

Richard John Manning

September 1945 to August 1948

At the start of what is to be a career in the British Army, I will quote what Field Marshall Montgomery said in a small pamphlet about the school at Arborfield that I am about to join, he said:

"I commend this career to all boys who wish for a life of comradeship, interest and achievement. At the Army Technical School, you will become fitted both in character and technical ability to play an important part in the work of this great team; the Army.

The opportunities you will have afterwards to become leaders and skilled craftsmen will be of the greatest value to you throughout your life."

The attestation document below is the document that starts my twenty-five-year career in the British Army.

Figure 1 - R. J. Manning Attestation

The year is now 1945 the war is at an end, the army is downsizing, large numbers of men who were conscripted and many others who were completing their terms of service are returning to their civilian jobs, many have only a further few months to serve before they to get out, so there is a lot of

changes going on, and as we still have world-wide commitments there is soon a shortage of men. This will be addressed by conscription.

So, on the 6th of September 1945 at the tender age of fifteen I was attested at the Recruiting Office in Castle Street, Exeter, I signed the attestation form and thereby committed myself to three years in the colours (regular army) and a further four years on the reserve.

I doubt if there is any other organisation where a boy of fifteen would be asked to make such a commitment, and without any opt out clause should you find the life was not for you.

I cannot now remember the exact date Chang and I travelled to Arborfield I think it was the ninth of September, Mum came to see me off at Exton Station, Chang coming from Exmouth was already on the train, at Exeter we changed stations, and from St David's Station we caught a Great Western train going to London Paddington, stopping at Reading our destination.

In those days it was all steam trains, and they were always crowded, it was not unusual to have to stand or sit in the corridor for the whole journey, servicemen formed a large section of the passengers, they would be travelling with full kit, packs, pouches, tin hats, gas masks, kit bags, suitcases and sometimes weapons.

On arrival at Reading station in mid-afternoon, we were met by school staff and escorted to waiting lorries for the seven-mile journey to Arborfield, I can remember going through the camp gates but nothing else comes to mind other than we were sorted into companies, I was to go C company and Chang went into B company.

I am now escorted to my new quarters which is in H block room H5 where I join seventeen other new boys like myself, we each get a bed, bedding and a locker. After a meal we learn how to make our beds, I am fortunate here in that a friend of Chang's brother, Peter England who is also in C coy in his last term, comes around and shows me how it was done.

This my first night ever away from home and here I am in a strange room with all these other boys from all over the country, but after that first night I settled in and got on with what I had to do.

Before I get into my life at Arborfield I thought that it would be a good idea to copy a letter sent to my parents, this letter I think will be of interest to the reader. It is from Colonel JD White who was the Colonel Commandant and Chief Instructor at the school. It reads:

"Dear Mr Manning.

You will be glad to know that AT Manning RJ has arrived safely. He has been posted to C Company and is in the process of settling down. He will be well cared for, as every member of the staff here has been

specially selected for his ability to handle boys with understanding and sympathy.

The name of his Company Commander is Capt R Ball to whom you should write on all normal matters.

Your boy has come here to learn a skilled trade, and, provided he has the right aptitude, behaves well and works hard, he should succeed and start himself on an interesting career with good prospects.

Though the teaching of a trade is the main function of this school, it is not the only one. It is realised that three years spent here, are among the most formative in a boys life, and for this reason his general education, his military training, and above all the development of his character, receive special attention. The object is to send him out from here at the end of his course, not only in possession of skill and knowledge of which he may be proud, but with formed habits of discipline, smartness, uprightness, and integrity, that will cause you to take even more pride in him, and will fit him for advancement in the Army.

I would especially commend to your notice the great help that the Chaplains are able to give to boys in the School. There is one for each denomination and all are men of deep understanding and devotion to their work. Your boy cannot do better than become a friend of his Chaplain.

I would also invite your attention to the desirability of helping your son form habits of thrift. During the first year of his service his pay will amount to nine shillings and eleven pence per week but he will only receive four shillings per week in cash. Out of the remainder there will be a deduction of one shilling for hobbies (The Arborfield Union Society) and he will be encouraged to subscribe eight shillings per month towards War Savings Certificates. The balance is saved up and paid to him at the end of term so that he will a good sum to go on leave with.

I would strongly advise you not to send the boy any additional pocket money during term time. Four shillings may not seem very much, but as the boys here are fed five times a day (breakfast, morning

cocoa, dinner, tea and supper) and have their sports, dances, cinema and a wide range of recreations provided free of charge, there is little need for pocket money. In any case it is not a good thing to form a habit of spending money unnecessarily and uselessly.

One more point I would invite your attention to is, the rule, which prohibits smoking until boys reach the age of seventeen years. There is no doubt that this is a very sound rule for the boys' own benefit and I hope that you will encourage him to abide by it loyally.

The enclosed notes give some information about the school and its activities but if there is anything further which you would like to know, please do not hesitate to write to your sons Company Commander who will be very pleased to answer your questions.

In conclusion I extend a hearty welcome to you if at any time you are able to visit the School and see things for yourself.

Yours faithfully

JD White

Colonel Commandant and Chief Instructor."

The enclosed notes which came with the commandant's letter are reproduced as they provide some interesting information, as follows.

