



Issue 17 The Newsletter of THE ARMOURERS' ASSOCIATION 2010

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<b>President:</b>	<b>Mr. E. D. Stratford</b>
<b>Chairman:</b>	<b>Mr. E. Briscoe</b>
<b>Vice-Chairman:</b>	<b>Mr. N. Brown</b>
<b>Secretary:</b>	<b>Mr. R. D. Cotter</b>
<b>Deputy Secretary:</b>	<b>Mr. C. Dennis</b>

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## 56<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL REUNION

**You are invited to attend this year's reunion dinner:**

**Date:** Saturday 04 September 2010  
**Time:** 18:30hrs for 19:30hrs (Bar opens at 17:30hrs)  
**Venue:** The Victory Services Club  
The Trafalgar Room  
63/69 Seymour Street  
LONDON  
W2 2HF  
**Cost:** £28.00 per person

(Please make cheques payable to "The Armourers' Association" in Stirling only)

***Travel Note:** The nearest underground station is Marble Arch. Leave by the Oxford St. North side exit, turn right and after walking about 150m turn right into Edgware Road. Turn left into Seymour Street at the first set of traffic lights, approximately 100m. Secure parking is available at Cumberland Place, approximately 400m away. A discount is available to those who stay overnight at the VSC. The congestion charge does not apply at the weekends.*



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## *The Armourers' Association 56<sup>th</sup> Annual Reunion*

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### *Menu*

\* \* \*

*Steak & Ale Pie with Portobello Mushroom*

*Or*

*Tempura Battered Fish with Ginger in a Sweet and Sour Sauce*

*Both served with Potatoes, Seasonal Vegetables and Salads*

*Followed by*

*Strawberry Cheesecake or Fresh Fruit Salad*

*&*

*Coffee*

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### **Security**

Please be prepared to show VSC membership cards or prove identity at the door.

### **Dress**

**Gentlemen:** Lounge Suits/Jacket and Association tie (available from the Secretary).

**Ladies:** Appropriate to the occasion.

### **Guests**

Guests are limited to one per member.  
**LADIES ARE MOST WELCOME**

### **Overnight Accommodation**

Accommodation is available at the Victory Services Club for VSC members and non-members attending functions. Those wishing to stay the night should contact the Club.

Reservations: Phone: **020 7723 4474**;  
Fax: **020 7724 1134**; or e-mail:  
[res@vsc.co.uk](mailto:res@vsc.co.uk)

The cost is approx £42.50 per night in the Old Club House, for a single standard room including breakfast for VSC members. Non-members are welcome, when attending functions, but must pay at the time of booking. En-suite, double and twin rooms are available.

Membership details are available at their web site: [www.vsc.co.uk](http://www.vsc.co.uk) Single Annual Membership is currently £20.00.

### **Absent Friends**

If you are unable to attend the dinner but would like to pass on a message to your friends please inform the secretary when replying. If you are able to provide up-to-date information for members who are out of touch with the Association please feel free to do so and please pass on the Association's contact details to them.



## Assisted Attendance

Thanks to the generosity of our members, the Association is able to offer assistance to any member who is unable to attend the reunion for financial reasons. This assistance extends to all aspects of the reunion including travel, accommodation and the cost of the function. If any member feels they would be better able to attend the function accompanied by a guest, then assistance to defray the costs incurred by the guest will be considered. There is no restriction on the amount, with each request being considered on its own merits.

### All Requests Are Treated in the Strictest Confidence

Please write to, or phone the secretary, if you feel we may be of help. This scheme is a reflection of the Association membership who wish to help. Many of the donations received specifically mention the Assisted Attendance scheme. It is felt by all that we would be letting down any fellow member who cannot attend for financial reasons.

## Reunion Returns

Numbers attending this year's reunion **MUST** be finalised by **FRIDAY 20<sup>th</sup> AUGUST 2010**

Please ensure you avoid disappointment by returning your reply to the secretary as soon as possible. The **MAXIMUM** number we are able to accommodate is 90. Places will be allocated on a **FIRST Come FIRST served** basis, so don't delay your reply.

