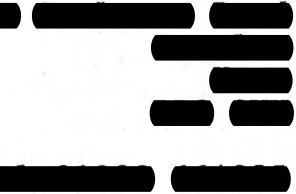




*Founded 1955*



September 2000

HRH the Duke of Edinburgh  
Colonel-in-Chief  
Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

Your Royal Highness

Sir,

Amalgamation of the Armourer and Gun Fitter  
Career Employment Group

I am writing as President of the Armourers' Association to beg your indulgence in taking the time to read this letter. It concerns a matter of import to many serving and ex-Service members of REME.

I refer to the change of trade name that has been suggested for the trade of Armourer resulting from a manning review which has recommended the amalgamation of the trades of armourer and gun fitter.

As you will know the armourer is a man or woman who has the task of maintaining the personal and support weapons of a fighting unit in peace and war. For many years until mechanisation in 1937 the armourer and his assistant were the only mechanics or technicians in an infantry unit. They were called upon to do many jobs beside armouring. Consequently they became men of many skills and valued members of the regiment. Their record of service is a proud one. They are jealous of their well-earned reputation and rightly so.

Armourers have been part of the army since the earliest battles were fought. The earliest known mention of them in our history is in the thirteenth century. Since then they have been known by their works and have been mentioned by Shakespeare. Their name is carried on in the Armourers and Brasiers' Company of the City of London which through the association with the first President and founder of our Association instituted the award of the Armourers and Brasiers Medal at the Annual Skill at Arms Meeting, then held at Bisley.

It is for consideration that the two other Services with their much more limited armourer requirement have retained the name of armourer. From my experience gained many years ago this was the case. The Royal Air Force armourers in fact have extended responsibilities which include bombs and ejection seats.

The problem of the trade name arises with the necessary and well intentioned recommendation to amalgamate the trades of armourer and gun fitter. That in itself provides few problems and we have no wish to comment on what is a necessary solution to a manning requirement. Our present interest is the fervent hope that our case will be seriously considered and the name of armourer be retained. However whatever the outcome, the units in which they serve can rely on the continued high standard of service which has been and is the hallmark of armourers.

The suggested name for the combined trade is Weapons Specialist with the added qualification of 'Light' and 'Heavy' to differentiate between the armourer and gun fitter not yet trained in the additional discipline. This designation seems to us rather cumbersome and vague for easy reference. Why one named a 'specialist' among many tradesmen? In most working environments the call for an armourer would be correctly understood whether it be for heavy or light category of work. Our suggested titles are:-

Armourer(Light Weapons)	(Armr(L))
and	
Armourer(Heavy Weapons)	(Armr(H))

May I just add a few words about the Armourers' Association. It was founded in 1955 as an annual dinner club. It was formed with the object of fostering and maintaining the comradeship and esprit-de-corps that has always been associated with Armourers of the RAOC and REME and subsequently Weapon Artificers of REME. Membership is open to all armourers of the RAOC and REME and weapon artificers of REME. Currently we have a membership of over 300 ranging from a Lt Col who joined as an apprentice armourer at Hilsea in 1926 to several craftsmen who completed their training in the late 90's and are now serving with units across the globe.

My own involvement with armourers started in May 1935 when I started my apprenticeship at Hilsea. I retired as a Warrant Officer Class 1 in 1964 and took up a post as Technical Author on weapons at Woolwich later becoming editor at REME Publications Centre until my final retirement.

In closing may I make it clear that we do not seek to change policy or change decisions that have been made after careful consideration of all the facts, however we do ask you to use your influence to ensure that our trade or at least the title of Armourer is not consigned to the dustbin of modernisation.

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

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

I remain, Sir, Your obedient servant,

E D Stratford  
President  
The Armourers' Association