



RAMC REUNITED NEWSLETTER JULY 2015

NATIONAL DEFENCE MEDAL

The Parliamentary Member for the Constituency of Stone, William Cash, tabled Early Day Motion 641 on 17th December 2014 and has 72 Members of Parliament signatures supporting the motion for the introduction of National Defence Medal.

The following is the motion that he tabled:

"That this House notes the significant personal sacrifice armed forces personnel make in their service to the nation once they take the oath or affirmation of allegiance to Her Majesty the Queen; acknowledges that ex-service personnel are proud to receive and wear Her Majesty's Veterans Badge, but notes that it is not awarded posthumously and it is considered by many to be insufficient recognition of the contribution veterans have made to the safety of the nation since the end of the Second World War; and therefore calls on the Government to rescind its decision not to recognise the veterans more appropriately by the award of a national defence medal and instead to establish a working group to

work with the Committee on the Grant of Honours, Decorations and Medals with a view to implementing a national defence medal as soon as possible."

Further information can be obtained by visiting the NDC website at <http://nationaldefencemedal.webs.com>

Or

join the NDM Facebook Group at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/NationalDefenceMedal/>

Would you please consider giving this campaign your support?

ROYAL ARMY MEDICAL COLLEGE MILLBANK - MOVING OFFICE THE McCRAN WAY

I served the last four years of my army career at the Royal Army Medical College Millbank. On posting to the College I assumed the appointment of RSM/Staff Assistant. Having been in post some 18 months the hierarchy decided that the College needed an RQMS/CSM and the RSM Appointment was disbanded.

The majority of the college other rank staff was comprised of Senior NCOs, with a few Junior NCOs. The College held Laboratory Technicians Courses throughout the year and the pupils rank on these courses ranged from Private up to Corporal.

The Owls Nest was the Unit Social Club and was run on the lines of a Sergeants Mess. I was the Presiding Member of the Club with a Committee consisting of PMC, PEC and Treasurer. These appointments were changed quarterly. Monthly meetings

were held on the lines of a Sergeants Mess Meeting.

My story goes back to December 1990. The traditional practice then and, I am sure is still the tradition today, was to invite the officers of the unit into the Sergeants Mess and the Officers reciprocated. The RAM College was no different to any unit Sergeants Mess when it came to Christmas. The Officers of the College were invited to the Owls Nest for Christmas drinks. Having welcomed the Officers into the Owls Nest and intermingling with them and pilling them with drink and eats, I happen to notice The Professor of General Practice the late Colonel Tommy Bouchier-Hayes (B-H) - I had to have my wits about me all the time when in his presence - standing by the fire exit doors. On approaching him, I noticed that he had opened the doors and left them slightly ajar. On questioning him as to why he had opened the doors he replied "Have you got eyes in the back of your head" to which I replied, "Always when you are about Colonel" He eventually told me why he had left the doors ajar. He informed me that he had arranged for the Post Graduate Medical Officers Course to come into the Owls Nest and take out the furniture later on that evening and relocate it around the College. On returning to work I came across a number of the PGMO Course going out for a drink, as it was the last night of their course. I approached Captain Rob Wainright - those rugby fans amongst us will know he played for Scotland and eventually skippered them - and informed him that the plan to enter the Owls Nest and remove the furniture had been foiled. He came clean and informed me that Colonel B-H had addressed the course with the plan. They were not prepared to do it, as the previous week the members of

the Owls Nest entertained the PGMO Course students to a games night and, the students thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

They were invited back to the Owls Nest that evening and some 8 officers attended and a plan was hatched to move Colonel B-H's office into the Lecture Theatre. It took two hours to accomplish the mission, leaving behind in the office, the telephone and his wooden train set.

There was a Captain at the time that was stationed at QEMH and was seconded to The Department of General Practice. He came rushing into my office at 0815 hours stating that there was no furniture in Col B-H's office. I informed him that it was probably the PGMO Course who were responsible as it was their last night and, previous courses had form for moving things about an relocating statues, furniture etc. around the College and HQ Mess. On asking for my assistance he was informed that I was on my way to daily prayers with the Commandant, Major General Ian Patrick Crawford. The Captain disappeared of into the college looking for furniture.

The Commandant was at 1100 hours giving a final address speech to the students in the lecture theatre. I informed him of what had gone on the night before with the moving of Col B-H's office and placing it at the front of the theatre. He tried very hard not to laugh.

On returning to my office the Captain was waiting in the corridor. I asked him if he was able to locate any furniture belonging to Col B-H, and stated that he was unsuccessful. I took him along to the lecture theatre and put him out of his misery, and

showed him Col B-H's office furniture. He asked that I gave him a hand to move it back. To which I replied "Sorry, Brig Abraham is doing the final lecture to the PGMO Course and that will be followed by the Commandant giving a final address speech to the students."

I escorted the Commandant into the Lecture Theatre and looked around but could not see Col B-H. The Commandant started his final address speech. Five minutes into his speech the door at the back of the theatre opened and in walked Col B-H. The Commandant looked up and said to Col B-H "Nice that you can join us Tommy." Then pointing to the layout to his right, he says "Do you recognise this Tommy" to which he replied "I will see you later Mr McCran"

Once the address was over and the Directors and Professors left the theatre, it was all hands on deck to return the furniture to its original place. It did not take long as the whole course helped move it.