Army Technical School (Boys) Arborfield Berks

Situation Arborfield, Berkshire.
Railway Stations – Reading G.W.R. 7 Miles. Wokingham S.R.4 Miles.

History In 1938, The Army Council decided to increase the facilities for training apprentice tradesmen for the Army. Accordingly this School was set up and started operations on the 1st May 1939.

Object The School was designed to accommodate and train 1020 boys in the following trades, Fitters, Vehicle

Mechanics, Armourers, Instrument Mechanics, Electricians, and Telecommunication Mechanics.

Boys are allotted to these trades in accordance with their aptitudes within the numbers required.

Terms Of Service. All Apprentice Tradesmen are enlisted for a term of twelve years commencing from the age of eighteen years. Eight years are spent with the colours and four on the Reserve, except in the case of boys enlisted as Armourers who spend the whole twelve years with the colours.

Age Of Entry. Between the ages of fourteen and fifteen and a half.

Method Of Entry. Entry is obtained by competitive examination conducted by the Civil Service Commissioners.

These examinations are held twice a year, and candidates must be between fourteen and fifteen and a half at the date of the examination.

Duration Of Training. Approximately three years.

Standard Of Proficiency. To train to the Third Class Standard in their respective trades.

Pay During Training. During the first year one shilling and five pence per day. During the second year one shilling and five pence to one shilling and nine pence per day. During the third year one shilling and five pence to two shillings and eleven pence per day.

Tradesmen's Rate Of Pay. On attaining the age of seventeen and a half, apprentices are trade tested and if successfully graded as Third Class Tradesmen, are paid at the rate of four shillings and three pence per day.

The above rate of pay is, of course in addition to accommodation, food, clothing, medical and dental treatment, etc.

Leave. The School Year is divided into three terms and leave is granted as follows Easter, fourteen days, Mid-Summer twenty-eight days, and Christmas fourteen days. A total of fifty-six days. No other leave is granted, except in very special circumstances.

Travelling Facilities Apprentices receive a free railway warrant for each period of leave.

Organisation. For administrative purposes the school is divided into four companies each Company into three wings. Each new intake is divided between the companies so that they remain equal in strength, ages, and experience. This makes it possible to run inter-company sports and competitions on a fair basis.

Barracks. Housing accommodation is provided in a series of barrack Blocks. Each block contains six living huts, connected by means of corridors to a central lavatory and ablution block. The living huts are centrally heated and hot water is always available in the central block for washing and shower baths.

Cookhouse and Dining Rooms. A central Cookhouse with dining rooms on either side provides feeding facilities for the whole school at one sitting.

Workshops. The School possesses seven large workshops, each measuring two hundred and ten feet by seventy-three feet, giving a total capacity of 107,300 square feet. These workshops possess excellent lighting both natural and artificial, and are centrally heated. The layout is as follows: - Fitters Shop, Machine Shop, Electricians, Blacksmiths (including Welders and Coppersmiths), Armourers, Carpenters, M.T.Shop, Instrument Shop, and Radio Laboratory.

Each workshop has a tool store and also a classroom for instructional lectures.

Military Training. On entering the School each boy is medically and dentally inspected, clothed and equipped, and spends the first four weeks of his service on the barrack square, in the Education classrooms and in the gymnasium. Later on he is given weapon training and field craft training.

Technical Training. All apprentice tradesmen spend the next six months in the Fitting Shop where they learn to file, and to use hand tools of their trades. The hours of work are from 8am until 5pm, and the allotment of time for the first year is as follows: - Workshop and Trade Lectures 15 ½ hours, Education 10 hours, Technical Lectures 2 ¼ hours, Physical Training 2 ¼ hours, Games 3 ¼ hours, Religious Instruction ¾ hour, Regimental Training 7 ¼ hours, making a total of 41 ¼ hours.

The technical training is accepted as an Apprenticeship and consequently the soldier trained in an Army Technical School is definitely a "craftsman" and on return to Civil life has the full status as such.

Education. General Education takes place in three huts each sub-divided into four rooms to give facilities for general education for three hundred and sixty students at one time, the instruction continues until the First Class Army Certificate is obtained.

Technical Instruction in Machine Drawing, Workshop Practice and theoretical subjects is given in special classrooms provide for the purpose.

Religious Instruction. Each Apprentice Tradesman receives ¾ of an hour religious instruction weekly under a chaplain of his own faith.

Smoking. Smoking by apprentices under seventeen years of age is not allowed.

Cinema ETC. The camp hall provides seating accommodation for 1,200 people and fulfils three functions i.e. 1. Gymnasium. 2. Cinema and Concert Hall. 3. Church for Sunday Services.

The School possesses its own 35mm projectors and pictures are shown on Sunday, Tuesday and Saturday evenings. Company dances are also held each Thursday evening and concerts at frequent intervals.

Regimental Institutes. The NAFFI has a well-furnished canteen in which light refreshments can be obtained.

The billiard room is equipped with three full size tables and one half size. In addition ping-pong tables are provided in the Games Room together with Draughts, Chess and Dominoes.

Sports. The grounds of the school are fairly extensive and Football, Rugby, Hockey and Netball are played. Boxing is exceedingly popular and the School possesses an up to date Boxing Ring.

