

The following articles were originally published in the printed version of the Journal in August 2003, Issue No. 10

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# The Airborne Engineer



August 2003, Issue No. 10

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## Publication Deadline – December 2003 Edition

Members submitting material for publication in the December 2003 edition of the Journal, are advised that the closing date will be Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> November. Articles received after this date will not be published until the April 2004 edition. **(Branch Secretaries please NOTE!)**

Kindly ensure that you forward your articles direct to the editor - address as shown above. Please don't leave it until the last minute or you may well miss the deadline!

## The Balloon Shed Episode

By Major Colin Gillespie

This year (2003) the Trooping of the Colour on Horse Guards Parade was perfection. As I watched, tears came into my elderly eyes. When I heard the order given for the officers to 'take post' my memory cast back to a parade where I, as Squadron Commander of 9 Independent Parachute Squadron Royal Engineers, gave the order to 'take post'. Not quite so grand a parade, but possibly a unique parade. The year was 1963.

9 Squadron was based in Gibraltar Barracks in Aldershot, with troops scattered, as ever, around the Empire. Aldershot was about to be vandalised by new development and the squadron had been allotted a wartime hutted camp at Crookham. It was splendidly isolated from Brigade HQ suitably in keeping with the tradition of the independence of that squadron. Among the red brick barracks we were to leave was The Balloon Shed and Balloon Square. The shed was no great architectural beauty but it had history. It was built in 1892 as the first permanent home of military aviation. It was from there that the first balloon detachments were sent to South Africa in 1898 for the Boer War. From 1904 onward much experimental and training work was done--S F Cody one of the best known aviators of all time was associated with the balloon school. The Royal Engineers ran it with an 'Air Estimate' budget of £4,300.



**The balloon awaits the troops - Wing Commander Turnbull RAF is pilot in the basket**

The chance was too good to miss for 9 Squadron to grab a bit of publicity. We asked for a farewell ceremony to be held. The Chief Engineer Southern Command claimed the privilege of taking the salute. (The Parachute Brigade Commander took umbrage and I was in the doghouse again).

On parade were a detachment from 7 RHA to represent the gunners who used the balloons for observation, a detachment from the RAF who represented those who took over military aviation from the Royal Engineers, and 9 Squadron to represent the Corps of Royal Engineers who provided the balloons. On parade was the Royal Engineer band from Chatham. Among the spectators was a ninety-year-old survivor from the pre 1914 balloonatics--Brigadier Gervers--who walked all the way from Aldershot station. (To my embarrassment we didn't provide transport). To complete the parade was the last remaining gas balloon maintained by the RAF at Cardington. This huge inflated envelope, with its' wicker basket slung below, was marched on to the parade by a small team of handlers. I digress here to explain that the drill for filling the balloon is critical so that it does not fly away with too much gas. Thus, the team have their hands on the basket and, on the command 'hands off', the team raise their hands and the pilot, who has control of the gas, can see if the basket lifts. After several minutes of 'hands off', 'hands on', 'hands off', 'hands on', there comes a moment when the balloon wants to fly and is restrained only by the ground team. It was at that moment of equilibrium that it was possible to move the balloon to the place appointed in front of the troops.

So I come to the point of this story. When the parade was quiet I spoke the famous words, which I am sure no other parade commander has ever given to his second command, "Captain Hill take post in your balloon".

John Hill saluted, turned to the wicker basket and climbed aboard.



**Maj Colin Gillespie reports to Brig Reid, Southern Command and Sqn SSM looks on.**

Scattering its' handlers with a sudden jerk, the balloon rose, took a corner off the roof of the balloon shed in passing, narrowly missed the chimney stack and climbed to the clouds above.



**Hands off" the balloon ascends with Capt John Hill RE -Sqn 21C, in the basket. The detachment from 9 Sqn look on with wry amusement as it heads for the shed!**

The band played "Will ye no come back again"

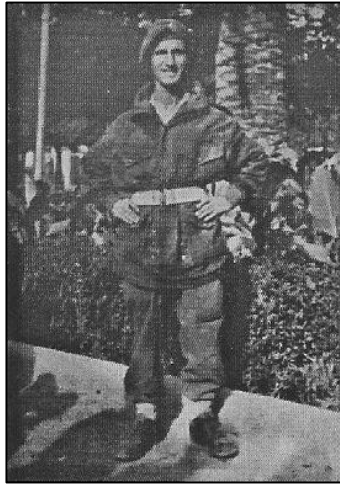
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## Days Gone By

By Maurice Weymouth

I was born in Gillingham Kent in 1920 and joined the Royal Engineers at Kitchener barracks, Chatham on 22 July 1935 as a Bugler (1871652) at the age of 15. I served for 26 years retiring with the rank of WO2 in 1961.

My first posting was to 9th Field Company RE at Shornecliffe in January 1939 and stayed with that unit for 4 years and made many friends, but sadly also lost many during the following war years.



The Unit embarked for France on 30/9/39 with the B.E.F and our short war ended at Dunkirk and we were evacuated 3 June 40.

At the end of 1941 9 Fd Coy was moved to Wiveliscombe in Somerset and this was where I met my future wife Cis Coles.

In mid-1942 the Company had now become a Gliderborne Unit and was moved to Bulford Camp for Airborne training. Volunteers were called for to attend a 4 jump Para course and I subsequently displayed my little white parachute badge on the right sleeve.

On the 2nd March 1943 Cis and I were married. By the end of April the Unit now designated 9 Fd Coy, RE (Airborne) and part of 1st Airborne Division was installed in North Africa and after further action in Sicily and Italy returned to UK.

On the 30th July 1944 I was posted to 4th Parachute Squadron RE and did a further 8 jump Para course, which apart from the pay increase to 2 shillings a day, as against the shilling Glider pay, I was now able to proudly wear the Para Wings.

On the 17th September Arnhem. 4 Para Sqn (part of 4 Para Brigade) was designated to drop on the second lift on 18th September. The realisation that I was about to complete my 13th jump didn't hold a lot and we met quite a lot of opposition as the Germans, having been alerted by the previous days landings, despatched everything but the kitchen sink up in our direction as we approached the DZ, plus quite a reception waiting below.

My war finished 10 days later when with 2 others we were captured on the 27th September and found ourselves heading towards Stalag Camps for the next 8 months. I was, with others, in a working party at Dresden in Feb 1945 when the RAF and USAF bombed the city. Not a pretty sight! Not only were POWs killed, but also some of the Camp guards and their families who lived there.

In May 1945, I was back in the good old UK and wondering what it was going to be like, being a soldier again! I was by this time given a second stripe - it's true, 2 are better than 1!! At Ripon I was medically downgraded and I had several admin appointments including Battalion Pay Sgt in 1947 with No1 (SME) DBRE. In 1951 I had 2 tours of 18 months each in Accra, West Africa as a Sgt instructor with 35 (Gold Coast) West African Engineers and having passed a Referee & Judging Boxing course also undertook the training of the unit boxing team.

Back to the UK I found myself on a 2-year tour at the War Office (AG7) Stanmore. I was a S/Sgt by this time but my promotion to WO2 came through on 12/8/56. I completed my War Office tour and ended up at HQ, Training Brigade, Aldershot as Chief Clerk followed by Chief Clerk HQ A.E.R. Farnborough until my retirement from the army in 1961.

I was employed with Coles Electrical Ltd, Wiveliscombe branch until closure due to a road widening scheme and then with Dunn's Motors Ltd, Taunton for 20 years becoming their Parts Manager, until retirement in 1984.



On the 3rd May 2003, Cis and I celebrated our Diamond (60th) Wedding Anniversary at the Walnut Tree Hotel, North Petherton, Bridgwater with dinner for 16 guests including our family and friends from the West Somerset Branch of the Parachute Regiment Association.

We were pleased to say the evening was in every way a great success and enjoyed by all. Considering there were 6 ex Paras and their wives present they showed remarkable restraint, relying on verbal rather than physical activity; much to the relief of the Hotel Management. This could of course have been because of the age factor.

We have a son and Daughter a Grandson and Great Grandson.

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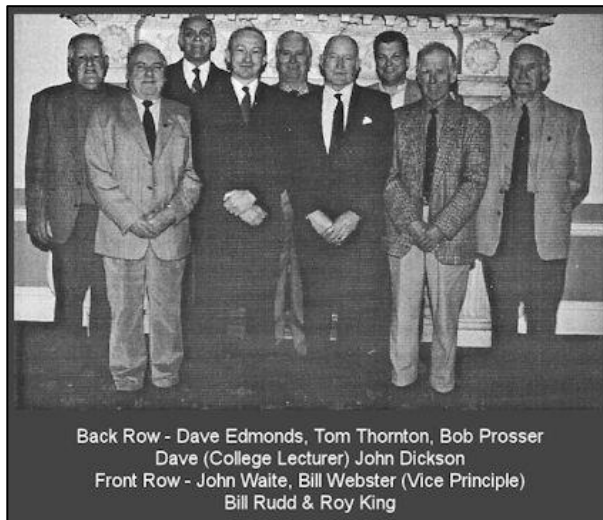
## Design for Life – Airborne Engineers Exhibition

By Bill Rudd

On 20th March several Yorkshire Branch members and myself represented the Association when we gave a presentation to the Doncaster College of Art.