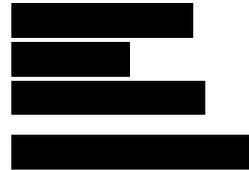
## Reply Form

The Reply Form is attached to the newsletter and in order to save on costs

replies will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

Return the forms to:

The Secretary  
The Armourers' Association



## A Message from the outgoing Secretary



*Chris Dennis receiving his SA80 from "Eric" Briscoe, [Chairman]*

I would like to start by **thanking the members of the Association** for the very kind gift of a Pewter SA80, suitably engraved, to mark my stepping down from the position of Secretary. **It is greatly appreciated** and was totally unexpected; it is suitably displayed in pride of place and admired by all!

As you will all know by now Bob Cotter has taken up the reins, and for those of you who have been able to visit our website, you will see he is working hard to bring us in to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. To



keep the site fresh and interesting Bob needs your support, photographs and articles, he can scan any items you would like to see included and will return the originals. [www.ukarmourers.org.uk](http://www.ukarmourers.org.uk)

As always it wouldn't be me if there wasn't an apology included. Many of you will have noticed some discrepancies in the balance sheet for 2008 and were too polite to mention it, but for those of you who did my genuine thanks for doing so. Once again I plead incompetence. I have passed the finances to Bob and asked him to check the figures and will make good any shortage that may show up. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Bob for his patience and tolerance during what has been a long drawn out hand over.

*Please accept my thanks for the support given me and kindness shown to me during my tenure as secretary.* As Bob will soon learn it is a very gratifying position to hold. Finally, and once again, *special thanks are due to Eric our President* who has always been on hand with advice and encouragement. *Ably supported by Betty, they epitomise the spirit of the Association.*

**Chris Dennis**

## President's Notes

I was *pleased* to be asked by our new secretary, Bob Cotter to add my pen'orth to this issue of the Arms News. Bob has a difficult job to take over from Chris *who has performed so ably* for our



benefit during his tenure of office, but I am sure that like most armourers that have been thrown in the deep end, he will soon take a grasp of his new responsibilities and will be giving us the same quality service as his predecessor. *I ask you all to give Bob your full support.*

The news from Iraq and Afghanistan is constantly to the forefront of our media coverage and rightly so; I take a great interest in it. This is for two reasons. Firstly, I was in Iraq and Persia for two years during the war, so have a good idea of the climatic conditions they have to contend with and secondly, by the very high respect I have of the professional ability of our REME soldiers who are competent, both in their trade skills and fighting skills. This is nowhere more evident than in the pages of the Craftsman. I have been impressed by the contributions that come from the units out there, many, from the lower ranks; give accounts in their own words of situations in terms with which we are familiar. It was always expected that a tradesman was a soldier as well, but the training towards that end has never been as thorough as it is today. In my training, pre-war, we were not taught the skills of field craft and skill at arms and I think that that was the norm for most, if not all of the supply services. I feel sure that during the period I am writing about, bayonets were not issued to the RAOC, my Corps at the time. I am sure that the powers that be were still using plans based on WW1 fighting, namely a more or less static front line with workshops and stores at the ports and bases well to the rear. This outdated thinking was tragically soon to be proved wrong by events at the time of the blitzkrieg and the fall of France in 1940, when the fast moving German troops by-passed the



defence lines and were soon attacking the bases and ports which were essential if the army was to remain an effective fighting force. Store men, clerks, butchers, drivers and workshop personnel of the RAOC and the RASC as well as other non-infantry 'base wallahs' suddenly found themselves behind hastily prepared defences on the perimeters of the ports of Calais and Antwerp and other bases armed with just their rifles and a few rounds facing well trained German troops and tanks. Despite the bravery of those concerned it was no contest. As armourers, our workaday handling of infantry weapons was our bread and butter, so we were halfway there and if we were attached to an infantry regiment were able to pick up, second hand, many of the field skills required. That this was often done to good effect, I know of two armourers who were called upon to command platoons during action and another awarded the Military Medal. I consider that the present day armourer has been trained to a syllabus much more suited both to his work and his operational requirements than ever his earlier predecessors were. They have my profound admiration as do all troops serving in that hostile environment.



*Three of our Senior Members  
LR: Eric Stratford (Hilsea 35) [President],  
Clem Hoyle (Hilsea 35) and  
Sam Perry (Hilsea 34)*

*I look forward to meeting many of you at the September reunion.* Please do not be offended if when seeing you I don't greet you by name. Names connected to their proper faces are a problem for me. *You are all my friends* and no slight is intended. Please stop me for a chat if you feel so inclined. *To those who are unable to attend the reunion,* for whatever reason, *I wish you well.* Do not neglect to send your apology to Bob and add a bit about yourself or an anecdote for inclusion in the Arms News. That plea for an anecdote goes to you all. Cheers.

