



Arms News

Issue 13

The Newsletter of the ARMOURERS' ASSOCIATION

2006

President:

Mr. E. D. Stratford

Chairman:

Capt. P. F. Feeney R.E.M.E.

Vice Chairman

Mr. N. Brown

Secretary:

Mr. C. Dennis

52nd ANNUAL REUNION

You are invited to attend this year's reunion details are:

DATE: Saturday 2nd September 2006

TIME: 1830hrs (Bar Opens 1730rs) Dinner 1930hrs

VENUE: The Victory Services Club
The Trafalgar Room
63/69 Seymour Street
LONDON
W2 2HF

Travel Note: Nearest Underground station is Marble Arch. Leave by the Oxford St. North side exit, turn right and after walking about 100yds turn right into Edgware Rd. Turn left into Seymour St. at the 1st set of traffic lights, approx 75yds. Secure parking is available at Cumberland Place, approx 400yds away. A discount is available to those who stay overnight at the VSC. The congestion charge does not apply at the weekend.

COST: £24.00 per head.

Please make cheques payable to: "***The Armourers' Association***"

Please Note: Cheques made payable to any other payee creates accounting problems.

The introduction of the Euro mean we now have to pay a handling charge on "Eurocheques" and we have yet to deal with our first payment in euros.

CATERING: (Seated Buffet)	Starter, Various Cold Meats, Salad, or, Chicken Curry with Rice & Condiments <i>Followed by:</i> Cheesecake or Gateau, Cheese board & Coffee
SECURITY:	Please be prepared to show membership cards or prove identity at the door. If you wish to have a membership card sent to you please inform the Secretary.
DRESS:	Gentlemen Lounge suits/Jacket and Association tie (available from the Secretary). Ladies: Appropriate to the occasion.
GUESTS:	Limited to one per member. LADIES ARE 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 Club Reservations: Phone: **020 7723 4474**; Fax: **020 7724 1134**; or e-mail: res@vsc.co.uk

The cost is approx £36.00 per night 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 Annual Membership is currently £15.00

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 pass on up to date information of other members who are out of touch with the Association please feel free to do so and pass on the Associations contact details to them.

ASSISTED ATTENDANCE:

Thanks to the generosity of our members, the Association is able to offer financial assistance to any member who is unable to attend the reunion because of prohibitive costs. 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 help to defray the costs incurred by the guest will be considered. There is no minimum or maximum amount each request being considered on it's 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 Associations membership 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 was unable to attend for purely financial reasons.

ASSOCIATION FUNDS

The President and Chairman, on behalf of all members, wish to thank all those who made donations during the last year. It is your continued generosity that allows the Association to be run on a no subscription basis and the Assisted Attendance Scheme to be offered. It is hoped you, particularly, will feel a warm sense of satisfaction at the Associations ability to make charitable donations, (See below)

ASSOCIATION ACCOUNTS

A copy of the balance sheet for 1 January 2005 to 31 December 2006 is attached. Please indicate your acceptance of these figures, or otherwise, in the space provided on the reply form.

The sharp eyed amongst you will have noted a mistake in last years balance sheet. Although it showed the presentation of 2 Association ties. The £71.98 for the decanters being included in 'Purchase of Glassware'. Therefore £19.00 was missing from the expenditure column. **Rowland 'Eggy' King (Arborfield 58B)** my Nemesis regarding all things financial was kind enough to point this out to me. Once again I hope we've agreed this is about my competence, or lack of it, rather than an honesty matter

I hope this years accounts are more accurate.

CHARITABLE DONATIONS

Copies of the receipts and acknowledgments received from the REME Benevolent Fund, BLESMA and St. Dunstan's are available upon request. Please supply a s.a.e if you are unable to collect at the reunion.

In order to save on costs replies will not be acknowledged unless specifically requested.

ASSOCIATION TIES Etc.

The secretary holds Association ties, lapel badges, plaques and glassware in stock. A list of the most popular items, with prices, is on the reverse of the reply form, which may be used for ordering. Other items may be available if the demand exists. Please contact the secretary with any ideas you may have.

ASSOCIATION MEMBERSHIP

An up to date copy of the membership list is available upon request. Please supply a stamped S.A.E. (Size C5) with your request.

RETURNS

Numbers attending this year's reunion must be finalised by **Friday 26th August 2005**. Please try to avoid leaving it until the last minute to get your reply into the post. In an emergency a phone call or e-mail will do, but it means the secretary will swoop on you on the night for payment.

