



## **RAMC REUNITED** **NEWSLETTER** **JANUARY 2015**

Welcome to the January edition of the RAMC Reunited Newsletter.

### **WILLIAM (BILL) WATT BEM**

Bill has forwarded me a picture taken of him in his Scarlet Outfit. Thought I would share it with you. He would like to hear from former friends and colleagues and can be contacted at [watt.bill21@gmail.com](mailto:watt.bill21@gmail.com)



## **FORT PITT - A LOST MILITARY HOSPITAL**

Mike Ballie served as a Clerk in the RAMC having transferred in from the Royal Engineers. He placed the following thread on the Forum Section of [www.ramcreunited.co.uk](http://www.ramcreunited.co.uk) in October 2011. I thought it would be of interest to those historians amongst us.

Whilst researching some RE stuff about the military fortifications around CHATHAM and the river Medway I came across some information which may be of interest.

How many people know that FORT PITT, along with other forts was built between 1805 and 1819 on the high ground overlooking CHATHAM DOCKYARD as part of the Defensive Line defending the dockyards against a land based attack from the south by Napoleon and the French?.

It became a hospital for invalid soldiers in 1828, with an asylum added in 1849. The first ARMY MEDICAL SCHOOL (for nurses?) was founded there by Florence Nightingale in 1860 (then moved to Netley in 1863).

The hospital was included in the 1841 Census of England (Chatham Borough) and it was recorded that the hospital and barracks housed 637 military persons.

According to the MEDICAL TIMES of May 1863 the hospital could hold about 300 patients. By the 1920's the hospital was closed and converted into a girl's school, now called the FORT PITT GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

Seeing that all the other 19th century military hospitals in England were opened later (RVH Netley in 1863,

RHH Woolwich in 1865, CMH Aldershot in 1879) the FORT PITT HOSPITAL could well be the oldest military hospital in England, if not in the UK?

(Since distributing this Newsletter via my RAMC Reunited Address Book earlier today, Peter Starling has contacted me and he has given me permission to publish his comments on Fort Pitt which are appended below.

"Reference Fort Pitt, I have visited it many times and lectured on the subject and still have a large file on it. The museum has volumes of orders for Fort Pitt and two volumes of patient's notes for the 'Lunatic Asylum' at Chatham.

The reference to Florence Nightingale is not correct. The first Army Medical School was established there and the Senate met for the first time on 14th April 1860 but there had been a medical library established at the insistence of James McGrigor many years before. The school was nothing to do with Florence Nightingale and nurses.

The first Army Medical Museum was also established at Fort Pitt")

## **FORECAST OF EVENTS**

The following are events which will be of interest to members have been extracted from the RAMC Association Central Branch Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/RAMC-Association-Central-Branch/616146658453101>

### **THURSDAY 18th AND FRIDAY 19th JUNE 2015 - AMS ATHLETICS**

Venue TBC

For further information please contact

The Corps RSM on 01276 412935

### **SUNDAY 21st JUNE 2015** **RAMC LUNCHEON ON CORPS** **SUNDAY**

The RAMC Annual Luncheon for Regular Serving, Reserve, members of the RAMC, members of the RAMC Association, Old Comrades and their guests will be held at the Princes Hall, Aldershot following the RAMC Corps Day Church Service and March Past on Sunday 21st June 2015.

The cost for serving, retired and association members is free. Guests - £5.00 per head. Places for the Annual Luncheon may be reserved by contacting the RHQ, with a cheque for guests made payable to 'The RAMC Charity'.

Closing date: Friday 5th June 2015. Tickets for the Luncheon will be sent out by post.

### **23/144 PFAOCA DINNER 10th** **OCTOBER 2015**

23/144 PFAOCA dinner, combined with the Midlands Region PRA Gala Dinner, will take place at the Royal Court Hotel, Coventry on the 10th October 2015 and is open to all Airborne medical and supporting Arms who have served in a Airborne Medical Unit both Past and Present.

For information: cost, accommodation etc, contact Roy Hatch, (Captain Retired) on royhatchbem@fsmail.net or 01926812363

**FRIDAY 16th OCTOBER 2015 - AMS  
RETIRED OFFICERS' LUNCHEON  
(INCORPORATING FRIENDS OF  
THE MUSEUM AGM & LECTURE)**

The AMS Retired Officers' Luncheon will be held at the AMS Headquarter Officers' Mess, Camberley at 1200hrs, for Retired Officers and their Guests. Serving Officers are also welcome.

Prior to the lunch the friends of the AMS Museum will hold their AGM and guest lecture at 1100hrs. All are welcome.

A Fork Buffet Lunch will be served at 1245hrs.

Cost per person £10.00

Application to attend should be made to Regimental Headquarters remittance made payable to The RAMC Charity must accompany the application. All members of the AMS are welcome; you are permitted to bring guests should you wish.

Closing date: 28th September 2015  
Contact RHQ (01276 412751) for more details

**THURSDAY 5th NOVEMBER 2015  
THE FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE**

Representatives of the RAMC, RAVC, RADC and QARANC Associations will place a badged cross on behalf of their respective Corps in the Field of Remembrance, St Margaret's Church Yard, Westminster Abbey at 1100hrs. Those attending should wear full size medals if entitled. Please contact RHQ (01276 412751) for tickets.