Many Apprentices are in possession of the Royal Society's Medals and Certificates for life saving, but the absence of a Swimming Bath makes this very necessary sport very difficult.

Library. The School possesses two libraries, technical and fiction, excellent use is made of both.

Hobbies. An organisation known, as the Arborfield Union Society exists in the School, it has nothing to do with trade or trade unions; its purpose is to encourage and assist apprentices in the pursuit of suitable spare time hobbies. Among the hobbies catered for are: - Shooting, Scouts and Rambling, Fishing, Photography, Sketching, Dramatics, Appreciation of Music, Airplane Modelling, Swing

Music, Choral Singing, Cricket, soccer, Boxing, Swimming, Hockey, and Rugby football.

Voluntary Studies. In order that apprentices may make the best possible use of their time in the School they are encouraged to take up extra studies connected with their training through the City and Guilds Institute of London, Reading University or other suitable Institutions.

Progress Reports. Parents or Guardians of Trainees are furnished with detailed reports of the progress of their sons or wards twice yearly i.e. Christmas and Mid-Summer and it is obvious that in a majority of cases these reports are treated seriously.

Hospital. The School possesses an excellent Hospital with accommodation for 72 patients. Medical Officers and Nursing Sisters are always available.

Savings Group. The School possesses a War Savings Group and practically all the Apprentice Tradesmen contribute at least four shillings per month to the fund. The School holds the Certificates until the boys leave on completion of training.

Also attached to the above was another letter from the Commandant but unsigned it was addressed to: - All Parents or Guardians.

"I would like to enlist your help as regards to supplying handkerchiefs and football boots for your son or ward.

I regret that the army is unable to supply these free. I am sure you will agree that it is necessary for every boy to have at least eight handkerchiefs. There are many boys who have only two or three, which is most unhygienic.

As regards football boots, we can supply these coupon-free for about twenty-five shillings. The pooling of boots is very

unsatisfactory, and it is really essential for a boy to have his own boots.

I fully realise the extra expense involved, but would be most grateful for your co-operation.

I would like to say that the response to my appeal for cricket shirts and flannels was most gratifying and made a lot of difference to those boys that had them.

Yours very truly,

(Sgd) C.E.M. Grenville –Grey

Colonel, Commandant.”

With the two letters from the Commandant that I have reproduced in this section of my story, I feel that the reader will be able to form some sort of picture about the Army Technical School, as it was when I joined in 1945.

What I intend to do now is to put myself into this picture.

My memory of those first few days is very hazy, with so much going on it would be impossible to remember everything, but do remember that we were medically and dentally inspected, interviewed and given aptitude tests.

The biggest event would have been the kitting out going along to the Quartermasters Store and receiving a huge pile of kit, I will list as many things as I now remember, kitbag, one suit of Khaki Service Dress, two pairs of leather boots, four pairs of grey socks, two sets of underwear (pants and vests), three khaki flannelette shirts, two sets of denims, one set of denim buttons and a buckle, two pairs of PT shorts two PT vests, a greatcoat, a service dress khaki peaked hat, one beret two belts, one white buckskin one web belt, webbing big pack, small pack, pouches, water bottle, mess tins, knife fork and spoon, mug, a pair of

braces, three cleaning brushes (boots and buttons), button stick, the last thing that I can think of was a housewife, “not a real one” this was a cotton wallet secured by tapes that contained needles and cotton for clothes mending , and wool for mending socks. All this had to be signed for and you became responsible for it, if my memory is right it was all on an Army Form 1157.

With your pile of kit it was back to the barrack room to sort it all out, some of it had to go to the tailor for fitting, I seemed to be one of the stock sizes so most of what I was issued with fitted reasonably well. To make petty theft difficult we had to put our new army number on everything that was personal to you, numbering your kit also helped when it was sent for laundering,

As part of the initial documentation we were given our army number that was retained throughout your service, so I became 14469531 A/T Manning RJ. (A/T =Apprentice Tradesman). It is a fact that anyone who has served in the army never forgets his army number. We like every soldier in the army were given two books AB64 Pt 1 (Pay Book) which was your identity book and AB64 Pt 2 that kept all your pay records.

Another must in those first few days was to get your hair cut to conform to the army requirements, the army in 1945 really insisted on short hair, I think that the camp civilian barbers took great delight in shaving of the locks of the new boys, short back and side was the order, those in authority were quick to spot a boy with “long hair” it could cost you restricted privileges.

All this new kit that you have now inherited has to got ready for inspection, the webbing had to be

blancoed using khaki Blanco, all the brass buckles have to be cleaned with brasso back and front, your boots boned to get rid of the dimpling on the leather and then it is spit and polish until you can see your face in the toe caps and to a lesser extent the side and heels, I learnt this art very quickly and always had good boots.

There was the army way of doing everything, the packs had to be squared off using cardboard to pack them out, the greatcoat was folded up dolly fashion, the belt at the back was brought around to the front and the sleeves folded at the back under the belt, the leather chin strap for your peaked hat was something else that was spit and polished, for inspection everything had to be folded in a very uniform manner, it soon became second nature.