Shortly after the furniture was restored, Col B-H came into my office stating that he was missing a fax machine which had been donated to the department by a Medical Firm and, would need to stop the students going off until it was found. I knew that we did not touch the fax machine as it was in another office. I immediately proceeded to the office adjacent to Col B-H's office, which belonged to the Director of Dental Practice. On entering the office, I asked the Sergeant sat behind the desk if Col B-H had been in recently. He pointed to a cabinet behind the door which when I looked, sat on the top, was a fax machine. I commandeered the machine and placed in my office. I then rang Col B-H and enquired as to

how much the machine was worth. He said "it was worth about £1500." To which I replied, "due to the amount of money involved, I would need to contact the SIB." He then informed me that the SIB should not be informed and he would have another look around his office for the machine. On noticing that his machine was missing from where he had placed it, he came into my office waving a handkerchief and walked off with his fax machine.

I have always been one for playing practical jokes, especially in my younger days of service. I was so pleased that everyone, even Col B-H saw the funny side of it. Don't know about the Captain though!!!

THE VICTORIA CROSS TO THE ARMY MEDICAL SERVICES

INTRODUCTION

Prior to 1856 the honours available to be awarded for exceptional service and bravery to officers of the British Army were the Order of the Bath, Brevet Promotion and a Mention in Despatches.

For the medical officer, whose status in the army was lower than that of other officers he were not eligible for the Order of the Bath until 1849 when a five page article appeared in the Lancet pressing for greater recognition of Medical Officers like their combatant counterparts. This cry was eventually taken up in the War Department and on 16th August 1850 the London Gazette announced that the Order of the Bath would henceforth be awarded to medical officers.

Captain GT Scobell MP, a retired naval officer, moved in Parliament on 19th December 1854 that some form of order of merit be instituted for personal gallantry.

In early January 1855 the Duke of Newcastle took up the cry and wrote to Prince Albert pressing for a new gallantry award. Over the ensuing months a design was approved and manufactured. Queen Victoria herself took great interest in the new award and made various recommendations about its design and manufacture. Queen Victoria eventually signed the Royal Warrant instituting this new award on 29th January 1856; The Victoria Cross was born. It is made from bronze, originally taken from Russian canon captured in the Crimea but it has since transpired that bronze from Chinese canon has also been used. The ribbon was red for the army and blue for the navy but it is now red for all three services.

The first investiture, by Victoria herself, took place on 26th June 1857 in Hyde Park.

Initially the cross could not be awarded posthumously but there was much controversy during the South African war about awards to deceased personnel, which would continue until 1920 when a new Royal Warrant officially stated that the award could be recommended and made posthumously, although in reality it had been since the South African War.

SURGEON JAMES MOUAT



James Mouat in uniform



(Mouat Medal group)



(Artist's depiction of James Mouat rescuing William Morris)

During the Crimean campaign there were three awards to medical officers of the army and it is fitting that we should look at the first award. James Mouat was born on 14th April 1815 at Chatham in Kent. He was the son of Surgeon James Mouat who had

joined the Army as a Hospital Mate in 1812 and at the time of young James' birth was serving as an Assistant Surgeon in the 25th Dragoons. The young James was educated at University College Hospital London where he entered in 1832 aged 16 years, having been nominated by R Dent Esq. Other brothers would follow him into UCL shortly after and Frederick John Mouat would pursue a distinguished career in the Indian Medical Service.

During his time at UCL he resided both at 73 Great Portland Street and Charlotte Street, Portland Place. During the 1832-33 session he attended classes in Anatomy; Chemistry and Materia Medica, followed in the 1833-34 session by Anatomy; demonstrations and Chemistry again. These were followed over the subsequent years by Practice of Medicine; Surgery; Botany; Midwifery and Medical Jurisprudence. He eventually qualified MRCS in 1837. He seems an average student having not been awarded any prizes for his studies.

A year after qualification James applied for and was accepted as an Assistant Surgeon in the army and served initially in 44th Foot from 14th December 1838 until August 1839. During this time the 44th Foot were stationed at Chinsurah, in India and served under Surgeon John Harcourt and with Assistant Surgeon William Balfour. Cholera broke out during which 250 men died within 3 months. In January 1839 the regiment moved to Kurnaul on route to Afghanistan with the 3rd Infantry Brigade.

On 9th August 1839 Mouat transferred to 4th Foot, also stationed in India and in 1839 at Bangalore. They too suffered the scourges of Cholera, a

disease that Mouat would encounter on a much larger scale during his later service in the Crimea. Mouat stayed with the 4th Foot until 3rd November 1848 when he transferred to the 9th Foot as the Surgeon with David Anderson as his assistant. During this period his father was also serving in India, as a Surgeon with 15th Dragoons but in December 1848 he died whilst on passage to England.

In 1848 the 9th Foot was serving at Newry and for the next few years they continued to serve in Ireland at various locations until they embarked for Malta in March 1854. Soon after, James Mouat had transferred to 6th Dragoons the regiment with which he would eventually serve during the early days of the Crimean campaign. He joined a regiment that had served for 38 years at home stations. At the time of their embarkation, 31st May 1854, they had a strength of 19 officers and 295 men but not all of them would disembark at Varna some 6 weeks later, for some members of the Headquarters of the regiment, being conveyed aboard the transport Europa, perished in a fire which engulfed the ship. These included the Commanding Officer, Veterinary Surgeon and sixteen men.

Soon after landing bowel complaints manifested themselves amongst the regiment and the camp was moved to higher ground but these complaints prevailed and Cholera appeared, killing four of the men. On 25th September the regiment embarked at Varna and landed at Balaklava on 1st October, where it encamped on the plain in front of the village of Kadekoi, eventually moving up to the heights before Sebastopol on 28th October. Disease continued to spread through the regiment whilst it engaged in frequent patrols and pickets and then the battle of Balaklava where two men

were killed by pistol shot and fourteen wounded.