**SUNDAY 8th NOVEMBER 2015  
RAMC ASSOCIATION AT THE  
CENOTAPH PARADE LONDON**

The RAMC Association will be marching at The Annual Remembrance Sunday Parade at the Cenotaph in London on Sunday 8th November 2015. As only 30 places are allocated to the RAMC Association, tickets will be issued on a first come first served basis. Those wishing to attend should contact their respective Association Branch and submit their names at their earliest convenience. Last year a lot of members were unable to attend due to the lack of sufficient passes being available.

**RAMC REUNITED REUNION 2016**

I would like to remind members of the need to book early if you intend attending the 2016 Reunion. Please do not leave it until the last moment.

The Reunion has become a very popular event and, this is shown in the growing number of people attending over the past years.

If you are attending, would you please contact former Corps friends and colleagues that you have in your address book and let them know of this event?

Copy the link below and paste it into your browser window to obtain information and booking form.

<http://www.ramcreunited.co.uk/liverpool-2016.html>

Any problems, please email me at: [michael.mccran@ntlworld.com](mailto:michael.mccran@ntlworld.com)

## **GENERAL**

I am considering opening up a “**WHERE ARE YOU**” Section within the newsletter. If there are any former members or colleagues you wish to get in touch with maybe this outlet could put you in touch with them.

If members wish to place a message or messages in the RAMC Reunited Newsletter, please forward your request to me at:

[michael.mccran@ntlworld.com](mailto:michael.mccran@ntlworld.com)

## **23018325 HARDY T.L RAMC – EX NATIONAL SERVICE – 8<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1954 TO 7<sup>th</sup> APRIL 1956**

I contacted Terry to confirm whether he wished to receive information on the forthcoming RAMC Reunited Reunion. Whilst talking to him I established that he was a former National Serviceman who had served as a Laboratory Technician following his 10 week basic training course at Church Crookham. During our conversation he informed me that he had written numerous notes that covered his NS period. I asked if he would be willing to share his experiences and, he was more than happy to do so.

His first writing is on “A Defining Time - Turning Points in My Life”.

## **A DEFINING TIME – TURNING POINTS IN MY LIFE**

As the seasons of my life enter the late winter, it is really quite pleasant to look back to the long years and think which of them presented me with the most impact. Which episode, be it a day or a week or a year or years or even a single happening. This note refers only

to my long and fascinating career and outside of domesticity.

Was there a time in my career which gave me real pleasure, pain or perhaps intense satisfaction over other times? No one can deny the intensity of my life or the exuberance with which I have grasped my years on this Planet or that there have been few times of wastage. My philosophy has always been to use every second though the everyday practicalities of life and wading through complexities: even thinking about a myriad of ‘happenings’. Yes there have been dull times, frustrating times and times of stress and sadness but I have no regrets – and not many people can say that!

I have simply grabbed life by the horns and shaken it and done what I could with what I have got and when I could. That is what life should be. As was once told to me “Life is like a bank. One puts something in and one takes something out – the more one puts in the more one can justifiably take out”. My investment has been applied with spirit and I have, accordingly, had a great deal out of life.

So was it the period spent throwing myself into the task of registering a new medicine though the Japanese bureaucratic system, distilling out what made the young people I worked with ‘tick’? Was it the time spent happily working away at the bench in organic chemistry, scratching away at a few crystals in a watch glass and gently sniffing them? Was it to do with the many ‘long’ haul flights to America or India, or Japan and meeting fascinating people or being kidnapped in Mumbai? Has it indeed been meeting interesting people, some at the top of their profession? Was it protecting and building that team in

Baranzate, Italy and making it work and the Guys and Dolls a happier team? Was it the year at The Middlesex Hospital or visiting the University in Winnipeg? Yes, it has been all of those – and many more. But I have decided that I come down unreservedly on the years 1954 – 1956, the years I spent doing my bit in National Service, as truly defining years.

Those two years defined my future in many ways. Sometimes there was trauma, sometimes there was great happiness. I learned to get along with disparate types of individuals from around and about and coming from grossly different backgrounds. We are all different some place within ourselves. If one can get inside that place and learn about that individual then that is a huge bonus to a relationship. Michael Angelo described sculpture as having the masterpiece already within the stone and all you have to do is get it out! National Service taught me and enabled me to try to understand fellow beings in the same boat and to seek and grant help and aid. NS taught me about discipline which with its many facets served me well for the remainder of my life. It taught me respect and to a degree, tolerance – though I confess to not being very good at that despite with all the teaching.

Being rudely snatched away from my young wife, who I had to leave, living alone at only 22yrs. It was no joke, but within hours I was learning. I was unceremoniously plunged into a completely foreign environment of eighteen individuals. There were two ex-convicts, a pharmacist a boxer and a lad who could neither read nor write and cried for his Mother. That first night in B Company brought strange noises – a boot thrown at a rat with a

lot of swearing, grown men quietly tearful in that silent wooden hut and already homesick – 2 years! Would I endure it, would I come to hate it? Would I be accepted back by my Wife and back into my already budding career?