The huts we occupied had eighteen bed spaces with a steel double door locker above each bed, which had three coat hooks under it. The beds that we used were in two sections the rear section had four legs and the front section that slid back into it had two legs, the mattresses were supported on steel mesh with steel coil springs clipping them to the frames of the bed, we had three square horse hair filled mattresses called biscuits, two sheets a pillow and three blankets. Every morning the bed had to be "made up" to look like a chair, using the blankets to cover the biscuits, this termed as armchair fashion. Before you went on first parade the room had to be clean, all the beds in the room were lined up to a chalk line.

Each hut had a bunk that was occupied by your Room NCO who would usually be a boy sergeant or corporal from a senior intake; he was responsible for everything that happened in the room.

Each room was issued with a six-foot table that rested on steel trestles, two soft brushes, a scrubbing brush, steel bucket, and a bumper, (a bumper is a short haired brush screwed to a steel block that was hinged to the handle, and was used to polish the floor), all these items came under the heading of barrack room utensils.

The army did not employ cleaners, we all had to take our turn cleaning the block, that included corridors, windows, toilets, wash basins, showers, and all floors, and also the immediate area around your hut, these tasks together with your room job were changed on a weekly basis, all tasks had to be completed before first parade at eight o'clock, some jobs could be done the night before, dusting lamp shades cleaning windows, outside area gardens around the hut. For a COs inspection the work of cleaning went on late into the night, even the room utensils had to be clean scrubbed and polished. It was always a rush in the mornings.

A typical day would be reveille at six thirty with the sounding of a bugle call (wakey, wakey get out of bed) followed almost immediately by the Orderly Sergeant bursting into the room banging on the lockers and encouraging you to get out of bed with dire warnings of what would happen if he came back and found you still in it. Breakfast was at seven and first parade at eight. On parade there was a roll call and an inspection, it would depend on what sort of parade it was how long it took, after the parade you were marched off to wherever you were supposed to be. That generally would be the routine and then your programme of activities controlled your day, with tea breaks, lunch, tea, and supper meals before the bugler blew "lights out" at ten thirty, again the Orderly Sergeant made sure of that.

I have tried to remember the names the other boys in my room G3, there was Skin Asquith, John Batchelor, Brian (Wog) Harling, Neville Hughes, Tich James, Ken Kearsley, Kingsbury,

Alex Murray, John Pountney, John Sullivan, Peter Towers, John Tilt and Willie Winder (Beezy), Hayward, Bill Smith, Alan Streeter.



Figure 2 - Some of 45B intake C Company

Back row: left to right John Batchelor, John Kersley, Pete Towers, Al Rolling, Peter Lewis, Jim Smith, Tony Smith

Middle row: left to right Peter Wharton, Richard Manning, Mike Winder, Alex Murray, David James, Roger Harrison, Fred Bulmer

Front row: left to right John Pountney, Alan Sullivan, Harry Asquith, and Alan Streeter.

We have all survived the first month, most of it spent and the parade square, under our drill sergeant, Sgt Dalaway of the South Staffordshire Regiment, because he was quite a small man he had the nick name "Drag" I found him to be quite a good instructor. All the foot drill that we were taught was based on Guards drill; there were a number of drill instructors from the various Guards Regiments. RSM McNally from the Irish Guards was the school RSM for fifteen years.

While most of the month was taken up with drill, we had daily sessions in the gym, something that I learnt quickly, was not to take up boxing, there were too many boys who had boxed for a number of years for their schools or

clubs and were very good at it, there was no percentage in being beaten up.

All new boys were known as "Jeeps" I have no idea how that originated, but you were treated as low life. As in most public schools there was an element of bullying, I never suffered any direct physical violence, just had to put up with the senior boys pushing to the front of queues (gypping in) and being tipped out of bed after lights out.

Also in the month we met the padre, and started studying for the Army Second Class education certificate.

At the end of the month we were finally allowed to go out of the school into the wide world beyond the front gate, of course there obstacles, you had to pass an inspection at the gate before

you were let out, if it was considered that you were not smart enough you had to go back and get smartened up. I rarely bothered to go out it cost money and there was too much hassle.

Discipline at the School was quite strict; it was applied at two levels, one by the boy NCOs and the other by the permanent staff, with all the “activities” to be completed it was very easy to fall foul of some real or trumped charge, I managed to keep my nose clean.

Some boys suffered from home sickness, for me this was now my life and I was going to make the most of it, I wrote home every week without fail, mum wrote and gave me all the home news, she also sent me a food parcel once a month, I looked forward to that.

Sport now started to play an important part in my life. I was not a star, just a good team man. I played football for the intake team and later for the Company team. With my two particular friends Alex Murray and Neville Hughes, I had a go at most sports.

We move on to start trade training, for this part of the apprenticeship and for the next six months the whole intake is in Fitter 1 Workshop, here we will learn how to use basic hand tools

associated with metal work, files, squares, scribers, hacksaws, chisels. We all start with a hammer and chisel, we have to chip a metal block down to size this is boring and quite painful if you miss the chisel and hit your hand.

During these first few months together with Neville Hughes and a couple of others we attend Confirmation Classes, I think we did it mainly because it got us free tea and biscuits, but it resulted in me being Confirmed by the Bishop Of Reading on the 10th December 1945, I do not regret doing it but confess that am not a regular at communion services.

