of thing up there! Here have a bite of my Mars bar, it'll take the taste away!! It did and he was right what a good mate!!

PS:

Thereafter I learned quickly and was very surprised at the reactions I had to this new found skill of mine!!

PPS:

In my next story LinLNo:7, I shall tell all about my next conquest (cock-up) but...you must promise **not to tell a soul!**

Tony Moogan 66B

'No big t'ing mhan' - by John Swarbrick (62A)

May 1977, and after having served for three years with the 16th/5th The Queen's Royal Lancers at Tidworth, Cyprus (Turkish invasion) and Wolfenbüttel, W. Germany, I was duly informed that my next posting would be to HQ Belize Garrison Workshop REME. The thought of returning to a tropical environment was very pleasing after having endured three years of cold, wet and miserable exercises on the northern plains of Germany! The posting however was only for six months, nevertheless 'don't look a gift horse in the mouth' as the saying goes, so departure to the Caribbean was eagerly anticipated.

After being dined out and an interview with the Colonel, I duly packed up my Volvo car and headed home for leave before departing by train for Brize Norton and the onward flight across the Atlantic, courtesy of the RAF and their VC10 aircraft.

Being single, what do you do with a car when you have nobody to look after it whilst away? I garaged it at my mother's house, and her brother, my uncle Norman, promised to occasionally start it up and 'move it about.' Also, I had three firearms, a .22" Anschütz target rifle, a .22" sporting rifle and a replica Colt Army 0.44" black powder pistol. Fortunately, at Chorley, where my mother lived, there was a huge Royal Ordnance Factory (now closed, and a residential and commercial site). I contacted them, explained my predicament, and the ROF police duly agreed to store my weapons. This also satisfied the local police!

The flight to Belize was uneventful, but on arrival I will always remember exiting the aircraft to be met by that wonderful tropical climate that the Caribbean provides. Settling in didn't take long. Mess accommodation for SNCO's was in two-man rooms with somewhat antiquated air conditioning, and I was to share with the REME Art Tels. With a few exceptions, all postings to Belize were unaccompanied, and therefore for six months, so the turnover of personnel was a continuous process.

Some background. Previously known as British Honduras, the country changed its name to Belize in 1973, before being granted full independence from Britain on 21 September 1981, although the country remains a member of the Commonwealth, and the King is the head of state. It is a diverse country, located on the Yucatan peninsula, the northeast coast of Central America, with Mexico to the north, Guatemala to the west and south and the Caribbean Sea to the east. English is the official language, but with such a diverse mix of cultures, numerous languages are spoken including Spanish, Creole, Mayan and even German, but each of these has a spin off, depending on which part of the country you are in. Therefore, most Belizeans are bi-lingual with many being multi-lingual. I mentioned German which might surprise some, because Belize has a sizeable Mennonite population, a religious order who migrated to Belize from Canada and Mexico in the 1950's to escape religious persecution. They were, and are, farmers who produce a large proportion of the country's fresh produce. The capital is Belmopan, which is a new city built some 50 miles inland after the former capital of Belize City, which is on the coast, was ravaged by hurricane Hattie in 1961. At the time of my tour Belmopan was sparsely populated, as naturally the population of Belize City were reluctant to 'up-roots' and move inland.

Security. There was (and still is) an on-going dispute with Guatemala over a longstanding historical territorial claim by Guatemala over Belize, a dispute far too complex and lengthy to go into here. All that needs to be said is that from time-to-time Guatemala would rattle its sabres, which would invoke a response from the British to uphold Belizean sovereignty. This, at the time of my posting in 1977-8, resulted in a Royal Navy frigate being stationed offshore (she also participated in anti-drug running operations in the Caribbean), an infantry battalion, and six Harrier 'Jump Jets', plus all supporting elements and infrastructure that goes with that including Royal Engineers, a battery of Royal Artillery 105mm guns and some CVR(T) Scorpion.

Deployment of these assets (excluding the RN) was in four principal locations. The main HQ was at 'Airport Camp' located adjacent to the international airport and just north of Belize City. Inland there were two 'out stations' one at 'Holdfast' near to San Ignacio, and 'Salamanca' remotely situated further south, both being to the west of the county and thus closer to the Guatemalan border. Even further south was camp 'Rideau' near to the town of Punta Gorda. Access to these locations was an adventure on its own. Holdfast could be reached by road, after a rigorous and long bumpy drive over dirt roads and wooden bridges of somewhat dubious construction. The only practicable way to reach Salamanca and Rideau was by air, and both the RAF and AAC were continuously flying sorties with Puma and Scout helicopters respectively. The RCT also ran a shuttle service by sea to Rideau for more bulky cargo with their Ramped Powered Lighters (RPLs look like the landing craft you see in the D-Day landing film clips; but larger and obviously more modern).

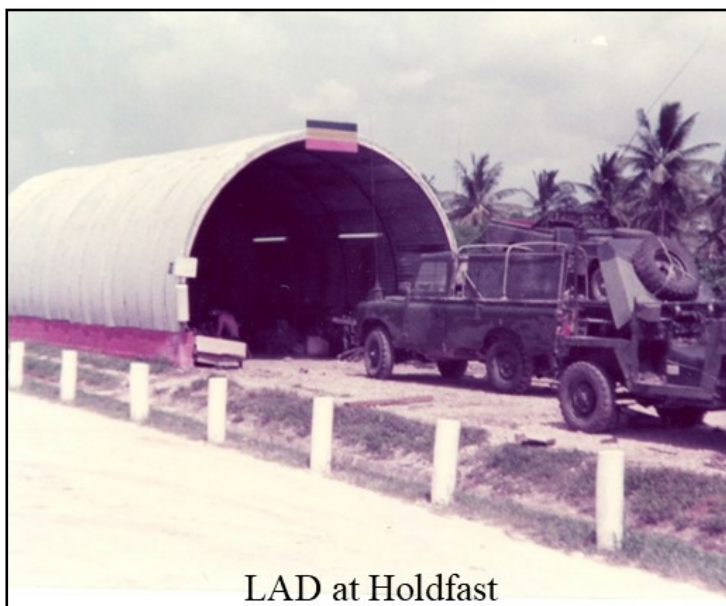
Guatemala did rattle its sabres in 1977, so much so that British forces were put onto a possible invasion footing. Sangers and weapon pits were cleaned, weapons issued, and positions allocated, the workshop being responsible for a small section facing the international airport, and therefore ready to repel any airborne assault! Well, if you rattle your sabre louder than the opposition, they tend to take notice, and Guatemala did just that and blinked first. Fortunately for all concerned nothing materialized, apparently due to many Guatemalan troops deserting – they knew better than their politicians!

There was no TV or modern-day technology such as Internet or mobile phones, and the local Belizean radio tended to concentrate on local matters, so every day the Royal Signals would produce a short newscast of what was happening in the world, plus any other relevant news and announcements. These would be posted on bulletin boards, one of which

was in the Sgt's Mess. After the above 'stand too' the teleprinter printout was duly posted, which I 'liberated'. See the picture of that notice plus the congratulatory comments from the Commander British Forces Belize. The notice I should have 'acquired' on the 16th August 1977 was that announcing the death of Elvis Presley. Fearing that it would be taken as a hoax, the item also incorporated those immortal military words 'No Duff, No Duff'!

BRITAIN IN CARIBBEAN WAR PERIL
BRITISH TROOPS WERE PUT ON FULL ALERT YESTERDAY AS A WAR THREAT LOOMED IN CENTRAL AMERICA. URGENT TALKS WERE GOING ON IN WHITEHALL AS GUATEMALA, A RIGHT WING BANANA REPUBLIC, THREATENED OUR LITTLE KNOWN COLONY OF BELIZE, FORMERLY BRITISH HONDURAS. IN THE TINY COLONY, 600 SOLDIERS OF THE QUEENS REGIMENT FACE A POSSIBLE INVASION BY GUATEMALA'S 10,000 STRONG ARMY, BACKED BY ISRAELI-SUPPLIED FIGHTER PLANES. THE ALERT BEGAN WHEN GUATEMALA'S MILITARY RULERS ACCUSED BRITAIN OF 'CLEAR PROVOCATION' OVER THE FUTURE OF BELIZE. GUATEMALAN DICTATOR EUGENIO LAUGERUD HAS BEEN TRYING TO CLAIM BELIZE FOR YEARS, AND THE LATEST ROW FLARED WHEN A PLANE-LOAD OF AMMUNITION BOUND FOR THE GUATEMALAN ARMY WAS SIEZED IN BARBADOS. YESTERDAY A GOVERNMENT SPOKESMAN IN GUATEMALA CITY ACCUSED BRITAIN OF ARRANGING FOR THE ARMS LIFT TO BE HALTED, AND DESCRIBED THE ACTION AS A CLEAR BRITISH PROVOCATION BY WAY OF ITS COLONY BARBADOS.

R.Signals teleprinter notice regarding the Guatemalan 'incident.'



LAD at Holdfast

REME Support. The workshop was, all but in name, a glorified LAD. The OC was a Captain, who wore two hats as he was also on the garrison staff, so he didn't really get involved in day-to-day activities, and this was left to a WO1 (ASM) and two Artificers, one vehicle and one tels, therefore most of the workforce were of those two trades, with obviously some others. There were also four local civilian employees, two VM's who were both named George, so naturally they were known as George 1 and George 2, and Gerald who was a metalsmith. There was also Charlie Renaux who was a textile 'fitter,' a young man who sported a large 'afro' hair style and moved no faster than a snail on steroids. When he was at work, (he tended to take extended periods of unauthorised leave) he spent much of his time making canvas and webbing holdalls for weekend away trips. I still have mine and use it weekly for my shopping! REME of course was also deployed country-wide, all of whom being attached tradesmen of their relevant parent units, and therefore not on the strength of the workshop. However, I used to take regular 'Round Robin' flights by RAF Puma helicop-

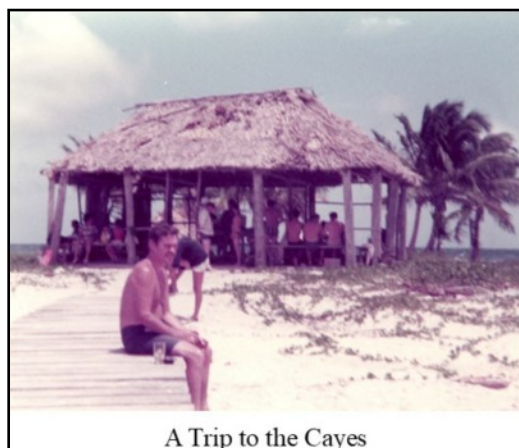
ter to visit all outstations to reassure attached personnel that support was always available. Working conditions for some, especially at Salamanca, were 'challenging' to say the least, and all who endured that deserve worthy praise.

Swamp Rats. Long before I arrived, the REME workshop had adopted the name of 'Swamp Rats.' Over the years various items of memorabilia have been produced to reflect this including 'T' shirts, plaques and even Zippo lighters. One of the workshop recovery vehicles, which was an old Bedford Light, was known as 'Swampy' and sported a sign atop its cab to advertise the fact. Naturally, and purely to promote camaraderie and enhance morale, 'Swampy' functions were regularly held within the workshop area, during which various rituals involving the downing of pints of Charger beer was a necessity. The local beer was named Charger, which, having just come from a cavalry regiment seemed a little ironic to me!