During the previous 12 months students on their last year of their HNC Diploma in graphic design have spent many hours designing in detail our Exhibition. This is located at the Yorkshire Air Museum Elvington near York and was officially opened by our President Brig Ian McGill on the 22nd June 03.

An Association shield was presented to the Vice Principal Bill Webster as a small thank you to the college, especially to the young students who gave much of their time and enthusiasm to the project, I am sure that the end result will be of great benefit to the Association in the years to come. This display will be an ongoing project and any member who might have memorabilia tucked away at home, we would be most grateful for it.



Back Row - Dave Edmonds, Tom Thornton, Bob Prosser  
Dave (College Lecturer) John Dickson  
Front Row - John Waite, Bill Webster (Vice Principle)  
Bill Rudd & Roy King



Bill Rudd presenting Association plaque  
to Bill Webster  
(Vice Principle) Doncaster College of Art  
March 2003

# Sicily Was Not All Failure

Dear Editor

It was an account of the allied glider invasion of Sicily in 1943. It left the impression that the invasion was a total failure by concentrating the content on the mistakes made by the American pilots and the dreadful loss of life, which ensued.

Whilst recognising that the airborne landing did not go to plan and had disastrous consequences for many, my father (Harry Stokes, 9<sup>th</sup> Field Company RE) was one of the "lucky" ones whose glider landed safely in Sicily. Despite the general chaos of the invasion, he managed to achieve the objective he and his group had been set. In order to set the record straight, he was moved to write the attached account of his part in the enterprise. Given the fact that he is now 84 years old and disinclined to put pen to paper, he clearly felt quite strongly about what he had read. It is with his permission that I am sending you this copy, in case you can make use of it in a future edition of "The Airborne Engineers Journal".

Yours sincerely,

Delcia Fussell

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## **Sicily was Not All Failure**

### **By Harry Stokes 9th Field Company, Royal Engineers, Airborne Division**

In 1940, after Dunkirk, Major Houghton, Officer Commanding 9th Field Company, decided that we should train to fight as infantry as well as being sappers. Forty-mile route marches every Wednesday in full battle order, bayonet fighting and a general toughening up became part of our training/routine.

We moved to Wiveliscombe and it was there that we were told we were to become glider borne troops. Major Kite took over as Officer-in-Command with Captain Beasley as Second-in-Command. I was Captain Beasley's driver and we spent much time travelling the country looking for equipment suitable to be carried in gliders, such as trailers, compressors and the like.

We moved to Bighton, and later to Bulford. Practice gliding started from Netheravon in Hotspurs towed by small twin-wing planes. Major Kite left and Captain Beasley was made Officer Commanding.

We then moved to Africa. When the Sicily job came up, Major Beasley, myself and a radio operator were allotted to a WACO glider carrying a motorcycle and sidecar, a compressor for removing charges from the bridge and Pilots Lt. Dale and Sgt. Baker.

We took off from Tiersville aerodrome. It was a terrible trip. All of us, including the pilots, were violently ill. The motorcycle came loose from its moorings but nobody worried because we felt so unwell. There was lots of flack and tracers but we made it to the Dropping Zone.

I remembered that at the briefing we were told to look for a house with a large 'Y' on the end of it, and there it was. We landed among a hail of small arms fire. We tried to raise the nose of the glider to get the equipment out, but the firing was so concentrated that Major Beasley decided we would leave it and make our way to the bridge.

By this time it was getting light. As we crawled along ditches and hedgerows we kept being shot at. When we got near the bridge Major Beasley could see Red Berries already there. This gave us confidence and we soon made it to the bridge where the infantry were in charge. Major Beasley and I inspected the bridge and found the charges were only tied to it and covered with bundles of raffia to protect them from the weather. We were able to cut the ties and drop them into the river.

Later in the morning lorry loads of Germans arrived and a real battle took place. During this engagement Major Beasley was shot in the head and died immediately.



Soon after, the ten or fifteen of us left alive were taken prisoner. Later we were being taken along the towpath when a naval picket of about 20 men overcame the guards and we were free again.

Somehow — I don't remember how — I arrived at Brigade Headquarters. I saw Colonel Henniker there and told him Major Beasley had been killed. He wanted to know the details of the bridge and if I thought it would take tanks. As a young sapper, I was a bit vague, but he must have been satisfied for soon afterwards the tanks moved forward over the bridge.

I stayed on in Sicily as Colonel Henniker's driver and he tells of our escapades in his book "Images of War".

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## Libya Air Tragedy

By Tony Ridgeway

If my memory serves me correctly, it was early 1967 when the Sqn went to Libya as advance/rear party for a Battalion or Brigade exercise. We were based about 20 miles inland from Timimi, a small place about 50 miles west of Tobruk. Our job was to renovate an old wartime airstrip and rig up temporary accommodation, toilets, showers etc. for use by the battalions after the exercises. Everything went smoothly, and the showers were rigged up about 500 yds away on a low hill overlooking the runway. As the water had to be transported from the coast, the showers were very rudimentary; 45 gallon drums with holes in the bottom, rigged on scaffolding.

On the exercise there was a Sqn of fighter planes, along with the Argosy's and Hercules' for jumping and heavy drop. There may have still been some Hastings, I can't remember. Anyway, the exercises finished, the remaining men from the battalion were having showers before emplaning for transport back to UK. The following incident happened in the last few days, and I am sure that anyone who was there will remember it vividly, as I do.

Apparently the RAF had a tradition, when leaving an airfield for the last time, of buzzing the strip. On this morning, myself and dozen of the lads were supervising the showers, as some of the planes took off for the last time. The fighters did a circuit, and buzzed the strip, very impressive. Then the Argosy's started taking off. I think one or two did the buzzing bit, and then an Argosy took off, did a circuit, and came down over the hill where we were supervising showers. We all clambered to the top where we could see the plane approaching and as he flew over the hill, I swear we almost had to duck as he was that low. The sand was swirling up in our faces from his downdraught.

I think we all had a premonition that something was going to happen. We stood on the hill and watched the Argosy dip down toward the airstrip. About 100 yds before the airstrip at the right hand side was a water tower (A 45 gal. drum on scaffolding, probably about 15 ft. high max.) The Argosy's wing tip hit the water tower and the aileron flew off, the plane dipped about 25° to starboard, flew for another 100 yds then did a 90° flip. The Starboard wing hit the deck, and she cartwheeled nose first into the airstrip, with a dull thump. In my eyes this was all happening in slow motion. The whole episode probably took less than 5 seconds but it seemed like 5 minutes. On board, apart from the flight crew, were 25-30 RHA blokes with a couple of Land rovers and trailer-mounted guns.

The Paramedics were there first, sorting out bodies etc. By the time we got there to help sort out the mess, there was a row of charred bodies, bits and pieces, boots, helmets and human remains, etc. all lying by the side of the runway. The smell was nauseating. Apart from a wheel about a 100yds away, I could not see a bit of wreckage bigger than about 18- 24 inches high. I did not think that anyone could possibly have survived.

Needless to say, no more buzzing was allowed. I think all remaining personnel were trucked to El Adam for return to Blighty. I know that there was an R.A.P. enquiry into this incident, but I never did hear the outcome.

About 3 years ago, I bumped into an ex-RHA chap who was running a pub in Devon. We got talking about this incident, and I was amazed when he told me that there were a couple of survivors.

I would appreciate any further information on the last two points, or indeed anything relevant to this accident, and recollections of anyone else who was there.

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## A Medal for Service in Egypt, 1951 – 1954

After more than fifty years the Whitehall Establishment has finally given way to intense pressure from veterans their MPs and the Media and agreed that those who served in Egypt in the tumultuous period from 1951 to 1954 shall receive a campaign medal, they have just announced that the General Service Medal (Army & RAF) 1918-62 and the Naval General Service Medal 1914-62 shall be awarded with clasp "Canal Zone. It is understood that the qualifying service recommended to the Queen is ninety days on unit strength in Egypt from 16th October 1951 to 19th October 1954. The ribbon of the Naval medal, which will go to Royal Naval and Royal Marines personnel, is white with pink edges and two narrow pink stripes in the white. The Army and Royal Air Force medals have a ribbon in three equal panels of purple, dark green and purple. Both medals already have sixteen clasps that are worn in order of participation in the relevant campaigns with the first earned just above the medal and the latest at the top. For some, mostly regulars, who already have the medal only the new clasp, will be issued and this may require professional fitting to put it amongst other clasps already held.

A short history of the situation in Egypt in 1951-54, and of the consequential campaign to award a medal is given below, as are details of the authorities to which claims should be addressed.