**Eric Stratford**

## Chairman's Notes

The first thing I'd like to do is to *thank* Bob Cotter for his hard work putting together the newsletter, sorting out the association emails and myriad other unpaid and time consuming jobs. I'd also like to pass on *further thanks for the 15 years that Chris has done the job,* at times onerous and often unsupported.



It seems that the pace of life never seems to slow down; I was *grateful* to be elected Chairman in 2008 but must confess to all to have taken my eye off the job with a recent house move. On taking over the Chair, I promised a website, trips out to places of interest and an increase in younger attendance at the annual dinner. We have delivered the website [[www.ukarmourers.org.uk](http://www.ukarmourers.org.uk)] and two trips out went ahead; but I have



failed to increase the younger membership. *Therefore my goal for this year is to succeed in the third task.*

I proposed at the 2009 dinner (and the members attending agreed) that the Association pay the cost of dinner and a room at the VSC for the top Basic Armourer student passing through Bordon that year. Further the Association would pay for dinner only for the top 2-1 Armourer Upgrader in the same year. The hope being that the youngster will attend, maybe bring a few of their peer group and go back and spread the word.

The last things I wish to say are; spread the word to the serving members and see you at the dinner

**“Eric” Briscoe**

## Secretary's Notes

Sadly, at last year's reunion dinner, Chris Dennis stepped down as the Association Secretary after 15 years of service. He will be sorely missed in this role, but has agreed to stay on as Deputy Secretary for at least the first year. His assistance to me in taking over the role of secretary is greatly appreciated and I shall endeavour to continue building on his legacy.



## Association Accounts

Once again apologies for the errors in the previous accounts, the 2009 balance sheet shows that we are now correct

and that is a good starting point for me as the newly appointed Secretary.

A copy of the balance sheet for the period 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2009 is attached. Please indicate your acceptance, or otherwise, of these figures in the space provided on the reply form.

## Website

Our address: [www.ukarmourers.org.uk](http://www.ukarmourers.org.uk)

The Association website has gone through some changes since taking over as Secretary. It now gives visitors a chance to understand who we are and what we are trying to do.

Since the site in its new format was published we have received an astonishing number of visitors, *over 6,000 unique visits* at the last count. Additionally, the *number of pages viewed* by these visitors *has exceeded 50,000*. I didn't realise that we had so many armourers out there!

One thing does disappoint though, and that is the fact that with all of the visitors to the site, no one has commented on the content. Only a handful has submitted anything and these are mostly photographs. *So, come on*, it's your site lets have some feedback, and more importantly, "stuff" to put in the pages.

## Web Site Costs

During my tenure as Secretary, a gift from me to the Association will be payment of all costs associated with the web site. This includes the cost of transferring the web site into my name and a monthly fee currently of £8.99. The web site however, remains the property of the Association.



## Association Email Address

Email addresses are available to all of the Association members, so you can have your own unique email address "[yourname](mailto:yourname@ukarmourers.org.uk)"@ukarmourers.org.uk. The uptake has been slow so far, but there are plenty available for all.

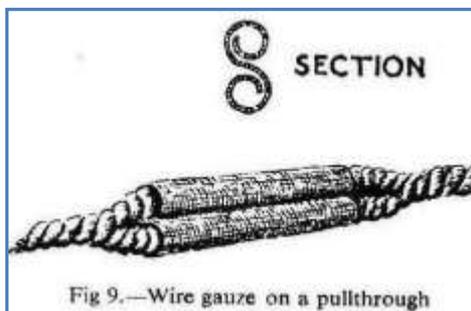
## Association Shop

The shop can be found on our website and sells Association memorabilia such as Ties, Plaques, Mugs, Glasses and Badges. There are plans to widen the range of goods available, but only if sufficient support is forthcoming. Let me know what you want to see in the shop and I'll do my best to include it.

## Bob Cotter

### Wire Gauze

In response to last year's article on how to use wire gauze,



**Pete Walker (Arborfield 59C)** writes:

"I found the article on gauze interesting as we still use it today occasionally to remove copper jacket fouling to get the bore gauges to run on 7.62mm & 5.56mm barrels. The gauze is cut to a

cleaning rod eye as with flannelette, in severe cases we use 'Milfoam' de-coppering spray and leave overnight before giving a really good scrub."