General. My initial posting was for six months. However, being single and having thus far enjoying the environment, I approached my boss and volunteered to extend my tour. This was approved by REME records, so I was to spend a year in Belize, which will have saved some unknown married Art Veh from a six-month unaccompanied tour! Life progressed and as already stated the turnover of personnel was constant and on-going. This was not just for REME, but for everybody else also, as when I arrived in Belize the resident infantry battalion was the Queen's Regiment (can't remember which battalion). They were replaced by 1RRW, which brought its own idiosyncrasies as being a Welsh regiment, personnel with common surnames were referred to as 'Jones 237' and 'Evans 613,' and they were relieved by the K.O.S.B. (and woe betide anyone who referred to them as 'KOSBIES').

There was also an ongoing turnover of RAF Regiment personnel. Their only function was to man the airport defences with Rapier AA missiles, but with true service humour they used to 'grade' the landing of RAF aircraft by holding aloft number boards like those by ice skating judges. This apparently was taken very seriously by the pilots of the incoming aircraft. I believe no pilot ever achieved three 10's!

R&R. The workshop worked a five-day week, so weekends were free, unless of course circumstances dictated otherwise. I spent a lot of weekends away at San Pedro, one of the Cayes (small islands offshore). San P was not strictly a Caye as it was joined to the mainland, but it was named as such. It was situated north of Belize City and a 15min flight by Britten-Norman Islander aircraft operated by local Maya Airways (known locally and to service personnel as 'My Arse Your Arse' Airways!) The resident infantry battalion had a R&R facility at San Pedro so that troops could 'get away' and enjoy sun, sea and the local rum at little cost, if only for a few of days. The RAF used to fly a regular service by Puma on a Friday afternoon with return flight on Sunday evening, but this was strictly managed to make it fair for all, so during my tour I only managed one 'free' trip!



A Trip to the Cayes

After landing at San Pedro, it was necessary to remove both footwear and your watch! All the roads and paths were of sand, so going barefoot was not only comfortable but practical, and time was of no consequence.

Indeed, on my first trip there I asked the time from a local who just looked skyward and said 'nighttime' as it was dark, but he would have said 'daytime' had it been light, such was the laid back lifestyle of the locals. On offering my somewhat bemused thanks, he just said in that lovely Caribbean accent, 'No big t'ing mahn,' hence the title of this piece.

Day trips to the Cayes closer to Belize City were a regular event. A boat trip with the necessary supplies of food and a cool box full of drinks, were all that was required. There was nothing to do once you got there except swim, sunbathe, eat and drink, and a walk paddling your way around the perimeter or 'estate' would take no longer than ten minutes! Of course, one could be a little more adventurous and venture further afield. Four of us decided that a trip to Mexico would be a good idea, so we travelled north and crossed the border (no visa required) close to the city of Chetumal. There was not a lot to do there either, but at least we could all say we had visited Mexico!

My only other short break was a long weekend to the Cayman Islands, situated mid-way between Belize and Cuba. During my frequent trips to San Pedro, I got to know the local Mayor, a young chap by the name of Tavo. He arranged a trip to the Caymans for local craftsmen to explore the possibilities of expanding their crafts and business opportunities, and there was a spare seat available on the flight. I jumped at the chance but had to get clearance from 'the boss' and take the necessary leave. The Caymans are a British Overseas Territory, and whilst its flag incorporating the Union Flag flew proudly, the place was, and still is, totally 'Americanised'. I walked down the main street in George Town, the capital, to find that every other building was a bank! Goodness knows how many millions/billions of dollars have passed through them over the years, and yet I couldn't find a laundrette anywhere!

Being on a one-year tour I was entitled to annual leave, so three Royal Signals friends and I opted for leave in El Salvador which is on the western side of Central America. We flew there with TACA Airlines (Transportes Aéreos del Continente Americano) but more commonly known as 'Take A Chance Airlines! Despite the disparaging acronym there were no problems. We stayed in the capital San Salvador and enjoyed a week of exploration. It is a charming country, albeit, at the time, being a military dictatorship, but we could sense an unease within the population and sure enough in 1979 a civil war erupted which was to last until 1992. Obviously travel there was forbidden during that time.



'Sundowners' with Pimm's umbrella.
Nice to see everyone still wearing a hat

Sundowners. At the end of a working week, Friday evening was always something of a release. One day, both my roommate and I, having 'flopped' after returning from work, decided that before dinner an early drink was called for. Despite the mess bar being closed we somehow managed to procure lemonade, ice, some fruit and a bottle of Pimm's No 1 Cup. Needless-to-say, we eventually made it to dinner somewhat the worse for wear! The formality was repeated the week after with additional attendance, and it was decided that a name be attributed to the gathering, and with a somewhat colonial bent 'Sundowners' was voted in unanimously, and it was also decided that all attendees must wear a hat! We had a 'T' shirt produced and after much discussion as to design, settled for the front and rear labels from a Pimm's bottle with the added words 'Sundowners' and 'Belize Section' front and back. As I was leaving Belize it was suggested that we write to Pimm's and ask somewhat tongue in cheek that we had not infringed copyright, and we

enclosed a 'T' shirt. I then flew home, but Pimm's responded and sent to Belize a sun umbrella and other Pimm's marketing paraphernalia (see photo). I was posted to 5 Armd Wksp at Soest and considered forming a 'Sundowners Germany' branch, but on reflection thought that a Sundowner session atop the nearby Möhne dam (of dam buster fame) would not have enhanced Anglo/German relations!

Some asides. The SAS had a presence in Belize, enough said, except that one of their number, a SNCO, was 'pulled up' one day by the garrison RSM, who was Guards, and 'dressed down' for being improperly dressed, as he was wearing desert boots and blue PT shorts and nothing else! I was on friendly terms with this individual and offered to lend him a spare beret with REME cap badge. Some days later the workshop ASM, who shall remain nameless, mentioned to me that he had seen said individual wearing blue PT shorts and a REME beret! Who was he, as he didn't recognize him? I had to explain, tactfully, that the workshop now had an honorary member!

Crabs, land crabs to be precise, (*Cardisoma guanhumi*), would appear in biblical quantities during the rainy season, not in hundreds or thousands but millions. They were everywhere, and due to the numbers inevitably got trodden on. Due to the heat this soon resulted in a stench worse than any fish market you may have visited. Fortunately, their mating season didn't last very long, and normality was soon restored.

The Sgt's Mess at Airport Camp did a roaring trade as there was no other outlet for relaxation other than taking a taxi into Belize City. The presiding member was the Garrison RSM (Guards) who rarely appeared, and in my yearlong tour I can't remember ever having attended a mess meeting, such was the continual turnover. However, certain regimental 'practices' were still upheld, and I well remember crawling on hands and knees in a conga with the RRW members singing 'Hi Ho, Hi Ho, it's off to work we go,' I laughed so much my sides ached next day. That wonderful organisation the Combined Services Entertainment (CSE, and now BFBS Live Events) put on more than one show in Belize, but only one that I remember whilst I was there. Jim Davidson (a staunch supporter of CSE) and the Nolan Sisters were the main acts, supported by others, amongst whom was a soldier from the RRW. This lad had a singing voice to be believed, and it was reputed that he had beaten Tom Jones in local talent competitions when they were youths and before he had joined up. Such is the mysterious path of destiny that we all tread!



Xmas 1977 at San Pedro with Tavo the Mayor

In closing. I thoroughly enjoyed my yearlong tour. British forces no longer serve in Belize (except for a few advisors), but regrettably the country has fallen victim to the drugs epidemic and is used as a staging point by the cartels on the route north toward the USA. Locally grown marijuana, money laundering and drug related gangs bedevil the county now, which is a shame, as its potential as a safe tropical holiday destination will not now be realized for many years, but the Belizeans take it all in their stride, so as my anonymous friend from San Pedro would say, 'no big t'ing mhan'.

NOTICE

CONGRATULATORY

The following is a message from CBF:

After a very hectic and dangerous period during which I firmly believe that we were near a conflict with the Guatemalan Armed Forces. The timely arrival of our additional Military and RAF Units together with the arrival of HMS ACHILLES has without any doubt at all, restored the deterrent value of the Force to the full.

I know how very hard all ranks, both in the resident and incoming units, have worked over this period and I would like to say how very much your efforts have been appreciated not only by myself but also by the Governor and the people of Belize. Well done.

Congratulatory notice from the CBF after the Guatemalan 'threat.'

John Swarbrick - 62A

Christmas Island Tour. (Operation Grapple) 'H' Bomb test site

Eggy Egleton - 52B

We managed to find a decent tattooist. Then managed to find the out of bounds areas and when stopped by the Red Monkeys and asked our unit we told them all we could say was Operation Grapple. We directed in a rather impolite manner back to the in bound areas.

We purchased some fruit enough to last a couple of days. After an exciting and tiring weekend, it was off to Labuan in North Borneo. Another nice over night stop in decent billets and good food.

Next day off to Darwin, Australia on landing the Customs treated us like drug smugglers. They wanted to unpack the kit that had been on the plane since the journey started in Blighty. Confiscated some of the lad's magazines and sealed them in a parcel. This was given to the pilot and not to be opened until we had left Australia. These magazines had been printed in Australia. Countries that were not too friendly to Britain had treated us better. We stopped overnight in an RAAF camp. Another new day and a flight to an airfield near Brisbane still in Australia. With another overnight stop in an RAAF camp.



Native Village

Some of the natives visited us and kept saying you English or Limeys do this and that. Some of the idiots had been born in England. One found out we were REME and wanted his radio repaired. He was politely told were to stick his radio.

Next morning off to Nandi in Fiji on landing we were transported in a civvie bus with no glass in the windows just blinds to a hotel. We went out on the town and had a good night. The locals were very friendly, and we found that a small Fijian was six feet tall.

Not long after leaving Fiji the RAF Flight Sergeant came around and told us to put our safety belts on. We were in rows of two each side but Jock Burnett (ex-boy Chepstow) was asleep with his coat over him near the door in a single seat. The Sergeant did not tell him. Suddenly we hit a huge air pocket and the Hasting being a slow old tub dropped like a stone. In front of us Jock was in mid air his arms and legs shot out from under his coat as he crashed back into his seat.

We should have flown from here to Christmas Island, but the main runway was under repair and the temporary one had no lighting. Therefore, it was an extra over night stop in Canton in the Phoenix Islands. The British and the U.S.A. jointly ran the island and you could only spend U.S. dollars except in the Post Office they would take English money.

The food was provided by an American construction company and was out of this world. They cooked it while you waited and as much as you wanted. It was the last take off and we headed for Christmas Island. We landed at the far end of the island on a coral runway with tents not buildings. We were here at last but of course there was no transport. We waited in the tents and were shown photographs of sun burnt people. It had taken eighteen days to get here perhaps a boat would have been quicker.

2 Special Engineer Workshops.



At last a Bedford 3-ton truck arrived and we were transported to the REME lines in the main camp. These were long wooden huts divide into four- and six-man rooms. Outside each billet was a 45-gallon oil drum with a lid painted in REME colours for rubbish. The air conditioning was louvre windows and a gap between the walls and roof. The showers and toilets were in a separate block. The water was heated by the sun for the showers and wash hand basins.

The first thing had to do was set our watches to army time which was different to local time. This meant at 8 am it was broad daylight and 8 pm pitch black. As the island is close to the equator the sun rose and set so quickly there was virtually no dawn or sunset.