OBITUARIES

It is with great sadness that we have to inform you that the following Association members have passed away since the publishing of the 2004 Newsletter.

David Lionel Jeffrey (Arborfield 45)	October 2004
Edwin (Eddie) Stone (Hilsea 1930)	13 April 2005
John McCormick (Bordon 1984)	20 November 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF THE REPLY FORM

David Lionel Jeffrey

**Submitted by John Johnson (Arborfield
56B) S.A. Armourers' Association**

'Jeff' as he was known to his friends and colleagues, passed away on 9 October 2004 after a short but debilitating illness, aged 73.

Jeff was an Armourer Apprentice at Arborfield between 1945 and 1948. He was then attached to the Norfolk Regiment before serving with 6 Inf. Wksp, Irish Guards, 4 Inf. Wksp. And the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. He was seconded to the Trucial Oman Scouts in 1957 and the 1st Bn. King's African Rifles in 1961. There followed a tour with the Malawi Army before Jeff returned to the UK and SEME Bordon in 1970 from where he finally retired in 1972.

Jeff then emigrated to South Africa and worked for Paramount Arms until 1980; he then joined the South African Railways Police (SARP) as an Armourer. The SARP amalgamated with the SA Police in 1987, where Jeff served until retirement in 1997, by which time he was the Senior Instructor at the Police Training Centre for Armourers. Jeff is survived by his wife, a son and daughter. He will be missed by many; it was an honour to have known him.

Eddie Stone

The sad news of Eddie's death was announced in The Craftsman of June 2005, aged 90. Eddie joined the army as a Boy Armourer in the RAOC in 1930. He eventually retired as a WO1, Armourer Sergeant Major. He will be known to many of the ex-Carlisle apprentices as a civilian instructor in the Small Arms Wing there.

Doug Smales

Sadly news has been received of the passing of Dougie Smales.

Dougie was an Art Wpns who upon retirement became an instructor at Bordon. He eventually became the civilian head of

the Small Arms Wing, where he "endeared" himself to many of the Armourers and Art Weapons who passed through the Wing.

Often seen as abrasive, I had the dubious privilege of being the 'Wing Dogsbody' in the early 80s, working closely with Dougie on a daily basis I soon realised that beneath that gruff exterior he always had the interests of the Weapons trades at heart and would frequently stick his neck out to protect his staff and students when he believed an injustice was being done.

If any of you have more details of Dougie's career either in or out of uniform please let me know. (*The Secretary*)

50th ANNIVERSARY DINNER

The following article was published in the January 2005 edition of the Craftsman magazine.

THE ARMOURERS' ASSOCIATION 50th REUNION DINNER

Scribe: Eric Stratford

On Saturday 4th September 2004 ninety Armourers, gun fitters, weapons tiffies and their guests sat down to a special reunion dinner in the Alamein Room of the Victory Services Club near Marble Arch. It was the 50th reunion since the Association was formed. Our special guests were DEME(A), Brig. S. J. Tetlow MBE ADC and Mr. Anthony Pontifex, Master of the Armourers and Brasiers' Company accompanied by his wife, Jan.

Members assembled early in the evening and our honoured guests arrived at 7.00 pm and were greeted by the president of the Armourers' Association, Mr **Eric Stratford**, the chairman, Capt. **Peter Feeney REME**, and secretary, Mr **Chris Dennis**. The dinner was excellent and the conversation flowed freely; it was obviously a meeting of old friends and a recall of former days. One or two of those present were there for the first time but others, such as **Mr Stan Ayley** probably our oldest member present having

enlisted in May 1934, had seen quite a few of the previous forty-nine.

A letter from HM the Queen, sent in reply to a message of loyal greetings sent from the assembly, was read out. Her Majesty thanked us and wished us a successful and enjoyable reunion.

After the Loyal Toast the speeches were short and interesting. DEME(A) brought some of us oldies up to date with a few facts about the changes in the Corps as they affected armourers; he was confident that the new structure would prove successful.

Mr Pontifex gave a brief history of the Armourers and Brasiers' Company and their connection with the army. Mr Stratford spoke of the early days of the Association and the respect with which the present day armourer and weapons tiffy was held. As a postscript he added that our secretary had received a letter from no doubt our oldest member, **Capt. (Ret'd) R.G. Dargan (AIA)** who on this very day 76 years ago joined the RAOC as an apprentice armourer. Now aged 90 he is still active and occupies his time using a modern lathe to do the odd turning job with the benefits of skills he learnt on a treadle lathe during his training.

