

Dedication of the Corps of Royal Engineers Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum, Alrewas, Staffordshire

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This Service of Dedication was conducted by the Right Reverend David Smith, FKC, a former Bishop to the Forces, in the presence of the Chief Royal Engineer General Sir Kevin O'Donoghue, KCB, CBE. The Royal Engineer Memorial comprises four massive granite blocks (9000 kilos each) presented to the Corps by the Falkland Islands. The stones are supported on four stainless steel dowels which are set in concrete and appear to make the blocks float over the immaculate grass mound, which is the focus of the RE Memorial area. The design concept for the Memorial is to suggest that the Sapper is able to intervene and control the physical and geographic environment of the land in which he operates.

For the mid-morning ceremony, the weather was perfect with brilliant sunshine and a strong breeze that suited all personnel whether they were in the full dress uniforms worn by the serving VIP contingent, the scarlet jackets of the Corps Band or the Khaki Service Dress with side arms worn by the Ceremonial Quarter Guard.

Behind the Memorial Blocks ranged over 80 standards – and lined up in two concentric circles stood the Royal Engineer Association Standard Bearers representing most Branches of the Association. The Military Survey (Geographic) Standard was carried by Mick Nottage while our own Mike Payne carried the Reading & West Berkshire Branch Standard, which is much lighter (clever) and also the sister REA Standard held by the Hermitage Garrison WOs' & Sgts' Mess. It was quite a sight to see the mass ranks of over 80 National Standards being dipped and raised to the commands of the Regimental Colonel Royal Engineers and the Corps RSM for the rendering of the National Anthem, the Last Post and Reveille.

In front of the Standards, there was a further unique line-up of 18 Regimental Sergeant Majors, under the command of the Corps RSM, representing all serving major units of the Corps including from Hermitage, our own WO1 (RSM) R D S Meakins, 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic) representing all currently serving Geographic Engineers and former Military Surveyors.

The exhortation – “They shall not grow old” was given by the Corps RSM and followed by the Last Post and Volley. After the Reveille, four official wreaths were laid by the Chief Royal Engineer, Chairman REA, E-in-C and Commandant

RSME and a fifth by a Representative from the Old Comrades Association (OCA). Finally the Chief Royal Engineer planted a regulation sapling tree with the usual silver spade to enhance the overall growing collection of trees at the National Memorial Arboretum.

On conclusion of the dedication a fine buffet lunch was served in a giant marquee, where all serving and retired ranks of the Corps together with their guests, wives and partners were invited to meet those who had participated in the Commemoration.

The break in formalities also allowed photographs to be taken of participants and the RE Memorial. In short an excellent display of simple ceremonial, performed with precision, which was followed by a friendly gathering of current and past members of the Corps bring entertained in colourful surroundings.