We went for breakfast in the dark and came out in bright sunlight. The RAF did the cooking for the main camp. The first time we entered the cookhouse everybody banged their eating irons on the metal tables shouting out 'Moonies'. We were white and everybody else was brown. When anybody was leaving they shout out 'Yab a dab a do days to do, then the number (it was always less then 10.)

It was a year tour, and some said a punishment posting. In the main camp were RAF, Royal Engineers, Royal Signals and REME The only white women besides the Governors' wife down at the Port were two WVS women in the main camp. The Marines and Navy were stationed at the Port of London, except for about five sailors who ran a fresh water plant at the rear of our workshops.



Waiting to Unload

The navy & marines were station at the port to unload the cargo boats. Due to the reef the supply ships anchored at sea and the goods were unloaded on to landing craft and pontoons.

The supply ships were all Royal Fleet Auxiliary. The native village at the port and was out of bounds. In the main camp was a NAAFI but we had our own club in the workshops that was run by one of the corporals in the unit. The workshops were about 600 yards from our lines and we walked there and

straight to our place of work. The normal working day was 8 am to 4 pm and dress was jungle green shorts, boots, socks and floppy hat or beret. We did not parade and all section NCO's had the responsibility to make sure their men were at work.



Egg on New Years Day

a few feet or a hundred yards. In some places the reef was dish shaped and when the tide went out it left large areas of water like lakes. Some of these had water up to three feet deep.

On weekends we used our club, swam in a lagoon, shark fishing at the quarry or went to the Port. At the Port there was a swimming area and a Navy Canteen.

One weekend we were swimming at the port when suddenly everybody was jumping out of the water at speed. We saw what appeared to be two shark fins approaching the swimming area. When they got really close we could see it was a very large ray fish with the tips of it wings above the surface.

Another time down the Port a RAF helicopter was circling and it banked sharply and the man sitting in the door fell out. He had to be rescued by his own crew. If you went passed the reef it was very difficult to get back. The edge of the reef was not uniform it could be

We had a Bedford QL MT repair truck converted for weekend camping. We drew rations from the RAF and cooked over a can of coral soaked in petrol. In the main camp was an RAF cinema. This had no roof and a corrugated wall with a Snowdrop on duty at the ticket office. The seats were metal, so we took a truck seat as a cushion and a poncho, (normally it only rained at night).

Shark fishing at the quarry was good and easy. We had hooks made by the blacksmith attached to don 8 wire and the wire attached to the rear of a one-ton Austin. Fish were caught with a rod with normal bait. These were cut in half and put on the big hook. We then waded out to about waist deep and threw the hook into the sea. When the wire went taught there was a shark on the end. We pulled them in and took them to the native village.



Sadie Thompson 53 Div

These were given to our two boys from the workshop. When I left the Island, they gave me a sword made from shark teeth.

Outside the front of the workshops was a Fijian unit in tents. The Navy lads and the Fijians used our club. The club sold soft drinks during the day and beer at night. We sold four types of beer, Watneys pale and brown ale, Pegasus and Amstel lager. It was in cans the 440ml size.

The workshop buildings were corrugated aluminium or hanger sized tents. The unit consisted of all trades and no Regimental Staff with at least half the unit ex-apprentices from Arborfield and Chepstow.

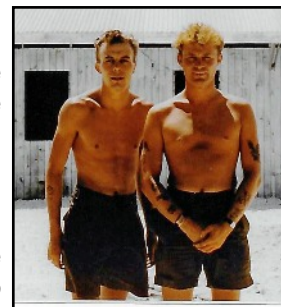
One Chepstow ex- boy a Cpl Chescoe a blacksmith was on his second tour. He must have upset some one. The most common rank appeared to be full corporal all substantive. I even met ex-boys in the Royal Engineers based in the Field Squadron.



Egg in Best Kit

The unit commander was Major Ost a very nice man, one of the few officers I liked in my 10 years 183 days service. He stood up for the REME one of the few who did. While we were there the Royal Engineers RSM contacted the workshops stating he was holding lectures for all junior NCO's on discipline. Major Ost informed him that we were tradesmen and would not be attending his lectures.

Normal dress was shorts, floppy hat, socks and standard issue boots. Some time we wore our berets and when we had an annual inspection we had to wear full jungle greens, beret, putties and blue hose tops. For the inspection the electricians painted our best boot toe caps with clear varnish. We all



Pete Grayson and Egg

looked very smart. For this inspection the MT section had to plant coconut trees around the edge of the workshops were the Fijians had lived. We went into the plantations digging up tree that were about 5 to 6 tall and self sets. We had a boring machine on the back of a Bedford lorry. The holes were dug quite deep and filled with coconut husks and the tree put on top of this and given plenty of water.

There were a lot of 'C' vehicle mechanics due to the large amount of Royal Engineers plant equipment. The Engineers had the Scammell Constructors. I found out that their power steering cut out at a lower pressure than the Explorer.



Scammell and Low Loader

In the workshop we had two boys (Gilbert Islanders) who were men from the village they worked doing odd jobs and cleaning. We were always busy in the workshop and I had the only recovery Scammell on the Island. I did recovery jobs for all three services. Plenty on weekends when off duty vehicles got bogged in and I was called out. The surface of the island was virtually all coral. It varied from concrete hard to heavy mud and liquid mud these surfaces could be only a foot apart.

One job was to the Senior RAF Medical Officer who had gone to an out of bounds area and got stuck. It was well off the beaten track on the way to recover him I had to cross a small creek. On returning the tide had come in and the Scammell started to sink in. It was reverse gear and back out quickly.

We left the Scammell there and went back the next day with a load of corrugated aluminium sheets. The lads laid them under the wheels as I drove across.

There was a cluster of huts that were out of bounds away from the military areas. It was for civilians with offices etc that were all most deserted. I was called there when an RE sapper had turned a one-ton lorry over. The Snowdrops (RAF Police) were in attendance. I normally took photos of jobs and they would only let me point my camera in fixed directions. (Knowledge of this site came in useful later).

The Navy at the Port of London had built ramp with a winch to pull their boats out of the sea to repair them. It was set in concrete, but they had done some thing wrong and could not winch them back into the sea. Every time they had to launch a boat I went

down with the Scammell. The Navy had a steel wire rope from the trolley via two snatch blocks in the sea to the land. I attached my winch rope and gently winched in till the boat was floating.



Another RAF Job

In the Navy workshop the men were all Petty Officers and Chief Petty Officers. One time I had attached my winch rope and was waiting to start when a Navy land rover stopped. There was a Navy Officer driving he asked me how it was going. I lent against the vehicle talking to him and then he drove off. I did not salute him to me he was just another officer. The senior CPO came to me and said, "That was Jimmy the one." I said, "Jimmy the one what?" It appears he was like their adjutant. (The Captain is god and he is next to him).



LCM Out of the Water

The boats were mainly LCM's (Landing Craft Medium) the fronts dropped down and it would hold a 10-ton truck. The crew for an LCM was a marine Corporal and two marines.

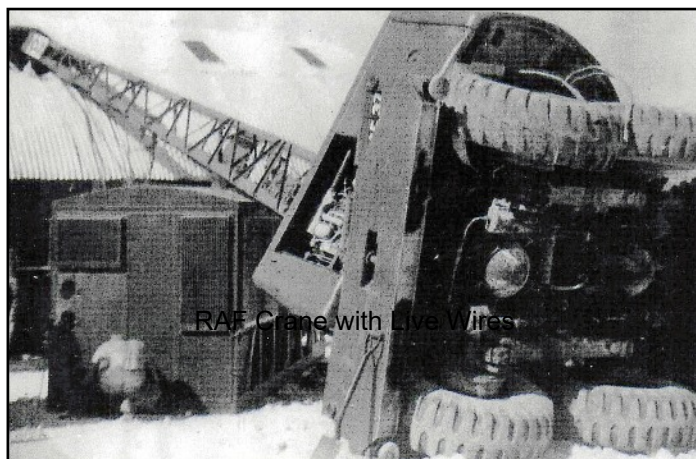
The only service police on the island were RAF (Snowdrops). I got to know a few of them due to being called out on recovery jobs. They had a Guardroom and sat out on the veranda with their land rovers parked nose in. One day I went passed pushing a Coles crane on an AEC chassis doing over 30 mph. (they tried to get soldiers for speeding). They almost fell out of their chairs by the time they had got into their land rover and mobile. I had turned into a coconut plant plantation and disappeared.

Another big job I had was tidying up dumped vehicles on the island. This was moving all the army wrecks to the RAF dump. Apparently, the Government Department the Ministry of Supply who we worked for was being sued by another department for making the island untidy. My Scammell was off the road, so I had a Fowler bulldozer for towing jobs. There were two of us working and one day return from the dump it as it was close to midday we finished early for dinner and left the dozer in a plantation and went for grub. We came back after grub and I started the dozer up. I was covered in warm oil a hydraulic pipe had burst. Luck we finished early because the oil would have been hot.

With the Scammell back on the road I borrowed a low loader trailer from the RE's for moving plant equipment and vehicles with no wheels. The RASC had 10-ton AEC cargo and 10-ton Albion tipper lorries. Plus, a number DUKW's which they used down the port for unloading the ships at sea. I was called out to two DUKW's that were bogged in on the beach at Paris. This was an abandoned old sea plane opposite the Port of London the other side of the island at the 'jaw' end. I

had to drive right round the island to get there. The track was only wide enough for a land rover. The birds here were never disturbed as nobody usually used the tracks. Some would not leave their nests and I had to run them over. I eventually reached the bogged in DUKW's and it was a simple straight pull and there were out. By now it was getting late and most of the return trip was in the dark.

One difficult job I had at the Port was when a RAF 10-ton mobile crane had been installing a generator and tipped over. The jib had gone through the roof of a building. I arrived to find a RAF Officer on scene and I inspected the casualty and noted that there were high voltage cables running above that were not insulated. I told the officer these would have to be switched off. He told me they could not be switched off as they fed the largest cold stores and refrigerated stores for food. I found a RE Sapper with a bulldozer and positioned him the other side of the building. Then I connected a wire rope from the jib of the casualty over the building to his machine. I instructed him when signalled start up and put it in bottom gear with the clutch dipped and hand brake off. He was on a padded seat I told him to touch nothing and just operate the clutch when signalled and roll forward on tick over.



RAF Crane with Live Wires

Just in case we hit the live wires with the jib. His job was just to roll forward and stop the jib whipping out of control. I put my crew man at the end of the building where he could be seen from both vehicles. I had my winch rope in the self recovery position giving me a full view of the jib. On my signal I started winching the casualty upright and the dozer held the jib. The vehicle was on its wheels and everything was working. Job done, nobody was electrocuted, and the food was safe.

A routine job for the Scammell was testing repaired RE low loader trailers. With the vehicle mechanic who had repaired the trailer we would go for a road test. We would get to 30 mph and I dipped the clutch and the mechanic operated the dead mans anchor (operating the trailers brakes) and stopping the Scammell. Due to the heat I had no side panels on the engine and on one run it rained. This was unusual as it normally only rained at night. We did the test and turned around to return to the Workshops when the Scammell started missing then stopped. The rain was going in the engine compartment and shorted out the plugs. We just had to sit there and wait for the rain to stop.