To mark this special reunion each of the honoured guests was presented with a suitably inscribed glass decanter and likewise all those present had on the table before them a very nice wine glass similarly inscribed which was theirs to take home as a memento of the evening.

The evening seemed to pass to quickly, some had late trains to catch but others could stay later and retire to the very comfortable accommodation provided by the club and meet again at breakfast. It was generally agreed that it was a very successful evening that boded well for future reunions.

LOST & FOUND

The 'eagle eyed' **Stan Ayley (Hilsea 1934)**, and senior member present at the dinner,

spotted and handed to the secretary a REME tie clip, gold in colour, with a blazer button style centre bearing the REME cipher. Please let the secretary know if you would like it posting to you or if you will collect on the 3rd Sept. Without wanting to sound impertinent if Stan, who I suspect has been collecting his pension for a couple of years now can spot something like that. What chance did we have of getting something passed him when he was instructing at Carlisle and Bordon?

50th REUNION WINE GLASS

There are 4 of the commemorative reunion wine glasses left, any member who would like one please let the sec know, NO COST. First come first served, but preference will be given to those who have not previously received one.

RETURN MATCH

An invitation has been received for the President and Secretary of the Association to the Master's Day Dinner to be held Armourer's Hall. As you may imagine this has been eagerly accepted and it is hoped that a suitable article, with photograph, will be submitted to the Craftman in due course, to be repeated in our next Armsnews.

SECRETARIES NOTES

PEWTER WEAPONS

The 1:4-scale model of the No. 4 Rifle, in pewter, which was one of the raffles, prizes at the dinner created so much interest that I have approached the manufacturer, handily located about 20 minutes drive from me and negotiated a sizeable discount in price for his range of models. This is approximately 20%, we paid £56.45 (incl. p&p) for the No4, I am able to get exactly the same for £34.00 + p&p. To gain these prices I have had to buy some stock and currently hold small numbers of the following:

No. 4	£34.00
-------	--------

No.1 (SMLE)	£34.00
No4 (T)	£36.00
Bren, on bipod	£36.00
L7 (GPMG) bipod folded	£36.00
L7 (SF) on tripod	£47.00
L1A1 (SLR)	£36.00
Sten Mk 2	£28.00
L2A3 (Sterling SMG)	£28.00
Vickers	£55.00

All of the above are 1:4 scale and come mounted on a wood base.

Mini No4	£12.50
Mini Bren	£12.50

Both approx 7" long mounted diagonally on a wood plaque 7" x 5"

Mini Sten Mk5	£7.50
---------------	-------

3.75" long mounted on wood base 2.5" x 2.75"

Postage will be at cost; I can usually ensure adequate packaging by scrounging. Should you wish to order one and collect it at the dinner there will be no charge, other than me hanging around the bar looking thirsty.

Other weapons may be available, Eric has had a Vickers, in all it's glory made up, recently delivered it has received the seal of approval! Jim Newton has had a Garand Rifle and there is certainly a 105mm Light Gun available for those of you who still feel the urge for something on wheels!

RELOCATION of the REUNION

Without going into a list of excuses I have been unable to progress this and offer an alternative venue for the 2006 reunion. I am currently speaking with **Peter Laidler (Carlisle 63A)** who works at the SASC RHQ in Warminster. He informs me that the RSM is very pro service organisations making use of his Mess facilities. There are a lot of details to sort out and if it comes to fruition I will send out details in an additional newsletter. In the meantime as a fall back position I will book the VSC and pay a

deposit (approx £75.00) to secure the Victory Room for 2 Sept 2006.

THE VETERANS AGENCY

The following is copied from the May 2005 issue of The Craftsman and may be of use or interest to some members.

The Veterans Agency is an Executive Agency of the MoD.

What information can the Veterans Agency help with?

- Medals. Lost & replacement medals.
- Military Graves. Where can I find the military grave of a relative?
- Keeping in touch:
- Old Comrade Organisations. Tracing old comrades.
- Service Records. How do I obtain my Service Record?
- Welfare. How can I or my family get assistance?
- Veterans' issues:
 - MOD property and houses for sale
 - Regimental memorabilia and accoutrements
- Claiming a pension:
 - War Displacement Pension
 - War Widows or War Widowers Pension

Contact details:- Phone lines are open Mon to Thurs 0815 – 1715hrs. Fri. 0815 – 1630hrs.

