

The Military Survey (Geographic) Association



Autumn 2011 Newsletter

Issue 42



CHAIRMAN'S PIECE

You will have noticed no doubt that we have a new format to the newsletter, but did you notice it is not just a change in format; we are experimenting with a new title. Let me explain why but firstly remind you of our aims as laid down in the TORs.

- a. To serve the membership by ensuring we run successful, fun events, provide a timely flow of information through the Branch Newsletter and web site and coordinate support to those in need. All these activities should aim to cater to all in the Branch – members and partners, serving and retired, young and old.
- b. Ensuring the continuing success of the Branch by sustaining and increasing our Branch membership, retaining strong links to those still serving, ensuring the Branch remains on a sound financial footing and maintaining a strong Committee.
- c. The membership embraces all those personnel from other arms and civilians who have served with Military Survey/Geographic units, not only Sappers.

The committee have whiled away many an hour or two over a pint trying to solve the problem of why the majority of ex Military Survey members don't show any interest in joining us but when a trade group has a reunion they get three times as many as we do attending! A number of initiatives have been made during this time especially raising the profile of our support to the serving soldier, (an investment in future membership); revamping the web site and trying to counter the perception that committee membership is an officer sport! A recurring theme is also that people have a very fixed idea of what a REA Branch is and they avoid it like the plague.

We therefore felt it would benefit us to minimise the REA aspect in our title and to get back to our roots. This organisation was born out of the 250th anniversary reunion and those organised by Nick Cheesman as a conduit for maintaining links between all those who had served in or with Military Survey/Geographic units. The only event we have as a group is the annual get together with the aspiration to have a more elaborate reunion once every 3 or 4 years. These provide an opportunity for those who want to meet up with old buddies they seldom see. For the rest of the time we meet the aims through the newsletter and web site as well as responding to individual queries. Our funds are used to support these activities and to help the serving personnel and units.

Our relationship to the REA is considered important and we have no wish to sever it but it is interesting that the only interaction we have with the REA is related to the branch Standard,

the provision of which for funerals is very much appreciated and it is occasionally paraded at Corps events. Otherwise it is providing the HQ with information for their use with no tangible benefit to ourselves.

By calling ourselves the “Military Survey (Geographic) Association” it is thought that more of our comrades will recognise that we offer friendship and companionship directly, and not via or under the control of any other organisation. This is an interim change which will have to be ratified by the AGM next year; we would be very interested in your views and reaction before that time if you would like to respond to the editor. The other area where your input would be useful is in how to make the reunions more attractive.

A final point relates back to the fact that I mentioned earlier regarding the revamping of the web site. The web site was started some time ago by Albie Field who then ran and developed it up until just over a year ago. He passed the baton onto Dave Johnson who has further developed it but until very recently Albie continued to host the site on his server. I am very grateful to Albie for his early development and the hosting of the site over the years. From our work with Dave it has become very clear how much work is involved in building and then maintaining a web site so well done Albie and may you now enjoy the time it has freed up.

Angus Cross

Headlines From The AGM

- Welcome to three new members attending: Ray Dunn, Tom Hughman and John Walton.
- COS 42 Regiment briefed on current Geo matters.
- Thanks to Mick Perry for again organising the event and to Major Mick James for hosting us.
- Our thanks go to the standard bearers: Mike Payne, Mick Nottage and Jack Crompton.
- Our finances are sound and we supported the RSMS graduation ceremony as an “esprit de corps” event and £500 has been granted, although not spent, for the Hermitage Sportsmen’s Dinner which has been postponed due to very heavy commitments.
- Membership had remained relatively stable at approximately 365.
- The Committee has been wrestling with the issue of membership and participation which has led us to change the name of the website.
- The proposition that Alf Isherwood be elected as Treasurer was passed.
- The Chairman explained that despite numerous requests he was again asking that someone come forward to take over the role of function co-ordinator from Mick Perry who had been doing this, with only one small break (of a couple of years), for the past 12 years.
- A formal vote of thanks was recorded for Mike Gowlett’s stewardship as Treasurer.
- A formal vote of thanks was recorded for Albie Field’s work on our very successful website.
- There was discussion on the several clashes of dates of different reunions and it was stated that thought would be given to ensuring that they do not happen again.
- RSM, WO1 Alfie Conetta, asked that a vote of thanks be recorded for the support given to the Geo Soldiers and gave a short overview of one of his recent trips to Afghanistan.
- Next year’s reunion is likely to be in September at Hermitage.

Following the AGM the Annual Award was presented to Corporal Andy Racktoo from 135 Squadron.

Visit www.militarysurvey.org.uk

CPL ANDY RACKTOO

“Spirit of Good Fellowship Beyond Normal Expectations”

Corporal Andrew Racktoo joined the Regular Army in April 1989. He trained as a Royal Engineer Signaller and achieved the rank of Corporal and Class 1 in his trade. He completed two operational tours in the Balkans with NATO and the UN in 1994 & 1996. In July 2000 he decided to leave the regular army and chance his luck in civvy street. In June 2009 he joined the TA at the Southampton Detachment.

Andy Racktoo has made a significant impact on the Southampton Detachment at Blighmont Barracks bringing his experience, common sense and maturity. His professional knowledge coupled with a keen sense of humour has been effective in the assistance with the training of new recruits at Southampton. It is widely appreciated within the Squadron that Andy is the lynchpin for the Southampton Detachment.

This year he was instrumental in creating the 135 Squadron Facebook website. This was no mean feat as he had to ensure that not only was the site security enabled but also was robust enough to meet the stringent military criteria. He has continued to improve the site and the Squadron members now use this as a valuable means of communication. He has also passed on his Signalling prowess to his peers



Bob Avenall presents the award to Cpl Andy Racktoo.

Corporal Racktoo is an outstanding Junior Non-Commissioned Officer, who is looked up to by his peers and respected by the Squadron management. His down to earth attitude lends itself to assist him in making himself easily approachable for the new recruits.

The Branch Award is presented annually, to the individual who has given outstanding and loyal support to the Regiment; whilst participating and contributing in a variety of activities throughout the training year. The fact that Andy Racktoo has been selected for this honour, demonstrates the significance of his outstanding contribution to unit life, during this period.