But in 10 difficult weeks, eighteen had become one. “Give me a hand mate”, “You OK mate – here, let me help with that” My own bleeding fingers from pulling and tugging at those new ‘brass keepers’ on that tough new webbing belt, helped the lad who could not tie a knot in the hairy string to post his ‘civvies’ back home to ‘Mum’. It became the ‘norm’, the thing to do. There was the chap who, with suitable monetary reward, escaped from his hut to mine and climbed into my bed to be counted so that I could get home to my Wife for a few precious hours. These were real people.

I had no time to stand and stare and perhaps gripe and weep – just got on with it for two years.

There were times for laughter and bonding in those ten weeks of basic training. A darkened hut after lights out and the filled fire bucket in the centre with a ruler delicately balanced with a piece of cake over the water. Silence, then a small splash and we had got one. A mouse would be swimming and several flash lamps illuminated the poor creature and we felt such pride. I learned to fire a 0.303 rifle – and hit the next chaps target and fired over the safety wall to the village beyond. ‘They’ wisely decided I was not for the front line.

Then came that stroke of luck and I was sent to Cheshire to the Central Pathology Laboratory for some pretty intense training. My Wife managed to find a flat for us though I did not have a

living out pass and had to wriggle under the barbed wire to get home for some comfort for a few hours. I got away with it - just.

The training was heavy duty and taught me so much. The Lord and Master of our group of eight was a perfectionist – a brilliant Pathologist ‘Captain’. If we were to go onto the ward and inflict some unedifying test on a patient then it was only fair that we inflicted it on our self and then we would remember the discomfort if we messed it up. His trick pas excellence was to make us drink a litre of cold water and urea and then he would lock the toilet door for an interminable time. Then we collected our urine and measured various parameters of renal function. As the due time seemed far off and as the agony in our bladders increased it was .... come on Sir, open the door.... he just stood and grinned while our bladders screamed. Of course we got our own back in due course by removing the engine from his old Ford. We were a closely welded team, after all. We had to swallow Ryals tubes, coughing and spluttering and realise what the patients went through. I was learning the hard way. It was undeniably hard when I had to take blood from a seriously mentally disturbed patient who was ‘far gone’ and foaming at the mouth – I was scared but I had learnt not to give in, in the face of trivial adversity. I saw my first surgery and saw my first death and came to understand that once tough young chaps died. I was becoming hardened to the rigours of hospital life.

Then it came like a clap of thunder – I was posted to Hong Kong. Once again I had to leave my young Wife – this was becoming a habit. At least this was only for a year this time. So the Mighty MV Georgic a vessel of some

twenty eight thousand tons was to carry me and my kit bag across the oceans to savour trials and tribulations in faraway Asia. Thirty five days in that ship was bound to invoke adventures and happenings not strictly in Her Majesty’s Army Regulations and I took great advantage of the opportunity to become an entrepreneur and earn a few shillings for my first few days in China. More learning and more heart ache and, some enjoyable mischief.

March 1956 saw me standing on the Ocean Terminal on ‘Kowloon side’ waiting for a jeep to take me to 33rd. General Hospital up on La Salle Road and to report for duty at the Laboratory. I knew from the very beginning that there was a mistake somewhere and I should really be at the old BMH (British Military Hospital) No 27 Company way up on The Peak at Bowen Road. It took some convincing and fluttering of my ginger eyelashes and a lot of nerve, but I made it and survived arguing my point with the Admin Major - very politely of course. After a few days of sleeping in a Nissan hut in the heat I was posted to the old hospital to conduct my quasi research work on a mysterious tropical complaint which disappeared almost as soon as I arrived. I then spent my days in the so called ‘routine’ Lab. Dealing with everyday afflictions of the poorly and injured. I did return to the 33rd several times for short relief duty spells but I was to spend the next eleven months at BMH.

I really did see life and death and all stations in between. Twenty four Post mortems in primitive conditions and without training, was enough but it did not really affect me at the time (see my writings “The good the bad and the ugly”). I ‘had it all’ including putting a little 3 year old blond girl together with hairy string and making her hair look

as good as I was able: I made her pretty again. I held the hinged skull of the poor chap who fell off a roof somewhere and I carefully examined the groove in a young fellow's skull after he had shot himself. But I had the pleasure of seeing a sick child 'get better' and finding his young friendship and holding his tiny hand. Gave him comics and that bought me ease when collecting his blood.

I had learned to get on with life, on my own and to survive. I came back a better person and re-joined a society which never knew. These were my defining years. To the end of my mortal days, I will be grateful. I think and I remember.

Cheers and best wishes, ex 23018325  
Hardy T.L, RAMC (retired)

### **ABSENT BRETHREN**

Since the publication of the last edition of the Newsletter, I have been informed of the passing on of the following former members of the Corps:

Lt Col (Retired) Bhasi Bhaskaran  
Major (Retired) David John Charles  
Major (Retired) Jimmie James  
Captain (Retired) Mo Pringle  
Lesley Jones. joined in 1939