In 1936 a Treaty was concluded between Britain and Egypt allowing Britain to station troops there. Over the years it became apparent that the Egyptians were unhappy with this arrangement and on 8th October 1951 their Prime Minister, Nahas Pasha, tabled decrees abrogating the Treaty with Britain. This was ratified in their Parliament on 15th October and thereafter a government backed terror campaign was waged against our troops in the country. This continued until an agreement between the two countries was initialled on 27th July 1954, but the final details were not agreed until 19th October 1954. Even then relations continued to be strained until our final withdrawal of uniformed personnel on 13th June 1956.

During the troubled period at least 54 British Army and RAF personnel were killed in action, murdered or disappeared, presumed dead. During the period over 300 service personnel and members of their families found a permanent resting place in Egyptian cemeteries due to terrorism, disease and adverse conditions. Families were evacuated or concentrated in safe areas, civil labour defected and was replaced from outside Egypt, reinforcements streamed into the country. There were battles where tanks' main armament was used. The best known, but by no means the only occasion, was on 25th January 1952 when British units stormed the Caracol and Bureau Sanitaire to disarm the, occupants. This was the Police Station and Barracks in Ismailia manned by regular Police and auxiliaries who were called Bulak Nizam, a kind of official terrorist organisation. Our troops included 1st Battalion, The Lancashire Fusiliers, supported by two troops of 4 RTR (Centurions) and four troops of Royals (armoured cars). In the ensuing fierce fighting we lost four dead and ten wounded and the Egyptians, who had fought well, had forty killed and sixty-five wounded. The Army Council would not agree to military bravery awards, so only civilian equivalents were available. One George Medal one British Empire Medal and one Queen's Commendation for Bravery were awarded. Corporal acting Sergeant, Henry Foster received the GM which undoubtedly would have been a DCM elsewhere, and some consider to be verging on a VC. He was Platoon Sergeant and was wounded in the upper arm early in the assault. He ignored this wound and five minutes later was again wounded, this time in the leg, but he continued to lead his grenade-throwing party. About half an hour after his first wound he was severely wounded, again in the leg. Even then, and in great pain, he refused assistance and had to be ordered to be evacuated by his Platoon Commander.

The Commander-in-Chief, General Sir Brian Robertson, requested a campaign medal in January 1952 in a letter to London also asking for military awards such as the Military Medal. The Army Council rejected his request for MMs, etc, and this rejection has become muddled with the request for a campaign medal, and used to reject subsequent claims by veterans for such a medal. It was not until mid-1999 that proof of this error came to light, but even then Whitehall refused to shift on the question of giving a medal for Egypt. Various arguments have been used over the fifty years to refute veterans' claims:

Active service was not declared - it was.

The Army Council considered and rejected the claim - they did not.

The Honours and Decorations Committee rejected the claim because it was outside the five year Emit for such consideration - they did not and they never had the issue put before them.

There were only 40 killed, not 54 - the veterans produced 53 of the 54 names with proof and an official Middle East Office telegram to the Foreign Office for a Parliamentary answer dated 1954, which quoted 54. Veterans have since identified the 54th name and believe there are several others who fall into the category of killed in action or murdered.

So the arguments have raged over many years. Many Members of Parliament across the Parties have been involved in the case with a number of debates in Parliament and countless official letters written, most reiterating the old, and often already discredited, arguments. Eventually, after one Parliamentary debate Cllr Annette Brooke, W for Mid Dorset and North Poole, secured an agreement that a veterans' delegation could meet the Chairman of the HD Committee, Sir Richard Wilson, GCB, Secretary of the Cabinet and Head of the Home Civil Service. At last the case could be presented to those right at the top. Great care was exercised in selecting the delegates and preparing a comprehensive brief that was sent in advance of the meeting to all delegates and to Sir Richard. The actual meeting was

held in the Cabinet Office on 2nd July 2002 with Sir Richard, and Sir Hayden Phillips, KCB (now GCB), who was to succeed him when he retired in August as Chair of the HD Committee. The delegation consisted of Cllr Annette Brooke MP, Mr Paul Burstow W (Sutton and Cheam), Mr Bob Blizzard W (Waverley) and Mr Mike Hancock NW (Portsmouth South). The veterans included Mr Charles Golder, MBE, Mr Cyril Blackburn, Mr John Friberg and Mr Mike Hardy. Mrs Anne Ammundsen represented her late father, Colonel Pip Newton, MBE, who was a tireless campaigner for this cause up to his death. Finally, Lieutenant Colonel Ashley Tinson, a medal historian who supported the campaign, though not a Suez veteran himself.

The discussion was full and friendly centring on the brief all had received in advance. At the end Sir Richard said he was sympathetic though he could not promise anything as the Prime Minister and ultimately the Queen would have to be involved in the process. However, he promised to try to forward the case and would give Cllr Brooke a progress report before his retirement. Better than his word, he reported on 23rd July with a copy of an answer to a Parliamentary question, which said:

"The Government considers it important to respect the principle that where there is a clear, demonstrable decision taken within five years of a campaign that a General Service Medal should not be awarded, that decision should not be reopened."

The evidence related to consideration of a General Service Medal for the Suez Canal Zone is however less clear-cut. A number of representations have been made by the veterans of that campaign with which the Government has considerable sympathy."

As a result General Lord Guthrie was asked to Chair a sub-committee of the HD Committee to report on this case and they met a further delegation on 22nd November 2002. This time the veterans included Major General Julian Thompson Captain Richard Tatham, Mr John Morris, Mr Richard Wooley, Mr Cyril Blackburn, Mr Mike Hardy, Mr John Torrington, and Mr Peter Newton. Sir Geoffrey Johnson Smith, PC, a longtime supporter of the cause, Cllr Annette Brooke MP, Bob Blizzard, MP, and Lieutenant Colonel Ashley Tinson also attended. The sub-committee reported their findings to the HD Committee in early December 2002 who considered the matter in the spring of 2003. The findings have now been made public.

The individual concerned may claim medals, or when he or she has died, by the immediate next-of-kin. Applications should be made to the appropriate authority shown below and should, if possible, contain full Service particulars, including Number, Rank, Full Names, date of birth, dates of enlistment and discharge and the name of the Regiment or Corps where applicable. However, the authorities will examine the individual's record so details of service in Egypt are unnecessary.

**Army**

(including civilian claimants).

Officer in Charge,

Army Medical Office

Government Office Building

Worcester Road

Droitwich Spa  
Worcestershire  
WR9 8AU

Applicants applying on behalf of those who have died will be asked for some proof of relationship. As this probably involves completing a form applicants should await instructions from the medal office and should not send any relevant certificates until asked for them.

In every case records will have to be checked to verify the claim and, if substantiated, a medal prepared and named. All this will take time and applications are dealt with on a first come first served basis. So get your claim in quickly and be prepared for a longish wait.

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## Never Too Late to Teach an Old Para New Tricks

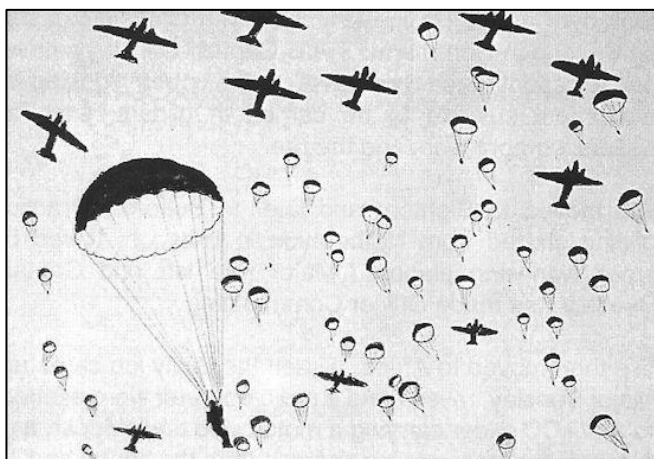
By Don Lay

When I was made redundant 5 years ago at the age of 64 I applied for other jobs, but was told I was too old. As I had an occupational pension it wasn't too difficult to make ends meet while waiting a year for my Old Age Pension. I suddenly had all this spare time to fill in, what could I do? I had my greenhouse, garden and I did DIY, but I needed something else.

The place where I worked had computers on every desk and they were a complete mystery to me. So I thought why not buy a computer and learn about it. I duly presented myself at Dixons and a salesman gave me a demonstration of what a computer can do. He showed me how it would scan a document save it and then print a copy. He also showed me how it would print photographs, write and print letters, play games and numerous other things including the Internet, but not, he said, until you fully understand the computer. I felt completely overwhelmed, but in the end I bought one that had been on display in the shop and I also got a free scanner and printer. Which was duly delivered connected up and switched on. (Connecting is easy because all plugs and sockets are colour coded). The salesman had told me all the basics and I had a booklet called, 'Getting Started'. I felt my way around for a few days learning the basics, when everything froze and I couldn't operate anything. Dixon's helpline was a £1 a minute so I rang my son who told me how to fix it.

Over the next 12 months I learned a lot of the mysteries of computing. I had decided to wait a year before I went on the Internet. Then I signed up with Freeserve for no other reason than that they were the cheapest at a penny a minute. I put in their disc and followed the on screen directions and within 15 minutes I was on the Internet, and a whole world of information was available to me.