I was down the Port again for a job the Governors Head Boy (a Fijian) was driving their AEC 10-ton cargo onto an LCM and the lorry had pushed to boat out to sea and fallen into the water. The RASC. always reversed on to the LCM but this man had driven on. The marine used the boats engine to hold it against the land but by driving on the weight at the front took him by surprise.



The Governors Driver in the Drink

London to Paris Race.

When this race took place in England Major Ost arranged one on the Island. A baton was made in the workshops. It was of nylon which was hollowed out and could be unscrewed. The boss man on the Island wrote a message in it at the main camp. Then a relay of REME runners took it to the village at the Port of London where it was handed over to the Commissioner. He took the message and replaced it with a reply. This then another REME runner took it to the docks. Then a man swam to Cook Island, (One of the swimmers was Major Ost) a runner crossed Cook Island and another swimmer went to the mainland near Paris and a relay of runners ran around the island from the far side back to the main camp.

The baton containing the Commissioner reply was handed over to the RAF boss man. The runners were accompanied by land rovers (one being the Padre) and these had radio contact with the workshops. At the workshop were my recovery crew and a vehicle mechanic with the Scammell and a spare vehicle were on call. Note: the baton should be in the REME. museum.



Cpl Jock Burnett, The Governor with the Baton

As I mentioned at the beginning there were flies on the island in their hundreds. To keep them off us in the billets we had mosquito nets. These were rectangular and wired to the beams in the billet. When we woke up in the morning the corners of the net were full of bed bugs. To combat the flies we had flying flit guns (Royal Artillery Auster spotter planes converted

to spray) they sprayed the billets every day, but the flies all went indoors when they heard the plane. We had dogs as pets living in the billets. We had a few cats but most of them had gone feral and kept well clear of humans.

In the workshop we had static vehicles for the turners and other various trades. One of our turners a Cfn Brummie Tummey had to make a spare for one of the RAF planes and got a certificate from the top RAF man.

The Great White Gods in England decided to reduce the man power on the Island as it was to be closed in the future. The Fijians departed first then the RASC followed. We had to take over all the vehicles that the RASC had. A party of us corporals and below went to their vehicle park to get all the vehicles running and bring them back to the workshop and form a vehicle park. We were met by an officer who asked for the man in charge. We wore our badges of rank on a wrist band but most of us left them in the billets. He looked perplexed while we tried to work out who was senior. In the end he just gave up and handed over the keys and log books. The Albion 10-ton tippers were in a terrible state as the vibrations from the engine and transmission shattered most of the windscreens. The AEC 10-ton cargo and 1-ton Commer tippers were in good nick.

It was now December yes Christmas on Christmas Island was approaching. They had decided to start sending vehicles back to the UK A couple of Fleet Auxiliary cargo ships were anchored outside the reef at the Port London. The Royal Engineers would oversee loading but a squad of REME would be in attendance. Their duties would be to get dead or mobile equipment that was not self driving on the pontoons.

Start any vehicle that broke down on to the LCMS and pontoons. Half the squad would be on the boat to drive the vehicle into position drain the fuel and disconnect the batteries.

The squad consisted of Cpl's and Craftsmen of all trades. We took it in turns either on land or on the boat. Going on the boat was quite an experience we went on an LCM or pontoon to the boat and stopped along side. Then a derrick lowered a cargo net down that had a wooden platform in the bottom. We then climbed on to this inside the net and were hoisted up to the deck. Once on the deck we had to climb down into the hold. The beams for the hatch cover were push to each end of the hold. To go down one had to hold on these and swing your legs over them and feel for the ladder. Then reach with one hand under these beams to grasp the ladder, then the other hand on to the vertical ladder and climb down. These holds were at least four levels down each level being at least as high as a house.

The bottom of the hold was sand as ballast. The vehicle was driven into position where possible. We put the drained fuel petrol and diesel in the same 45-gallon oil drums. When we had about five full I contacted the RE Officer on deck and down came the cargo net we loaded them on and it went up to the deck. I went up with them on one occasion and the sappers on deck just threw them overboard.

We took our dinner break on deck to eat our haversack rations. The boat had a raft attached to the stern in case anybody fell overboard. The first couple of days some of the sappers got lowered over the side for a swim. We never ate all the bread and threw them over the side. This attracted small fish and gannets. Then a big shark appeared and then came around every dinner time swimming stopped.

On shore using the Scammell I had to push several trailers and plant onto the pontoons. On shore a sapper asked me to tow start his fork lift. This was a large vehicle with wheels bigger than the Scammell. I pointed out it would damage his forks, so I would push start him. I fitted the straight bar and started to push him I sounded my horn and he let his clutch out. The Scammell shuddered and almost stopped. I braked and shouted we will give it another go. This time as I blew my horn I floored the accelerator and from the air breather of the fork lift came oil. I stopped and spoke politely as always to the sapper he had the fork lift in reverse. Class one idiot, (when I left the army the police forces gain was the diplomatic corps lost, so I was told). We repeated the push start in a forward gear and to my surprise it started. We went back to the main camp everyday for the evening meal.



Loading a dead vehicle

As Christmas was approaching it had been decided the unit would put on a pantomime The Pied Piper. I was told I would be the Burgermeister by the producer Cfn Bradley. The cast and support crew was as follows S/Sgt Stanford (Stores), Sgt's Low (ex Arborfield), Harrington, Cpl's Burnett (ex Chepstow, Dyson, Dykes (ex Chepstow), Chescoe (ex Chepstow), Foster (Ginger ex Arborfield), Grayson (ex Arborfield), Lawson (ex boy?), L/Cpl Jones (DUKW) Cfn's White, Tummey, Pye (singer at Butlins), Hammond, Thompson (Sadie ex Arborfield), Reeves, Evans, Gent, Bacon (Des ex Arborfield), Wilson, Rees.

We practiced at night and made props etc in our own time. The play was freely adapted so it appealed to servicemen. Some had to play women, fairies and children. We put on shows at the hospital, Gilbertese Village, the Port, our club and the junior ranks club (NAAFI). It was a success and we raised money for charity. We got a good write up in the Island news paper the Mid-Pacific News.

The services radio was running a collection for 'Wireless for the Blind' some of the money went to this. While the pantomime was running we completed the loading of ships at the Port. I was told I would travel back on one as military representative in case anything was need on the voyage. As the pantomime had not finished I was told I could not go and was replaced 'Gutted'.

(Back in England I was posted to 10 Command Workshops at Mill Hill, London. I was called to the ASM's office and ask what I knew about a boat load of vehicles from Christmas Island. I explained and was told they were at Tilbury Docks and I would be going down there as one of a squad from the Workshops to get them running.)

As the pantomime was finished it was time to get some serious drinking done. Our unit managed to drink a month's rations over Christmas'. Another Christmas idea was we had a DUKW that did not exist, and it was painted in REME colours and L/Cpl Jones nick name Ducky (DUKW) drove Father Christmas down to the village with sacks full of toys.

The RE RSM issued orders that there would be no beer in the billets over Christmas. Of course, we took no notice and my billet floor like most of the REME ones it was covered in empty cans on Christmas morning. Major Ost and the senior ranks came around with 'gun fire' before breakfast.

We went for breakfast and left one lad asleep in the billet. He was Chalky White who slept with his eyes open. The RSM made a visit and had great difficulty waking Chalky up. He made him pick the cans up and put them in the bin. As our officer had already been and not complained there was nothing he could do.



Dukie Jones and Santa



After the Show

The services radio was collecting money for the guide dogs for the blind. By paying money they played a record of your choice and it stayed on till you were out bid. The REME corporals had a whip round and we played a record that had the words 'hair cut ring the barbers bell' in the song and dedicated it to the RSM.

Then it was news year eve in England a party of us went pearl diving down the Port around Cook Island. The water was so clear it was possible to see an old penny 18 feet down on the sea bed. I never managed to find any pearls, but several did.

Time was going by and troops were leaving. It was decided to have an inspection of living quarters to find damage etc. The MT section was given the job of tidying up our lines. We had some louver panes of glass were missing. I remembered the semi deserted buildings in the out of bounds area. I took a couple of drivers in a one tonner through a plantation and came near the back of the buildings. Then on foot we got to the back of the buildings and removed the required number of panes of glass. After the inspection Major Ost asked me how we had no broken panes of glass. I just said, "Don't ask."

After the Christmas and New Year break it was back to normal. At last I was given my date to leave and it was my turn to shout "Yab a dab a do days to do". It was alleged you had a choice of postings on leaving. Some lads went to Hong Kong and Singapore. I asked for the Midlands as my wife had been ill while I was away. I got a posting to 10 Command Workshops at Mill Hill, London. Thanks a bunch.

The return home.

Our day had arrived, and it was off to the airfield. We had to travel in uniform. In our battle dress that had been hanging on a coat hanger for a year. On reaching the airfield we found that the plane was an Eagle Airways DC 6 turbo prop. The crew were real air hostesses.

First stop was Honolulu airport for a couple of hours. I managed to get drunk on Southern Comfort. I was alright till we hit some rough weather and I was air sick. One of the girls looked after me and once I managed to eat I was alright. To thank the girl, I bulled her shoes before we got to the UK.

The next stop was San Francisco and it was a weekend stop. We arrived at the airport and our accommodation had not been arranged. We had to wait in the restaurant and order what food we wanted. We just signed for what ever we had ordered. While we were eating the Americans nearby talked loudly saying we were Australian. They were trying to get us in conversation and find out who we were. We just blanked them.

Eventually buses arrived to take us to a hotel. We were unlucky as it was a Forces Hotel. At other times the lads got posh hotels. The hotel was OK, but it did not do food. We went around the corner to a restaurant for our meals. We had what ever we wanted and just signed for it. We walked around the town and women kept talking to us asking were we came from. They were all British and married to Yanks.

In the evening we were out again and got a taxi to China Town. We went in a Chinese night club and had a drink. They told us to wait in the bar till the floor show started. We were taken to a table at the front. You had to order food and there

is a cover charge to sit down. We had our food and the floor show was over and we called for the bill. When we got it, they had missed off the cover charge. We informed the waiter and he called the manager. The manager said, "We do not charge servicemen the cover charge."

The next place we went was the jazz area. You had to be over 21 to drink. One evening we spent in the Edinburgh Castle pub and all the staff were jocks. We had met a Scottish woman and she invited us there. Virtually all the customers were British. The American husbands were in another bar.

No more overnight stops it would be sleeping on the plane. From San Francisco to Winnipeg for a refuelling stop. It was cold here and thick snow several feet thick on the ground. Snow ploughs were working on the runways. From Winnipeg to Gander in Newfoundland that was next fuel stop.

In those days' planes had to refuel to cross the Atlantic. Coming the other way, they refuelled in Ireland. We had been flying for a while towards Newfoundland when my mate said, "The engine is on fire." I said, "No that's just the exhaust." Then the pilot said "We are making a stop in Montreal due to a technical fault."

We looked out the window and the prop was just idling and the flames had stopped. The snow was even deeper Montreal and we were fed, and it took 10 hours to repair the plane. It was off again to Gander without incident and we landed.

It was freezing cold and the snow was many feet deep. One of the lads put his hand on the rail of the steps as he got off the plane and it stuck. Back on the plane and England the next stop.

