



Founded 1955

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Phone: [REDACTED]

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DEME(A)
Regimental Headquarters R.E.M.E

[REDACTED]

6 September 2000

Sir

Almagamation of the Armourer and Gun Fitter Career Employment Groups (CEGs)

I write to you in my capacity as the secretary of The Armourers' Association to express our concern over the proposed amalgamation of the Corps' two weapons trades. The reasoning behind this move is no doubt sound and done for the benefit not only of the Corps but also for the Army as a whole, and in the light of increasing commitments needing to be met by limited resources will provide a much more flexible resource.

It is, of course, not our place as a social organisation to try and influence the policy or decision making processes of the Corps, but we would ask if it is really necessary to abandon the old and very much respected title of "Armourer" for the new combined trade. The new tradesman of the Weapons Mechanic CEG will after all be fully trained as "Armourers" and employed as such until they reach their 2-1 course and from this point on begin to move towards their specialities in Light or Heavy Weapons, they will still be Armourers and will take many of the skills learnt on Small Arms, including the turret mounted systems of 30mm RARDEN and Chain Gun with them, and indeed that experience gained on Light Weapons will serve them well as they face the new challenges of their specialist roles with Artillery and Armoured Corps units.

We are, we believe, rightly proud of our heritage as Armourers, we jokingly describe ourselves as the second oldest trade in the world. We trace our lineage back through history to the 13th Century when a Gilbert le Armeurer is mentioned as a witness at an inquest in 1278.

Records of an Armourers Company, known as the "Companie of the Brothers and Sisters of the Mysterie of St George of Armourers" are to be found in London. These were the forebears of the present Armourers and Brasiers Company of The City of London with whom the REME Armourers still have association. The Company present The Armourers and Brasiers Medal to the Champion Armourer at CORPSAAM each year.

The Armourer has historically always supported the Army and we believe we are the only trade still found in the Army that is mentioned by Shakespeare, in Henry V on the eve of the battle Henry in his speech says "Now thrive the Armourers". Later in June 1858 the Corps of Armourer Sergeants was formed, by Royal Warrant, to ensure that the high standards of equipment maintenance required by the Army were met by N.C.O.s trained to a uniformly high standard. The responsibility for ensuring this high quality of tradesmen was maintained was eventually taken on by the Army Ordnance Corps in 1895 when they Absorbed the Corps of Armourer Sergeants by Army Order. Interestingly the Army Ordnance Corps also absorbed The Armament Artificers R.A. who found their roots in the Corps of Ordnance Artificers (Formed in 1882), surely the forebears of the present Gun Fitters, both trades remained with the Royal Army Ordnance Corps (Having become Royal in June 1918) until the formation of our Corps in October 1942.

It was not my intention to give you a history lesson when I sat down to write to you, and I hope you will forgive the impertinence. I do however also hope you will recognise why we hold in equal measure our pride of being members of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and also being Armourers and Artificers Weapon. Some may say "What does it matter what you are called?" and I'm sure that whatever their trade title the men and women entrusted with the care of the Army's weapons will continue to maintain the high standards that we all aspire to, but that little bit of extra pride, that tradition instils, cannot be measured, as any soldier in any of our famous regiments will tell you.

Founded in 1955 the Armourers' Dinner Club was formed with the object of:

Fostering and maintaining the standard of comradeship and esprit-de-corps that has always been associated with the Armourers' Section of the RAOC and REME and subsequently the Weapon Artificers of REME.

Membership is open to any Armourer who served in the RAOC and all Armourers and Artificers Weapon serving or who have served in REME. We currently have a membership list of over 300 ranging from a retired Lt. Colonel, who joined as an apprentice Armourer at Hilsea in September 1926, to several Craftsmen who completed their training in the late 90's and are now serving with units across the globe.

I reiterate that we do not seek to affect policy or change decisions that have been made after careful consideration of all the available facts. We would however ask that you use your influence to ensure that our trade, or at least the title of Armourer, is not consigned to the scrap heap of modernisation.

The practical benefits alone must be worth considering. How many publications, both in equipment support and user instructions will need to be amended to delete Armourer and insert Weapons Mechanic? How many unit sign writers will need to produce new signs for the unit Weapons Mechanics Shop? Will our customers ever accept that they no longer have an Armourer's Shop to turn to when something that doesn't fall neatly into a specific category needs making or fixing.

Finally, we are not dinosaurs who will not accept change, indeed we believe that anything that is not constantly evolving must be dead, but we would ask that you consider the following as an alternative to the new CEG of Weapons Mechanic.

Armourer (Light Weapons) [Armr (L)]

and

Armourer (Heavy Weapons) [Armr (H)]

These titles would obviously become of greater significance after the 2 - 1 upgrader course where an individual would begin to specialise and gain expertise in a specific area.

Please accept my apologies for the length of this letter on a subject that may only be of importance to members of the Association. We do not believe we are more important than any other trade within the Corps, however the way in which Armourers are deployed, quite often as the only REME badged individual in a unit, means we develop a sense of pride and independence that reflects well on the Corps as whole.

Thank you for the time you have taken to read this letter.

I remain, Sir, your obedient servant.

C. Dennis
Secretary
The Armourers' Association

(S/Sgt Armourer 1968-1992)