You can find virtually anything on the Internet, I have used it to find phone numbers for Canada and Australia, find anagrams for crosswords, if you are going on holiday you can usually find information to all bus and train timetables and you can even book your tickets. Last year I booked a hotel in London and a ride on the London Eye in 10 minutes on the Internet. Whatever your hobby or interest you can find information on it. I had my first computer for 4 years and then bought a new one, a faster one with a bigger hard disk capacity. My first one had 1.2-gigabyte hard drive; my new one has 80 gigabytes so you can see how fast things change. Computers are a lot cheaper now so go ahead and get one and in 12 months time you will be emailing an article to Dave [Rutter] for the Journal.



### Water-colour Painting.

Last year I went on a coach holiday to Scotland and was talking to a woman, who did water-colour painting. I have always fancied painting so she talked me into going to classes. The upshot was I got the equipment needed from Edna for Christmas and had a go. I am really enjoying it and getting on very well. In the 12 months since I started I have painted still life, landscapes, and animals, I even tried painting a Para drop from Dakotas.

I did this after only 3 lessons; I was very pleased with it. The basic equipment needed, is 3 brushes, watercolour paper, pencil and rubber, 6 colours of paint, kitchen roll, jam jar, and a white plate for a palette.

So if you have hidden talents you have never used have a go, you may be like me and surprise yourself.

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## 9 Parachute Squadron RE- Operation Telic

### Introduction

Having recently spent a disjointed Christmas at home in the UK with the continued anticipation of Operation FRESCO constantly disrupting our family lives, 9 Parachute Squadron were now set for a frantic month of intense training in preparation to get 23 Engineer Regiment (Air Assault) to Full Operational Capability (FOC).

Early in January 2003 the newly formed 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) underwent an FTX (Ex EAGLES FLARE) on Salisbury Plain as its initial shake out. This was in preparation for events in the Gulf that was at the forefront of everyone's minds. Compounding this was the fact that 16 Air Assault Brigades were undergoing planning preparations for war.

The Sqn deployed with its Headquarters, two Field Troops and a large Support Troop. The HQ element used the exercise as the basis for real time rehearsal of SOP's and the refinement of our own communications plan. The Field Troops used the exercise as an opportunity to conduct Bridge Recces and practice / develop pipeline over-bridging techniques and Support Troop were fortunate to undertake a real time plant task in support of 7 RHA. In hindsight, everyone gained valuable experience from this exercise and the lessons learnt were to be put to good use during war fighting operations in the Gulf.

### OP Fresco

"Just as we thought it was all over", upon completion of Ex EAGLES FLARE, the Sqn was called back to man their two fire stations in Hemel Hempstead and Hitchin. While the remainder of the Bde (less 3 PARA) were undergoing preparations for deployment to the Gulf, we, in Support of 3 PARA, were fighting fires. This situation did not help our families' anxieties.

### OP Telic

Late in January, it was announced that the Bde were confirmed on the Op TELIC orbit. The Sqn deployed a command element, Maj Paul Fountaine RE (OC), Signaller LCpl Tony Cross and Capt Alan Jarvis RE (Ops). The Regimental advance force took the form of 3 Troop under the command of Lt Simon Greaves and SSgt "Russ" Power and a 3 PARA BGE Party, Lt Andy Hart RE, Signaller and Driver.

On the 16 February 2003 the remainder of the Sqn flew out to be met by the happy, smiling, ever enthusiastic, mad as a hatter, SQMS, SSgt "Mick" Stewart. After a delightful induction to the Operation by RAF movers and overweight Navy Doctors!!! Upon completion of a 2 hr coach trip we were reunited as a Sqn once more and poised for operations.

The Sqn's overall Mission was essentially to "Provide Close Support (CS) to 1 PARA and 3 PARA". It was a deliberate move to form two strong field troops based on the management and foundations of 1 and 3 Troops in order to maintain the Troop / PARA affiliation. Almost immediately planning and training began in correlation to the affiliated Battle Groups (BG's).



**OCs address to the Sqn in Kuwait**

The training took the form of NBC, Medical trg, Ranges, SH/Para drills, Convoy drills, POW handling, Mines awareness and Combat Engineering. With the advent of RHQ 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt), only on arrival was it confirmed the Sqn would support the PARA Bns. (51 Fd Sqn (Air Asslt), our sister Fd Sqn in the Regiment, was tasked with supporting 1 R IRISH and 3 AAC. Common sense had prevailed.



**Sqn medical training**

## Parachuting

By Lt Gareth Dent RE – 1 Tp Comd

On the 16th March 2003, the desert sun cast a cool light over the sand as members of 1 Troop 9 Parachute Squadron laboured under the weight of their containers. Two C130 Hercules aircraft sat motionless on the US Marine Corps dirt runway carved out of the sand as part of the build up to Op TELIC. The 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment along with their Close Engineer Support assets were about to conduct a training Parachute descent in the Kuwaiti desert as part of their Airborne Taskforce (ABTF) preparations. The DZ was 30 Km south of the Kuwait / Iraqi border and, although we didn't know it at the time, we were only five days away from the start of the second Gulf War. Nerves were on edge and the descent was to be made in full NBC kit (less respirator) and operational body armour. To make matters worse the cool of the morning had been replaced by the heat of the afternoon as we finally boarded the US Marine Corps aircraft. As well as being a training jump, this was also the confirmation that British Paratroopers could be safely despatched by US Marine aircraft for subsequent ops if required.

Fully loaded the aircraft was suitably cramped for the forty-minute flight. The heat was stifling as we struggled to fit our equipment shortly after take-off. With the doors opened the first man in the door could see the empty desert racing past below, but as we descended the dust kicked up and obscured any view, people further down the line could see none of this as we waited for the lights to come on. Red on, Green on, GO!!! As I left the aircraft I just had time to register the sandstorm and the fact that I couldn't see the ground before I was caught by the slipstream and thrown away from the aircraft. I felt the reassuring jolt of my canopy deploying and was straight into all round observation. Suddenly the dust had cleared and the sky was full of parachutes. From 600 ft we had an awesome view of Iraq and Kuwait below and just enough time before preparing to land. With virtually no wind and soft sand everyone had a good landing. The heat and nerves in the aircraft had been replaced by the fresh air and rush of the descent. We had proved the system and were now ready for what lay ahead.

## Crossing the Border

On the 21st March 2003 the Coalition crossed the border into Iraq. This almost immediately resulted in a serious of air missile attacks against UK forces based in Kuwait. The result of these lightening SCUD warnings brought home the reality of our NBC training and the fact that this was war. After the first missile explosion was reported in Camp RHINO, and an explosion within the boundaries of Camp COMMANDO the hard-hitting fact that this would not be an unopposed assault became clear.

The 16 Bde Mission was to essentially "Secure / Hold the North Ramaylah Oil Fields". A strategic target, of grand strategic importance as it is the oil fields that will pave the way for the new Iraq. Not the most glamorous of missions, but hugely important none the less. 3 PARA / 3 Troop moved into Tactical Assembly Area GRYPHON 24 hrs prior to crossing the Border Breach (DALLAS 5). They were to push north and conduct a Relief in Place(RIP) with 5 RCT (Regimental Combat Team) part of the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF) on the Northern Gas Oil Separation Plants (GOSPS). In support they had 1 x STRE team who would work from north to south in conjunction with EOD operators from 21 EOD Sqn, led by Lt Toby Rider (late 1 Tp Comd 9 Para Sqn). Their principle task was simply to make sure the oil infrastructure didn't go up in smoke, either through sabotage by retreating

Iraqi army or as a result of an engineering failure. The Troop divided itself equally between the 3 PARA Companies and provided mobility, (was prepared to provide counter mobility Sp) and survivability support. Thankfully this phase was uneventful although there was a major UXO / Mine threat around all of the GOSPs. Subsequently as a "Be Prepared To" task 9 Para Sqn were tasked with scoping the bridging of the North of the Ramaylah Bridge.