Corporal Racktoo is engaged to Lucy and has a 2-month-old daughter Eloise. His hobbies include fishing and rugby.

PS to Life After Military Survey

The would-be REME Craftsman in the last edition of the newsletter was of course – Ron Birch. Below is the final paragraph of his ‘life after Military Survey’.

What a blessing those pieces of *Meccano* turned out to be as my career in RE Military Survey continued for another 26 years seeing me reach the dizzy heights of RSM prior to commissioning. In fact the training and qualifications I received whilst serving as a Military Surveyor enabled me to reach senior Survey appointments within British Coal and Leicester City Council.

Dedication of the Ordnance Survey War Memorial

On Tuesday, 21st June, the Ordnance Survey celebrated 220 years since its formation in the Tower of London. Tree planting ceremonies took place involving four previous Directors General and the current Director General and Chief Executive, Dr Vanessa Lawrence CB.



Prior to this, a Service of Dedication of a new war memorial situated in a Garden of Contemplation at the new Ordnance Survey headquarters in Adanac Park, Southampton took place in the presence of many hundreds of visitors and staff. The memorial takes the form of an elongated trig pillar in Portland stone with the names of 123 colleagues who fell in the two world wars engraved on stainless steel plates. In World War One, 41 Royal Engineers and one Royal Flying Corps are recorded with 17 Royal Engineers in World War Two.

Dr Vanessa Lawrence's guests included Dame Mary Fagan, DCVO, Lord Lieutenant of Hampshire, Brigadier Ian James, OBE, ADC, Engineer-in-Chief [Army], Reverend Julian Williams, Chaplain to Ordnance Survey, former Directors General and Directors of the Ordnance Survey. Representatives of other military services and regiments included Lieutenant Colonel Antony Wiley, CO, 42 Eng Regt [Geo], RSM A. Conetta 42 Eng Regt [Geo], the Guard of Honour

was provided by 42 Eng Regt [Geo], Dr Lawrence is Honorary Colonel of 135 Ind Geo Sqn RE[V]. In attendance were Major Michael James, OC, 135 Ind Geo Sqn RE[V] with SSM I. Lunt RE[V]. The local Member of Parliament and civic dignitaries and senior members of the Royal British Legion and Standard Bearer were among the guests.

The procession was led by the Southampton and District Branch REA Standard carried by the Chairman/Standard Bearer Mr Jack Duke and the Branch President, Mr Norman Hardisty, and Vice President, Mr Geoffrey Keeffe, both former Military Surveyors, took an active part in the Service of Dedication and a wreath was laid on behalf of the Royal Engineers Association. A Reception, attended by many members of the Branch, followed the major events to celebrate an outstanding day for Ordnance Survey and the Royal Engineers past and present.

Jack Duke

Article first published in Sapper magazine.

Mike Payne Awarded the REA Badge of Merit

Mike Payne received a very pleasant surprise whilst attending this summer's Beat Retreat at Hermitage when he was called forward to receive the REA Badge of Merit from the Hon. Mrs Mary Bayliss JP, the Lord Lieutenant of Berkshire.

Not only is Mike our lead standard bearer but he also carries the Reading and West Berkshire standard and has been Secretary of that branch since 1998. He was granted this prestigious award for his dedicated commitment to the REA, to his church and to other charitable groups.

Congratulations and well done Mike.



Welfare Support

Over the past years the role of a Unit Welfare Officer has changed drastically and not only in name as we are no longer Families Officers, who were primarily focused on the married soldiers and officers, we now have responsibility for the welfare of single soldiers and their extended families. In addition the work load has increased because of the constant 'roulement' (organised rotation) of personnel moving in and out of operational theatres.

The welfare mechanisms have changed and I personally find myself as a confidant, surrogate father, kindly friend and caring uncle. All of these roles are played at some time or another particularly when you have a young wife with small children facing separation for the first time. I am sure you can appreciate the strains placed on a marriage particularly when the separation suffers from intense media coverage. I also face questions from parents, grandparents and girlfriends who are not familiar with military terms but have the same worries and concerns about their loved one who is deployed away from the UK. We regularly ask families and relatives not to sit watching the news and to only rely upon information passed by us but unfortunately during a lonely evening there will always be someone who watches and then starts to worry.

To a certain extent I suppose an operational tour of duty is easier for the soldier than for the family. The soldier is undertaking a role for which he has been professionally trained and operates in an environment which has few distractions so he can remain focused on the operational mission. On the other hand the families back at home have to face the normal routine and dramas of life - getting the children to school, nursing a sick child, worrying about getting to hospital for a maternity appointment!

I can honestly say that each and every day brings a challenge and personally I am blessed with excellent support from my chain of command who place a high priority on robust welfare support. On the other hand I would be absolutely lost without the help of the Service charities and support agencies.



A TV to watch the football and a bike to get around Bastion are examples of the use of our Geo Fund money.

In particular I am truly grateful for the excellent financial support I have received from your branch of the REA. I am constantly reminded by your committee that funds are available in support of operational efforts and this has manifested itself in the form of bicycles, televisions, and a raft of electrical items. All of these items help to enhance the morale of our soldiers

and officers who are on operations providing geographic support to the missions that are currently being conducted in Afghanistan. Our women and men are working in increasingly harsh conditions, but are enjoying the challenges of working in a real time scenario. All efforts towards enhancing the morale of our troops are appreciated and your support has been truly memorable.

Nick Collins

Brian Donald (Jimmy) James 1933 – 2011

The following eulogy was written and read out by Major Philip Shannon, Captain of Invalids, Royal Hospital Chelsea, at Jimmy James' funeral.

Jimmy, as he was known, enlisted into the Army in 1948 at the tender age of 15. In 1951, he was badged to the Royal Engineers and was posted to Merebrook for Sapper training and later to the School of Military Survey at Newbury. Following his training, he was posted to Nairobi and attached to 82 (Photo Reconnaissance) Squadron RAF, before being moved east of Baghdad to 683 Squadron, where he flew in RAF Lancasters and Canberras, with 6 Radar Air Survey Liaison Section.