Freephone Help Line 0800 169

Text-phone: 0800 169 3458

Tel (Overseas) +44 1253 866 043

E-mail: help@veteransagency.mod.uk

Internet: www.veteransagency.mod.uk

Address: Customer Service Manager' Veterans' Agency, Norcross, Blackpool, FY5 3WP

Still Thriving.....

DISCIPLINE

From the Craftsman Feb 2005:

Maj. M. G. Couture (Retd) writes:

I have recently been looking through some back numbers of *The Craftsman* where I saw the obituary for **SSgt 'Paddy' Meagher (Hilsea 1937)**. It reminded me of a time in Hong Kong when we were discussing discipline. He told me the following story that readers may find amusing, or even enlightening.

Paddy had recently joined the army as a Hilsea Boy and had gone home on his first leave. The uniform, in those days, was the high-necked jacket with the collar held together by two brass clips. This was quite uncomfortable when clipped up and most wearers, unless on parade, preferred to leave them undone. Now Paddy's father was the RSM of one of the Irish Regiments and as such the family lived on camp. It was the first day of his leave and Paddy dressed in his uniform had strolled out into the camp. As he reached the regimental square he heard a bellow of '*Put that boy in the guardroom, his collar is undone*'. The RSM had spoken and clang, Paddy was inside. It took his mother three days to get him out!

His final words to me that day were 'Now that's discipline laddie'.

EXERCISE PARTING SHOT

Abridged from the Small Arms Review Aug. 2003 (Apologies for the delay)

On 14th July 2002 at Stickledown Range, Bisley, Exercise Parting Shot was held to mark the 80th anniversary of the demise of The Machine Gun Corps, 1915 – 1922. Ten Vickers M.G.s were prepared under the watchful eye of **Peter Laidler (Carlisle 63A)**.

Stoppages?

Not hardly. These ancient masters of the battlefield chewed up over 40,000 rounds of ammunition that day, with only three

stoppages. One broken firing pin, one firing pin with dirt under it that worked after clearing (*cleaning?*), and one broken belt feed slide top feed lever. An occasional firing pin breakage is normal, but the broken feed lever is truly unusual and can only be assigned to the arrival of "Hurricane Dolf" – our own Dolf Goldsmith* who was operating that particular Vickers when the breakage occurred. The outstanding maintenance and attention to detail that Captain Laidler's crew applied paid off in the virtually stoppage free event, and the exception of the feed lever breaking did not tarnish their performance. We all jokingly held Dolf responsible for that, blaming it on some jinx that he brought across the puddle with him. An outstanding day for the Vickers Gun, and for the soldiers who maintained them.

* *Dolf Goldsmith is a Vickers Historian, author of 'The Grand Old Lady of No Man's Land' among other machine gun books.*

P.S. Did my eyes deceive me or did I recognise the shape of the body lying alongside Jeremy Clarkson in the programme "Inventions That Changed The World: The Gun"? Who was that fine(?) figure of a man feeding a belt into a Vickers, as Jeremy waxed lyrical about Hiram Maxim?

Not quite up to Stan A's standards but I can still spot them (Sec.)

& ANOTHER N.D. or All Well that Ends Well

The tales continue to arrive, this time the name has been withheld to protect the guilty but I know who he is and will see him at the bar!

Having arrived at Warminster from Carlisle I was a 3rd Class, but probationary 2nd class Armourer. I was accompanying Cpl. John Sparrow and Sgt. Wilf Atrill on Bulford ranges with a couple of the companies from the Welch Regiment, with their L1A1 rifles and L4 LMG's. If I remember correctly, during our apprenticeship, we'd been

instructed by Harry Weekes on the old Mk 3 .303" Brens, but here, in the real world, we were using a similar version but in 7.62mm, called the L4 LMG. The fatherly Wilf and John left me on the range with the Bren crews as the Brens were just SO reliable that nothing ever went wrong with them! I remember the kindly Wilf reminding me that if there was a failure, just to remember to first check that the gunner hadn't changed the change lever from SAFE to AUTO with the trigger squeezed.

Suddenly there was a call for an Armourer as one of these magnificent Brens had jammed up. Not only had it jammed up, but it had jammed up BIG time. I strutted to the firing point full of newfound enthusiasm and tool kit in hand, looking as though I knew what I was doing. Looks can be deceptive though and deception was the order of the day here I can tell you! I carefully peered down into magazine well and into the bowels of the red-hot Bren. There I saw the piston extension and piston partially jammed back with the jammed partially closed, with a fired case stuck to the face and a few other empty cartridge cases jammed solidly underneath the ejection slot in the piston extension as though stuck between the partially closed ejection opening cover. If my memory of Harry Weekes was correct, the ejection opening cover should be OPEN during firing!