## Awaiting the Call Forward

By Lt Andy Hart RE BGE to 3 Para BG

### Planning for War!

On the 6th of February 2003 the planning team of the 3rd Battalion the Parachute Regiment eventually landed at Kuwait City Airport, prepared for some long and arduous days in the months ahead. After a few hours to settle in to our 5\* accommodation at camp RHINO, the Battle Group (BG) received its first mission and the planning frenzy began. The next couple of days were spent going through the detailed Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield (IPB) and Battlefield Area Evaluation (BAE) process. Unfortunately we had no talc for overlays so plastic mattress covers had to get us by. It soon became apparent that trying to do this manually using the good old "permi" pen was near to impossible. A little Airborne initiative yet again and problem solved. Most of my time throughout these days most time was spent in the Bde HQ, raping and pillaging the Engineer GEO cell for all the resources it had to offer, not once did they let me down! From the IPB and knowing the Commanding Officer's intent the initial obstacle trace could be completed. This took a few iterations but was eventually finalised and handed to the Regiment. It was recognised that the likelihood of using obstacles would be near to impossible but the staff work still had to go ahead. After a couple more weeks of planning, changes to the mission and then more planning the CO was ready to give his orders. On a hot and sticky day, in a small tent, in Camp1, CA EAGLE the first set of full BG orders for OP TELIC was given. The mission: "To Relieve in Place (RIP) 2 Battalion 5 RCT, secure and hold the North Ramaylah Oilfields and create the conditions for the exploitation North to the river Euphrates". The orders followed the normal format, with myself giving a detailed ground brief as part of the Prelims. (Probably the biggest moment in my career so far). For the next couple of weeks during the build up to crossing the LD the BG concentrated on training and Mission Rehearsals. The main Battalion emphasis being on NBC, physical fitness, live firing and British SH/US Asslt Sp helicopter training, with 9 Para Sqn and the Assault Pioneers concentrating on pipeline crossing, demolition's and low-level search - myself being the key link between the Sqn / Tp and the Battalion. This sometimes proving quite tricky throughout the Op, as it seemed a constant battle to get the Battalion to recognise what we could offer - no surprises there. On The 20th March 2003, 3 PARA BG left the close confines of Camp LONGDON, CA Eagle and headed for Tactical Assembly Area (TAA) GRYPHON and subsequently Iraq. The BG finally crossed the border at first light on 22nd March 03, all with a big feeling of anticipation, to finally do what we get paid for, but also with anxiety of the times ahead.

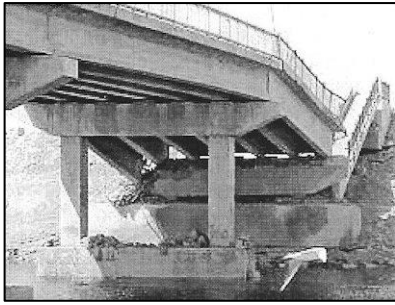
## Crossing the North Ramaylah Bridge

By Lt Simon Greaves RE – 3 Tp Comd

In the south of Iraq, about 40 Km from Basra lays the Ramaylah Oilfields. A barren area of land criss-crossed by oil pipe lines and dominated by Gas Oil Separation Plants (GOSP's). At the northern tip of these oilfields is the Hawr Al Hammar Canal about 25 km south of the Euphrates River. A 130m simply supported concrete beam deck bridge crosses the canal. 3 Troop 9 Para Sqn were tasked to recce the North Ramaylah Bridge.

3 PARA BG had to first conduct a relief-in-place with 5 RCT. As soon as all elements of "A" Company group had been briefed for the handover, 3 Troop began clearing safe areas for the Company to move into their battle positions. I Platoon secured the bridge and SSgt Power and I went forward to recce. At this point the bridge had not been crossed yet, so a distinctly non-BEW recce technique was employed to gain initial information. The Tp Commander lay at strategic points on the bridge, whilst the Troop SSgt aimed the laser range finder at his head to gain the essential dimensions! The bridge consisted of two 16m spans, two 32m spans and a further two 16m spans. The Iraqi Army had dropped the northern most 16m spans by blowing a pier and a 32m gap had been created. The second 16m span had been cratered by the US, producing a 4m hole with re-bar showing.



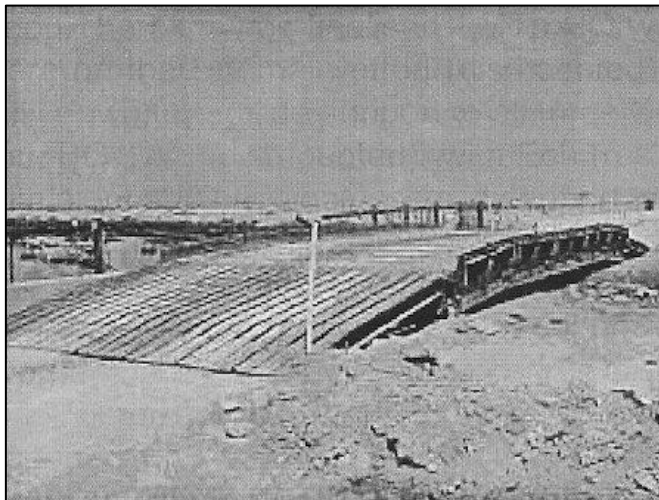


**North Ramaylah bridge before**



**North Ramaylah bridge after**

SSgt Power managed to dangle himself over the bridge edge to discover that it was in fact a partial bridge demolition within which one of the piers had failed to detonate. We reported our findings to the BG and Engr cell at Bde. At first light we took to the water in our trusty Raven Red Crest and surveyed the damaged underside and inspected the abutments for mines. Three of the seven beams had been damaged but the demolition had been a rushed job. A single firing cable had been wired to a bunch of electric detonators and "stuffed" into a box of PE4. A rapid bridge assessment was conducted and it was decided that the remaining beams would hold an MGOB and an MLC 35 vehicle over the crater.



**MGOB over Ramaylah bridge**

A tensioned GSB would be required to bridge the dropped span. If this option were to be employed then the collapsed deck would need to be removed to allow sufficient under-bridge clearance. Vickers was contacted and a 36m un-tensioned GSB (MLC 16) was authorised. EOD were called in and Lt Toby Rider and SSgt Power cleared the demolition's in rapidly fading light. Time was tight with 3 PARA "chomping at the bit", eager to cross the bridge. The MGOB went in under difficult conditions with enemy artillery fire falling short of the bridge and a heavy weight of outgoing artillery streaming across the night sky. After some precarious plant work, the GSB successfully trafficked the MGOB and placed the 36m bridge down in an extremely restricted site. 3 Troop had achieved their mission within the time and a once in a lifetime engineering task.

## 1 Para BG- AD DAYR and 6 Armd Div

Having eventually aborted an Airborne Task Force (ABTF) Attack mission to: "attack and hold QALAT SIKAR airfield", 280 Km into Iraq and only 150 Km from Baghdad, 1 PARA BG - supported throughout by 1 Tp, 9 Para Sqn were inserted by helicopter into Iraq, to forward assembly area Rhyl. Various BG operations were planned, but never executed, including a number of raids following contacts just South of the Euphrates. Eventually, the BG received orders to conduct an advance to contact clearance operation and rapidly set about its business. Designed as a shaping op to support the defeat of the Saddam Regime in Basra (to the South-East), the BG was to clear towards the enemy, (6 Armd Div - which had the mission of protecting the main lines of communication between Baghdad and Basra, and the Iranian border) in an effort to "defeat in boundary's and force mass capitulation". Planning began in earnest and it soon became apparent 1 Tp were going to need reinforcing. There were simply not enough troops to maintain a Close Support (CS) element with each of the Coys, whilst retaining a reserve for the unforeseen. Put simply, the OC did not want to strip the Coys of their CS assets in the event any kind of deliberate task was necessary. The answer was simple.



The Sqn Ech Gp regrouped, forming a reserve Tp consisting of plant, three field sections (one of the sections being provided by 1 Sect, 3 Tp 9 Para Sqn who at this stage had gone firm with 3 PARA BG) and a small HQ. The Sqn QM, Capt Dick Brown who wasn't going to miss this one for the world, would command the troop. The plan was finalised. 1 Tp HQ with C Coy, who were on the BG main effort (dismounted) with the troop split down to provide support to all three Coys. OCs TAC with BG TAC (dismounted), with Ech (res Tp) on wheels with plant and bridging assets in support, engines running - waiting for the call. The BG moved in under darkness and tabbed the last few Kms to the LD. Eventually, we heard the Bns mortars engaging, supported by air (fixed wing), aviation (rotary) and of course arty and it wasn't long before 1 Tp and Ech (res) found themselves engaged in close support to 1 PARA BG. Due to the irrigation systems in the area, in terms of mobility the BG was constrained to tracks on 3-5m high levees. Whilst this was the same for the enemy, he knew the ground and it wasn't long before the BG Milan and MSGs were called to a halt by a belt of forty two AT mines. Unseen by the lead Coy, and therefore not yet identified as an Engineer task, the CO consulted the OC as to how to deal with the obstacle.

Having been listening in on the net, whilst the OC briefed the CO as to the plan, 1 Tp Comd Lt Gareth Dent had already worked up the solution, confident as to how the OC would want him to deal with the problem and had got the show on the road. SSgt Davey Marr organised an RV with the nearest available section and set to clearing the mines. In a matter of minutes the route was open and within a short while all 42 AT mines had been cleared. The sect returned to support its Coy and the clearance op continued.

Next would be the requirement to bridge a major culvert, which could not be by-passed by any of the BG hvw wps and was therefore causing the CO a major headache. Again, missed by the lead Coy, SSM Fitzimons (part of OCs TAC, acting as OCs bodyguard) made a quick appraisal of the gap and the necessary information was passed back to Sqn HQ. With the MGOB prepped on wheels with the reserve troop, it left the BG Ech area and set to getting the BG mobile again. The OC let out a sigh of relief as the route was bridged in under the 30 mins he predicted to the CO! And the BG was able to continue. The remainder of the reserve troop conducted further mines and UXO clearance, in addition to repeatedly digging in the guns of 7 (Para) RHA and 3 RHA. 1 Tp also conducted further mines and UXO clearance, but in all, in the heat of the Iraqi sun it had been a long and demanding day.

The clearance op was a resounding success and as a shaping op - after further exploitation East to the main arterial routes North / South, having secured that night the town of QARYAT NASR and the following day the much larger town of AD DAYR, the BG helped create the conditions for 7 Bde to sort out Basra once and for all. With the Paras of 16 Air Assault Bde working to the North of Basra, and the Marines of 3 Cdo Bde to the South, 7 Armd Bde, enforced by 3 PARA BG (with 3 Tp, 9 Para Sqn in Sp) went in to Basra that night - and this time they stayed there. This marked the defeat of the Saddam Regime in Iraq's second city and its surrounding Garrisons. The operation had been a major success.

After a considerably busy period dealing with UXO and EO, the Sqn is now engaged in providing life support to the BGs and a little 'hearts and minds', although this country isn't broken, it just needs a chance. 1 Tp will remain in theatre in support of 1 PARA who are not due to depart until early / mid-July, whilst the remainder of the Sqn will depart with 3 PARA and RHQ 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) TAC Gp, in early June.

## From the OC

Operation TELIC, Gulf War II, call it what you will, marked a number of Corps firsts. Not only was 23 Engr Regt (Air Asslt) formed in a matter of weeks rather than the months planned (and that was over Christmas and new year!), it built the first ever GSB in anger (3 Tp, 9 Para Sqn), conducted the first operational dive (the Regimental dive team surveyed piers on North Raymayla Bridge prior to the build) and formation Engr recce - (23 Engr Regt Recce Tp, formed over the last 2 yrs by 9 Para Sqn) operated both alongside, and as part of the Bde's Pathfinder Platoon. 23 Regt is on the map, Recce Tp is on the map, and the Sqn has surpassed itself on operations, yet again.

Both troop commanders on this operation were 1st tour officers who had not yet completed a year out of training and were yet to complete a Bde exercise. The skill and professionalism in which they led their men was indicative of the quality of the individual and only seeks to confirm the Squadron continues to attract extremely high quality junior officers. Coupled with an incessant thirst for action that is the trademark of an airborne soldier, they have served their men well on operations. From Squadron 21C to the most junior Sapper, I have been impressed (although knowing the Squadron as I do, I shouldn't have been) at the level of courage, mental and physical robustness, and general hardiness of the soldiers in the Squadron today. We were fortunate, facing different challenges than the close quarter battles that were experienced by some in this campaign. Had we done so, we may not have been as lucky as we have been to date. God willing, our luck will remain with us and we will return without loss or injury.

The Squadron has done a fantastic job and all who know it can take pride in its achievements.

Our thanks go out to all in the AEA, not only for their best wishes at the start of this campaign, but also for the support provided through the Squadron rear party to those loved ones we left behind. It is, a truly remarkable family. Thank you again.

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## RE Works Study Team (Willich)

Having read Tony (Toots) Ridgeway's article on his experiences of the "Big House" at HQ Rheindahlen and his security problems it reminded me of my own experience there in the seventies.

I had returned to BAOR from a tour at BATUS (British Army Training Unit Suffield) Canada where I had been the QMSI i/c range for five months. A very demanding job covering hundreds of square miles of ranges used by Battle Groups sent out from the UK and BAOR for live firing exercises.

I was posted to a backwater of the British Army to a dreary little town called Willich, situated on the border of Germany and Holland. It was also the home of 21 Engineer Stores Squadron RE, a REME Workshops, and a number of minor lodger units including the Royal Engineers Work Study Team, (REWST). I'm sure this particular unit consisting of one Major RE, one WO1 RE and one Staff Sergeant RE had been formed to find a niche for soldiers and officers who had reached the final years of their service and had to be hidden away from sight until age or length of service took its toll. When I walked into what passed for an office to meet my "Superior Officer" my heart hit the floor faster than when Frank Bruno met Mike Tyson. It was a long room not much wider than a corridor with a high ceiling. The only light was provided by florescent tubes in the ceiling and a number of very narrow windows at a height of about ten feet. In the gloom I saw a Staff Sergeant sitting at his desk amusing his very young son who had been involved in a recent traffic accident. At the other end I saw this portly, rather scruffy looking Major reading a book. I gave him a cracking salute as any newly promoted WO1 would and waited for some kind of reply. He looked a little puzzled and asked who I was. As I had written to him twice, without reply, I was slightly surprised but explained that I was the replacement Warrant Officer for WO1 "Blondie" Truran, another ex 9 Squadron type. Again he looked surprised as he asked the Staff Sergeant where Mr Truran was. He told him Mr Truran had left two weeks earlier on posting. The Major thought he was on leave! So started my two years with REWST.

In the first year we did very little except play with the new computer and draw up a plan to rearrange the car park, a plan that was never implemented. I rewrote the Class 60 trackway manual including supplying photographs at my own expense. The major had refused my claim for the cost. He indulged in his favourite pastime of reading books on train disasters and the Cornish tin mine disasters that had occurred in the early part of the century. Then came big time Work Study for REWST. We were tasked to study the problems involved in transporting hundreds of tons of mines and demolition stores from the rear area stores depots to the forward area covered by the British Army, (a front of twenty-two miles) in the event of an invasion by the then Soviet Union.

We set about this task by first making a list of all the major HQ units in BAOR, at both divisional and brigade level. A further list of RCT units that would have to provide the bulk of the transport required for such a task, with additional help from RE resources. Once these units became mobile they would be controlled by the Military Police, so another list of RMP units had to be compiled. We also had to know which units had priority on the roads and bridges and when they would be called forward to their respective "stand-to" areas. At that time the British Army had about twenty-two armoured regiments, about two thirds of them in Germany. Anyone can imagine the chaos on the roads with infantry, armour, artillery and engineer vehicles all wanting their own space. With this in mind the three intrepid work-study operators set about solving this huge problem of moving the mine and demolition stores forward. In those far off days the self-loading trucks had not yet come into service, so off-loading had to be done by manpower alone or by forklift trucks, if they were available.

For the next eight months, either in pairs or singly, we visited every HQ unit in BAOR. We had access to the map rooms (normally accompanied by the unit draughtsman) and were allowed to look at time-tables for the movement of other units, and we learned at what stage of the emergency the RMP would be allowed to take control of all the major routes used by the Army. We knew where all the proposed minefields were to be laid and which bridges were to be blown immediately, and those earmarked to stay intact until final withdrawal across the rivers had been completed. We also had to look at the timetable of the movements of the Belgian and Dutch armies as they would in some cases tangle with ours. After the fact-finding stage of our study we probably knew more about the deployment and tactical plan than the vast majority of the officers serving in BAOR. With this mass of information my "Superior Officer" set about writing the report.

After about two weeks into the report writing stage there was a massive "Oops" which could be heard all the way from the "Big House ". Someone had discovered that I didn't have any vetting or security clearance. Even though I had done the long Work Study course at Shrivenham, no one had bothered to check that I had been vetted before I was posted to Willich. As my Superior Officer didn't even know which way was UP most of the time he had not bothered to check either. That was to be expected of him as he didn't even know I had spent my first QMSI tour with the Canadian Army as the RE Exchange Warrant officer and had been the SSM of 42 Squadron in Hameln. I don't know whether any heads rolled over this breach of security but it didn't affect me. I'm sure there would have been a locking of doors and drawers at the approach of anyone associated with REWST and probably the odd draughtsman corporal given the sack. I was due to leave the Army in a matter of months anyway so I was not clapped in irons nor even questioned by anyone from the security branch. As for the Major, he was a dead duck and had been for many years. I have no doubt they would find him a nice quiet corner to stand in until his retirement.

The report must have been presented to someone but I did hear a story (but only a story) that it was irrelevant anyway as the battle plan had changed. I often wonder if the vetting procedure had been tightened at the Big House, but I doubt it. It was probably cheaper to disband REWST which they did a short time later. One thing it did for me was to give me a greater insight into the movement plan for the BAOR in the event of war with Russia. Interesting, even though it was out of date. The first and only time I was given a security classification in the forty six years I spent working for the MOD both as a serving soldier and a civilian was in 1980 after I had left the Army. This took seven months to complete at a cost of about £10,000. Even this was supposed to be reviewed at five yearly intervals but in twenty-one years it only happened once. So much for "security" in this country of ours.

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# Snowdonia Adventure 2003

By Fennimore Fleck & Mike Ellery

## Part 1- By Fennimore Fleck

Chris O'Donovan suggested that as a Welsh Virgin I should enlighten everyone with my experience of Wales. Wales was a breathtaking almost humbling experience; there were many highs and a few lows:

1. Meeting old friends and Pete Bates
2. Munro's (refers to Scottish mountains over 3,000ft)
3. The top bunk
4. Rediscovering my will to survive
5. Pain

I found the journey to JSMTTC exhilarating, every mile was like travelling to the "Shot" on my way to P Company, doubts about the trip, was this really a good idea, was it everything they said was or was it just the alcohol and male bravado. Was I prepared, of course I was, physically and mentally, I'm 54 and Airborne!