The charge of the Light Brigade, on 25th October 1854 will forever take its place in British military history, perhaps helped by Tennyson's poem. One of the many wounded resulting from the charge, which eventually found themselves staggering back down the valley was Captain William Morris, the acting CO of the 17th Lancers. Morris had been severely wounded; his skull was laid bare by a Russian lance, his right arm had a sword wound, including an oblique fracture and one or more of his ribs were fractured on the left side

There are conflicting theories of who found Morris first but it is generally accepted that Lord Scarlett himself sent Surgeon Mouat of the 6th Dragoons, down to the valley floor to tend the wounds of this gallant officer. Mouat rode to where Morris had finally collapsed and joined by Sgt Wooden of the 17th Lancers tended his wounds. Controversy now exists of what actually happened next; one account states that Mouat and Wooden were attacked by Cossacks and that Mouat drew his sword to fight them off but it is doubtful that the Cossacks rode that far down the valley. Whatever the circumstances Morris was carried off the field and eventually made a full recovery.

The London Gazette of 4th June 1858 announced the award of the Victoria Cross to Surgeon Mouat with the following citation.

For having voluntarily proceeded to the assistance of Lieut-Col (sic) Morris CB, 17th Lancers, who was lying dangerously wounded in an exposed position after the retreat of the Light Cavalry at the battle of Balaklava, and

having dressed that officer's wounds, in the presence of and under heavy fire of the enemy. Thus by stopping a severe haemorrhage he assisted in saving that officer's life.

Wooden initially got nothing but on seeing the announcement of the award to Mouat applied for the VC himself (as you could in the early years) and was eventually awarded it.

On his return from the Crimea Mouat went on Half Pay in December 1856, was re-instated to full pay March 1858 and promoted to Deputy Inspector General on 1st October 1858. On 6th October 1859 he married, in Dublin, Adela Rosa Ellen, the daughter of Reverend Nicholas Tindall.

Mouat's next experience of campaigning was during the New Zealand Wars of 1860-61, where he served under General Pratt and again in 1863-65 during the operations in the Waikato, Taranaki and Tauranga Districts. During the latter he was repeatedly mentioned in despatches and received the thanks of the New Zealand Government for special and valuable services rendered in the Colony. His official report of the medical aspects of the war was published in 1865 as the Medical and Surgical History of the New Zealand War. In October 1864 he was promoted to Inspector General of Hospitals and in 1867 found himself serving in Aldershot and then went on to half pay from March 1868 to April 1870. In 1871 he was briefly in India and eventually retired in 1876. In 1888 he was appointed an Honorary Surgeon to the Queen and made a Knight Commander of the Bath in 1894. He died on 4th January 1899 at his home at 108 Palace Gardens Terrace, aged 83. His death certificate records the cause of death as Morbus

Cordis Hemiplegia. He was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, London.

The Victoria Cross medal group to Surgeon Mouat is now on display in the Army Medical Services Museum.

Thank you Pete Starling for this article

FIFTY MILLION POUND REFURBISHMENT AT KEOGH BARRACKS

More than 300 British Army Medics have moved into the newly renovated Keogh Barracks in Surrey.

4 Armoured Medical Regiment have been based at Normandy Barracks in Aldershot but under the Army Basing Program they are moving to a new home.

Interested in re-basing? Forces TV has been covering this issue for quite some time - go to <http://forces.tv/33784925> for more reports.

HMRC - MARRIAGE ALLOWANCE

On 19th June 2015, Gloria and I attended along with Mac and Norma McHale, Roy and Andrea Martin, The Miners & Welfare Club, Swillington, for a Charity Event organised by David "Nobby" Garbutt which was in aid of the Brain Tumour Research Yorkshire Branch. Some members may have come across Roy Martin during their time in the Corps. Having completed over 27 years and on leaving the RAMC he became an Independent Financial Advisor (IFA) During the course of the evening, Roy mentioned how one can transfer some of your

partners unused tax allowance. I was not aware of this and thought of how many members were also not aware, and therefore, asked if he would be prepared to write an article for our Newsletter.

Roy has completed the article and has copied the information from the site, which is appended below. It is suggested you open the website when reading this article for ease of reference.

From Roy Martin: Good news the government and tax office (HMRC) have approved a transferable tax allowance between spouses it is only a small amount of £1060 per year. It is a start on the principle that stay at home or low earning spouse should be able to utilise some of their unused tax allowance by transferring it to their partners.

The detail are shown below and you should register as soon as possible with the tax office, they will then send you a link, part of the process is to register with a credit checking agency during the application.

This process is not onerous I am not a techy and managed to complete it in about 20 minutes, so not bad for approximately £212 per year less tax to pay.

Please note application has to be made in the name of the person giving up the allowances i.e. non or lower tax payer.

Good luck and **remember "patience is a virtue."**

MARRIAGE ALLOWANCE

<https://www.gov.uk/marriage-allowance-guide/>

1. Overview

If your income is £10,600 or less, you may be able to reduce your husband, wife or civil partner's tax by £212.

You may still be eligible if your income is more because of tax-free savings interest.

Marriage Allowance lets you transfer £1,060 of your [Personal Allowance](#) to your partner. This is £10,600 for the 2015 to 2016 tax year.

You can [check that you're eligible](#).

Example

You earn £9,000 and your partner earns £25,000 before tax.

You transfer £1,060 to your partner through Marriage Allowance.

Your partner now has a Personal Allowance of £11,660 (£10,600 plus £1,060). Your Personal Allowance is now £9,540 (£10,600 minus £1,060).

If you or your partner were born before 6 April 1935, you may be able to claim Married Couple's Allowance instead.

2. How it works

In the 2015 to 2016 tax year, you can transfer £1,060 of your [Personal Allowance](#) to your spouse or civil partner if you're both [eligible](#).

This transfer will:

- increase their Personal Allowance, reducing the amount of Income Tax they pay
- reduce your own Personal Allowance

You'll transfer part of your Personal Allowance to your partner every year until one of you [cancels Marriage Allowance](#) or your [circumstances change](#), eg because of divorce or death.

The tax year starts on 6 April and ends on 5 April the following year.

How your partner gets their extra Personal Allowance

Once you've applied, HMRC will give your partner their allowance automatically either:

- by changing their [tax code](#), usually to 1166M - this can take up to 2 months
- when they send their Self-Assessment tax return, if they're self-employed

HMRC will also change your tax code if you're an employee or getting a pension. Your new code will reflect your new Personal Allowance and will end with 'N'.

Tax if your income is above £9,540

Your Personal Allowance is reduced if you transfer some of it to your partner, and you'll have to pay tax on any annual income above £9,540.

Example

You earn £10,000 and your partner earns £25,000.

You transfer £1,060 of your Personal Allowance to your partner. Your reduced Personal Allowance is £9,540.

You need to pay [basic rate](#) tax on £460 (£10,000 minus £9,540), giving you a tax bill of £92.

Your partner pays £212 less in tax because of the increase in their Personal Allowance.

3. Eligibility

You can claim Marriage Allowance if all the following apply:

- you're married or in a civil partnership
- your annual income is £10,600 or less, plus up to £5,000 of [tax-free savings interest](#)
- your partner's annual income is between £10,601 and £42,385
- you were born on or after 6 April 1935

If you or your partner were born before 6 April 1935, you may be able to claim [Married Couple's Allowance](#) instead.

If you live outside the UK

If you or your partner live abroad, you may still be able to claim Marriage Allowance if:

- you get a [Personal Allowance](#)
- your income is less than £10,600

4. How to apply

If you and your partner are [eligible](#) for Marriage Allowance, you can register [your interest online](#).

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will send you an email explaining what to do next.

If your application is successful, HMRC will backdate any changes in your tax to 6 April 2015.

5. If your circumstances change

You or your partner can contact [HM Revenue and Customs](#) (HMRC) to cancel Marriage Allowance. Who does this affects the date the allowance ends.

If you contact HMRC to stop transferring the allowance to your partner, it will end on 6 April 2016.

If your partner contacts HMRC to stop receiving your allowance, HMRC will backdate the change to 6 April 2015.

If your partner dies

If your partner dies after you've transferred some of your Personal Allowance to them:

- their estate will be treated as having the increased Personal Allowance
- your Personal Allowance will revert to the normal amount

Example

You earn £8,000 and transferred £1,060 of your allowance to your partner, making your allowance £9,540 and theirs £11,660.

After their death, their estate's Personal Allowance remains at £11,660 and yours reverts to the full amount of £10,600.

If your partner transferred some of their Personal Allowance to you before they died:

- your Personal Allowance will remain at the higher level until the end of the tax year (5 April)
- their estate will be treated as having the smaller amount

Example

Your partner transferred £1,060 to your Personal Allowance, making their allowance £9,540 and yours £11,660.

After their death, your Personal Allowance stays at £11,660 until 5 April, and then goes back to the normal amount. Their estate is treated as having a Personal Allowance of £9,540.

If you get divorced or dissolve your civil partnership

You or your partner [must contact HMRC](#) - tell them if you want to cancel the allowance.

If you do, the change will be applied from the start of the tax year (6 April) you got divorced in. If you don't, the allowance will end automatically at the end of the tax year (5 April).

Thank you for this contribution Roy.

REALITIES OF TWO YEARS OF NATIONAL SERVICE

During the past editions of the newsletter, I have had the pleasure of publishing Terry Hardy's accounts of the time he served during his National Service days. Terry has submitted a final article summing up some of the nasty sides of his two years as a National Serviceman.

Some nasty sides of a chunk of my life

Why explore this at all? I do it in part because I don't think my family have the faintest conception of some aspects of the realities of my life. They should have understanding but in some ways they cannot because they cannot relate to certain situations. At times I recognise that I may be a trifle unfair in attributing their ignorance to disinterest. In fact they cannot possibly fully understand certain situations because it is impossible to have a true understanding without exposure and involvement – they can have no perception. I don't honestly feel that they have necessarily tried very hard to find out either but that is their problem: I am around to ask and I have written the essentials to provoke enquiry.

I have now started this short narrative somewhat provocatively. Why not – it is, after all, me. The experiences of bits of awfulness per se is not unique to me of course but the actualities are. They did happen and it was not a joke. Perhaps I am laying some ghosts too and I certainly hope so.

I am talking about growing up, maturation and life at the sharp end. How to define 'growing up'? I think perhaps it includes, albeit subconsciously, an awareness that mother is not around, 'wifey' is not around and in fact at times no one is around to bail you out, buddy. You are on your own and at times you may feel as if you 'want out'. Growing up is not just about discovering that your parents must have 'done it'.

I am setting down some happenings which occurred between that special period between April 8th 1954 and April 7th. 1956 – The 'National Service

Years'. Misnomer if ever there was one – National Service was not just about polishing buttons and daft kit inspections – it was also about conscription and young men going to war and young men serving their Queen and Country: it was about young men being killed and wounded and traumatised in horrible circumstances. It was an extension of military service and let us not forget right here that somewhere around a thousand died or were wounded or were taken prisoners of war in Korea alone; a place they did not ask to go to. They were conscripts. I was a conscript and there was no opting out. This was not a game and sometimes it was bloody awful. I was around 22 when it all began: when I was conscripted and served in the R.A.M.C.

I imagined that at 21 or 22 or so, married with a growing and already productive career I must already be grown up when I was decanted from the back of a lorry on to a parade ground at Queen Elizabeth Barracks, Church Crookham, Hampshire. It was 8th. April 1954. I rapidly found out I had some way to go in the growing up saga. I had no help, no one to talk to. There was no such animal as 'texting' to contact my Sweetheart and no 'e-mail' and no 'mobile phones' as they hadn't been invented. Yes it was rather tough even from an emotional point of view. I have written of my experiences over the next two years in "The National Service Years" and that, I am proud to say, is in the Army Medical Services Library and also in the Imperial War Museum. It was tough for the many because they did not want to do NS and they were probably rather scared: I did not want to be plucked away to indulge in NS either. For many it was to be their 'Gap Year'.

Here are some more home truths as life happened to me

I start at the beginning, that first day – and night. I had just left my young wife living in dark woods in the middle of Surrey and didn't even know if I would see her again and I was alone: just think about this as an entree! I was soon in a hut with 17 other conscripts. They were all to some degree or another either bloody minded, stinking and unwashed, cocky little bastards, brutish, sad, trying to be kind and friendly because they wanted something another other guy had, or all of those at once – in common, they were all mega home sick: no one wanted to be in that hut – they were conscripts. That night I lay in my bunk wide awake, cold under a rough blanket thinking of home and how or if I could manage, and listening to discreet crying among the other bunks. Yes, it was a bit tough, but survivable. The rats chewing at my next door neighbour's boots and him swearing at them kept me awake - "F... off you little furry bastards" - and the sound of his boots crashing around the hut is now ingrained in my ears. It had started and I had two years minus one day to come. An enthralling thought to go to sleep on. I learned to help others – the young and incompetent lad in the end bunk who sat and stared and cried because he couldn't write his address or tie the too short a piece of string round the too small a piece of brown paper to send his 'civvies' back to his mother. I was growing up.

The trials and tribulations of those ten weeks of so called 'basic training' were survivable and not truly nasty. They were objectionable yes but being kept intolerably busy and always on the move, helped. I could survive the cockroaches falling out of the wooden slatted walls of No 1 cookhouse as I

stirred the morning tea at 6.00am for the lads. Tipping tins of condensed milk into the bubbling brown stuff and adding a generous handful of bromide mixed with the sugar (to keep them quiet, I was told) and stirring the huge vat with a broomstick was – well, interesting, and I began to enjoy trying to swipe a cockroach with my sophisticated stirrer. But I never managed this particular feat of coordination, I was too damned tired, always tired, absolutely knackered was the terminology. But I could survive these absurdities of life. I could survive catching hot crusty loaves of bread being thrown at me so that I could in turn chuck them high into the back of a three tonner. My fingers and hands bled from this pursuit and I was white as the proverbial snow as I fell into my 'pit' for a brief break later in the morning. Within minutes I was on my way to shovel coal somewhere in the 'Depot' from one place to another – for no particular reason. I was now black and with the white from the morning's efforts I resembled a gawky Dalmatian dog. The difference was I was bleeding from my own little paws. My fingers took a pounding again and again and every time I tried to push the brass keepers over my ultra-stiff webbing belt I felt the fragile skin pulling sorely away from my nails. I helped the snivelling little chap in the corner bed because he was simply incapable – I was already learning the arts of compassion. Who the Hell designed those items of torture, the webbing equipment? I listened to the inane chat in the darkness – mostly about sexual experiences and mostly, I hope, imagined and designed to impress a near neighbour in the next bunk – what the girl at the end of "our street" could do and what he had done by way of compensation. Those who were 'up for it' couldn't wait for that first 24hrs in Aldershot and they came back

with, what? They often came back with a dose of the 'clap' as it was colloquially called, that's what some came back with.

Yes, I could survive all this even though it was not good. It was not really nasty. The nasty bits were to come. I came to realise the training game was to break us in like some aberrant young foal and some of the individualities of each and every one of us were being expunged so that when we were told to do something we bloody well did it in someone else's quick time, not our own. It was basic training – very basic. But it turned 18 individuals into an efficient machine, fit for purpose, and by and large the contents of the hut were better young men for the experience after that ten or so weeks. I had learned what comradeship could be. I got on with this life and in retrospect I was better for this new window on the world of reality. It was part of a new experience of really growing up and becoming aware that all was not roses all the time 'out there'. I was coming to find the verb 'to appreciate' and the noun 'comfort'. I was getting wiser too, known in those days as being 'a bit fly'. In doing so I made, for example, a friend of a Pharmacist and he kindly injected local anaesthetic into my painfully sore feet so that I could walk upright in order to escape the Guard Room and get to see my beloved Wife for a few hours. Yes, I was learning and getting a little 'fly'. I was in my 22nd Year.

The 'nasty bits' first emerged when I joined No. 19 Company, and the Western Command Laboratory at Chester Military Hospital. The initial shock was moving into my new home, the back half of a Nissan hut with no end. The back door was ... the fields and the Tank Corps lines. I wanted

desperately to run across those fields and smell the grass and find my wife. But resisted the urge to become free and get locked up.

I soon entered into the world of training in Laboratory Technology and pathology techniques and this was the blessing of all blessings in those two years of conscription. My five months at Western Command Lab. served me well for the next half century. I have described my life at Chester elsewhere and in some detail [see February and March editions of the RAMC Reunited newsletters – Western Command Laboratory Chester Military Hospital June – December 1954) but have rather avoided some truly nasty bits.

At some time later on in my training I had been judged proficient at venepuncture to collect blood samples. This is somewhat of an art form unless you reduce the swearing recipient to a pincushion while finding that elusive vein, especially so in an obese female: it can be a nerve racking experience. Nowadays it is called 'phlebotomy' and one has all manner of certificates, training, and medico legal backup if you cock it up, and the patient is given an appointment at the 'phlebotomy clinic'. What a laugh! If I had made a cock up of the procedure the responsibility was mine and the result could be twenty eight days 'over the wall'.

Anyway, one day I was sent on an errand to the 'nut' ward to collect a blood sample and equipped with syringe, needle (sharpened by myself by the way) and tubes I approached a small ward to poke a needle into my 'client's' arm. Standing outside were two artillery chaps with rifles and all. "Where are you going mate?" I explained my mission and the two guys asked me to wait for a minute or

two. Inside came sounds of absolute mayhem and eventually the guardian angels appeared, sweating. OK mate, he's alright now – or some such. My patient was strapped to his bed. He was still thrashing about and, alarmingly, foaming at the mouth. His eyes were pinpoints of fire as he stared at me. Well, I just had to get on with it. It went OK and I escaped rapidly to the confines of my friendly Lab. "What the hell's wrong with him?" I asked. "Oh he's got terminal syphilis" I was told: he was literally raving mad, poor sod. This was a little bit 'nasty' and I suppose I grew up a little more. I had not asked for this experience, remember, I was a conscript. The experience would have certainly made anyone so inclined to having casual sex to think twice or to be put off forever and be celibate for life.

Another and early 'nasty' was also at Western Command Hospital. Leading from the Laboratory to the wards was a narrow rather gloomy corridor. Half way down, on the right hand side, was a small single occupancy side ward and I became aware that there was a patient within; I was not encouraged to ask what his problem was. One day I found out. I was asked, by the Captain Pathologist, 'Higgy' [see February edition of the RAMC Reunited newsletter], if I would like to help take a blood sample. This seemed a little odd as I was getting used to the more direct command of "bugger off and get that sample will you". We went in and.... there was a smell I won't forget and a pathetic sight lying on the narrow bed. He - almost 'it' - was dying, very painfully. The primary cancer was of the sphenoid and ethmoid bones. The smell was from him and he was rotting and he was screaming. My good Captain 'Higgy' in his compassion sent me out and that was the last time I had to enter that room. I had learned a lot

about 'Higgy' in those few minutes and he had taught me a bit too. The word was compassion but it was learning the hard way. 'Higgy' did the autopsy himself and would not allow any of us near and he was a good man for that and I came to respect him: more growing up.

I was in my 22nd. Year: I was a conscript and I did not ask for that experience but that was life and I was beginning to see it as it was. The rosy spectacles were off. There were no other really 'nasty' episodes at Chester and all went well and with much interest and avid learning. But soon I was off to Hong Kong. Tough at the start as I had to say goodbye once again to my young wife and head out to Asia and another new life. I was nearing the halfway mark and surely it would be exciting and an adventure. Yes, it was. 'Full of Asian dreams' – well I still have dreams about some of that so called 'adventure', more than half a Century on! By the way, yes it was an adventure but it was not really, in the modern idiom, a 'Gap Year'. Don't even think of it as such or some ex NS guy may take a swipe at you providing of course he had not had his arms removed in some bloody awful little war somewhere.

After a pretty miserable journey to Liverpool via that morgue of a station, Crew, crammed in with sleepy noisome young men, anxious young men, tired young men – we had been up at 4.00am, I remember – and many fairly miserable young men. I arrived at Liverpool and boarded our trusty Troop Ship with all my kit which I could barely lift. We cast off from the quayside in the darkness of late evening and after initial turmoil we slowly saw the Liver Buildings disappear: we were leaving home

and England. We obeyed ghostly orders, emanating from distant and ethereal megaphones to "lay to attention with boots removed" on our narrow bunks. I was somewhere down in the bowels of the great HMT MV Georgic, sister ship of the mighty Britannic. I must have been close to the anchor chains and the noise blasted my eardrums when the chains were hauled up and stowed in their locker. The portholes were secured (ominous) and we were off at last and all was well until I emerged from my 'pit' early in the morning and opened the 'cabin' door. Another nasty sight and experience met my eyes and nostrils. Along the narrow gangway and as far as I could see, men hung over dustbins vomiting and groaning and swearing and clinging to one another. I was now conscious of a strange movement underneath my own feet and legs and my stomach seemed 'volatile'. At times it was leaden then it appeared to want to float upwards: I thought we must surely sink at any moment as the storm in the infamous Bay of Biscay thrashed, with all its might, our 26,000 ton ship. I managed to grab my greatcoat and some warm clothing and scrambled to the deck. I stayed there for two days and nights wanting to die. I lay on my back and watched the masts caressing the stars. This was preferable to inhaling the fumes of vomit below. More growing up? I suppose so and I have had a healthy respect for cruising ever since: I was learning to survive in the best environment available and on my own, as was always my personal preference.

Nasty bits in Hong Kong

Now a new life was to unfold and with it a series of nasty bits as well as the good times – life, and certainly life in a busy general hospital. I have written

enough elsewhere to answer the question 'why Hong Kong' The specifics are spelt out in some detail in "Green Cans in Asia: troubles in Hong Kong" and within this reference to Green Cans I make clear one of the more unpleasant of duties. A cranky so called 'Research Project' which involved looking for trouble in cans full of foul faeces from patients supposedly with a syndrome called Tropical Sprue. This turned out not to be the case and mercifully the project folded and after a spell I was spared the ghastly business of mixing faeces in a magic mixer and sampling and 'analysing' it. Yes, this was another bit of the nasty side of life but not too horrendous just mildly awful and I could make up by enjoying the ambiance of Hong Kong and general hospital life.

Life in a General Hospital. Well, life and death and that is what hospitals are all about whether civilian or military. The British Military Hospital up on Bowen Road – No. 27 Company – was a small but very busy General Hospital. The staff (including me) were British, Chinese (the HKORs as they were known) and Ghurkhas. Most of the 44 or so British Staff were National Servicemen. A few had signed on for an extra year for the pay and there were a few regular servicemen. I was doing my conscript bit and I was around 5,000 miles away from my Wife and family: but I had good mates and I learned something almost every day and was growing up rapidly. I met some ragged guys who were back and who had served in Korea. One became one of my 'mates' and I made a friend of him; he was a bit of a mental wreck.

A truly rotten task

In addition to staff and the troops as patients there were Dependants. That meant wives and children. Ghurkha troops, their wives and children, Chinese, their wives and children, and so on. A right mixed bunch. Apart from dealing with the Laboratory analyses of sundry bits and pieces and body fluids there was another task which it was my lot to work on. The task – death! My particular task? Assisting and dealing with and clearing up afterwards, the several autopsies and resultant bodies we had mutilated. People young and old and middling, military and civilian, did actually die and had to be cut up and examined, even young children. I had no training, no special counselling, and no advice as to how to handle my own mental stress or whatever. I just got on with the job: at times it was 'B' awful and the situation which had resulted in death was often 'B' awful too. Here I was, the other side of the World from home, and my loved ones. I was in a strange if not ridiculous environment dealing with the dead in seriously awful circumstances. There were, fortunately, good mates to chat with and a NAFFI to drink in at the end of an awful day. I could not go out and get seriously 'smashed' because of the money – I didn't have any. And anyway, I was on duty most of the time. No, this was no 'Gap Year' adventure!

The autopsy room – just the "PM" room in my days, was small and functional. It was around ten or twelve feet square with a slab for the corpse and a sink and one dangling clear light bulb. There was a cupboard or perhaps two. There was one window high enough so that one could not see out of it – and I suppose that was also so that no one could see in. The room

sat on a concrete slab below the drive into the main hospital. The house of horrors was near to the Guard Room at the entrance to the hospital and it was accessed by a narrow flight of downward steps with an iron railing. It was an old room – as was the entire hospital – and was most likely an early relic dating from the first construction in 1907. There were a few white glazed tiles around the walls. That was it. At least it was cool in the Hong Kong summer. This was a grim little room and just about ‘fit for grim purpose’.

[I re-visited some 50 years after my first ‘task’ and the concrete slab was still there. Only the slab and a few fractured white tiles all covered now with greenery and jungle like growths of the sub-tropics. I stood and thought and remembered and tears fell without shame].

My task was simple. My Pathologist ‘Lord and Master’ would start, after making the classic ‘V’ section, at the bottom end – exposing the abdomen, thorax and contents – and I would cut the skull in half to expose the brain. After weighing the organ I would present it to the Pathologist and he would in due course slice and examine it, record sundry details and take appropriate slices for histology – which would sometime later be my ‘duty’ to process and prepare for histological examination. I should mention at this point the Pathologist. He was also young. He was a recently qualified ‘Medic’ – a National Serviceman. To some extent we were in the same boat. [I mention here that during my time at BMH I worked with three young NS Pathologists] Once I had ‘done’ the head end I would muck in with the abdomen and other sundries and we would work together. I say ‘done’ the head end with some

sort of abandon – until I remember that taking the top of an adult skull was actually quite hard physical work – the saw? It was an old manual saw. We only had one and it was as blunt as hell and it was not of course electric. Removal of the top of the skull had to be done with some delicacy so as not to disrupt the dura mater and destroy ‘evidence’. This was an even more difficult task in the case of very young children and babies. Knives and so on were old and basic and from time to time I had to try and sharpen the things. To get new kit meant indents to the stores in Singapore and this took forever. There were few other ‘tools of the trade’ and no fancy lights and there was no extract system – nothing of the paraphernalia one sees in the modern TV dramas of the 2000s. As I worked I took the odour of hot bone dust into my still young nostrils and this still emerges from time to time five or six decades later. This was a very grim room indeed.

After the Pathologist, aided and abetted by me as his assistant had finished, I had a very difficult task indeed and, remember, I had received no formal training – just did what I had been shown (once) and got on with the job. The Job was to put the poor individual back in one piece and make him or her (even baby) as presentable as possible and within my own competence. It was possible that dear ones would want to visit and see their loved one. This was not easy and I struggled with inadequate materials and hairy string and blunt triangular needles to stitch and stuff and whatnot. I was usually on my own in that grim room, wrestling with my own incompetence. I was always conscious of this being the most important task I would ever perform in my life and – well, I did the best I could for that poor

unknown soul and can always look myself in the mirror on that score. Yes I was usually alone, under that single dangling light in that stark room. As I struggled to get the top half of the skull to match the bottom half I also struggled with my own state of mind. I still do. Who were these corpses and what had brought them to this room, half way up on The Peak on Hong Kong Island?