He was then posted to 89 Field Survey Squadron RE in Nairobi and in 1951 returned to the UK to the Survey Liaison Staff (UK) at RAF Wyton. In 1957 he accompanied the unit to RAF Seletar and RAF Changi in Singapore. In 1958 he was posted to Germany and then completed his A1 Surveyor Trig Course at the School. He then became an instructor at the Army Apprentice College at Harrogate and Chepstow. From 1962 – 63, he was based in Northern Rhodesia seconded to the Director of Overseas Surveys, and then to Nigeria.



In 1965, he commenced a 6-month emergency tour in Aden with 19 Topographic Squadron RE and on returning to the Regiment was posted to JARIC at RAF Brampton. The winter of 1969 was spent in South Georgia and he then moved to Thursday Island in Australia. In 1971, as part of 512 Specialist Team RE, he completed a tour of Chile and in 1972 returned to the Regiment at Barton Stacey. SHAPE in Belgium was his next posting in 1973, where he remained until his discharge in 1974, having been promoted to the rank of Warrant Officer Class 1.

As if Jimmy had not travelled widely enough overseas, following his Army service he found employment as a land surveyor for Seismic Surveys in the Middle East, and in West and South Africa. He was also involved with hydrographic surveying in the North Sea and the Arctic until his retirement in 1989.

Jimmy joined The Royal Hospital in 2003 and quickly immersed himself in the many activities on offer. Assuming the role of Museum Attendant, he made sure he was well versed in the history of the Hospital to support visits by the public. For two years, he also carried out the role of Ward Sergeant with diligence and enthusiasm. Jimmy was a keen supporter of the In-Pensioners' Club and with his ready wit and humour, he was well known as one of the Royal Hospital's characters. He maintained his association with the Royal Engineers and attended a number of events in their Headquarters at Chatham. He was always a regular on their annual Sapper Sunday parades, where he was immaculately turned out in his Scarletts.

For his loyal service, Jimmy was awarded the African GSM (Kenya), GSM (Malaya) and the GSM (Saudi Arabia). Jimmy sadly died in St Mary's Hospital on 12 September 2011 aged 78.

He is particularly missed by the nursing staff here in the Infirmary, as well as all who knew him.

Jimmy James' funeral service was attended by members of his family; two of his Military Survey comrades who had joined up with him in Group 48B at Longleat - Brian Reader and Peter Timbrell – also Peter's wife Diane (they were neighbours to Jimmy, Margaret and family at Faircross). Also attending were RSM Alfie Conetta representing the Regiment; the Branch Standard Bearer, Mike Payne, and his deputy, the Branch Secretary, Rod Siggs, and a number

of comrades from within the Royal Hospital Chelsea. One should get a special mention, Neal (Jock) Grimes, WOs' & Sgts' Mess Manager for many years at Barton Stacey.

The Service was conducted by the Resident Chaplain, the Rev R H Whittington MBE, in the Margaret Thatcher Infirmary Chapel. It was nice that the Chaplain, an ex Sapper, knew Jimmy personally and was able to give a very humorous account of one of their recent meetings.

Captain of Invalids at the Royal Hospital, Major Philip Shannon, gave a very enlightening eulogy which also highlighted what we already new about him being such widely travelled during his Service and in his civilian posts and, above all, being such a character. Jimmy, I'm sure, would have approved of his funeral; it had touches of humour that lightened the sombre occasion whilst still being quietly dignified.

Rod Siggs

James Roy 'Mitch' Mitchell

Mitch joined Boys Service with Intake 54B at Harrogate and trained initially as a Litho Artist and later became a Cartographic Technician Class 1. After training he served a three-year tour with the Regiment at Zyyi and then did four tours in BAOR, the first two separated by a short tour at Barton Stacey and then each subsequent German posting was interspersed with a course at Hermitage.



Mitch receives his LS & GC from CO Lt Col Mike Busk on the square at Barton Stacey.

In 1968 he went to HQ AFSOUTH in Naples for two years and then again to the Regiment at Barton Stacey before three years in the Map Depot in Cyprus. Mitch spent his final tour as SSM 19 Squadron at Barton Stacey leaving the service in March 1979. Mitch returned to his native Dundee and was granted a commission in a local TA unit.

Mitch had been ill for some time and died in hospital surrounded by his family on the 8th of August 2011. As per his wishes his body was given to and accepted by medical science which left the family with no funeral however wake was held at The Park Hotel in Dundee on Monday 15th August to mark his passing.

Brian Woodfield

Brian entered the Army Apprentice School, Harrogate with intake 53B and trained as a Litho Artist. After the Training Regiment he served three years with 42 Regiment at Zyyi, Cyprus and then spent two years as cartographic/lithographic draughtsman instructor at Chepstow. His final posting was to 13 Field Survey Squadron at Fernhurst and from where he went on detachment to Singapore.

After leaving the Army at the start of 1964 he worked in the civilian printing trade, first in his home town of Birmingham and then in Cheltenham. After a few years he returned to the Apprentice College at Chepstow as a civilian instructor where he stayed until an early retirement due to a health problem.

Brian died on the 20th of September and was cremated at the Forest of Dean Crematorium on Thursday the 29th of September.

Jeff Sonnex

Jeff Sonnex joined up as an adult recruit in the early 1950s and at some stage after training he qualified as a GD Draughtsman, then a specialist qualification and not a trade. However, in the late Fifties, like a number of other GD Draughtsmen over the years, he came into Military Survey and trained as a Topographic Draughtsman.

His first Survey postings were on Cyprus, first with 42 Regiment, then 47 Squadron and finally the newly reformed 1 ASLS. Then, after a short spell with 14 Squadron in Germany, he was posted as a sergeant to Carto Troop, in 47 Squadron with the Regiment at Barton Stacey. He was an instructor at Hermitage in the late Sixties before in 1970 enjoying a three-year tour in the Far East assisting the Singapore Armed Forces to set up their Mapping Unit and train the personnel.

He was commissioned in 1975 and did a tour in Germany as OC 3 BAOR Map Depot before retiring in 1980. He then ran his own newsagents business in Portsmouth for many years before retiring to Spain some 10years ago.