As soon as we got off the plane we were on leave. It was good bye to most of the lads and good riddance to others. I was off to Wolverhampton, but I had a slight problem my wife had moved while I was in Christmas Island. I had the address but no idea of the location of the house. At the railway station I managed to find a taxi driver who knew where it was. When I went to pay the driver I only had just enough English money for the fare. US and Canadian dollars were no good so for a tip I had to give him a packet of American cigarettes. What made it even better home coming was the wife was off work.

Eggy Egleton. 52B

Ed's comments: I had an e-mail from Eggy telling me that I had failed to publish the second part of this story. It took me some time to find all the data, files and photos on my hard drive. So, here you are, Eggy. I have included the rest of the story even though it is rather long. My apologies for forgetting to complete this.



Richard George Wilson - Glider Pilot - Lynne Copping

The following very brief record of one incident in Richard Wilson's twenty-seven years' service was written at the request of his granddaughter Vanessa for the purpose of her primary school project. Because the project would be viewed by young schoolchildren, it appears that Richard modified the text to exclude the harsh reality of life prevailing in German occupied Europe during World War Two.

The more sinister aspects of Richard Wilson's wartime experience at Arnhem only came to light when, in 1994, a British man had writing scratched on a cellar wall pointed out to him in a house in Oosterbeek. He went to the Airborne Museum (now in the old Hartenstein Hotel) and asked if they recognised the army number. They told him that it might have been a gunner's number, so he wrote to the 'Gunner Magazine' and asked if anyone recognised the name and address. An ex major in the Gunners had a friend in Burntisland, Scotland, and contacted him asking him if he knew the name. This chap said that he didn't, but he wrote a letter to a local Scottish newspaper, the 'Fife Free Press', who published the story.

At that time Richard Wilson still had two brothers and a brother in law in the town, and one of the brother's read the letter and contacted the newspaper, informing them of his brother's identity. A newspaper article in the following week's edition, announced that the mystery had been solved.

The enquiries revived memories of Arnhem for Richard Wilson. In the midst of intensive enemy action and realizing he had little hope of survival, Richard had no wish to involve residents of the house he had been ordered to occupy by writing a farewell message to his mother on paper. Instead he hastily scratched a message on the lintel of a door in the dark cellar hoping it would eventually be found and passed to his mother.

I was fifteen years of age when war broke out, and with my mother, sister and brothers moved from RAF Hornchurch where my father, an airman, was stationed, to my mother's home town of Burntisland, in Scotland, where we acquired accommodation for the duration of the war.

Not having a likeness for school, I found myself a job as an apprentice maintenance fitter in the local aluminium factory, and remained there till I was seventeen years and two months old. I then joined the army as a Gordon Highlander by giving my age as nineteen years. I was posted to the Bridge of Don Barracks and trained as an infantryman. Within a month of joining I was informed that I, with other young soldiers, was being transferred from the Gordon Highlanders to a young soldiers regiment called The Highland Regiment, where I was posted to the 2nd Battalion, and continued my infantry training and home defence duties.

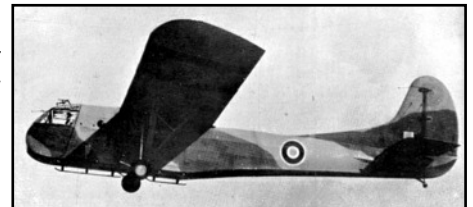
In November 1942 The Highland Regiment was disbanded and I was posted to the Royal Artillery at Sutton Valence in Kent and was trained as a Gun Position Officer's assistant, but becoming bored with the type of duties required requested a transfer to the Royal Armoured Corps. I was posted to the 141st Regiment RAC (the Buffs) where I was trained as a Gunner / Mechanic where my duties were as primary co-driver and front gunner and secondary as turret gunner. (In a tank each crew member can do another man's job in case needed due to casualties in action).

In February 1944 it was decreed that men under nineteen years of age would not be sent overseas in action and although I had just attained my 19th birthday I was put into this group temporarily and given the choice of working on the tanks on their return from training in the late afternoon (out in the cold and wet) or as a waiter in the Sergeants Mess. Obviously I chose the job of Sergeants Mess waiter, as this meant being inside a nice warm building.



Tiger Moth

About a week later it was announced that volunteers were required for training as glider pilots for the future invasions and as I has always wanted to be a pilot I volunteered and was tested for suitability and health by the Royal Air Force Selection Board at Euston, London, and was accepted for training. With other trainees I commenced the specialist infantry training of a glider pilot. (A British glider pilot, on having landed his glider in action fights on the ground as an infantryman).



Aircspeed Horsa ExCC

Having completed my ground training, I, with others, was posted to 21 Elementary Flying School, RAF, at High Wycombe, and eventually went 'solo' on the Tiger Moth training aircraft. I was then posted to Glider Training Schools at Stoke Orchard and North Luffenham where I was eventually awarded the Army Flying Badge (wings) to wear above my left breast pocket, and was promoted from corporal to sergeant.

I had attained what I wanted; I was now a sergeant pilot in the Glider Pilot Regiment. In September 1944 after many false alarms we were informed that on the 17th an

airborne invasion would be carried out by the 82nd U.S. Airborne Division, the 101st U.S. Airborne Division and the 1st British Airborne Division. The U.S. divisions were to land, take and hold the bridges at Grave and Nijmegen, and the British division the bridge at Arnhem.

On the morning of 17.09.44 there was great activity as the Horsa gliders towed by Dakota's departed for Holland and the landing zones, but my flight (E Sqn at Down Ampney) had been delegated to leave on the 'second lift' on the following day. On that day I was called early with the others of my flight and after a good breakfast in the Mess drew a weapon and ammunition and went to our waiting Horsa glider.



After meeting our passengers and assuring their field gun, limber and jeep were correctly lashed down and secure, Jock Dunbar (or Dunn) my first pilot and I proceeded to carry out a pre-flight check of our glider and found everything correct. We then stood outside and smoked cigarettes and talked with our passengers, the gun crew of five men from the Royal Artillery until ordered to stand by.

On a given signal the gliders and tugs ahead of us commenced to move forward and take off into the sky and eventually it was our turn and away we went. When we were airborne we joined up with the remainder of the flight, and then with the squadron, then with the wing until we were part of a giant air armada protected by RAF and USAF fighter aircraft. We flew on over the English Channel and encountered anti-aircraft fire as we approached the coast at Flushing, but passed through unscathed although others were not so fortunate. On approaching the landing zone between Heelsum and Wolfheze, an area to the west of Arnhem, our tug pilot in the Dakota informed us we had (as we already knew) arrived at our destination, so after he had wished us luck, Jock, the first pilot, pulled the towline release lever and the 'tug' banked to the right and away home to England, leaving us in 'free flight' and looking for our run in to land.

When we had identified our landing area we told our passengers to stand by as we were going to land, and for them to be ready to move as fast as possible in getting their jeep, gun and ammunition out of the landed glider as it would not be too pleasant once we had come to a standstill in the landing zone, as the enemy would be trying to destroy us before we could unload and become combative.

Jock and I then pushed the control columns as far forward as they would go and applied 'full flap', the nose of the glider descended and the barn door sized 'flaps' started to come down fully and we were on our way to the ground.

When we were about two hundred feet from the ground the glider began to shudder and rock and we realised we were being fired at, and I turned to see why Jock was not pushing hard down on the control column at his side and saw him slumped on his side. By this time the ground was rushing up to meet us, so I eased the control column back until the glider bumped down on its two main wheels, keeping it straight by strong use of the rudder pedals and then the nose dropped until the nose wheel was also on the ground and we were rushing smoothly forward. I commenced to use the wheel brakes to stop us moving. As we were moving along it had been noisy in the glider but when we stopped it changed somewhat, now it was the noise of mortar bombs falling near us and in the distance the chatter of machine gun fire. We released the tail section of the glider without Jocks assistance as I saw that he was obviously dead, having had the left side of his face and head shot away, and managed to disembark the gun, jeep and ammunition. The sergeant in charge of the gun then took command of it and his men, and with me also in the jeep with the gun and limber attached drove as fast as possible for the shelter of the woods away from the enemy.

Once in the shelter of the woods I joined up with other glider pilots and fought as an infantryman for the rest of the time except when put in charge of eleven assorted infantrymen holding a house (see note 1) opposite the Hartenstein Hotel, our divisional H.Q. I then conducted them to the 'Lower Rhine' where we were evacuated by the Canadian Engineers, eventually arriving at Driel. At Driel we were given a hot meal, rum and cigarettes and were then taken to Nijmegen for evacuation to England by air from Lanvain airport in Belgium. I shall not tell of my experiences during my stay in the Arnhem area during that battle as many other young men (and older) could tell the same story, and some have even done so.

On arriving back in England I eventually returned to the aerodrome (as they were called then) at Down Ampney, and went to my billet where the W.A.A.F.'s had made our beds for those returning (see note 2). If I remember correctly out of thirty pilots who occupied that hut only five had returned, the others were either dead, wounded or prisoners, and I realised how lucky I had been.

After a spell of leave the reinforced squadron continued training for any other airborne invasions which may be arranged, and life once more became less exciting.

In December 1944 I was sent to India (see note 3) as part of a combined Army and RAF glider force to prepare for an invasion against the Japanese in Burma and at first was stationed in the Punjab in the Rawalpindi area where fortunately I was able to visit my father at Delhi, where he was serving as a Wing Commander in the RAF.

In March 1945 the 'wing' moved south to Belgaume for jungle training and was so engaged in May of that year when the war in Europe finished, and on V.E. Day we were engaged in going over a jungle assault course. Having completed jungle training I moved to the Delhi area to await an invasion of Burma but before that could be so the atom bomb was dropped on Japan and the Japanese capitulated, for which I was thankful as we did not hold out much hope of returning unscathed from the Burmese jungle had there been an airborne invasion, and with the end of the war with Japan so ended my war.

Richard George Wilson (Dick, Tug) Written in 1986 for his granddaughter Vanessa, for her primary school project.

Note 1: The address of the house is Utrechseweg 185, 6862 AJ Oosterbeek, The Netherlands, and at present the home of a local church minister, Henk Spoelstra.

In September 1994 (the 50th anniversary of Arnhem) a letter was published in the Fife Free Press, (the local paper for Burntisland) asking for information regarding a name and address scratched on the door lintel in the cellar of the above address. Richard had written this while sheltering in the cellar, and had forgotten about it when he wrote the above account.

Note 2: On arriving back he wanted to send his fiancée, Rita Kean, a telegram, telling of his safe arrival. The original of this is now held by the Imperial War Museum, and a copy is kept in a folder held by his daughter, Lynne Copping, along with other memorabilia.

Note 3: The squadron that he joined in India was No.669 Squadron. 28 years later, in 1973, his daughter Lynne (a member of the WRAF) married an army helicopter engineer who belonged to 669 Sqn Army Air Corps, which was then based at RAF Wildenrath, Germany. Lynne has visited the house in Oosterbeek and discovered the family have always painted around the address on the cellar wall, keeping it as it was, and now have a little scrap book all about her father, to show visitors. Lynne has also visited the Airfield in Down Ampney from where her father took off on the 'second lift' operation heading for Arnhem in 1944.

Note 4: The above account "My War" was contributed by Richard Wilson's daughter Lynne Copping after her attention was drawn to our website library Index 149. The author of 149 was one of our Aircrew Association members Jack McKerracher, who had also been a Glider Pilot and former member of No.669 Squadron.

Ed's comments: Many of you will have seen Lynn at our AOBA Reunions over the years. She and I are also members of the Facebook group, 'Ex Far East Brit Brats' as others of the AOBA are.

E-mail from: Lynne Copping - Hi Andy, re your request for items for the AOBA Newsletter would you like my dad's glider pilot story (or part of it) because in it it mentions that he was on 669 Sqn in India as one of the first members, and Roger, my deceased husband, was on 669 Sqn when I first met him. There is a loose Arborfield connection as two of my brothers were at Arborfield (63C and 72A). My middle brother went to Sandhurst when I joined the WRAF. Roger's brother Steve was 72C. Roger went straight into men's service at 17, he had had enough of school and didn't want to go to Arborfield.

From an Internet search: **Royal Air Force**

No. 669 Squadron RAF was formed on 16 November 1944 at Bikram, Patna, British India as a glider squadron, with the intention of being used for airborne operations by South East Asia Command. However, after a short period it was re-designated No. 671 Squadron RAF, due to an earlier mix-up of squadron designations and bases. The squadron was reformed anew the next day, with the same role and at the right base, and continued to train, as part of No. 343 Wing RAF, until the surrender of Japan, when it became surplus to requirements. The squadron was disbanded on 10 November 1945 at Fatehjang, British India.

Army Air Corps

The squadron was reformed as part of the British Army's Army Air Corps as 669 Aviation Squadron at RAF Wildenrath under the control of No. 1 Wing AAC operating de Havilland Canada Beaver AL.1s and Westland Scout AH.1s. The squadron was renamed to 669 Squadron AAC on 1 January 1973 and was deployed to Northern Ireland for various times between October 1973 and February 1976. The squadron was disbanded on 1 September 1976 and became No. 12 Flight AAC.

The squadron was reformed at Hobart Barracks, Detmold, Germany on 1 April 1978, from 659 Squadron, 9 Regt operating the Scout AH.1, continuing with Northern Ireland deployments. 669 moved to AAC Wattisham during 1995 becoming part of 4 Regt and operating the Westland Lynx AH.7 and the Westland Gazelle AH.1 in the anti-tank role. The Gazelles were removed during 2007 and the squadron moved to 9 Regt. Its last base was Dishforth Airfield operating the Agusta Westland Lynx AH.9A until 31 July 2016.

For 15 months until November 2016 the squadron operated as the British Army Training Unit Kenya (BATUK) Aviation Support Squadron based at Nanyuki Airfield.

The Airspeed Horsa was Britain's primary troop-carrying glider in World War II, built mainly of wood, capable of delivering up to 25 troops or vehicles/guns, and crucial in major operations like D-Day (Operation Overlord) and Market Garden, known for its large capacity and distinctive detachable tail for rapid unloading, making it a vital, if risky, part of Allied airborne assaults.



Stroke Recovery - Andy Dickson 66B

OBAN 92 complete, printed and mailed. Another personal milestone completed.

I am back to doing my 'standing up' physio exercises again. I had to wait until the physio ladies were happy that I could do them without falling over. I must admit the first time was a bit scary but I managed it and I am doing all the exercises except the torso twisting ones until my hip fully heals.

My frustration levels with my left arm are sky high. I have no muscle tone in my shoulder and it is taking ages for me to build them up again. The problem is the muscles get tired so quickly and I can only work them for so long before I have to rest. This is where my impatience and frustration kick in.

My appetite is still rubbish and I almost have to force myself to eat. I can't face some of my favourite foods which makes meal times a bit boring. I have had any amount of blood test and there is nothing to worry about except I am slightly anaemic but I put that down to my diet. I will have to wait until the New Year for the next blood test to see if I am improving. I sleep ok although on my back. This makes me snore more than usual but I wake myself up and stop making an unholy noise regularly.

I stayed up to see the New Year in and wished I hadn't had Hootenanny on the TV. What a disappointment. I did manage my first whiskey for quite a while, it is so long I can't remember my last one.

My hip/leg is starting to ache a bit during the day. It may be an alignment issue. I did ask the surgeon how he managed to get the length and orientation right before I had the surgery and I can't remember what he said but I was reassured. I am sure it is nothing serious and my body just getting used to the repairs. It doesn't stop me from doing anything.

It seems my optimism was just a reminder that anything can happen and often does.

I was sitting watching some TV on Jan 31st just after lunch when I started to feel a bit ill. All of a sudden I got a coughing fit and then threw up this brown vomit. I suggested to Sue I had better lie down for a while. No sooner was I on my bed when I threw up twice more, same brown stuff. A bit scary. Sue took my temperature and it was 40c. Time for a 111 call and they sent a medic around. He did all sorts of tests and called an ambulance. Back to Southampton hospital, blue lights flashing and not holding back on the horses.

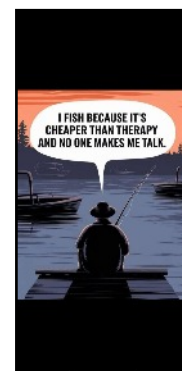
Any number of blood tests, x-rays and CT scans of my chest until I was allocated a bed at close to midnight once I was pumped full of antibiotics and I also had an oxygen mask on. A fitful night in amongst 5 other blokes all suffering different illnesses. More tests the following day with some concern I might have pneumonia or sepsis. Apparently my x-ray showed my diaphragm on my right side was looking a bit lazy, hence my shortness of breath. Doctors coming and going all day more concerned about my condition than I was.

That night it all kicked off at about 22.00 with the guy on my left shouting and swearing at his carer. This went on until about 02.00. Then at about 3 this bloke walked in from another ward and peed on the floor. No sooner had we got rid of him when the guy opposite to my right had a coughing fit and threw up. The nurse ran off to get stuff to clean him up and when she got back he had passed out. She managed to rouse him but she pressed the emergency button and a whole bunch of people arrived. They did CPR on him for ages but he didn't make. He is still in his bed space with the curtains around until well into the morning. What a nightmare. No sleep again. What a night. I was only 8 to 10 feet away from him when all this was going on.

After I was well enough I was transferred to Romsey Rehab hospital and spent 10 days there getting my strength and mobility back. They finally shipped me home on the 18th of Feb. Thank goodness. I lost even more weight while I was in hospital and am now down to 98.15 kgs. (I haven't been this weight since I was 15!) Its a good job I don't go out anywhere posh these days as none of my clothes fit me.

Another down side of being in hospital is all my muscle tone has disappeared again. This is the third time this has happened and it is hard work building it all back up again. Ah well, its not as if I have much else to do.

Andy Dickson - 66B



Arnhem Platoon Reunion 5th September 2026 - Andy Redman 75B

Hi Andy,

Happy New Year.

Further to our recent conversation. I am organising a 51st reunion for Arnhem (REME) Platoon (RAOC Apprentice College 1975-6) to be held at the Union Jack Club on Saturday 5th September 2026.

I have managed to locate approximately 50% of the intake but am keen to "spread the word" as far as possible.

Below is a list of platoon members that I have, to date, been unable to locate. Any assistance you could give regarding circulating the date of the reunion and requesting that if any of your members know of any of the below that they contact me, would be greatly appreciated.

Please contact me if you require any further information. Many thanks in anticipation.

Ed's comment: I have Andy Redman's contact details if anyone wants them. You can contact me through the 'Contacts Page' on the AOBA website.

Best wishes

Andy Dedman

Crawford	Bradley (Brad)	Derby
Ditton	Michael (Mike)	Ashfield
Jeffrey	Roderick N (Roddy)	Calne
Kemp	Kelvin M	Brighton
Laing	J G (Jock)	
Meredith	Angus D (Gus)	Scotland
Moore	Steven J	Kidderminster
Rafferty	Paul P	Kidderminster
Strang	J M (Jock)	Kettering
Swann	Michael W (Mick)	Midlands
Thompson	Ian A	Leeds
Ware	Mark N	London / Surrey
Watson	Keith	
White	A A (Pat)	Manchester
Young	Steve J	Southampton

From Robert Cassidy - 65B

It rained and rained and rained and rained
The average fall was well maintained
And when our fields were simply bogs
It started raining cats and dogs
After a drought of half an hour
There came a most refreshing shower
And then the queerest thing of all
A gentle rain began to fall

Next day 'twas pretty fairly dry
Save for a deluge from the sky
This wetted people to the skin
And after that the rain set in
We wondered what's the next we'd get
As sure as fate we got more wet
But soon we'll have a change again
And we shall have a drop of rain

The veterans' mental health and well-being service

OpCOURAGE

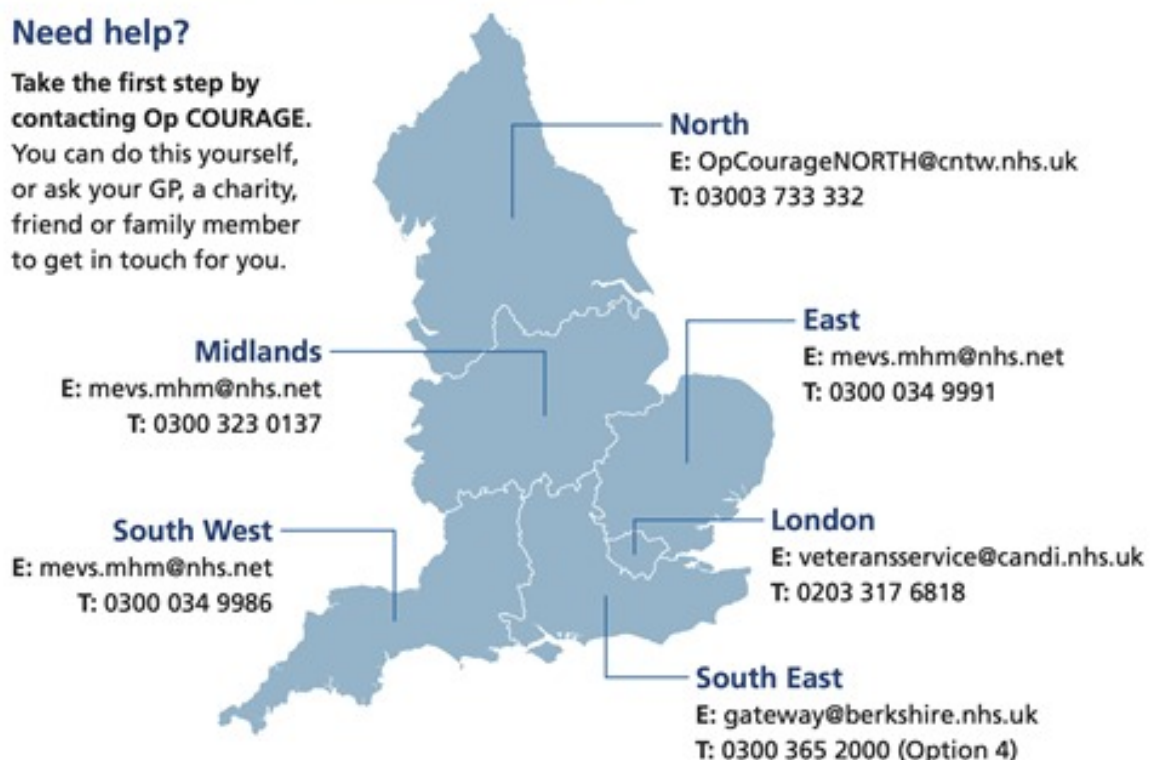


**The Veterans Mental Health
and Wellbeing Service**

Specialist care for Service leavers, reservists, veterans and their families

Need help?

Take the first step by
contacting **Op COURAGE**.
You can do this yourself,
or ask your GP, a charity,
friend or family member
to get in touch for you.



Make sure you register with a GP

If you've left the military, it's important to register with an NHS GP and tell them that you've served in the Armed Forces. You can then get help from services dedicated to caring for veterans. To find your nearest GP go to www.nhs.uk

For more information on Op COURAGE go to www.nhs.uk/opcourage

**Urgent and emergency
support from other
NHS services**

If you're having a mental health crisis, you can get help by:

- Calling 111 or 999
- Booking a GP appointment
- Going to your nearest A&E

If you're still serving, you can also call the Military Mental Health Helpline on 0800 323 4444.

CONSEQUENCES

By Adrian Lacamp, B Coy, 64A

Continued from OBAN 92

The next thing that she could remember for certain was being held in the most gentle and tender embrace she could imagine.

She remembered that someone had placed something over her head, but for some reason she was not scared. She remembered a voice talking to her, it had kept telling her that it would be okay, and she just knew that someone had been there for her when she had needed someone.

She could not, however, wipe her teacher's look of puzzled hurt from her mind. The memory of the look of pain that she had seen on Mr Hepscott's face just before he had run out of the classroom was etched into her memory, but somehow, she just knew that it was Mr Hepscott who had held her then, held her even now, and she knew for a certainty that she would never ever do anything even remotely stupid, again, ever.

And something like a warm glow sprang into existence in her heart, and it suddenly blossomed into a wonderful warmth that spread through her whole body. And she just knew that she was, somehow - different.

Bethlynda

Meanwhile, back in an abnormally quiet Room Seven, Davey had left Bethlynda, standing in front of the whiteboard, totally stunned. She remembered that she had waited for her sister to take out the cigarette; she knew it was coming, after all, it had been her idea. She remembered that she had had to bite her bottom lip, to stop herself from giggling with excited anticipation when her sister had finally got the ciggy out.

She hadn't noticed the lighter, though, well, it hadn't been part of the original plan, so she wasn't looking for it. She remembered grinning like a fool when her elder twin had stuck the cigarette in her mouth. She remembered turning around to start egging the class on.

Then she remembered hearing a somewhat familiar sound. It had taken her a second to realise that it was the sound of a cigarette lighter being clicked, but its significance hadn't instantly registered in her busily scheming mind. Mellie was not supposed to have lit that damn cigarette; the plan had been to just pretend to smoke it. Then everything seemed to go horribly wrong.

She couldn't remember anything that the teacher had done or said, she had been having too much fun winding the class up.

While Betha had been trying to whip-up the class into egging her sister on, her twin's hair had somehow caught fire. The next thing that she remembered was screaming her sister's name at the top of her voice. All that she could later remember of the next couple of minutes was that Mr Hepscott, whom she thought that she had hated with a vengeance, like all their teachers, had suddenly become an absolute hero. Her memory seemed to replay the next few moments in slow-motion. Their teacher had literally sprung to her sister's rescue, just like a real-life super-hero, had taken her sister in one of his arms, smothered the sparks in her hair with the other and just held her in his arms and whispered to her. He had taken complete charge of the situation, and had left her studiously leading a very subdued class in a half-hearted discussion of the day's word.

She remembered she had been trying her very best to keep the class going.

She also remembered that, at one point, she had been using her smart phone, the one that she smuggled into school every day, completely against School Policy, and had she had been trying to write a text message to her parents. She remembered that she had started it, and deleted it, maybe five or six times, at least. She remembered that this was the most difficult text message she had ever had to write.

To start with, her first instinct as usual had been to put all the blame on someone else, in this case, their teacher. But each time started to type in another lie her memory would play back how he had leapt over his desk to save her twin sister; her elder twin by seven minutes, the twin she had always hated for being the first born, who always seemed to get to choose the birthday party themes, who always got to do everything first. But she was her sister, nevertheless, and most of all, her very best friend, ever.

And then she remembered that Mr Hepscott had spoken so softly and gently to her sister, and used her name, her right name, without having to ask which twin was which, not like everybody else in the whole wide world did. He just knew. And then she remembered how Mr Hepscott had used his own jacket, his brand new one, to smother the fire in Mellie's hair, his now probably ruined brand new jacket, that had still had one of those shop price tags hanging inside it. And she remembered the look of anguish in his eyes, as if he could actually feel her sisters pain himself.

And she remembered how he had called for Betha herself, again by name, no one else, he had asked her, Bethlynda, to take charge of the class, and she remembered the look of calm and absolute trust in his eyes as he had done so.

So, she had kept deleting out all the different lies and blames she had been about to send, and, for probably the first time in her entire life, she just told the truth. And also, for the first time in her life, added a little line of x's at the end, before sending it to both of her parents. And while she stood at the front of the class, she felt something warm and strange start to tingle in her chest, as if a new emotion had been born, she felt happy, she felt calm, she felt proud and humble at the same time, she felt Trusted, with a capital T, and she felt a peace that she had never known she could feel.

And she knew that Mellie was in the safest hands she could be in.

And she just knew that she would never, ever, ever, be that stupid again, because she remembered that the cigarette idea had been hers, and she felt, something, change in her heart at that moment.

Losses

Parents

Both Angela and Patrick Mevagissay had been thoroughly annoyed at being called at work by their daughters' Headmaster.

And for what? To tell them that, yet again, their darling daughters had been up to yet another undefined 'something'. They had each received more than enough of these calls in the past, and none had been for anything more than high-jinx, silly pranks or mild insubordination.

Each of them had, therefore, dismissed this latest call as being in the same category as all the others.

Each had been informed that the other parent had also been informed of this 'incident'.

As a consequence, each had decided it was simply a minor matter, and could be dealt with when everyone got home later that day, if they remembered it at all...

Then came the text message from their younger daughter, the little prank-meister herself.

But the tone of this text was so much different from her normal messages that they both knew that it had to be genuine.

But, both parents just happened to be in what each considered to be highly significant and important business meetings at the time, and both had sat, stunned and slightly confused for a moment or two, after reading their copy of the message.

It must be important if Betha had texted them after the Head had called, and she wasn't supposed to have her phone as school, another stern talking to might be required, if they remembered.

In their confusion over the situation, each had stood up and stated, "One of the twins has been hurt at school, sorry!", or something similar, and both had respectfully excused themselves from their meetings.

By now, however, their confusion was beginning to give way to anger, at the school in general, for not keeping discipline to a high enough standard to prevent silly little problems, and at the girls in particular, for both interrupting their corporate ascension, oh, and having been caught, yet again.

Each made a quick dash to their respective offices, grabbed their keys off of their respective desks and made their hasty ways to their cars. Each had then leapt into their company car and almost literally raced out of the car parks and headed for the school, from their different directions. Both the twins parents felt very similar emotions at that time.

No, they weren't worried, oh no not at all. They were, by now, way past just angry, oh yes! In fact they were now fast approaching fuming, one could say they were almost incandescent in their rage.

At Mellie, at Betha and definitely at the headmaster.

Firstly, they were furious at Mellie.

Their fury was not because she had done the (alleged) deed, they both hoped the text could still be another of Betha's pranks, but furious for the fact that she let herself get caught.

They were also more than just a little worried for her, because if she actually had been the perpetrator of a failed prank, and they had had to call for medical assistance, she could, just could, really have been hurt.

Both of them were also fuming at Bethlynda.

Not just for interrupting important business with what would probably turn out to be another one of her stupid lies.

But they were also aware that neither she, nor her sister, were supposed to have their phones in school with them, something they believed could be a cause for yet another exclusion.

And to top it all off, they were totally incandescent at the Head. For not telling them the full story when he had phoned them, that is if what little Betha had sent in her text was anywhere near the truth which, of course, they both seriously doubted. If it was the truth and darling Mellie had been hurt, then the Head, the school, and probably even the Council, were all in for a very expensive day in court.

However, something deep inside each of them told them that there was an undeniable ring of truth in Betha's text, and that they just had to get to the school as quickly as possible.

On that bright, sunlit morning, there were other factors starting to come into play, factors that neither parent was in any position, or mood, to consider at that moment.

Lady Fortune had finally smiled on each of the parents, each had recently been promoted to higher positions; Angela to senior accounts manager at her financial corporation, while Patrick was now the senior regional funding coordinator within his government agency.

Both had received their promotions on the strength of the many hours of overtime that they put in every single week of the year, plus their voluntary commitment to out of hours work with social and charitable activities, each of which just happened to be connected to their work.

In keeping with their better positions, higher salaries and increased benefits packages, they had both moved into new offices the previous week, both in different brand new, purpose build units and in new and unfamiliar locations. And to justify their bigger expense account balances, each had, that very morning also taken possession of bigger, more expensive, more luxurious, and much more powerful, company car, oops sorry, new status symbols. And both were yet to fully familiarise themselves with either their new locations or their new cars.

So it was that racing their nice, shiny, powerfully unfamiliar cars along narrow, urban, unfamiliar back roads, both parents had had similar, her separate, accidents on their way to the school.

And it just had to be the fickle finger of fate, or maybe just pure coincidence, but the two separate accidents happened out on some of the narrowest and windiest of lonely country roads, roads little travelled in these days of motorways and fast cars.

And it must have been pure coincidence that both cars left their respective roads on tight bends. That both bends had a high sloped verge, so the cars, hitting the bends, at speeds that the roads were never designed to cope with, hit those banks and were thrown up into the air, hurdled thick, bushy hedges and, then they just vanished from sight into the fields behind and below those same hedges. It shouldn't come as any surprise that, as a consequence, neither parent survived the initial landing impact of their accidents.

Headmaster

Having had to deal with a panicked school counsellor and having to shut off that annoying alarm, the headmaster swept back into his office to refresh his memory as to the correct Policy for dealing with, what sounded like to his mind, a prank gone slightly awry.

He had already decided, not too reluctantly, that he would need to counsel the school counsellor, yet again, but that could wait until later.

He still had no idea why Policy had been forced on his school in the manner it had, piece by piece and with a completely incompetent counsellor to enforce it.

The Head had also often wondered why they had to have a counsellor on the staff in the first place. Up to now she had only had to dealt with a couple of minor problems, more by luck than by judgement. And, to his mind, she had only exacerbated both situations by giving advice that was, in his most humble opinion, un requested, incorrect and totally inappropriate, even though it was fully in line with Policy.

Oh well, County had imposed her, and her ilk, on his and every other school under its purview, along with the new Policy. A Policy, which took health and safety, as well as Political Correctness, to an absurdity of new interpretations. These, unfortunately, where also the self-same Policies that imposed severe penalties for any and all contraventions and especially failure to comply.

He often felt, having read through them several times now, that Heads of Schools were superfluous to requirements, he now had to seek higher approval for many matters that, until recently, had been his sole responsibility.

And the paperwork? All those new forms and reports - Heavens to Murgatroid, as the Pink Panther would say. Reports that used to need just one or two pages to complete and were only required once each term or half term, now ran anywhere up to twenty pages. It also seemed that the bigger the report the more frequently it was required, one of the more complicated reports was required every Tuesday morning by 9 a.m. No wonder he never had any spare time to do 'normal' Head teacher type work anymore.

To be continued.....

Coincidences - Lynne Copping

I mentioned to you how many coincidences there were with members having connections with other apprentices. Here are a few that I can think of.