My first surprise was that the JSMTTC (Joint Services Mountain Training Centre) was located at:

Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogoch, the receptionist at the Carreg Bran Hotel pronounced it fluently without a beer. Driving into JSMTTC on Friday afternoon with a smile on my face looking for familiar faces, just as I pulled up I noticed through the block window, Pete Kershaw and Jim Harrower, I am at least in the right place or we are all in the wrong place?

It's good to hear the name Fennimore again after months of the unfamiliar Richard (don't even think about it).

They seem to arrive from every corner of the globe, well Europe, Poncho from Dublin, Syd from Holland and a few Sassenachs to make up the numbers.

Where was the sun? I was sure that Poncho reminded everyone to bring their shades and sun block - at least I have my tan, having just returned from Malta on rugby tour with the Corp Vets (The Old and Bold) two days previous. If anyone is still interested in playing, we play a few games each season including a game against the Gunner vets and always a foreign tour each year, looks like Benidorm again next year. Note that we haven't lost on tour ever; we are a great touring side. Jim Harrower has a leave pass for next year.

What is all the talk about GPS (Global Positioning System)? Whatever happened to the OS maps and the sun, oh I forgot, what sun? Somethings do change, but I wonder if they improve.

With all the talk and planning for the Saturday trek over, Tony's breakfast down the hatch and nosebags filled, we boarded the bus for the drop off. Still trying to find the sun we got off the bus and I now know why we couldn't see the sun; it was because there was a bloody huge mountain in the way.



**Standing: Jim Harrower, Mike Ellery, Tony Manley, Frank Hudson, Porky Willis, Boff Harrap, Jeff Langford, Syd Hoyle, Mick Fisher,**

**Mike Robertson, Dennis Healey, John Aldridge, Colin Sangwin, Fennimore Fleck**

**Sitting: Louis Gallagher, Pete Kershaw, Nat Hague, Dave Grimbley, Bob Watts, Dave Rutter & Chris (Poncho) O'Donovan**

I didn't have to ask the question, we were off, up went the mountain goats and down came the rain, nothing changes and I volunteered for this weekend! Is this what I crave, is it really better than sex?

The line of intrepid adventurers slowly extended up the mountain until I couldn't see those in front, we wouldn't get lost we had GPS x 4, who had the instructions? The day seemed to go on forever, so did the mountains, but we had been here before, I remember this everlasting horizon.

This Virgin was finding it tough, it took an hour or so to settle in, sort out my mental attitude and realise that there were guys on this trip also finding it tough but would not quit, that's why I am on this mountain, that's why the Sqn means so much, that's why it is only pain, by tonight it will just be a distant memory, by tomorrow morning it will be hell getting up, but I will have Tony's breakfast to motivate me.

I'm glad someone else was map reading. I had other things to concentrate on and it wasn't the location of my feet. The mist was making life difficult but we had GPS, all of a sudden we seemed to gather in a huddle, "0 group" the mist cleared and there it was high up, the ridge we were supposed to be on, except we were at the bottom, someone whispered we need to go back up, I thought we had GPS, no complaints, get on with it, that's why I am on this mountain.

And another Munro bites the dust, by the end of the day I believe it was 3 but it could have been 6 or 7.

We couldn't have had worse conditions, wind, driving rain and hail it made for an extremely taxing day, but by late afternoon we were on the last leg (I've heard this before and it brought back a few memories and responses not suitable for this publication), this time it was true and before we knew it there was the RV and it was all downhill, let's hope the bus is on time and the beer is cold.

Dave Grimbley and I were first in the bar or so we thought, we had forgotten about the mountain goats that were comfortably parked on the best chairs with a drink in the hand, and boots off, "Hi guys what kept you?" I'm sure they took a short cut.

All I wanted was a hot shower, I said a mental prayer hoping that the water was hot and there was more than one shower. I was right on all accounts, somebody up there loves me, it's true, God is Airborne.

Saturday Night and Tony Manley has the night off, the dinner that evening was in the local hotel, and the night lived up to expectations, the beer was wet, the company vibrant and food excellent, Mr Gallagher was his usual

active self with camera poised ready for any event that was worthy of his attention. Saturday ended with fond memories of a very eventful day.

I awoke Sunday morning not knowing if I was alive or dreaming. Boff and Dave Grimbley brought me back to reality; did I really want to test myself once more? The answer was simple, I had nothing better to do - being a pagan, church was out of the question, I didn't want to do DRO's and swimming was out of the question due to a perforated eardrum. So it looks like the mountain and beating the pain barrier once more, never mind soon be Monday. There were only 6 of us ready to face the elements the remainder went to church (bloody Christians).

The biggest difference between Saturday and Sunday was the wind, gale force winds that took our breath away and made for some treacherous situations. The "tab" was reduced in length and height, but visibility was still minimal, which made navigation difficult, but we made the RV in fine time. Two elderly ladies who appeared in the 'snug' looking at the ceiling muttering something like, I can't find him disturbed our recovery in the bar. I thought perhaps they had lost their partners on the mountain. But no nothing so dramatic, we didn't realise it but the ceiling was covered with the signatures of the world's most illustrious climbers, Hilary, Chris Bonnington, Petula Clark, I had no idea that she climbed, perhaps it was different heights she attained. It brought home what we had achieved over the last two days that we probably had walked in the shadows of some great men and singers. The old dears left having achieved their objective and seemed extremely pleased with themselves, I wonder what Hilary and Bonnington had done for them.

We convinced the barmaid to spare us another log for the fire and before long with the embers dying and the post mortems over, the bus arrived and we were off looking forward to the evening's entertainment.



Everyone gathered in the JSMTC bar where the evening entertainment was supplied by the Dean Martin ensemble, this was interrupted by the BBQ, ably supplied by none other than Tony Manley and the raffle, prizes brought by all who attended. One of the disappointments of the weekend was not winning the weekend with Jim & Gail Harrower, whose contribution to the raffle was a falconry weekend for two at his place - good luck Poncho.

**Tony takes on well-earned fluids having slaved over the BBQ**

## Part 2 - Welsh Weekend Day 2 - By Mike Ellery

(Edited by Wife Morag & Daughter)

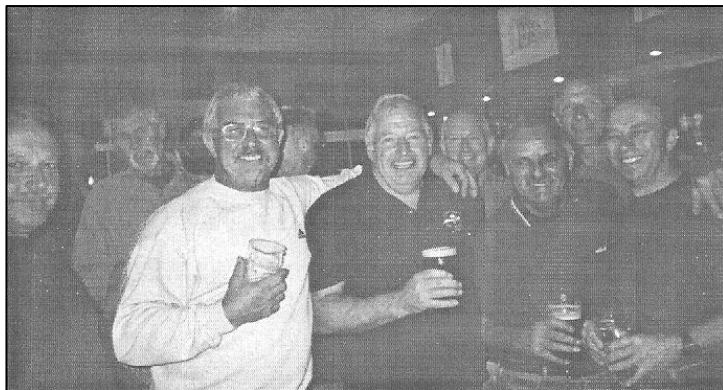
After the Marathon Trek on the Saturday, which in true Airborne tradition sorted the men from the boys and the wimp who wanted to play golf on the Sunday- (I never mentioned your name Dave), it was left to a party of 9 to complete the walk. It consisted of 3 racing snakes, 5 geriatrics and 1 walking wounded. Jim Harrower's blister looked like a piece of rib eye steak that wouldn't have gone amiss on Tony's barbecue. The summit to be bagged was Maol Siabod standing at 2,861ft, a lonely mountain standing on its own. The good news was that the finish took us straight to the door of the Pen-y-Gwyrdd Hotel, where light refreshments were to be eagerly awaited after the walk.

Sunday morning saw the coach departing for Capel Curig and an enforced stop at the Pen-y-Gwyrdd Hotel to pick up the 3 racing snakes who anticipated a flying start and an early bath. Having said that, once the walk commenced the 3 snakes were soon spotted disappearing over the horizon never to be seen again. I can only assume that they reached the Hotel as their car had also disappeared (on the other hand it could have been stolen). When we eventually arrived 4 hours and 10 minutes later, expecting a round of drinks waiting on the bar for the weary warriors, alas we were to be disappointed yet again!



The route starts on a track just past Swallow Falls, which were in flood - a fabulous sight. White water canoeing is one sport that I will definitely be giving a miss. Estimated time for completion was 4 to 5 hours on a good day, which started off reasonably well. Having meandered through a farm we were soon on the open hillside. It was at this point that the waterproofs were quickly donned and remained on until we reached the end. The wind at this point was negligible and the visibility good. The well-trodden path climbed steadily upwards towards the summit ridge. An easy scramble over broken rocks took us into the descending clouds and visibility was now down to zero. The wind had also started to pick up. As the clouds parted temporarily a precipitous drop could be seen on one side, a comforting thought in zero visibility.