**Chris Dennis (Carlisle 65C)** writes:

"My first encounter with gauze after Carlisle was with my first unit in Cyprus. Loose tea was common currency with the cooks who wanted all manner of things making mending and sharpening. However, for some reason not disclosed to a brat new out of the box, we never owned a tea strainer, along with **Steve Hill (Carlisle 66C)** who had arrived at the same time; it seemed to be our task to ensure a brew was always available. Tea leaves in the brew were forbidden and the use of gauze, suitably folded together, four pieces at a time, was the answer. What chemicals and oils we ingested doesn't bear thinking about in these days of health and safety!"



### We Are Survivors

**(For those born before 1940...)**

*We were born before television, before penicillin, polio shots, frozen foods, Xerox, contact lenses, videos and the pill. We were before radar, credit cards,*



*split atoms, laser beams and ball-point pens, before dishwashers, tumble driers, electric blankets, air conditioners, drip-dry clothes..... and before man walked on the moon.*

*We got married first and then lived together (how quaint can you be?) We thought 'fast food' was what you ate in Lent, a "Big Mac" was an oversized raincoat and "crumpet" we had for tea. We existed before house-husbands, computer dating and "sheltered accommodation" was where you waited for a bus.*

*We were before day care centres, group homes and disposable nappies. We never heard of FM radio, tape decks, artificial hearts, word processors, or young men wearing earrings. For us "time sharing" meant togetherness, a "chip" was a piece of wood or fried potato, "hardware" meant nuts and bolts and "software" wasn't a word.*

*Before 1940 "Made in Japan" meant junk, the term "making out" referred to how you did in your exams, "stud" was something that fastened a collar to a shirt and "going all the way" meant staying on a double-decker bus to the terminus. In our day, cigarette smoking was "fashionable", "grass" was mown, "coke" was kept in the coalhouse, a "joint" was a piece of meat you ate on Sundays and "pot" was something you cooked in. "Rock music" was a fond mother's lullaby, "Eldorado" was an ice cream, a "gay person" was the life and soul of the party, while "aids" just meant beauty treatment or help for someone in trouble.*

*We who were born before 1940 must be a hardy bunch when you think of the way in which the world has changed and*

*the adjustments we have had to make. No wonder there is a generation gap today....BUT*

## ***By the grace of God.... We have survived!***

**Courtesy of Harry Meakin (Tel-el-Kabir 1949)**

### **Self Loading Rifle**



AQMS Clem Hoyle (Hilsea 1935) supervising an A/T Sgt? we think firing an XL8 pre production L1A1, on the ranges at Arborfield circa 1959. If anyone can identify the others and confirm the weapon, please contact the secretary with the information.



# The Army Apprentice National Memorial



Some of you may not be aware of the plans to install an Apprentice Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum. Re-produced below is an article from the April edition of the Craftsman magazine.

## The Army Apprentice National Memorial

The Beachley, Arborfield, Harrogate and Hadrians Old Boys' Association's Appeal Fund is aiming to provide a fitting Memorial to recognising the debt the country owes to the Army Apprentices and to honour those no longer with us.

The aim is to establish a lasting memorial to our boy soldiers at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) at Alrewas, Staffordshire by the summer of 2011.

Individual former Apprentices can now buy a Tablet to commemorate their years at their school/college, with their own named stone tablet, to be incorporated into the large circular stone base of the memorial. The tablet measures 225mm x 150mm (9"x6" larger than a house brick). Relatives and friends also have an opportunity to leave a lasting personal tribute to the formative years of a loved one who has passed on, with the buy a tablet scheme.

For more information please contact

Maj(Retd) Mike J Davis MBE,

[Redacted contact information]

Our President, Eric Stratford, contacted Mike Davis to express his concern that those who served their apprenticeship at places other than mentioned, seem to be excluded. This is not the case, just let them know where you served your apprenticeship.

You can visit the appeal web site at: [www.armyapprenticememorial.org.uk](http://www.armyapprenticememorial.org.uk)

And the National Memorial Arboretum web site at: [www.thenma.org.uk](http://www.thenma.org.uk)

# WELLINGTON

*A Message From The Duke Of Wellington To The British Foreign Office In London*

*Written from Central Spain, August 1812*

Gentlemen,

Whilst marching from Portugal to a position which commands the approach to Madrid and the French forces, my officers have been diligently complying with your requests which have been sent by H.M. ship from London to Lisbon and thence by dispatch to our headquarters.