One of the crew said in his undecipherable Welsh accent "...it's shagged mate." I said 'what happened then?', to which he replied "... don't ask me, I got it like this!" I've since learned that these are technical phrases, much used by all when describing faults to REME Armourers. I said words to the effect that "...I know what it is, I can't clear it here, I'll have to take it off the firing point."

Truthfully I didn't know what it was at all. Much the same as I didn't know or understand the trigger mechanism of the No. 8 rifle. I just learnt it parrot fashion and bluffed my way through **Stan Ayley's** (See lost & found) end of 4th term exam!

With that I took the totally jammed up Bren to the end of the firing point and pointed it in the general direction of France while I set about getting the bloody thing apart and clearing the broken and crushed shell cases out of it. I tried everything finally deciding that if I dislodged the broken/jammed up cartridge cases from under the piston extension and now beyond repair ejection opening cover, the breech block and piston would be free.

It was that simple! So, with the gun upside down across my lap, with my feet dangling in the fire trench I set about gently pounding seven bells out of the ejection opening cover with the brass drift and the hammer, easing it forward a bit, then back, then forward and so on. In doing so I was able to pick out bits of crushed shell cases bit by bit. Soon it would be clear and my range credibility (the 60's equivalent of modern 'street cred') would rocketing skywards. It wasn't the only thing that would soon be rocketing skywards either, I can tell you!

Just as I'd cleared the last pieces of broken and crushed shell casing from the bottom of the gun, there was an almighty bang that distinctly sounded as though it came from the very gun I was working on. The brass drift went one way, the hammer another as the breech block, piston and piston extension reciprocated followed by another spent cartridge case that shot out of the bottom of the upside down Bren being cradled in my lap, and flew up in to my face. 'Dear oh deary me' I tried to exclaim...or words to that effect. But the words wouldn't come out. But. Those famous words last uttered by the Mayor of Hiroshima did as I muttered 'What the ****ing hell was that?' The range detail were not happy little rabbits either!

You've guessed it already of course. The subsequent investigation, kindly conducted by the sympathetic Wilf Atrill and John Sparrow, overseen by the AIA from 27 Command Workshops decided that the ejection opening cover spring or catch had apparently failed allowing the cover to move to the rear with the piston extension. The

first shell case had partially jammed and stopped the gun. The gunner had done the first IA and fired again. The same thing had happened again but this time they couldn't do anything, not even 'Cock Gun, Mag Off' because it was jammed solid. Only this time they simply removed the magazine and called the unsuspecting Armourer who didn't identify that the round half in the chamber was a LIVE round on its way in and not a spent round on its way out. Result, as the unsuspecting Armourer cleared the spent and crushed cases, the breech block et al was able to slide home, chamber the live round hanging half in and half out of the chamber and..., well the rest is history.

Things were a lot easier in those days and the beautifully written glossy report I signed I don't remember writing, and I certainly don't remember telling them I saw bullet strike the ground 50 yards or so in front of me and well away from anyone on the range. The EME told me later that this single fact had showed the care and attention to detail I'd shown during the extremely tricky stoppage that would have taxed an even a more experienced Armourer. I don't know which planet he was on, but it wasn't the same one as me! Some weeks later I was called in and told that the matter was simply a mechanical failure. The AIA, who ran the REME shooting team, of which, coincidentally, I was also a keen member and good shot, appended to the report that I should not be chastised over the matter which had highlighted a serious problem.

Some weeks later while spotting for me at league shoot against the RMCS, the AIA whispered quietly in my ear '*...don't make a cock-up like that again. We might not be in a position to help next time. Another thing, you're due to be posted soon, is there anywhere you'd like to go?*'

(Edited by the Sec.)

ARMOURERS AT WORK



Sgt Arthur Maddock (Hilsea 1937)

Carrying out the monthly check of BESA 7.92mm co-axial machine guns for Cromwell tanks. 4/7th Royal Dragoon Guards, Camp 21, Palestine March 1948. (*The eagle eyed amongst you may note the "New" REME cap badge being worn, just over 6 months old; pattern sealed 14 Aug 1947*)

NEXT YEARS REUNION

The reunion for 2006 will be held at the Victory Services Club on:

SATURDAY 2nd SEPTEMBER 2006

PLEASE KEEP IN TOUCH

Please return your reply form to the secretary:

