



## Military Survey (Geographic) Branch Royal Engineers Association



### Newsletter No 35 – Christmas 2009



#### PRESIDENT'S CHRISTMAS GREETING

The Branch has now been going for 10 years and we celebrated the tenth anniversary in July with some style, joining together with the Regiment and the School at Hermitage in July. There was a Beating the Retreat with the Corps Band on a warm evening. This was a foot-tapping evening that stirred the soul a little. We watched the Regiment parade with fixed bayonets through the streets of Newbury and some of us joined the parade. It was good to hear of the cheers of support from the people of Newbury and to be a small part of the event, with our Branch standard paraded. Above all, the tenth anniversary celebration gave us all a chance to come together as a Branch, to meet old friends at the bar and wish each other well as we look forward to the next ten years. The warm welcome from all at Hermitage helped to make the tenth anniversary a memorable one.

We said goodbye for the last time to members who died in 2009. It was good to be able to remember them at the AGM. The Branch standard was paraded at the funerals of some members and this has been appreciated by the families of those who died.

Your Branch committee is in good form though we are on the lookout for new members. If there is anyone who wants to be more involved in Branch activities, do please get in touch. We meet regularly, enjoy each others company and have some fun.

Looking ahead, the Branch committee (pictured below less Ken hall away working) will continue to publish the newsletter, improve the website and arrange for our annual reunion and AGM. We are also discussing new ways in which the Branch can continue to support the serving soldiers and civilian staff. I know that the Geo staff in UK and overseas value the support of the Branch; our cheers from the touchline are much appreciated. If you have any ideas to support the work of the Branch, do let us know.

As 2009 draws to a close, I wish you and your families a Happy Christmas and a peaceful New Year.

**John Elder**



**NEWS FROM THE CIVILIAN FRONT**



First of all let me introduce myself, I'm Pete Dowell and I have taken over the reins left vacant following the departure of Rod Siggs last year. I joined the committee in September of this year so I will take this opportunity to report on the highlights that have occurred within the Defence Geographic Centre (DGC), formally the Mapping and Charting Establishment and before that the Survey Production Centre RE over the past 15 months.

First, a short biography of myself; I joined what was the Mapping and Charting Establishment, RE in 1970 and in the 39 years that have followed I have held numerous posts within the organisation including Production, the early automated cartography section days, Configuration Management, and a 10 year spell working on Project Petros. I'm currently a Branch Head within Production Division. Married to Pam, who also works at DGC, have 2 children, both of whom are currently studying at university.

**PRIDE**

Programme to Rationalise and Integrate the DIS Estate (PRIDE) is now progressing well following the Main Gate Business Case approval earlier this year. This will result in the relocation of the Intelligence Collection Group (ICG) HQ (in a previous format D Mil Svy), currently at Feltham to Wyton in the 2012 timeframe along with other units within ICG.

Work has also been done in both Richmond and Hotine Buildings to prepare for the arrival of displaced Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) staff from London as part of the programme to close the Old War Office Building.

**DGC Production Modernisation**

DGC's Production Division is currently undergoing a major modernisation programme in terms of new equipment, hardware and software. This is the largest modernisation programme since the introduction of the Petros system in the early 1990's. This programme will enhance DGC's production capabilities, providing common systems and commercial GIS software applications across the majority of Production thereby allowing greater flexibility in tasking and production of the range of geospatial products.

Continuing the production theme, DGC has continued to be heavily involved in supporting Op Herrick, this includes close co-operation with geo staff in theatre. In addition to standard topographic line maps, new products have been developed and supplied, such as Cross Country Movement and Ditch Analysis all of which are fully attributed digital datasets.

**British Forces Germany (BFG) Map Depot Closure**

The closure of BFG Depot is generating significant work within the Map and Air Chart Depot (MACD) with the arrival of numerous consignments of mapping, each containing 70,000-90,000 maps.

**Green Initiative(s) Continued**

This campaign is progressing well and has gone from strength to strength with energy consumption being significantly reduced thereby minimising DGC's carbon footprint. This has been achieved by optimising the use of building management systems, the installation of power factor correction equipment in Hotine Building and staff remembering to switch off lighting and equipment when not in use. Further energy saving initiatives are planned including travel to work initiatives such as cycling where practical and car sharing.

**Old Boys Reunion (now referred to as Picnic in the Park)**



12<sup>th</sup> June 2009 saw hundreds of DGC staff leave their desks to partake in the various activities laid on by the Feltham Garrison Sports & Social Association (FGSSA). Numbers were swollen by 159 retired staff returning for their annual reunion and to catch up with friends.

Those previous members of the Garrison, military as well as civilian who wish to attend should send their name, contact details directly to:

Graeme Pitt – Secretary FGSSA Reunion,  
Capability Division,  
Room 147, Hotine Building,  
Defence Geographic Centre,  
Elmwood Avenue,  
Feltham,  
Middlesex. TW13 7AH

Tel: 0208 818 2981



*[Pictures: John Huse, Crown Copyright/MOD 2009]*

**Awards 2009**

Director of Defence Geographic Centre (DGC) awarded OBE.

Mr Stuart Haynes was awarded the OBE (Officer of the Order of the British Empire) by Her Majesty the Queen in her 2009 New Years Honours list in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the provision of geographic information to Defence.



*[Picture courtesy of BCA Ltd]*

Stuart said "I am humbled, honoured and proud to receive this award. I can honestly say that I am exceptionally lucky to enjoy what I do so much."

"The last few years in particular have been truly memorable, with the challenge of getting people, equipment and money in the right place at the right time to enable timely outputs, especially to operations. This OBE also reflects the hard work and dedication of all the people at the DGC. I have been particularly proud

of our collective achievements and the way that we have gone about our business. Whether for operations, or for support areas, everybody has worked together to meet the very high demand for geographic data."

In addition Ms Jean Smith was awarded the Order of the British Empire, Member (MBE) within the Queen's Birthday Honours list 2009.

## Sporting Activities

### CHARITABLE MARATHON RUN BY ICG STAFF - EDINBURGH MARATHON



A group of ICG staff decided they wanted to do something for charity with the bonus of getting themselves fit. So running seemed a good enough idea, also rather ambitiously, to run 500 miles.

They entered a series of runs and adventure races which would culminate at the Edinburgh marathon. A number of ICG staff took part in some or all of the races. This includes Andy Grieve, Jim Walter, Chris Sudding, PaulMenhennett, Mark Gonsalves, Crawford Thomas & Mark Harrison (guest appearance).

To date they have been pledged some £3000+. Well done to all.

*Photo: Jason Biggs, Defence Geospatial Centre.*

Map and Chart Depot Sergeant Darrel Ball has spent nearly a year on sabbatical playing for London Welsh and played in the Army v Navy game in 2009.

## Notable Retirees

March - Bob (Robert) Frost

August - Sue Lawes

November - Terry Hollands

## In Memoriam

It is with great regret that I report the death of Barry Knowles on 9<sup>th</sup> August 2009. Barry was formally a Warrant Officer in Technical Services Group (Richmond Building) who on becoming a civilian took on the post of Security Officer for both Richmond Building and subsequently Hotine Building. He had been retired for a number of years.

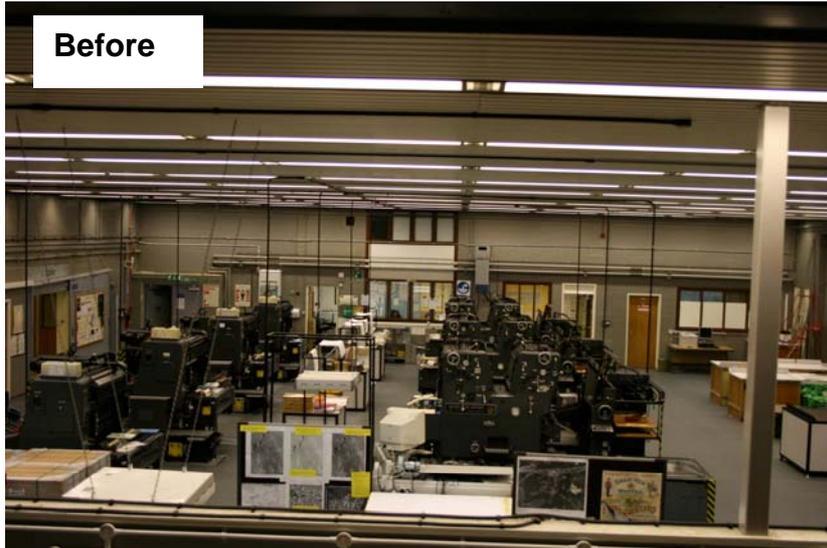
*Pete Dowell*

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## HELP URGENTLY WANTED

If you live in the Andover area and have a small amount of time available you could be of real help to the Andover Stroke Club. Les Morgan is the club's treasurer (apparently being branch treasurer in the early years gave him a taste for balance sheets) and he is desperately looking for volunteers to take over the roles of chairman, secretary and events organiser as the incumbents are all due to leave for various reasons. None of these posts is onerous but would provide the chance to help a group of people who have suffered one of life's more serious afflictions. Volunteers do not need to have any knowledge of strokes – to find out more details please give Les a call on 01264 356 865 – go on, pick up the phone – you could really make a difference.

FAREWELL TO A GOOD OLD WORKHORSE



July 2009 saw the final demise of the Heidelberg printing press from RE Geo.

The machines came into service in 1975; not a bad investment in light of current trends! *“Okay ‘Procurement Staff’, what we want is equipment – field deployable, to last 30 years with only one minor upgrade required – that we can sell for a reasonable amount at the end of its life”.* Hmm!!

The total number of machines was four single colour (Sord) and three double colour (Sord Z) in RSMS with 13 and 14 Squadrons each having two single colour machines container mounted and 135 Squadron with a single colour machine.

The machines supported all major operations from the Falklands and the Balkans through to Iraq and Afghanistan. They averaged around 12 million impressions per machine, in commercial terms about a years work! They were supported for the last five or six years with the Digital Pre-Press CTP (Computer to Plate) technology, a far cry from the pre-sensitized plates, negatives and positives of earlier days.

So for the first time since the 1930’s Military Survey/Geo does not have the capability to print “medium format” oversize B2 (for Cold War warriors that is about M745 size) in bulk in the field.



The presses, less the 135 Squadron machine which is still awaiting disposal, were sold at MOD auction with 13 and 14 Squadrons’ going complete with containers. Deemed to be in superb condition the presses were enthusiastically bid for by a number of interested parties. Their final destinations were reported as Africa and the Far East – quite appropriate in terms of Military Survey/Geo history! Their replacement for the next 30 years is eagerly awaited - clearly not plotters!

**Paul Sleep, Senior Instructional Officer Print, RSMS**

**Message from the Secretary**

Please let me know if you are still getting paper copies of the newsletter but you have an email address. Adding you to the branch email list not only saves postage but it means that you could hear some news items that don't go into the newsletter as the immediacy has passed, for example notices of deaths or funeral arrangements. My email address is: [kjhsurvey@aol.com](mailto:kjhsurvey@aol.com)

**Bill 'Curly' Lees**

Curly was born in India in 1939 and was the son of a service family. He enlisted as an apprentice with Intake 55B at the Army Apprentice School, Harrogate where he trained as a draughtsman topographical.

His first posting was to 42 Regiment at Zygi in Cyprus and on completion of a full three-year tour he was posted to HQ FARELF in Singapore in 1961. After a year at Tanglin he was posted across the island to 84 Squadron where he served until 1965. Posted back to the Regiment, by then at Barton Stacey, he left the Army in 1965.

Curly then joined the Newcastle upon Tyne Constabulary, which later became the Northumbria Police Force, where he was known as Bill, and remained with them for 30 years. He achieved the rank of Inspector and headed the Force Firearms Unit and eventually retired having served as Station Inspector at Wallsend.

Curly loved to travel and was always a major influence in organizing the annual overseas holiday for a small group of ex-Army surveyors (nicknamed 'The Wrinklies') and their wives. He was a keen photographer and played golf twice weekly. He had an enquiring mind and could always be relied on to engage in conversation in foreign countries when information was sought.

He died suddenly on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October and his funeral was held at the Whitley Bay Crematorium on Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> October 2009 with the Branch Standard displayed at the service which was much appreciated by the family. There was a good attendance of ex-Army friends with Andy Thomas, Tim Holt, Dick Elliott, Neil 'Scouse' McQueen and Brian Houldershaw forming a guard of honour as the coffin was carried into the chapel. Messages of sympathy in absence were received from Jim and Margaret Butterworth, Mick Guise, Robin and Margaret Barrett, and Bev and Francis Hill.

Well loved by his family he leaves behind a wife (Norma), son (Tony), and daughter (Adrienne).

**RAY MITCHELL**

Ray Mitchell was a civilian instructor at the Army Apprentice College, Chepstow from the early 1960's until 1992. All who served at Chepstow, whether instructor or student, will have fond memories of him in the Photo department and around the College with his camera in hand recording events. Bryan Osborne says that as a 17-year old he found him an inspirational instructor to whom he owes much of his career both in the Army and afterwards.

Sadly, after a couple of years of declining health Ray died peacefully on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October in Chepstow Hospital.

**HQ REA EVENTS 2010**

HQ REA events for next year had not been published at the time of compilation of this newsletter. For details it is suggested that members monitor the HQ website diary page at [www.reahq.org.uk](http://www.reahq.org.uk) and those not online should call 01634 822 394.

**Life after Military Survey: Bill Pointon**

On completion of a full and memorable 10½ years in Military Survey, finalised at SMS as a field survey instructor on Tech 1 courses, I purchased my discharge to take up an opportunity in SE Asia that had been offered to me by my brother-in-law, Mike 'Taff' Watson (who sadly died in 2008), as a surveyor in a Singapore-based dredging company. Little was I to know that this venture in May 1975 was to be the start of a mad roller-coaster ride through a fascinating, exciting and scary civilian survey career.

After a week in Singapore, I found myself living in appalling conditions in the middle of the Mahakam River in East Kalimantan. Working 12 hours a day, 6½ days a week, life was tough. There was a team of 4-5 and two other members were George Seymour and Mick Clowes, both ex RE Survey. I didn't complete my initial 6 months as I was medivacced (eventually) with hepatitis back to Singapore. It transpired that Mike Watson was leaving the company to join a pure survey company (part owned by another ex RE Surveyor, Mick Jones) and I was, for whatever reason, made the company Chief Surveyor. This opened up the realities of how bad this company was in both technical performance and staff relations. The opportunity also introduced me to the Middle East where the company was working (extremely badly) on the reclamation of the Dubai Creek Lagoon. However, the survey aspects of all projects were going well and in this regard, things were under control. Nevertheless, the company could not continue as it was and a new 'top management' team from USA came into the picture and eventually there were staff changes and I was the last expat to be laid off, just before Christmas 1976.

Being cast adrift in Singapore with a young family is no joke and it was imperative that I found a job right away or return to the UK. Luckily I secured a job with the offshore survey division of an international diving company and during my time with this company I travelled extensively in the region but primarily within Indonesia. The life was interesting and I loved the work, but the salary and allowances were poor, due to the fact that I had 'signed-on' in Singapore, rather than Europe. After two years, much to my surprise I was 'head-hunted' by a Swiss-based company that had just been awarded a very large contract in support of a construction programme offshore East Malaysia and Brunei.

The new job took me throughout South East Asia, mostly East Malaysia and the Philippines, but also Kenya and Diego Garcia and in mid 1980 I was appointed Operations Manager of the company in Singapore and thus started a rather rocky ride through management that lasted for a further 28 years. The next four years saw the company prosper and our areas of operation grow across South East Asia and as Operations Manager it was necessary for me to travel to all the job sites.

In 1984, I was designated to open an office in Swindon to cover the Company's West Africa and Middle East operations and after 9 years away from UK I was happy to return, at least for a while. The company started off shakily and things did not get too much better in the first two years. This was a time when oil dropped to US\$ 9.00 per barrel and the oil companies just stopped all development and exploration work, hence business was not exactly brisk but we managed to keep going. I did however manage to acquaint myself with Nigeria at this time and during a couple of my trips to Lagos I bumped into Dave 'Scouse' Curnow at the Shell offices. He was working for a Land Seismic company (SSL) at the time.

After a couple of years of apparent stagnation, Head Office decided in 1986 it was time for some draconian changes and I ended up as Project Manager in Angola which was then in the throes of a civil war. 1990 saw me promoted back to Operations Manager in Swindon but I spent most of '91 and '92 in Nigeria.

In 1992 the company reorganised into business divisions. I transferred from offshore survey into the Land Survey division and in career terms I was at the lowest point that I had been for a number of years. June that year saw me move to Pakistan as Project Manager for a large land survey project. Business wise this was a turbulent time and in '94 the Swiss parent company was sold to a Dutch multinational. I was by this time spending 4 months in Karachi and one

month at home and this was becoming stressful. At the end of 1994 I was offered a position in Abu Dhabi to take over an ailing offshore survey company of the group and also to continue running the Pakistan operation. I accepted this and in January 1995 moved to Abu Dhabi with my wife. It was very clear why the offshore company was 'ailing' and thus it was necessary to find ways to both cut costs and secure more business. One of the actions to cut costs was to move the company to Dubai, which was far less expensive than Abu Dhabi. However, it was with some relief that a 'top level' decision was made to close the Dubai company at the end of 1995 and the Dubai geotechnical company of the group that provided some land survey services and also required survey support, took up my services. However, the following year it was suggested to me by one of the Board in Holland that I should go back to Pakistan and focus on that operation. So, in 1996 that is exactly what I did. However my wife did not want to move from Dubai and thus started problems that led to divorce.

I spent the next six years in Pakistan, mostly in Islamabad, during which time many things happened; there was a military coup, increasing terrorism, 9/11 led to a temporary evacuation of all expats, the company moved into data conversion, I studied for an MSc in GIS and found a new partner. By the end of 2002 the business had grown into a very successful 150 strong company and I was offered the post of managing director of the group's Canadian land survey company based in Calgary, Alberta – somewhat colder than Pakistan!

January 2003 saw us move to Canada but for various reasons the next few years running the company were very stressful and, although Canada itself was enjoyable, when I was offered the chance to move to another company within the group I took it. This entailed a move to North Wales as Operations Manager involved with hard copy data storage and digital conversion projects. It sounds really mundane and boring, but in actuality it was absolutely fascinating and for 2½ years I was involved in all sorts of things that were new to me and it was a real intellectual challenge.

I finally retired at the end of May 2008 and so after 41 years in surveying and 2½ years in data storage I was free of all encumbrances at the age of 60. The last 29 years I had spent working effectively for the same group, taking into account that the Swiss company was taken over by the Dutch, but I had so many different roles and lived in so many locations that it seems like I was moving from job to job on this really weird roller-coaster. We are now living on the South East coast of Spain in a house that we bought some years ago with a view to retirement. Neither of us was keen to settle in the damp of Northern Europe and so Spain seemed ideal. I do not miss 'work' at all. I have spent the last 18 months doing serious DIY and gardening but still have a long way to go. I can really recommend early retirement but you must be ready and fully prepared. I was, and after a rather hectic working life, feel I can really reap the benefits.

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### BRANCH EVENTS 2010

#### Monday 24 May

The Corps Band has been booked to Beat Retreat at Hermitage during the evening and although details at not yet in place, Commander JAGO and the RSM have kindly agreed to invite Branch members to the evening. It is also hoped that a band concert can be arranged in Newbury during the day. Details will be published in the Spring newsletter and on the website – but diary the date now.

#### Saturday 4 September

The Annual General Meeting and Reunion will take place at Hermitage on Saturday the 4<sup>th</sup> of September. A detailed programme will be published in the Spring newsletter and on the website but again, book the date now.

## HISTORY MATTERS

### 'MAPS AND SURVEYS' 2010 SEMINAR

A reminder that the 2010 seminar on historic military surveying and mapping will take place at Hermitage between 1000 and 1700hrs on Saturday the 19<sup>th</sup> of June. Subjects range from RN hydrographic surveys in the Napoleonic Wars, African Boundary surveys at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the role of photogrammetry in photographic intelligence, the story of the tellurometer and, to come right up-to-date, a presentation on 'Technologies For Fusing GIS, Terrain and UAV Data in Real time Intelligence Support' by former Military Surveyor Derek Ireson.

Details to book a seat will be published in the Spring newsletter.

### WHAT EVER IS IT? THE ANSWER!



The last newsletter included this photo and asked whether anyone know what the equipment was and what was it used for. Two mature field surveyors responded with answers that together point to the late Sixties and early Seventies when research was conducted into battlefield illumination under an operation codenamed Firefly.

By total happenstance your editor was involved in the first Military Survey involvement when Mick Callow and I from 47 Squadron took an F49 air survey camera with a tripod made by the REME out to Cocum Farm near Barton Stacey on several cold clear nights in late 1968 or early '69 and photographed Schimuly flares fired from Moody Down range and timed their duration. Each following day the film was developed and the path of the flares was coordinated using a Cambridge stereocomparator. The data was sent off to Feltham and we never heard of the project again.

However, it would appear that 19 Squadron then became involved as our first response to the question came from Bill Pointon who thought it was a pinhole camera, one of a set of three used to photograph flares at Barton Stacey in 1970. He recalls two elements to the task; three teams with theodolites taking timed observations both horizontally and vertically to fix the position of the flare and three pinhole cameras to photograph it.

John Rowan's reply seems to confirm this answer. He remembers being detached to Stranraer in January 1971 where the camera in the photograph was used to photograph flares dropped from aircraft. The camera was linked to a chronometer and John was positioned in the Comp Wagon tasked with operating the timepiece, as he seemed to be the only one in the squadron at the time with first order astro experience. John purchased his discharge shortly afterwards and forgot all about the episode until seeing the photograph.

So, the answer appears to a pinhole camera used to photograph flares for Operation Firefly, probably replacing the difficult to operate air survey camera. Many thanks to Bill and John for responding.

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### HISTORIC DOCUMENTS ON THE DSA WEBSITE

The Defence Surveyors' Association has been adding a number of historic documents and unit histories to its website under the Historical Documents tab so that they are available to anyone interested in the history of Military Survey.

The website is at [www.defencesurveyors.org.uk](http://www.defencesurveyors.org.uk)

**TREASURER'S INPUT**

There is very little for the Treasurer to report at this time of year. The accounts will be prepared for audit in early January and subscriptions will become due in February. The financial situation remains healthy.

**Bank Accounts**

The three bank accounts contain: -

Current	£ 755.21
Savings	£7,009.72
RE (Geo) Fund	£1,877.47

**Subscriptions And Debtors**

277 members have paid subscriptions, (the vast majority by standing order), realising income of £2216.

8 members have failed to pay their 2009 subscription, a shortfall of £64. It seems unlikely that they will pay at this late stage and they will receive letters terminating their membership.

The Treasurer repeats his annual plea to the minority who pay by cheque, or in person at the AGM, to switch to our Standing Order scheme. This is very simple to set up and operate and it makes administration much easier (and cheaper). Please apply to the Secretary or Treasurer who will send out a SO form.

**Michael Gowlett**

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