After two years of poor health Jeff died on Saturday 17th September. Funeral took place in Torrevieja Spain, on Tuesday 20th September. Jeff leaves a widow, Babs, and three children one of which, Peter, went to Sandhurst and is currently serving as a Lieutenant Colonel in the Corps.

Donation Presentation To 42 Engineer Regiment (Geo)

The out-going Treasurer was pleased to present a cheque for £538.19 to Lt Col Tony Wilby, the Commanding Officer of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geo). This covered the cost of various items for the relief and support of troops serving in Afghanistan. The presentation was made in the Officers' Mess at coffee break on Friday 21 Oct 11.

Lt Col Wilby thanked the Military Survey (Geographic) Association for their support. The Treasurer was able to remind those present about the purposes of the RE GEO Support Fund, as stated in the Terms of Reference '*... which will be funded by donations, special events and other activities. These funds will be used to support serving Geographic soldiers when military funds are not readily available. The committee will allocate these funds based on requests from Royal Engineer (Geographic) units and will report back to members at the AGM.*



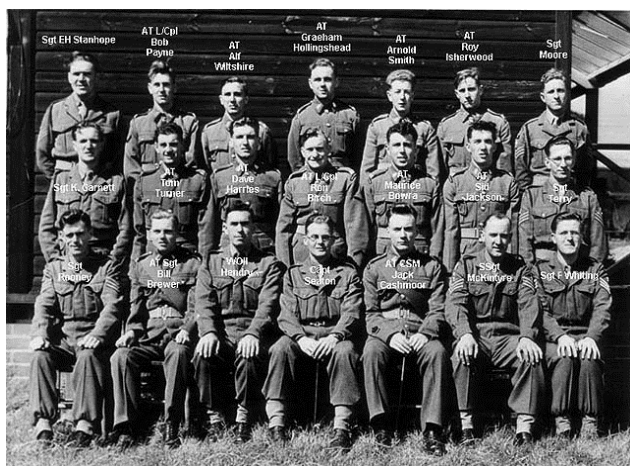
The Treasurer said that about £1800 remained available and was at the disposal of RE (Geo) units through the Unit Welfare Officer, Nick Collins.

Michael Gowlett

A Summer of Reunions

This summer saw a number of Military Survey reunions by either trade or course take place as well as our own 'do' and AGM at Ewell.

Harrogate Remembered—Sixty Years On – 51B (Survey) Reunion



Harrogate Survey Intake 51B...

In September 1951, along with numerous other apprehensive young school leavers, twelve “wannabe” surveyors arrived at the Army Apprentices School, Harrogate. Sixty years later, eight of that not so young dirty dozen met again at Hermitage to celebrate their ‘Diamond Enlistment.’

Their reunion was held within the WOs and Sgts Mess by kind permission of the RSM, WO1 Alfie Conetta, It showed we were getting old when we realised that the RSM was not born when most of us had completed a full service.

A formal dinner was held with the mess silver on display. The dinner and service could not be faulted and I’m sure the mess takings were boosted considerably.

From the original 51B Survey intake three were awarded the Queen’s Commission whilst three others retired as Warrant Officers Class 1; not a bad achievement from those twelve young lads!



Ron Birch

..and 60 later – clockwise - Tom Turner, Graeme Holinshead, Roy Isherwood, Sid Jackson. Arnold Smith. Bob Pavne. Dave Harries. Ron Birch.

Chepstow Remembered - 64B Army Apprentice College Reunion

Back in April of this year I was in contact with a few non-Survey 64B group members, when we decided to get together for a small reunion. Having arranged a weekend date and location, we decided to try and locate other members. We found ex-members from non-Survey, but I had lost contact with all the Survey lads.

I contacted Alan Gordon and Rod Siggs from the branch with a list of names that I wished to find. There were only two that were registered with the REA, those being David Powell and Roger Cramp. David led me to Ian Simpson and Roger to Duncan Brimson. I found Bryan Tidy through Facebook, living in Nottingham and he led me to Dave Young and Trefor Evans, both living in Norfolk. Trefor Evans had an address for Jim Adamson, who was now living in the Republic of Ireland. Remembering Jim Steger’s home town was Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, I searched 192.com and found him now living in Tewkesbury, Glos. That left me with Roy Stephens, who I later found through the Beachley Old Boys Association and Robert (Charlie) Brown, who I have still not found.

The last two of our Survey group being Mick Stonefry, whom I have been informed is deceased. I do not know the full details or when it was, so will not speculate, but I am led to believe that he took his own life some time ago. Lastly, Alan Phipps was also a group member but we knew he had been in a fatal accident many years ago.

Having passed on the details of the Reunion to everyone, all accepted the invitation to attend with the exception of Roy Stephens and Ian Simpson, due to work/family commitments. We had also traced 16 other non-Survey members, two of who were deceased and five others were unable to attend. We were also joined by nine wives/partners, giving us a total of 27 guests.

We all gathered on Friday, 23rd September at the Three Swans Hotel in Market Harborough, where in the evening they had reserved the Cocktail Bar for our sole use. The evening was a complete success with lots of backslapping, how are you? and “you haven’t changed a bit” type comments. It’s funny how you can pick up where you left off some 44 years ago. All the wives, realising what this gathering meant to us, joined in with all the fun and festivities.

On Saturday the 24th we had a photo session in the morning and continued throughout the afternoon with fun, chat, stories, yarns, comedy and humour of our Beachley days. In the evening we again gathered in the bar for pre-dinner drinks, prior to a four-course dinner in the Cygnet (Private Function) Dining Room. The décor, food and service by the staff matched and reminded me of our regimental and mess dinners. Superb!

Toasts, to our departed friends, and all remaining 64B colleagues wherever they may be, and speeches, followed dinner. We all then retired to the Cocktail Bar to enjoy the remainder of the evening.



On Sunday after breakfast and church parade (only joking), we all gathered and thanked each other for attending, prior to departing at lunchtime. Having all last been together some 44 years ago when we departed Chepstow, we promised to stay in touch in the future. We have provisionally

arranged the date of 9-11 May 2014 at Chepstow for our 50th Reunion. In the meantime we will continue to search for the remaining ex-members of our Group. The only Survey member being Robert (Charlie) Brown, so if anyone has any info on his whereabouts, please let me know via the REA.