In the middle of this training our first leave comes up it is Christmas 1945 and we will be going home for two weeks, you can imagine how I felt going home on my first leave, in uniform, “a soldier”. We were not allowed to travel in civilian clothes.

The big day arrives; barrack rooms have to be tidied, kit handed in, and then parade to get on special buses taking us to Reading Station where we change our Railway Warrants for tickets, and catch the first available train to Exeter. Chang and I travel together and would spend most of our leave together in Exmouth.

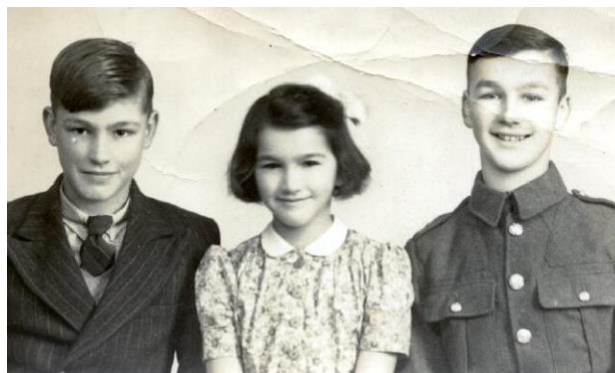


Figure 3 - Christmas 1945

Stanley, Jean and Self

As we were too young to go into pubs, we used the YMCA, Sailors Rest, Burtons Snooker Hall, Fortes Café, and the cinemas, at that time Exmouth had four cinemas, the Grand, Regal, Savoy and Forum. We had a good time.

We are now into 1946, with still three months to do in fitters one, the military side of life goes on parades and inspection come and go, we are now preparing for the sixth intakes Passing Out parade, this one is a bit different the Inspecting Officer is Field Marshall Viscount Montgomery.



Figure 4 - Field Marshal Viscount Montgomery

With the parade over things go back to normal, a new intake arrives and now we are number two intake, we do our test pieces in the fitters shop. On the 5th February 1946 I gained my Army Second Class Certificate of Education, I passed in Military History, geography and Map Reading, it was deemed that English and Arithmetic were passed at the entrance examination, I achieved a Distinction in Map Reading.

One feature of School life that I have not mentioned is the church parade that was compulsory every Sunday. The whole school formed up on the square in full parade uniform, after an inspection we were marched off to the service in the camp hall, quite a few locals attended these services.



Figure 5 - 45B Saluting the Inspecting Officer

After the service we formed up on the road outside and headed by the school Pipe Band marched out of the front Gate along the main road to re-enter the school at the Sergeants Mess Gate, at the square we turn into line and marched down the square. The Commanding Officer took the salute, we then marched off and were dismissed, and that was it until Monday morning.

Easter 1946 arrives and we are off on leave once more, Chang and I get up to our usual antics, we get girl friends for the two weeks we are home but

nothing serious, it is over until we come home again.

Back at Arborfield, we have finished in Fitters One workshop and we move at last into our trade workshops, Which for Chang and I is the Armourers Workshop, we are now faced with another six months of filing, tinsmithing, blacksmithing, and forge welding. It is now much more interesting as we are making tools that we will be able to use when we start with weapons. We make screwdrivers and punches that are filed to size polished, and then hardened and tempered.

The following pictures show the tools that I made during my first six months in the Armourers Shop.

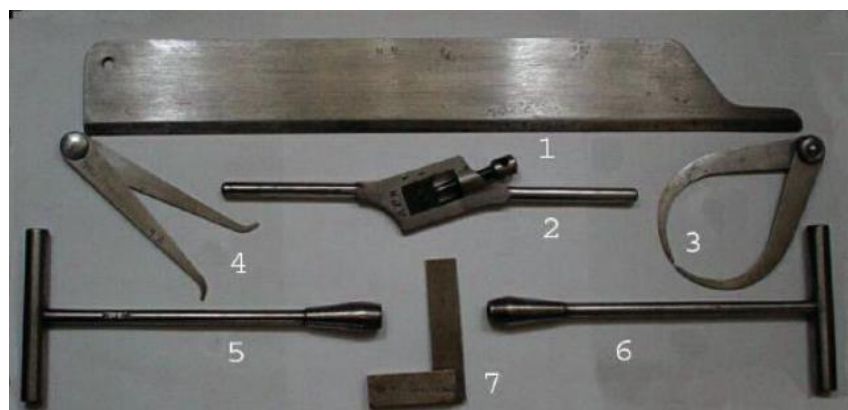


Figure 6 - Tools 1

1. Straight Edge. 2. Tap Wrench. 3. Outside Callipers. 4. Inside Callipers.
 5. Square Box Key. 6. Hexagon Box Key. 7. Fitters Square.
- (Items 5 and 6 were for use with army bicycles)

We also have to make a main spring for a pistol and it had to work in a pistol, I enjoyed this period and managed to make a lot of extra tools, I was quite a fast worker when it came to this sort of work. Most of the tools that I made were never used they were put away and kept. I have photographed and identified as many as I can remember.