I am not going to indulge in listing and detail. I seem to remember that I had to deal with twenty three or twenty four of those dark tasks. There were accidents – the three guys who had drunk and then drowned in a reservoir some place, there was a young woman who died of, I think, a diabetic coma, there was the chap who suffocated on his own vomit in an alcoholic mess in a cinema in Central (was it the Queens Cinema?). There were several Ghurkha babies who died of dehydration and toxæmia due to gut infection – left by parents of some other faith until it was too late to treat their young and their kids simply died. There was the tiny tot who drank chromic acid mouth wash and died in agony a few hours later. There was the chap who died after falling off a NAFFI roof somewhere out at Little Sai Wan and there was the young man who shot himself up his left nostril to escape trivial debts and dishonour.

I remember the few in particular with everlasting vividness. The young chap who fell off the roof had a fractured base of skull and when I had emptied the contents I could bend the base in half quite easily; it appeared to be hinged. I remember the one who shot himself because I can still 'see' the groove around the inside of his skull. And I remember him because I visited him on the ward a few hours before his death and he was coherent and smiled

to me. I remember the little babies because I was especially careful in reconstituting them back to something resembling a peaceful repose for the agonised parents.

Above all I remember the little blond girl. She was two or three years old and by dreadful accident she had drunk undiluted chromic acid mouth wash; mistaking it for some kind of orange fizzy drink, I suppose. A few hours later I had to cut the top off her little head and afterwards I had to wash her curly blond hair and try to make it look good. I tried. The Hong Kong Police came to observe and to take photographs especially of the tide mark of corrosion which encircled her tiny stomach – with my camera. Is it surprising that this was an experience of darkness which never leaves me? [until recently I had kept prints of the photographs and came across them. I destroyed them lest one of my family should ever come cross them].

There were other bits of nastiness even on the homeward bound ship, the HMT Orwell – I helped to thrust the raving lunatic into a net at the back end of the ship so that he could exercise. There were sundry other trivial episodes but they still bring back memories. I was, after all, growing up. With luck we all do that throughout our lives.

Those dark episodes were a part of that experience. I was a conscript, I was 22 and I was doing my job. I suppose I was learning to take the very rough with the smooth and learning, learning, learning. I had had to get of my butt and take life by the horns. I saw life and death. So, is it so very surprising that I sometimes find present day over tolerance in our 'everything goes' 'easy does it' 'hand

out' way of life more than somewhat aggravating? I don't think so.

Any regrets any recriminations? None at all. I suppose it could be called 'my Gap Year'. Certainly it was my good fortune to learn a little more about life and how to survive even if it was learning a rather hard way. I learned a little of what made young folk tick, too. I would certainly stand on my own two feet and I would accept and deal with my responsibilities. I made friends too – good 'mates'.

Yes, I was part of a great adventure in Asia and it was full of Asian Dreams. But I still dream. I wish that some of those dreams would go away

Terry Hardy

FORECAST OF EVENTS

The following are events which will be of interest to members.

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

RAMC/RADC OLD BOYS
REUNION DINNER 2015

The above Dinner is to take place on Saturday 22nd August 2015 in the Army Medical Services Officers Mess 1800 for 1930 hours. Information on this event has been placed on the following link

<http://www.ramcreunited.co.uk/files/Letter-for-OB-Reunion-Dinner-2015.pdf>

TURNING OF THE PAGE
CEREMONY – WESTMINSTER
ABBAY

Just to remind members of the dates for the above Ceremony.

| <u>DATE</u> | <u>UNIT</u> |
|--------------------|---------------------------|
| 3 October 2015 | 34 Fd Hosp |
| 5 December 2015 | 335 Medical Evac Regiment |

The Books are now located under the RAMC windows at the front of the Abbey.

The Ceremony always starts at 1100 hrs sharp.

Those wishing to attend should be in at the designated location before 1045hrs so that they can be in position and, if they need a seat then earlier as there are only approximately 20 seats.

Those attending should state that they are attending the RAMC Service and will be allowed in.

Are there any members who have performed this Ceremony and would like to share them with us?

PROVIDE ALL ARMED SERVICE VETERANS WITH ID CARDS

All ex-service personnel are entitled to claim the Armed Services Veterans Badge but it would be advantageous to issue all ex-service veterans, who have served in any of the armed services, with an ID card allowing them discounted goods etc. in all scheme member businesses. This would alleviate the fraud by some of using unjustified ownership of the Armed Services Veterans Badge.

Martin Harris from Peterborough has submitted a letter to the Prime Minister on the subject and, has also initiated a petition on Change.org which is currently running at just over 19,500, and needs another 5,500 before it will be considered to be processed.

If you feel that this is a worthy cause then please sign the petition by going to: https://www.change.org/p/david-cameron-mp-provide-all-armed-services-veterans-with-id-cards?tk=j6U29xLoAFIIHXxiPtu7s7sJJ1fy_qxgRQ_SldC-Kzs&utm_source=petition_update&utm_medium=email

ABSENT BRETHERN

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:

Late Robert Martin WW2 Veteran
Late John Wryncznsczn

RIP Gents