Ian (Gramps) Parr

Hermitage Remembered - 49 Army Survey Course

During 1972 and 73 ten students of 49 Army Survey Course enjoyed a pleasant academic stay at the School at Hermitage. The course comprised five Nigerian civilians, Fred Noseworthy a Canadian, Bob Kirby from the USA and three British officers, Reg Gibson, Chris Nash and Phil Wildman. For personal reasons Fred left the course to join 50 ASC.

On the 30th of May this the three Sappers and Bob Kirby met up for a reunion which also included their wives who qualified for attendance as they had all been on the trial survey employed as bookers!



From the left: Chris and Ann Nash, Sandra and Reg Gibson, Angela and Bob Kirby, Phil and Vicky Wildman.

Field Surveyors Gather to Swing the Lamp

During the weekend of the 11th/12th of June there was a reunion of field surveyors at Hermitage. It is hoped to include a write up of the event in the next newsletter.

The Carto Reunion 2011 – The Epilogue

Well that's all done and dusted for another year and yet again a most satisfying event. About the same number as last year but some different faces appearing. Hopefully Dave J has a list.

We exploited Armed Forces Day and enjoyed free camping on-site. My special negotiating envoy Al Easingwood managed to plead post traumatic stress disorder and referred to the shrapnel still imbedded in his leg, hence the limp - (or is that just his wrist!) We set up camp in the corner next to the allotments, the same place as last year. The owners will have a surprise when they harvest their crops, as they will probably taste of urine!

Top man Brian Hurley: he phoned up the pub from the States and put £50 behind the bar for the lads. It was much appreciated and prompted a few attendees to contribute a few quid to the beer fund. It was unanimously agreed that anyone who cannot make next year's gig should also contribute £50 to the beer fund.

It was a rather flustered bar maid that approached our camp and asked "Do you know a Brian?" to which Mick O'Dell said "I'm Brian and so's my wife"silly boy!

Talking of beer, there was a fantastic selection of real ales straight from the keg and we managed to go through the whole menu at least twice.

Neil Coppard turned up and lurched to a halt by the camp. Apparently one is a great-grandfather now. If ever there was a man who was born to bar-b, it's Tippo. There was no chance of anyone starving and there was even a veggie option for the big girly Geordie tart. Apparently Dave Blake was there too, I never heard him although most of Oxfordshire did. Good to see you again Dave.

Not satisfied with the beach buggy he turned up in last year, Jim Danks rode in on a brand new Harley with only 60 miles on the clock. Apparently with bikes these days, one has to rev it up a lot before engaging the clutch and moving off. Rog turned up in his big works van, kipped in it and did a few jobs down South whilst he was in the area. I reckon he had a mucky woman in the back, but what happens on camp, stays on camp.

Some bloke came all the way from Swindon. Nice one Al Pearsey, bring some mates next time. Scouse Bradshaw, get your priorities right. Sorry Stevie Smith, forgot you came from Swindon too. Good to see Steve Antonic who travelled all the way from Kabul again, plus it gave al-Qaeda a break in Afghanistan.

At the end of the evening, the gay boys and very old men departed for their accommodation. They were invited to breakfast on camp the next morning but the trouble with squaddies is that they are just too organised. By 08:30 hrs we had breakfasted and broke camp. Everyone just got on with the job.

It only remains to thank everyone who is still alive and turned up, and once again repeat the invitation to anyone who has scratched plastic or made a legible mark on paper to join us next year. It is very rewarding to meet up with the lads from the past and talk nonsense for 24 hours. Well done Nick Adnitt for getting Al Easingwood to arrange it all.

If anyone has any photographs, please send them to me and I'll collate a collection for Dave J.

The CROCS will start meeting soon to plan next year's event. Incidentally, anyone is invited to a CROCS meeting. There is talk about a new venue. If anyone has any ideas for an alternative event which we can join then please let me know.

The main criteria are:

1. Beer
2. Reasonably central England
3. Cheap but preferable free
4. On-site camping
5. Near-by accommodation
6. Ideally Armed Forces Day
7. No more suggestions from the A.R.S.E.S.

Nick Adnitt

The Print and Photo Reunion – A Trip Down Memory Lane

After hearing that both the 'Draughts Girls' and 'Fieldies' had held successful reunions there was a good deal of discussion about the 'pros and cons' of holding one for the Print and Photo technicians.....
so.....

On Saturday the 10th of September 2011 our inaugural reunion was held in the Officers' Mess at Hermitage. In attendance were 88 personnel who had entered Service either as an apprentice or an adult within the artisan trades of Military Survey. The evening was a simple affair which primarily entailed lots of 'chat', a very pleasant meal and a fair quantity of drink. There was a display of photographs most of which were retrieved from the staff room of the Survey Wing at Chepstow and the solid silver Heidelberg was on display with the family trees of both Print and Photo.

It was absolutely amazing to watch grown men greeting each other after so many years apart but it was even more amazing that it seemed as though they started to talk and continued to talk as though they had never been separated. Bearing in mind that some had not seen each other for thirty years it was just as though they were back at Barton Stacey or the Schoolreliving their careers, highs and lows.

Whilst trying to unearth candidates for the reunion and during the evening there were many fantastic stories:

Apologies to Ricky Braybrooke because 'someone' told us he had passed on to the 'darkroom in the sky'...thanks to Derek Pomeroy who identified this was fiction!

Making a phone call to Wally McGowan after tracking and tracing him for weeks and being the first member from Military Survey to speak with him for over 20 years!

Finding Tim Maskell in his forge in the New Forest which lead to Tom Forbes...always a pair!

Getting Cyril Wright to walk the streets in Devon to search for Bill Will but sadly not finding him.

Getting Doug Foulkes to fly in from South Africa and John Burnett from Thailand...brilliant effort.

Seeing Brian Frost, John Stamp, Ian Batt and Colin Gardiner stood together...memories!

Finding Pete Dove in Maidstone Jail and being relieved he was a warder!

Contacting Derek Edghill but spending hours on the phone talking to Joyce his smashing wife.