Another leave period is with us and it is twenty-eight days summer leave 1946, Chang and I enjoy the seaside holiday atmosphere at Exmouth, Chang introduces me to Molly Hall a girl he has met in Woolworth's, for me it was love at first sight, the three of us spent a lot of time together, but I had the inside track with Molly, back at Arborfield we kept in touch by letter, roll on Christmas.

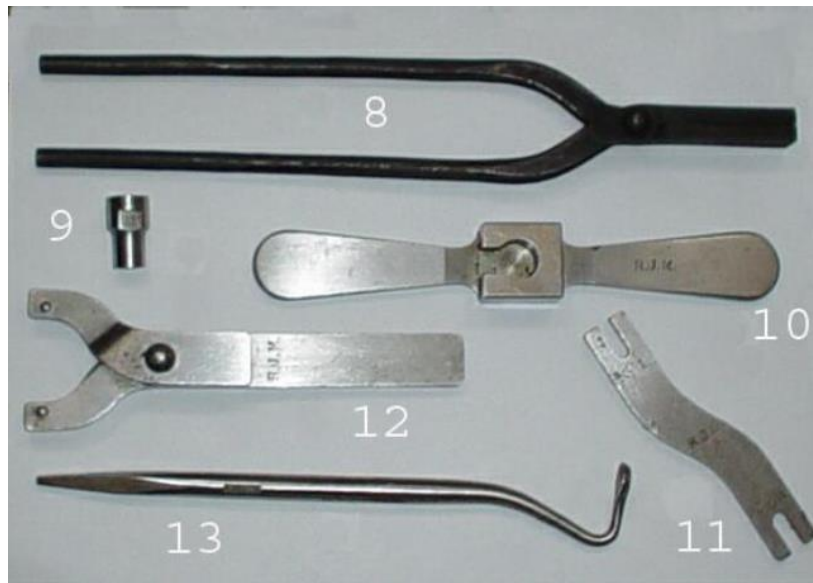


Figure 7 - Tools 2

8. Blacksmiths Tongs. 9. Collar Holder (Rifle). 10. Bolt-Head Wrench. (Rifle No 4).
11. Catch Barrel Tool. (Pistol). 12. Wrench Crosshead. (Vickers Mounting).
13, Scraper Fore-end. (Rifles).

We have finally finished with filing etc and have now started learning all there is know about stripping, assembly, inspection, action of mechanisms, and repairs to most of the weapons being used by the British Army at that time, this also included army issue bicycles, this part of the course is very

interesting. I seem able to grasp it and to have a reasonably retentive memory which is good asset as there are tests all the time both in practical and written. To be honest or modest I do quite well and get good marks for theory and practical putting me near the top of the class.



Figure 8 - Tools 3

The above is a selection of punches that we used in the maintenance and repair of small arms all made by myself, a lot of the tools were formed on the blacksmiths forge, and then filed to shape, before being hardened and tempered, again in the forge.

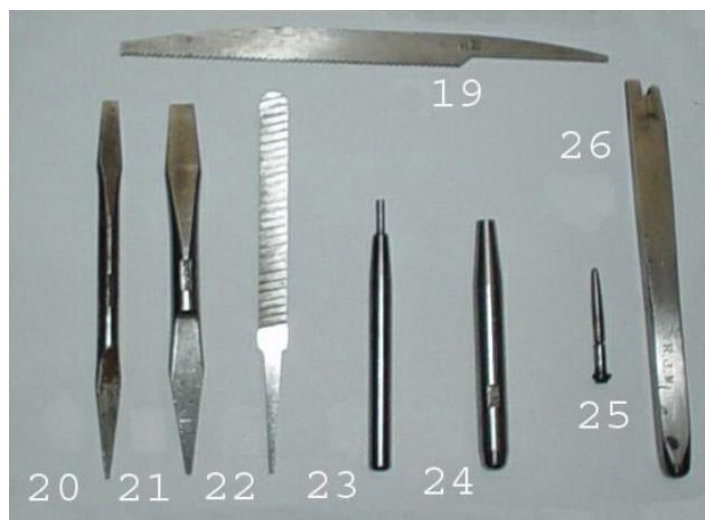


Figure 9 - Tools 4

19. Slip Patch Saw. (Rifle Woodwork). 20 and 21. Armourers Screwdrivers
 22. Saw Swivel Band. 23. Ring Punch. 24. Snap Punch. 25. Pin Joint Tool
 26. Sear Punch. (Rifles Nos 1 and 4)

I have donated all the tools to REME Museum of Technology at Arborfield, which has since moved to Lyneham

Shooting was one area where the Armourer was looked upon as something of an expert, most armourers were very good shots, my shooting was nothing special, but I

learn how to prepare a weapon for the experts to shoot.

On the 15th October 1947 I am awarded the Army Certificate of Education First Class with passes in

English, Mathematics, Geography and Map Reading.

The next eighteen months seem to slip quickly by I am quite happy with my chosen life, I play most sports including rugby and football for the company team, I later had a few games for the school rugby team, I wish that I had taken up rugby earlier as I enjoy the physical side of this sport, even though I was only about ten stone wet through. One sport that I was forced into was tug of war not my favourite sport but as I was a light and strong for my weight it was an advantage.

Periods of home leave came around on a regular basis, during the daytime Chang and I went around together, and in the evenings I would meet Molly after she had finished work, some nights I missed the last train home, and had to walk the four miles home, when you are in love it did not seem to matter.