The summit cairn was soon reached without any major mishaps but by this time we were battling gale force winds. Navigating off the summit needed some precise compass work. Luckily for us the cloud lifted sufficiently to expose the ridge by which we were to descend. It was at this point on the descent that one-step forward meant 3 steps sideways. As we dropped down in height the winds also dropped and we were soon under the cloud base. Our destination and finish could be seen in the distance, so no time was lost in heading for it, plus we had a deadline as the coach was picking us up at 4pm. It has always amazed me that you can spend all day tramping the hills with dry feet only to get them wet on the last 1km of your destination. This trek proved my theory, having to walk through a bog to reach the road.



A few well-earned beers ended a perfect day.

The participants:

Racing Snakes

Nat Hague, Mike Robertson & Frank Hudson.

Geriatrics

Poncho, Tony Manley, Fennymore, Bob Watts & Mike Ellery.

Walking wounded

Jim Harrower

NB. The proceeds of the raffle (£213) held during the weekend was donated to the central fund of the Association.

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## Now For Something Completely Different

By Jim Harrower

From the excitement of being one of the 9 Sqn lads, the booze, the rugby, the booze, the basketball, the booze, the lads and the booze, then into civvies, BUMP, what a shock! No lads, still booze, still rugby, still booze, still basketball, still booze, but no 'LADS'. The old knees were giving way a bit, so time for something completely different - FALCONRY.

I had always had a passion for birds of prey, but from a distance. Gail (the wife) surprised me one birthday with a day at a falconry centre where I had a chance to hold and help feed different birds of prey - and that was it for me, hooked. I followed a falconer for 2 years gathering up all manner of experiences, during which time I had been saving money to buy my falconry furniture, (so not so much booze). It is quite expensive to start off, needing bow perches, leashes, hoods, blocks and most importantly a telemetry tracking system.



In 1994 I bought my first bird; a Lanner falcon of 1 lb 9oz fresh from her parents aviary. Now my work began, learning to trust each other completely with the respect we both deserved. This can only be done by what we call 'manning' the bird for hour after hour, sitting next to or holding the bird on the fist to gain trust.

The next step is to tie the bird onto a creance (line) and to start jumping her to the fist for food, then into an open area to do the same - but with a greater distance each time and then the ultimate moment — the first maiden flight.

Will she or won't she come back to papa? This is always a scary moment. Will all the time spent on the training work? Luckily for me she did return and for many times to come. Of course on occasions when she didn't return our invaluable tracking system came into its own.

We have spent many an hour sitting in the car at night and early morning having tracked her to the nearest tree and waiting for first light to coax her down from that secure tree. This Lanner was called Pepsi and unfortunately I no longer have her, she was lost on a high thermal one summer, never to be seen again, she was ringed and registered, so you never know sometimes we do get the birds back and in some cases even after years if they have flown across different parts of the world.

My next purchase was another Lanner 1lb 6oz, which I named Phoenix (from the fire) and true to her name was a high-spirited nasty bugger who had no respect for me whatsoever. She was scatty and tended to think she was a bat and hung upside down most of the time. Despite the odd manners, she is a beautiful looking bird of great colour and feather and although not a good handling bird or flyer, she is currently part of my breeding program and is doing well.



I attend many field meetings for hunting and decided to try my hand at hawking and bought a Harris Hawk 2lb 4oz and called her Keo, after the Cyprus beer downed with Paul (Dunk) Dunkley in 2001. An extremely sociable bird, which will take rabbit, hare, pheasant and guinea fowl. A great bird, I take her up to Scotland with 5 other falconers every winter to fly and hunt in the hills - a truly wonderful experience



**Jim with Harris Hawk in Glen Shee**

Having spare time, I have, over the years, trained other people's birds over a period of weeks and returned them to their owners. It's good experience for me to handle different species as they all have their own characters, good and bad.

The last bird I purchased was a Gyr Saker called Rooster a bird weighing 2lb 1oz superb temperament and was training up a treat, but unfortunately caught a virus which damaged its spine so it had to be put to sleep. When the birds get ill, it's either quite a quick recovery or fatal.

I spend most weekends at a Falconry Centre at Holdenby House, Holdenby, Northamptonshire, which is open from 1200-1700 hrs on Sundays and 1300-1700hrs on Bank Holidays. The house and gardens are also open, so if you're in the area and would like to call in, you will be made most welcome.



## So Much for Experience- Or Spreadeagle!

By Eric Blenkinsop

It was in the early 50's and there we were in the Canal Zone when we received the dreadful news that the beloved C47 (Dakota) was being phased out to be replaced by a double door aircraft.

Who could possibly perceive such a fiendish idea? It surely had to be Barnes Wallis, after all, he came up with the bouncing bomb, so why not a few bouncing parachutists, just to confuse the enemy!!

Then horror of horrors we discovered that the wretched aircraft was to be called the Hastings which for every God fearing Englishman brought to mind the most ignominious military defeat in English history.

But like all good soldiers you just have to smile in the face of all adversity so the whole of 9 squadron was programmed for a four jump conversion course. Life, of course, is full of co-incidences and at this very same period several members of the Squadron Rugby team had been selected to represent the Corps in the annual RE/RA march at the Command Stadium in Fayid.

Unfortunately the timing of the conversion course for Jenny Wren (SQMS) and myself clashed with the Rugby fixture. So special dispensation was sought by the Sqn from the RAF for our conversion course to be reduced from 4 to 2 jumps. This was exceptionally agreed on the basis we were both experienced parachutists!

So the time arrived for us to attend for our synthetic training and nothing much had changed except that we now learned that because of the design of the aircraft there was a fairly high risk of collision with one another in the air. This being so, the great emphasis was on becoming aware of an imminent collision, one had to SPREADEAGLE to avoid going into a colleagues rigging lines.

However, if you became entangled then it was essential you lost no time in striving to become disentangled. So with synthetic training completed the day came to emplane at Kasfareet for this new experience. Just a short flight and then out, when to my dismay I found myself in the middle of a set of rigging lines!! Not funny at all. So recalling the PJI's advice I commenced to pluck with great alacrity, but failed to pluck my way out of them, instead plucked my way through them.

So there we were, two guys with our parachutes locked together but with both canopies remaining, thankfully, fully inflated. So we descended quite gently with my feet playing a gentle tattoo on the other guys helmet. We no doubt had to thank the warm air thermals in the middle east for had this happened in the UK it may have ended quite differently.

He hit the ground first and I landed a split second later alongside him and discovered that the victim in this case was none other than Sid Warrilow (he was not best pleased). But as I said to Sid, it serves you right for making such a poor job of teaching me to drive in Germany. If you need proof of that fact just take a long look at the front and rear bumper of my car.

The rugby match?

Well that proved to be a typical hard fought battle with the Gunners and from memory resulted in a 6 - 6 draw. We thought at the kick off that we were on a good thing as Jenny Wren was on first name terms with the referee but that was all to no avail. During a brief lull in the course of the game I caught a glance of one of the Corps rugby selectors Jumbo Thomas on the touchline who did not look best pleased with the performance. As for me I was just happy to be there running about.

On looking back on this experience now I count my blessings on two things:

1. That it was a clean fatigue jump.
  2. That we were not issued with reserve parachutes at that time otherwise I might have made an even bigger mess of things.
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## Standby Troop – Callout

By Baz Henderson

It was Easter weekend 1967, the Squadron were providing the Strategic Reserve standby troop — and we were it! All weapons and G1098 stores were packed and manifested, wills, next of kin forms and return to Unit (RTU) telegrams made out.

It was Thursday afternoon and most of the pads had already collected their 72 hour leave passes and were heading as far away from Crookham as fast as they could go.

I was talking on the guardroom veranda when the troop commander rushed and asked me to go and round up the pads. I asked where we were off to; and was told that information would be given out when the troop were mustered. By the time I got back to camp the living-in members had loaded the G1098 onto the 4 tonners and drawn up 3 days rations.

Once assembled we were given our destination — CORNWALL! Cornwall, had they raised the black county flag over a rebel army, and declared independence? No, it turned out that a giant oil tanker had run aground on the Scilly Isles, and was to be the first of the great oil tanker spills.

The tanker was called the Torry Canyon, and as we were already on 'stand-by', we were sent down to help prevent the oil from getting ashore. As this was the first of the big oil spills; no one knew what to do, so the decision was made for the RAF to bomb the tanker to try and set it on fire and subsequently burn the oil off. This failed, and only increased the volume of oil spillage.

Shellfish are an important industry in the West Country and we were sent to try and block off the inlets and estuaries where oyster beds were located. Anti-submarine boom netting were sent down from Rosyth in Scotland; and our task was to wrap them in Hessian and float them across the waterways. Steel floats approx 2.5ft in diameter were attached in order to maintain buoyancy, and each end of the boom was secured with great kedge anchors.

As you can imagine, not much of these booms protruded above the water (approx. 1ft) but the weather was kind, and the oil calmed the swell and many oyster beds were saved.

Once our task had been completed we were invited by a shellfish company for a get together to thank us for our efforts. There was free beer and oysters for everyone! Following many hours of beer drinking and oysters there was plenty of puking — this was blamed on the oysters!

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