Lining up Paul Sleep, Mick Phillips, Alan Wagstaff, Sid Wray, Nick Milne, Pete Ladds, Shane Deakin, Bryan Osborne and Kev Hindle for a photo.

Mixing with our younger technicians such as Nick Wright, Harry Harris, Paul Willis, Chris Willis, Sean Owen, Dick Barton, Simon Tonks, Tom Wilson and Al Beeton.

Seeing Bob Percival, Jim Howcroft, Alfie Ryan, Gramps Parr, Graham Simpson, Dave Hazell, Al Howarth, Mark Huish and Chips Miller engaged in conversation.

Watching Bill Huckle, Dave Bowery, Graham Farquhar, Barry Hughes, Mic Farren, Chris Harden and John Phipps talking over old times.

Seeing the beautiful people reunited....Alan Matthews, Stuart Minton, Carl Saunders, Keith Fenton and Ken McMillan

Realising that sadly very few of our numbers were actually practicing their trades anymore.

Stories and more stories and sadly not enough space to mention everyone on this fantastic evening. The group photo was actually the most difficult challenge of the evening....why.....have you tried to line up 88 men; get them to put down their drinks; stop talking and face the camera!!...we nearly succeeded!



Paul Sleep putting the finishing touches to the display.



Long term friends together.

What next.....it would appear that, after analysing our questionnaire, we will be holding another reunion in two years time, which means researching other personnelJohn Fear, Mike Jacobs and of course....Bill Will. We did inform the 'Australian clan....John South, Ted May, Doug Arman and Alan Ogden so maybe one or all of them might be able to make it next time.

If anyone does have an address or contact details for any other print or photo techs please contact either Paul Sleep (01635204332) or Nick Collins (01635 204239).

Nick Collins

The Reunion and AGM 2011 at Ewell

It must be at least 10 years since we last enjoyed the hospitality of 135 Squadron at Ewell and we chose a lovely sunny warm day to do it. We were all welcomed with the usual refreshments and enjoyed chatting with the troops and colleagues in the drill hall. For those who were ex-permanent staff members the discussion was about how Mercator Barracks has changed over the years, both externally and internally. The Squadron was preparing for its annual exercise in Okehampton which brought back memories for some of us.

Major Mick James, OC 135, welcomed all and gave a presentation about the activities of the unit and what the future held for the TA. With the recent announcement by the government to upgrade the TA, the future looks good and the need to increase the efforts to recruit would become a higher priority. Major James emphasised the fact that the unit had the added value of the wide range of civilian skills within its ranks.

Major Hamish Cameron. 42 Regiment COS, gave an overview of Operations and Training. Currently there is the manpower equating to half a squadron strength deployed worldwide, with the bulk in Afghanistan. The move of the Regiment to RAF Wyton is proceeding according to plan, with the move still on for 2014.



Sapper Adrian Martin from the Southampton Detachment had just returned from a 6 month tour of Afghanistan and gave a presentation of his activities whilst there. He described how he set up a map depot in Camp Bastion using a couple of 40 foot containers and racking he managed to acquire by a variety of means. He is by profession a mechanical engineer so was able to use his skills to construct the racking and furnish the containers. It was interesting to note that he was assisted by friendly US servicemen and used 'Nuts' magazines as a means of obtaining the generally unobtainable.

Noel Grimmett

News from the Military Front

RSM's Column

With Christmas fast approaching, life in the Regiment continues fly by extremely fast, to be honest since taking over as the RSM it's been a bit like hanging on to the side of a bullet train and just hoping that I don't fall off. The requests for support continue to pile up in the Ops room and both slowly growing Squadrons are running hot trying to keep up.

The second of the Afghanistan TAGGs task has just finished so hopefully another article will soon hit my desk, which I hope will be included in the next dose of the military front update. The TAGGs tasks are a very current topic within the Regiment, proving a renaissance for the art of field survey. The next task is a slightly better location, Sri Lanka.

Training

Currently the Regiment is in the throes of the BCIP 5 Bowman radio uplift, this is mandatory training that is being delivered by the Bowman team, and is likely to last well into November. The training was visited by the CO and myself and I have to say I was struck by the professionalism of the team and their enthusiasm for their subject.

On top of this the Squadrons are busy training in their military skills, currently called MATTs, which meant that a visit from the CO and RSM was always on the cards. The first visit was to 13 Geo Sqn and began with a long trip down to Chickerell Camp, Weymouth. The thick jacket was soon removed as we were met by WO2 (SSM) Andrew at the gate in the blistering sun, handy when part of the visit would involve the RSM taking part in the march and shoot. The CO was annoyed to be missing this luxury but was still suffering from the broken ribs sustained whilst representing the Regiment at football during the RE Games.

As expected the march and shoot was hard work despite being just about the right distance given the terrain and heat. The sections all got through with one of the 'corporal' teams breaking the record for time, only to be disqualified when it was discovered that they had become geographically embarrassed on the route. The morale in 13 Geo Sqn is in very good order at the moment due to some inventive ideas of the new SSM keeping them busy.

Our second visit was to Okehampton to see the military training being carried out by 135 Indep Geo Sqn (V) on Dartmoor. Once again the day started very early to ensure that the 3-hour journey didn't eat into our day too much. Met by the OC, Major Mick James, we received a thorough briefing on the activities that the Sqn had completed, and the activities that we were going to see.

Armed with nothing more than a flask of coffee, we jumped into a waiting Landover and went on search of every pothole on the whole training area. On the way we spoke to two out of the three sections on the area, also staying to see the sections completing their medical rescue, mine prodding and even an ambush of some rather western looking insurgents.

135 Indep Geo Sqn - Nijmegen Marches 2011

For those who have not heard of the Nijmegen Marches, it is something to be experienced as a true test of stamina, endurance and tenacity, or rather the stubbornness to refuse to quit!

The Nijmegen Marches, or Vierdaagse, is the largest marching event in the world, and is a 100-mile road march over 4 days, in boots, with males required to carry 10kg of deadweight, (not including water). There is even a tulip named after the event – "Vierdaagse" named by tulip grower Paul Botman in 2005 after completing the event.