Andy Dickson (66B) lived in army married quarters in Bapaume Road, Portsmouth as a child, as did my brothers Richard Wilson (63C) and Graham Wilson (72A), but at different times.

Dave (Dai) Stevenson (68B) lived in army married quarters at Jalan Bunga Tanjung in Penang, just round the corner at the same time as Sean Sofrin who lived at Jalan Bakawali. They both went to Minden Barracks Primary School (but didn't know one another).

Andy Dickson (66B) and Dave (Dai) Stevenson (68B) both lived in Osnabruck and went to Lancaster School in Detmold and then Prince Rupert School, Wilhelmshaven at the same time (but didn't know one another).

My brother Graham Wilson (72A) and brother in law Steven Copping (72C) became friends when I told Graham to look out for Steve when he arrived at Arborfield as I had just started dating his older brother while I was a WRAF at Wildenrath.

Gunter Webster and Andy Dickson both travelled to Singapore on the Willem Ruys and only realised this relatively recently. (Ed's comment: I wrote an article on this in an earlier OBAN).

Chalky White 66C also went to school in Singapore but I am not sure which one.

Gunter went to Alexandra Grammar School in Singapore (as did Lynne).

Dave Stevenson and Graham Wilson went to primary schools there. Don Webber (63?) went to a civilian school there.

You might get lots of responses from others with similar experiences. I know that I met a few other chaps who had been at school in Singapore but can't think offhand who they were. You may have some other coincidences.

Don Webber (who became a good friend of my older brother while at Arborfield) has a great tale to tell of his heroic mother while living on a rubber plantation in Malaya but it is not army related so you might not want it.

How about an article on what people did for work after the army?

Was anyone involved with scouting while in the forces? Being a scout or cub leader? I am just thinking of ideas to fill pages.

Ed's comments: Thanks for this, Lynne. It is indeed a small world. Readers - Lynne raises some interesting ideas above. Please feel free to drop me a line regarding your life after leaving the Army. I know there are some interesting stories out there. Lynne is connected to the AOBA through her late husband, brother and brother in law. Both are ex boys.

Andy Dickson - 66B



Letters to the Editor

From Arthur Ward

Hello Andrew Thank you for your reply. I always enjoy the AOBA Mag and its lay out.

All the "Jeeps" have some grand stories. You are doing a great job .

Thanks.

Arthur Ward - 50B.

Arthur, Thanks for your contributions and your support. Its always a bonus to get positive feedback.

Hello,

RE: Mr Arthur Ronald Leslie Cable

Intake 45B

Following recent email contact with your colleagues on the Committee, including Jeff Baker 65C on the 04 January 2026, regarding the status of my fathers annual membership subscription - that were subsequently clarified & resolved - I painfully & sadly but with much pride, wish to notify you that my dear father died on the 12 January 2026.

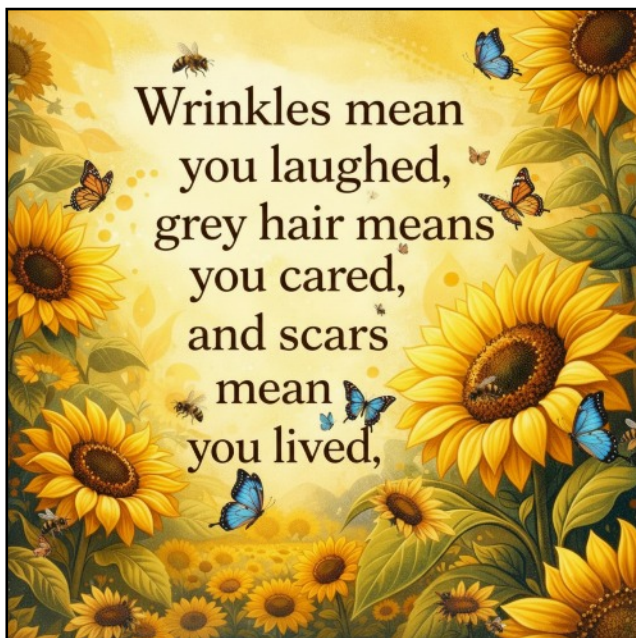
I understand that you have a 'Roll of Honour' for such as my father and would request that he be placed on the relevant roll to recognise him and his army apprentice days for which he was so very proud of. Thank you.

Sometime in the near future once his farewell & celebration of his life have been undertaken, I'd like to submit an obituary for inclusion in the OBAN that dad relished reading & that other members may find of interest as he had a rich army career, spring boarded by his formative days at Arborfield.

If you could kindly advise as to the process for doing so I would be most grateful.

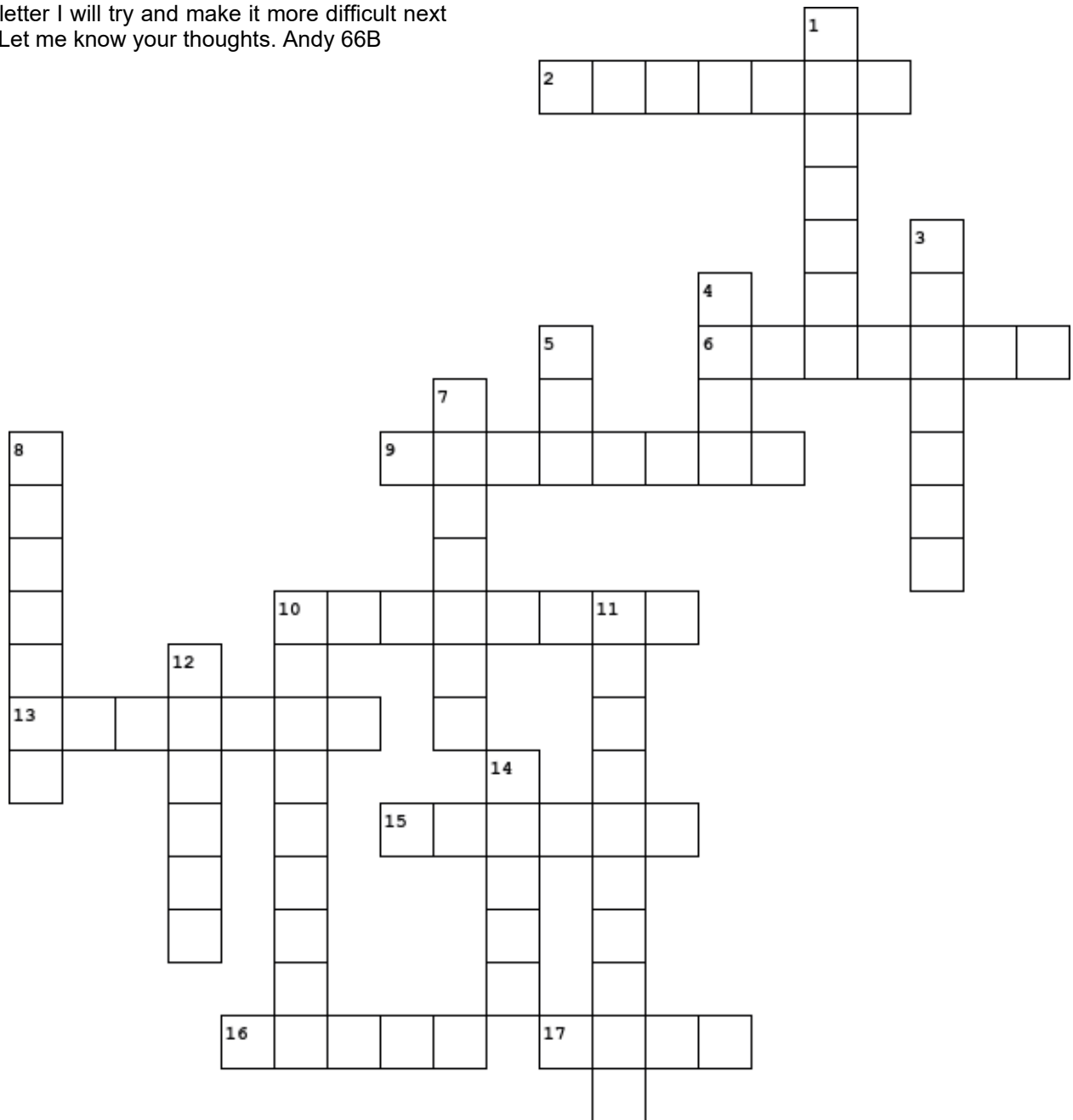
Thanking you in advance.

Richard Cable



Trial Crossword - No Prizes

This is my first attempt at trying to create a crossword. The answers seem easy to me, but I wrote both the clues and answers so they would be. If you think this is a useful addition to the Newsletter I will try and make it more difficult next time. Let me know your thoughts. Andy 66B



Across

- 2. A result of being charged
- 6. What we did to our boots
- 9. At the top of the square
- 10. Geordie's current role
- 13. Once a year we get together
- 15. Where we marched
- 16. What we got at the end of term
- 17. A coy colour

Down

- 1. Did they put this on our tea?
- 3. Our rooms
- 4. Our Newsletter
- 5. our last parade at Arborfield
- 7. Railway station many of us arrived at
- 8. What we wore
- 10. Where we got fed
- 11. Where it all started
- 12. A number followed by a letter
- 14. Marching out dress

Peter Howes 64A Obituary - Rob Castell 64A



It is with regret to have to report that I have received an email from Pete's son Rob telling of his death on the 25th of November 2025.

We joined Arborfield Army Apprentice School in January 1964 and, along with the rest of the intake, trained for our three years there. Together, along with many others we formed lifelong friendships and bonds that typified the esprit de corps we gained from Arborfield.

Pete went along to several reunions at Arborfield and since 2012 attended the annual mini reunions which I organised for a few members of 64A, where we were able to catch up with each other. His hobby, and in later years his second family, was the Morris Minor Owner's club and he purchased his first Morris Minor in around 2014. The owners club for these is very good and very active and attracts people of all ages and all walks of life. He soon found an active social life.

After a few years he purchased a Morris Minor Traveller in addition to the 4dr saloon he already had. Unfortunately, it turned out to need far more work than anticipated, and after a few weeks of ownership it was taken off the road for a full strip down and

restoration - sadly a project that he was never able to complete.

He gradually became more involved in the club, even joining the committee of his local branch. He would try and spend at least two hours a day working on his cars, more if he felt able to. Through the club he was even offered a job by another member, and at the age of 76 he went back to work, one day a week, every Tuesday, restoring cars. His club branch regularly held maintenance days, where those who knew, helped those who didn't. As well as contributing homemade cakes to these events, he gave his time, his knowledge and his mechanical skills to those in the club who like the cars but don't really know how to work on them.

In late October he started experiencing stomach pains, and a day or so later was rushed to Gloucester hospital by ambulance.

He ended up on the critical care ward with dangerously low blood pressure. They diagnosed sepsis of the colon, thought to have been triggered by a UTI. After a week his vital signs were stable enough to move him to another ward, and he was released home on the 11th of November to finish his recovery.



64A Mini Reunion

The illness had taken a lot out of him, and although seemingly stable, he was very tired and not very active in what turned out to be his last days, and on the morning of the 25th of November he passed away.

The postmortem showed that he had suffered a DVT in his right leg which caused a pulmonary embolism and he had died peacefully in his sleep.

So long Pete, God bless, RiP

A good friend lost

Rob Castell - 64A