I did gain promotion to boy NCO and reached the dizzy heights of boy corporal, this took me away from my intake and into being in charge of other more junior intakes.

At regular intervals throughout the time at the school we had to do a stint of fatigues, this took us away from all training for a week, the best jobs to get were in the Sgts Mess and Officers Mess, cookhouse fatigues were not popular, but they did put you close to the food supply. The worst was to get with Ben Cook; he was Major Ben Cook the camp Quartermaster and the School Agricultural Officer.

The School grew a lot of vegetables that were used in the camp kitchens, and there are many stories concerning Ben Cook, it was said that he caught some boys slacking, the tale is that he gave his horse Gilbert the cake that had been provided for the mid morning

break, saying he deserved it as he the horse was the only one working, another tale that he made boys pull a plough, I cannot vouch for any of these stories but they are part of the folk lore of the School.

My own experience with Ben Cook was to be caught by him not working, I think we were supposed to be weeding, he made another boy and I double around the playing field and then go and wait outside his office, we wondered what he would do to us, but when he arrived he asked "what are you doing here," we of course said "you sent us here," he had forgotten and just gave another weeding job.

Ben had a private soldier from the Royal Pioneer Corps, who looked after Gilbert and was Ben's dogsbody, he was the scruffiest soldier I have ever seen and was known by everybody as Bomber, it was not unusual to hear Ben shouting "Bomber".

One parade that everyone looked forward to was "Pay Parade" for this we had to parade outside the company office, you were called forward in alphabetical order, you marched to the pay table, halted, saluted the paying officer, handed over your pay book, took your money, saluted once more and marched out.

In 1946 the School was renamed the Army Apprentice School, and we had a new badge. The winter of 1947 sticks in my memory, it was very cold we had quite a lot of snow and the miners were on strike, coal stock ran low over the whole country, at the School there was insufficient fuel to heat the workshop so trade training was suspended, there was talk of sending us all home, but in the end we were issued with extra blankets and during the day were taken on route marches to keep us warm, there were also inter-company snow ball fights.

In my time at the School I was able to visit London for the first time, by attending two sporting events, one being the British Athletic Games at the White City, where I saw some of the worlds leading athletes of the time, the other was to Twickenham to see England play Wales, this match ended in a draw three points each.

Intakes over the last three years have arrived and those before us have left

until it is our turn to become the six intake, and we now know that we have just six months before we leave Arborfield.

As we complete our trade training the marks that we have achieved over the last eighteen months are all totted up and to my surprise I came out top of the Armourers and was awarded the trade prize. I chose a book on Workshop Practice, which I still have.

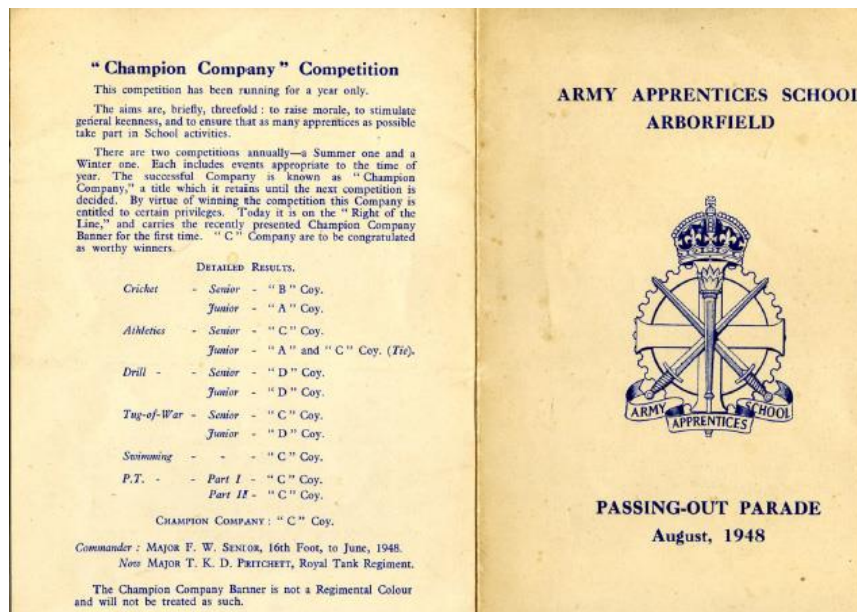


Figure 10 - 45B Passing out Parade

Our passing out parade is due in August; we hand in our Service Dress and are issued with Battle Dress, this is the standard dress for the British Army, we also have to learn rifle drill, as we will carry rifles on the Passing Out Parade.

Mum and Dad come up to Reading for the parade, they see me pass out and

get presented with the Armourers trade prize, by General Sir James Steel, K.B.E. C.B., D.S.O., M.C. After the parade and lunch there is a PT display and I am in the PT display team, mum and dad have a tour of the Workshops and then I say goodbye as they leave for the long journey back home to Devon.