What makes this event truly spectacular is the sheer volume of participants on an international level. The 2011 marches saw 41,316 participants, including 5,000 military personnel, of which were 900 British personnel. The routes for civilians are set at 30, 40 or 50km per day. The number of walkers who finished was 38,422 (surprisingly the largest number of 1,209 dropped out on the first day).

The local residents have a holiday over the Vierdaagse, and give their support greatly to the troops. All the locals tend to line the roadside with themselves, gazebos, speakers, bands, and give lots of support and excitement from them. Many small children are on hand giving out sweets and fruit, as well as collecting souvenirs from the troops.

The Formation of TEAM 309

So on Saturday 18th July, 14 intrepid (or foolish?) individuals made of 135 (V) and 32 Engineers, from Germany met to join the British contingent at Heumansoord Camp, which housed soldiers from several different countries, including France, Germany, Switzerland, US, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Denmark to name a few. Upon the entrance is a notable pair of boots and helmet followed by a bandstand to welcome incoming troops.

The camp has a massive cook house serving decent square meals although continental breakfast meant no English breakfast (boo), main beer / finish tent / equally large hospital for pre and post treatment of feet and then the accommodation was split into nations and then further into male and female accommodation. Metal mesh decking formed the road system to prevent large vehicles from sinking into the quagmire of silty sand. The decking proved invaluable when the heavens opened on day 3 and the camp was flooded for a short period. The accommodation was raised off of the ground so this meant that the flood waters flowed harmlessly under our bunk-beds.

So on the lead up to the marches, on the Saturday, Sunday and Monday there was a feeling of excitement and apprehension, and it is also an excellent opportunity for different nations to meet and interact. Then on Monday evening comes the full realisation of what is to come: marchers starting from 0400 with breakfast starting at an unbelievable 0230-0530, 9 (or possibly longer) hours of marching in the day with three rest breaks before finishing at Heumensoord Camp.

Day One (The day of Elst). We were rudely awakened at 0330 by an annoyed Dutch dude singing loudly over the tannoy to start. After queuing for the packed cookhouse we donned our bergans and were ready to join the British contingent for our leaving slot. As there were so many military personnel attending, we were fitted into 'windows' for departure times- something similar to an airport!

Once we were finally off and on the road, we saw the sunrise as we travelled through the main part of Nijmegen and to a massive reception from the spectators! We crossed the famous bridge before travelling the route. This was our first insight into what the Nijmegen was all about, walking amongst thousands of people from all over the world in different uniforms and festival type get up. There were music stations galore, children handing out sweets and people dancing to the music.

We arrived at our first rest stop and headed for the Union Jack flag, whilst the Canadians, Americans and the other nations headed for their respective flags which were encompassed by rest areas; a marked out area on the ground, one for each team. We were greeted with a mixture of bananas, chocolate, squash, pasta and tea to boost us on our way. We finally arrived back to the camp through the welcome boots (The gate entrance to the camp consisted of two 5m high boots for the posts and a massive helmet for the arch) and into the beer tent, where several of the more creative teams performed a sketch before falling out. In this case, it was Ritchie's birthday so after getting a few hundred people within the beer tent to sing a hearty rendition of 'Happy' Birthday, we fell out and Ritchie was greeted with a beer, which he had to drink through his sweaty sock that he had worn for the entire day, eugh.

Day Two (The day of Wijchena). An earlier start of 0500 found us finding our stride and avoiding the sore bits on our feet that were starting to develop. It was not uncommon for impromptu 'horse

watering' stops; the squad would continue marching and after having watered the horse it was then a task to catch up with your squad and resume formation. This was helped by the Sergeant Majors high flying union jack which made locating the correct squad a lot easier. Lots of people, particularly the female variety were giving out free hugs and kisses and we felt only too obliged not to offend but to join in with local custom.

Day three (The day of Groesbeek). The hills! A much anticipated hill did not occur till after the first rest stop, we were surprised to find that Netherlands had hills. This was a welcome change to the relatively flat terrain that we had thus far experienced. It helped having music and supporters all the way up some of the hills which helped spur us on and forget about the weariness. By the half way rest point, Aubrey's Achilles tendon had 'exploded' and after being re-strapped by the medics and given a cocktail of pain killers, we continued with him and 'Hopalong Jim' setting the pace since their feet were in the worse state. A few more niggling injuries began to emerge; and there was a nice mix of sunshine with a torrential downpour to finish. In fact, it was comical how much rain fell in the space of 10 minutes, we were absolutely saturated but we kept face and marched smartly past the band where we dismissed and promptly fell out into the stream that had formed due to the sudden onslaught of rain. Good admin drills meant that we had one fresh dry pair of combat 95's for the final day of marching.

Day four (The day of Cuijk). The last day and possibly the hardest due to its sheer length and that our feet by now were at their sorest and tender. We had the longest leg on this day of 15km between rest stops. Once we had come to the finish and the 100 miles were finished, there was a small 5k trip down the 'via Gladiola' where we were presented with Gladiola, a historic tradition where Roman gladiators were showered with Gladioli.

The atmosphere was electric, words cannot describe how amazing it felt...probably like when celebrities walk down the red carpet and are greeted by fans, except this carpet was 100 miles long and the last 5km just took your breath away. The streets were lined 15m deep either side with thousands upon thousands of Dutch nationals, as well as every window balcony crammed to bursting and even people taking up positions on the roofs for a good vantage point. They were all screaming, cheering, dancing and wishing they had done it too..not. Rob, in his infinite wisdom, had made up a cardboard sign. On one side it said 'FREE HUGS ACCEPTED' and on the other side it said 'NO NOT YOU'. Throughout the course of the day a few females took up the offer and got free hugs; some males tried the same and were met with the sign being reversed 'NO NOT YOU'. When it came to the 5km parade through town, we hardly saw him since he was constantly being mobbed by insatiable Dutch women.

Nijmegen by Night

Nijmegen by night was effectively a mini free festival with outdoor stages, acts and beer tents galore open to the small hours of the morning. Music types included conga, African drummers, live band performances and lots of Europop to name a few. The hardest part of the Nijmegen marches was to tear yourself away from the eclectic crowd of the Nijmegen party scene and send yourself to bed, only to be rudely awoken a few hours later to start marching all over again (Likened to the film 'Groundhog Day')

By Lucy Bufton and Kieran Terry

I will sign off now, take care all and I hope that the name change is completed before my tenure ends.