We have enumerated our saddles, bridles, tents and tent poles, and all manner of sundry items for which His Majesty's Government holds me accountable. I have dispatched reports on the character, wit, and spleen of



every officer. Each item and every farthing has been accounted for, with two regrettable exceptions for which I beg your indulgence.

Unfortunately the sum of one shilling and nine pence remains unaccounted for in one infantry battalions petty cash and there has been a hideous confusion as the number of jars of raspberry jam issued to one cavalry regiment during a sandstorm in western Spain. This reprehensible carelessness may be related to the pressure of circumstance, since we are at war with France, a fact which may come as a bit of a surprise to you gentlemen in Whitehall.

This brings me to my present purpose, which is to request elucidation of my instructions from His Majesty's Government so that I may better understand why I am dragging an army over these barren plains. I construe that perforce it must be one of two alternative duties, as given below. I shall pursue either one with the best of my ability, but I cannot do both:

To train an army of uniformed British clerks in Spain for the benefit of the accountants and copy-boys in London.

Or perchance.

To see to it that the forces of Napoleon are driven out of Spain.

Your most obedient servant,

Wellington

**Courtesy of Chris Dennis (Carlisle 65C)**

## Obituaries

Sadly we must say our last farewell to the following Armourers who have passed on since the last edition of the news letter.

Gerald (Gerry) Peck Arborfield 43B

Gerry passed away last August and appears in the 1956 seniority roll as a Sgt, substantive 19/2/55, date of birth 7/12/1928 and supplied the picture of REME Inspection Team in Ipoh, Malaya 1957.

Also

Steven O'Garra former WO1 (ASM)

If anyone knows of Steven and can supply more information please contact the [Secretary](#)

&

### **A. S. 'STAN' AYLEY**

*March 1920 – April 2009*

Regrettably Stan Ayley passed away last April.

Stan was known to many of us, particularly those Carlisle Armourers where for many years Stan took the first term of trade training introducing us to the joys of General Principles and rifles.

Stan joined the Army as a boy at Hilsea in 1934, regrettably I am unable to give any of his service details, however a copy of the 1956 Armourers' Seniority roll shows him as an Armourer Quarter Master Sergeant (AQMS) with a



substantive date of 15 December 1953, I was just 3 years old!

As far as I'm aware on leaving the Army Stan took up the post of Instructor at the Army Apprentice School, Carlisle. He was to remain there until its closure in 1969-70(?). It was then up sticks and move down to Bordon where he continued his instructing in the General Engineering Wing. In 1982 a vacancy occurred in the Small Arms Wing and Stan moved the hundred yards or so to become an instructor on the RARDEN.

I believe Stan remained there until his retirement when he settled in Liss.

I was in the fortunate position of being able to see Stan from both sides of the fence, as a boy of 16 where I sat at the front of the class, no chance of sleep if your name came early in the alphabet, being introduced into the mysteries of the world of Small Arms & Machine Guns, the deep joy of EMERs and FORWARD. Like many of my contemporaries it often crossed my mind that what could this ancient old man possibly tell me that was of any use to me in the modern army?

However I was lucky in 1981 I became Dougie Smale's dogsbody as the Armourer Sgt in the Small Arms Wing where I was fortunate enough to be able to call people like Stan colleagues, I learnt a lot about him and people like him over numerous cups of tea in the staff room.

Stan was a staunch supporter of the Association and sadly decided our 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary dinner would be his swan song. We are always poorer for the loss of any member, but the loss of Stan who gave so much to the following generations is especially sad.

## Help Wanted

*Mike Homard*, who is known to some of you from previous requests, has a working Bedford RL 3 Tonner. It is set up as a living history display of a Battalion Armourer Sgt working in the field. He has recently acquired a MOBAT Anti-tank weapon which will need some restoration and has a request for the following:

Mike needs any tools; gauges; E.M.E.R's; A.E.S.P's; I.S.P.L's and user handbooks that you might have lying around. In addition, *anything* else related to our respected trade, including ordnance weapon related items, which would all be gratefully received.

More information, including pictures of the MOBAT restoration as it unfolds, can be found on the Association web site.

## Quote Of The Day

Remember, if you ever need a helping hand, you'll find one at the end of your arm. As you grow older you will discover that you have two hands. One for helping yourself, the other for helping others.

[Audrey Hepburn](#)