Passing-Out Parade		Prizewinners. August, 1948	
<p>The Passing-Out Parade is more than an empty ceremony. It marks a solemn stage in the young soldier's career. It marks the end of his three years' term of training and the beginning of his service as a soldier-craftsman. It is therefore only proper that the staff and apprentices of the School should assemble on this occasion to wish "God-speed" to their comrades of the Senior Intake.</p> <p>May the boys in whose honour we are now met enjoy good fortune in their Army life; may they be ever conscious of their duty to King and Country; may they remember sometimes with gratitude the training, the tradition and example of the School they are now leaving.</p> <p>"Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?" — say . . .</p>		<p>TRADE PRIZES.</p> <p>Armourers - - A/T Manning, R. J. - "C" Coy. Electricians - - A/Cpl. Brooks, G. C. - "B" Coy. Fitters - - A/T Rice, N. H. - "B" Coy. Inst. Mechs. - - A/L/Cpl. Beel, J. - "D" Coy. Tel. Mechs. - - A/T Osley, B. - "D" Coy. Veh. Mechs. - - A/T Barrett, A. - "B" Coy. Turners - - A/T Buzza, F. H. M. - "A" Coy.</p> <p>TRADE CLASSROOMS.</p> <p>47A Intake - - A/T Dykes, D. G. - "B" Coy. 46B Intake - - A/T Marshall, G. - "D" Coy. 46A Intake - - A/L/Cpl. Walker, T. E. - "D" Coy. Senior Intake - - A/Sgt. Towers, P. - "C" Coy.</p> <p>REGIMENTAL EFFICIENCY PRIZES.</p> <p>46B Intake - - A/Cpl. McPhail, R. - "B" Coy. 46A Intake - - A/Sgt. Kelly, M. J. - "B" Coy. Senior Intake - - A/Sgt. Jennings, M. E. - "B" Coy.</p> <p>BEST ALL-ROUND APPRENTICE.</p> <p>Commandant's Cup - A/Cpl. Brooks, G. C. - "B" Coy.</p> <p>AWARD OF HONOUR.</p> <p>A/C.S.M. Nichol, J. B. - "D" Coy.</p>	
<p>Programme of Events</p> <p>1055: GENERAL SIR JAMES S. STEELE, K.B.E., C.B., D.S.O., M.C., RECEIVED AT MAIN GATE BY COMMANDANT.</p> <p>1100: ARRIVAL OF INSPECTING OFFICER ON PARADE GROUND.</p> <p>(a) General Salute. (b) Inspection. (c) Form up for March Past. (d) March Past. (e) Advance in Review Order, and General Salute.</p> <p>1145: INTRODUCTION OF STAFF TO INSPECTING OFFICER.</p> <p>1200: ASSEMBLY IN CAMP HALL.</p> <p>(a) Commandant's Report. (b) Distribution of Prizes. (c) Address by Inspecting Officer. (d) National Anthem.</p> <p>1300: LUNCHEON.</p> <p>1430: P.T. DISPLAY.</p> <p>1500: TOUR OF WORKSHOPS.</p> <p>In the event of wet weather, an alternative programme will take place in the Camp Hall.</p>			

Figure 11 - Prizewinners

I am now classified as an Armourer Third Class and will now be going out to join a unit, I had hoped that I would be going to an Infantry Regiment, but it was not to be I am posted to 18 Command Workshops REME at Bovington Camp Dorset. Chang is going to 13 Command Workshops REME at Aldershot, so we part but remain the best of friends.

Looking back at the three years that I have spent at the School, I can honestly say that I have enjoyed my stay, but I am now looking forward to life as a man.

At home life is very much the same Dad still works for Pratt's, my brother Stanley has left school and is an apprentice bricklayer, he also plays football and cricket for local league teams. Jean is now at the Exmouth Grammar School.

On the 18th August 1948 I leave The Boys School and did not go back for over thirty years although at various times over the years, I was to visit the REME depot at Poperhinge Barracks

Arborfield, which was just up the road from the School.

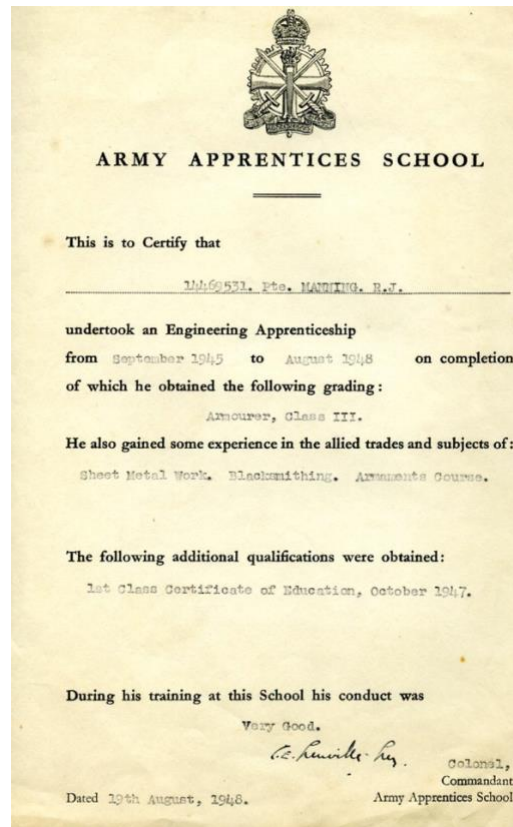


Figure 12 - Apprentice Certificate