'Once a Sapper, always a Sapper'!



***WO1 (RSM) Conetta RE,
Hermitage Station***

News from the Civilian Front

Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR)

In response to the SDSR announcement for a reduction of 25% in MOD's civilian staffing, 25,000 over the next five years, 52 DGC staff (majority being administrative grades) have been offered Voluntary Early Release in this current financial year. Departures will take place from 1 Oct 11 – 31 Mar 12. In addition we have received notice of further reductions to civilian manpower in the MOD between 2015 and 2020. The original baseline reductions were 25%, 25,000 civilian posts by 2015, now this has been extended to a total 33%, an additional 7,000 civilian posts from 2015-2020 bringing the total reductions to 32,000 civilians leaving 53,000 civilians by 2020.

The Department recently announced that consultation with the Trade Unions had started on a new Voluntary Early Release Scheme (VERS 2). The scheme would launch in November 2011 and run for two years from 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2014. Under the scheme, there would be 8 dates of departure over the two years. Applicants would be asked to state their preferred leaving date and also whether they would be prepared to consider an earlier or later date of departure. Precise details are awaited.

ICG Estate Rationalisation - DGC/JAGO Merger

The DGC/JAGO Merger Study was completed with the main recommendation being that a merger is not recommended without co-location.

Programme to Rationalise and Integrate the DIS Estate (Pride)

The study into the possible relocation of DGC to RAF Wyton has highlighted wider business benefits. The Investment Appraisal is now scheduled for early 2012 with no move envisaged until 2014-15 at the earliest.

Production – Support to Ops

DGC support to Ops continues with the production of a range of geospatial products, standard series topographic line maps and numerous digital datasets to meet specific customer requirements. Web mapping services have been developed for operational areas and geospatial viewers published across Defence. Work is continuing at a pace in the production of a 5K fully attributed digital dataset over the Helmand operational area.

Production Systems Upgrade

Work is continuing on implementing Foundation Divisions (formerly Production Division) Production Generation Upgrade. The new equipment and applications are being extensively used in supporting the production of operational products. Ultimately this capability will allow greater production flexibility and will lead to reduced production timelines and improved re-use of geospatial data.

Old Boys Reunion (Picnic in the Park) Next years event will take place provisionally on Friday 8 June 2012 (to be confirmed), those previous members of the Garrison, military as well as civilian who wish to attend should send their name, contact details directly to:

Tony Ruff – FGSSA Reunion Coordinator Foundation Division, Room 019, Hotine Building,
Defence Geographic Centre, Elmwood Avenue, Feltham, TW13 7AH
Tel: 0208 818 2702 or e-mail: Tony.Ruff943@mod.uk

Notable Retirees

August 2011 – Richard Kim, September 2011 – Nigel Kenny, October 2011 – John Swain

Pete Dowell

TREASURER'S INPUT – AUTUMN 2011

Bank Accounts as at 28 October 2011

Reserve Account £7,715.60
RE (GEO) Fund £2,001.77

Subscriptions as at 28 October 2011

So far 265 members have paid £2,120.

Discounting exempt members, 10 people who paid subscriptions in 2010 have not paid in 2011. It would be helpful if these members would pay their subs as soon as possible, or let the Secretary or Treasurer know if there is change of circumstances.

Donation

A contribution from the RE (Geo) fund of £538.19 was handed over to the Commanding Officer of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geo). This paid for various items for the relief of soldiers serving in Afghanistan.

Handover

Alf Isherwood and I are continuing to work on the handover of the accounts. Alf expects to take over the day to day running during the autumn and to finally assume control after the end of year audit is prepared.

Michael Gowlett

How About Joining The Military Survey Association!

If you attended one on the trade related reunions this year it means that you are interested in retaining old friendships from your days in uniform. That is what the Association does by means of four newsletters a year, running a very interesting website at www.militarysurvey.org.uk and meeting up each September.

Why not get in touch with Rod Siggs for details on joining – there's no dress code, no inspections and no parades – just the opportunity to keep in touch.

Rod is on 01252 654 599 or email him at rod.siggs@ntlworld.com.

Notice Board

The History of 19 Squadron 1977 – 93 and 512 STRE

Mike Nolan produced a comprehensive history of 19 Squadron covering its first 150 years – there is a copy on the website. Mike Stanbridge is now collecting material to complete the history from its 150th year until its disbandment in 1993.

He would appreciate details on kit used, major tasks and section/troop/unit exercises and deployments with dates. This history will be an important source document for the proposed 'Story of Military Survey' project that is still, albeit slowly, progressing.

Mike is also working on producing a history of 512 STRE and so similar information on that unit would be greatly appreciated.

Mike can be contacted at msdefassoc@btinternet.com.

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The Harrogate Army Apprentice – Our Story

Ex-Apprentice Fred Carslake from 57A Group has produced a compilation of stories by the lads who attended the Apprentice School at Harrogate. The book follows apprentices from their first days in uniform, then throughout their Army careers and on into Civvy Street.

The book can be purchased direct from Fred at 29 Coopers Drive, Yate, Bristol BS37 7XZ price £15 plus £2 postage.

Anecdotes

The Editor really appreciates receiving anecdotes or short pieces that may be of interest to readers and so many thanks to those who have sent contributions in over the last few months.

If your piece hasn't yet made it into the newsletter please don't take offence as I assure you all input will eventually make it into print. Getting each issue to fit the right number of pages (the hardcopy version is printed four up which drives the number of pages) whilst ensuring time sensitive material is included is quite a juggling act hence – some articles get put aside for a future edition.

Recent thanks go to Michael Sharp, Mike Gowlett, Ron Birch, Streak Hobson, Vic Moncrieff, Tony Webb and the author of 'My Ten Months with 6 RASLS' – I hate to admit it but I have lost track of the author's name – please let me know who you are – and accept my sincere apologies.

The bottom line is – please keep the articles flowing in.