



RAMC REUNITED NEWSLETTER MARCH 2015

WESTERN COMMAND
LABORATORY
CHESTER MILITARY HOSPITAL
JUNE - DECEMBER 1954
(Continued)

I have mentioned this was very much a working Laboratory as well as one for training.

We had the routine haematology to cope with from the busy hospital as well as groups and cross matches from the ops theatres, we had immunology to keep us on our feet - WRs and Kahns (the Wassermann and Kahn test for syphilis) and the full absorbed Paul Brunel test for glandular fever (rampant in a military environment). I spent many hours peering down the microscope looking for malarial parasites and even micro filaria as patients had come from tropical places and frequently had weird feverish complaints which "just might be....!"

We had all of the usual histology coming in and processed the material from "A to B" before the sections went to "Higgy" or the Colonel for diagnosis. No disposable microtome knives in

those days and we sharpened our own.

There was an endless throughput of bacteriology and again it was an "A to B" job as we made up our own media and poured our own plates, seeded them, made the slides and passed them on to "Higgy". I learnt the 'Kauffman White' tables for classification of pathogenic bacteria by heart - 'acid and gas in maltose' (or was it acid but no gas in mannitol? – I don't know now). Yes we learned all about salmonella and shigella dysentery and I collected a first hand experience. Somehow I picked up a dose of salmonella typhimurium and had to be stuffed with sulpha-guanidine for days on end. We never found out where the offending bug came from or how it got into my gut and we had no sample of it in the lab. I suppose it was from some sausages or pies brought in Chester!

"Higgy" rather fancied himself as the World's greatest bacteriologist and reckoned he could recognise most bugs from the plate odour. Well, he got his comeuppance when he got his rather large nose a little too near the plate and a colony of staph. aureus became impinged on it. The 'Nobel' Captain landed up with a magnificent boil on the end of his hooter and was not amused!

My first experience of a cancer patient in a hospital was at Chester. The poor, young, individual was in a side ward a few paces down from the Lab. and I had to collect blood from him. These particular visits were a terrible experience and they affected us all in the Lab. very badly. "Higgy" showed great compassion and understanding and, at the end, he refused to have us going into the room and did any necessary Laboratory procedures

himself. He also kept us away from the autopsy: he had no need to do this and I had a great respect for him for shielding us. I suppose this was my first really bad experience: and it was bad. Fifty years later I still wake up dreaming and feeling the awfulness of that young chaps suffering.

Taking blood samples was not always easy and I once had the task at Chester of taking blood from a young Staff Sergeant who was in the terminal stages of syphilis. I stopped outside of the small ward and was challenged by two Royal Artillery guards with rifles. "Oi, where do you think you are going?" I explained my mission and, after a violent struggle, I was allowed in and had to approach the poor guy who was held down by the two guards. The patient was quite 'out of it', foaming at the mouth and thrashing around: he had terminal syphilitic dementia

And so I was learning and, again, going through the ongoing process of growing up and seeing some of the less cosy sides of life.

In due course I took the exams. The first exams I really approached seriously and for the first time I had actually 'swotted'. Those examinations were important, they seemed to have relevance, I was interested in the subjects and I had task masters - "Higgy" and Sergeant Gregory - and competition and I had no excuses for not doing fairly well. I wrote to David Holland on 18th November "mean while the examinations are now finished, with, I am pleased to say, the best of results, managing to pull off 1st. place with an average of 85% for all four parts, I have just beaten the previous best by 2%". The "previous best" was a Dr. Bernard Whaler who was by then at MOD,

Porton Down. This was a very satisfying achievement as the 'competition' was all ex hospital pathology. laboratory types and by rights they should have walked all over me! They did not and the honour of Beecham was upheld.

Not too long after I had settled in to the routine of Chester and an active but reasonable comfortable and productive life, Greta managed to get a job at Anchor Motors in Chester. This was a main service set up for tractors and the like. Importantly we managed to find a little one roomed first floor flat just minutes away from the 'Rows'. It was No. 33A Lower Bridge Street and the flat was above a butchers shop. The Landlord and Landlady were very Welsh and lived on the premises. They were in the late fifties or sixties I suppose: neither had any sense of humour or understanding and we were never made to feel welcome. I can only describe them as being 'pinched' in appearance and desperately narrow minded.

Greta had stayed on at the caravan in the woods at Capel while I was at Crookham and now she had the personal upheaval of leaving that little sanctuary. She had to leave the idyllic setting, the solitude, the birds singing and the primroses and, most of all, Brumas, our little cat. It must have been very sad for her but at least we were going to be together again.

Our little one room flat was directly above the butcher's shop and he would come in at some unearthly hour in the morning and hang the heavy carcasses on to hooks which screwed in to the ceiling – our floor! Sleeping though that lot was impossible. The only consolation was the thought of him coming in early when we had had a rather good night, and perhaps

seeing the carcasses swinging from his damned ceiling!

I did not have a living out pass but this did not deter me and I risked getting caught. Getting out was simple enough and every evening I simply walked through the gates, shouted to the Guard "see you later mate" and caught a bus into Chester. Getting back in the early morning was a different matter all together. I would catch the earliest bus to the Deva hospital and somehow get in to the Tank Corps lines which were immediately behind our hospital. I would then crawl under the barbed wire, traverse a small wooded area and slide into my sleeping quarters and slip into bed, fully clothed in my 'kit', boots and all. Around 7.00am there would be a thunderous banging on the door and wake up call and I would be instantly up and over to the cook house for breakfast. It was a mystery to my mates as to how 'Ginge' was always so alert and at the front of the queue for breakfast!

Eventually I got my living out pass and all was legal. It is a matter of interest that the very first day I walked briskly in to the camp at 7.00 am. There was a check on all living out passes - this was a near one!

Life at Chester was not unpleasant and when I was off duty we could wander along the banks of the river Dee, explore the ancient walls and even take a bus to North Wales, visit Ruabon and walk along the canal banks. The Cathedral at Chester was rather fine and I took part in the Armistice Service Parade there and marched through Chester with the Cheshire Regiment. This must have been the last time I had to wear fully 'bulled' kit and perform while I was in the UK. We even managed a trip to Chester

Zoo with another married couple, the MacPhersons. He was also at the Laboratory Fred's wife was somewhat diminutive, very shy and spoke very little. She came out with a wonderful statement when confronted with the enormity of an elephant: "Fred, does it pass water?"

There came a shattering blow in the December. I had collected my pay from the Colonel and, as I was leaving, he called me back and said that as I was nearing 'half time', doing well in the laboratory. and clearly settled in, it was highly probable that I would stay at Chester for the rest of my National Service. This was great news as Greta and I were happy there and nicely settled in. However, I had done rather too well and the Colonel had sent papers to the War Office suggesting I was given accelerated promotion (never found out to what). The Colonel had been a little too kind and enthusiastic and I had now been brought to someone's attention in the mighty machine; this is nearly always a serious mistake

As I walked from the laboratory. Someone called out "Hi Ginge, do you know that you are on draft?" I could not believe this, thought it a joke and told him so. "Well, just look on the board at Company Office." I did and there it was, 23018325 Hardy, posted to Hong Kong. I was stunned. "When am I going?". "Immediately" they said. Well, it was not immediately but, effectively, it was not far off.

This was not the best of news to take home to my wife but we seemed to take it in our stride. Anyway, with Christmas coming up and some sort of embarkation leave, we were moving towards half time – well, nearly, anyway.

I returned to the flat with at least some good news – for our wizened witch of a Landlady. We had been urged for some time politely, to find somewhere else to live and couldn't wait to get away from 33A Lower Bridge Street. It had served a purpose but enough was enough. That night, when I returned home with the great news that I was moving to the other side of the World, 'Madam' asked again. "Have you found anywhere to live yet?" She looked at me and was aghast at my reply: I enjoyed that precious moment. Why Hong Kong?

This was not someone's petty whim. There was, at the time, a mysterious 'Sprue like' disease out there among the troops and it needed investigating. As I had some experience of the world of "research", which I suppose must have been on my records somewhere, and also I had experience of pathology laboratory technology at Chester, I was marked down to go out to the gateway to China and find out a little more! I say sprue like because the symptoms resembled that syndrome which was generally marked by diarrhoea, soft fatty and frothy stools, wasting, a macrocytic anaemia and general malaise and 'malabsorption'.

First I had to visit, the very next week, the Birmingham University and the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the metabolic unit at Little Bromwich (H.G.Sammons Lab.) and Prof. Fraser's lab. (Fraser was the famous nutritionist) for some "specialist" training. This was a somewhat intensive short course and lasted for two weeks. I was a bit of a fish out of water but they treated me well although I remember feeling like an alien from outer space at the time, me in my RAMC kit and they in their civvies.

The training really consisted of learning how to determine the fatty acid content and iodine values, and so on, of faeces. Not a pleasant or particularly mind bending task but another one I had to master. Also I had to master the art of chylomicron counting. This was a determination of the numbers of microscopic fat globules in the plasma using dark ground illumination and microscopy. It was a bit of a hit and miss affair but one could get some idea of the amount of fat absorbed after giving the patient a mug of coconut oil or olive oil. I also had to brush up on my observation for macrocytic anaemia and the absolute values - not a problem as I had been doing this anyway at Chester.

The faecal examinations involved homogenising the whole 'dollop' in a magimix, measuring the volume, taking a measured sample. Then one would dry this down in an oven and grind the result to a fine powder with a pestle and mortar, weigh out so many grams and then extract the fat with petroleum ether using a soxhlet thimble. The last part of the procedure was to titrate the acid and determine the iodine value of the fat. I confess this was all a bit of a mystery to me and I never did grasp what was the meaning of the results. This whole palaver was not pleasant as one might well imagine. I began to speculate how much worse the smell might be in the tropics. In the event, there was not much of a problem at all as soon after my arrival in HK the whole situation cleared up and the strange disease completely disappeared – **but that is another story!**

Christmas 1954 came and went and embarkation leave was over all too quickly. I was now about to embark on a voyage to China! Exciting? Yes but not too good for Greta and me as a

young married couple when there was no prospect of her joining me unless I was mad enough to sign on as a regular serviceman and that was not in my grand plan.

We said our goodbyes, yet again, and I was off to H&D Company (Holding and Drafting) at Crookham where I spent a few days before the long and dismal train journey with hundreds of other chaps, to Liverpool - via the morgue like Crewe interchange station, of course.

So this was it, a voyage into the unknown and a lot of trepidation. More heart searching on that long, long train trek through the night. New comrades, nearly all very miserable and, truth be known a little scared and apprehensive. We sailed late evening on the 28th. January 1955. **(To be Continued)**

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

EXTRACTS FROM PETER REDMOND'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Peter Redmond has kindly shared some extracts from his autobiography with us. Peter served many years in the Corps as a Dispenser.

JOIN THE ARMY – THE MODERN CAREER!

December 1946 - "What do you do for a living?" "I'm a chemist's apprentice, Sir."

There was a pause as he studied my application. "Right. We'll put you in the infantry."

"Can't I go in the Medical Corps? I'd like to go in the Medical Corps. Sir."

"No. Sorry, lad. No vacancies, you see. But we'll put you in the Green Howards Regiment. It's the local

regiment. You'll be stationed at Richmond; that's Richmond in Yorkshire. You'll be able to get home at weekends...."

He painted a lovely picture. And I believed him!

Join the Army. The modern Career. That's what the posters said. Which is why I was in the Army Recruiting Office in Scarborough. To be truthful, I would never have thought of joining the army but my foster mother was becoming frail and was going to live with her son and his wife. There wasn't room for me in their house so I suppose it was considered the kindest way to get me away. "If you wait 'til you're eighteen, you'll get called up. If you go as a volunteer, you'll get more money". What better incentive!

I signed on for "five and seven". That was five years with the regular army and seven years on the reserve with the option to extend if you had a good record.

February 1947 - The winter of 1946-47 was one of the coldest on record. I remember it well. I was sent to a unit in the north of Scotland to do my basic training. The barrack room was a long, cold wooden hut with a wood-burning stove in the middle. It was lit in the evening and filled the room with smoke. There was a small room at the end for the corporal in charge and twenty of us raw recruits in each of a camp full of identical, dreary looking buildings. We were each allocated a bed then were marched off to the Quartermaster's store to collect our bedding. A palliasse, a course linen, rectangular bag that we had to stuff with straw. "Not too much or you'll roll off it!" we were advised. Four blankets, and a pillow.

Our corporal was a National Service miner from Barnsley. "Pay attention. I'll

show yer once and not again, so yer'd better bloody learn." Regardless of what he was demonstrating, he gave us the same introduction. On Saturday nights, he would stagger through the barrack room, always drunk, sometimes pausing to climb onto somebody's bed so he could urinate out of the window. He always removed his boots first. Showed breeding!

Back to the QM stores to draw kit; ill-fitting battledress that was pulled into shape by a chain-smoking tailor, itchy woollen shirts and vests, forage cap, steel helmet, heavy greatcoat, large pack, small pack, ammunition pouches and yards of webbing to hold it all together. A Lee Enfield rifle, mess tins, water bottle, boots, two pairs, one for working in and one for best, i.e. kit inspections.

They taught us how to polish the buckles and buttons, how to "bull" our boots with boot polish and spit, how to clean our webbing. They taught us map-reading and field craft. They taught us how to march, how to salute and how to kill people. And they taught us Survival in the Snow. That was really useful. My first overseas posting was to Khartoum.

December 1947 - The band on the Liverpool dock played "Now is the Hour" as we embarked on the SS Samaria, a commercial liner that had been transformed into a troopship.

Soldiers were being detailed for deck-scrubbing and other unpleasant jobs as we went aboard. A call went out for a cinema projectionist. "I'll do it" I volunteered. We'd had an 8mm cinematograph when I was a boy and I could thread the films. Not quite professional standard. The projectionist laughed. "I like an opportunist" he said. He taught me the

routine and I became his assistant for the journey to Port Said.

We only had two films to show but had different audiences each evening. Officers Deck, Families, Other Ranks. One film had the crooner Perry Como in the leading role, the other was a classic with David Niven, Roger Livesay and Kim Hunter. So we sailed towards the Middle East war zone with a choice of "If I'm Lucky" or "A Matter of Life and Death".

Some disembarked for service in Palestine, the rest went from Port Said to Port Sudan in a calm sea followed by a thirty-six hour train journey to Khartoum where I joined the Second Battalion The Green Howards Regiment. Early days of route marches, cross country running and other physical activities to keep us fit. Every hour, we'd have a ten minute break so we could "fall out for a smoke". We were each given a free issue of 50 cigarettes a week. Some of them had been attacked by weevils so smoking a ciggy with holes in was a bit like learning to play the recorder! Then I was sent to work in the MI (Medical Inspection) Room.

The corporal in charge clearly didn't know much about making medicine and when I saw him pouring Tincture of Belladonna into a white mixture and shaking it, then pouring more until he got the right shade of green, I just had to say something. Perhaps it was the way I said it but after that, relations between us deteriorated and I found myself running about in the sand at unsocial hours, carrying a heavy pack and being reprimanded for having dusty boots! Sometimes I whitewashed the ropes that hung on the posts that surrounded the buildings. A friendly sergeant in the guardroom offered me

an alternative to the punishment but I declined. Politely of course.

June 1948 - I applied for a transfer to the Royal Army Medical Corps and was pleasantly surprised to find that they were happy to let me go. I could have become the longest serving private in the Green Howards.

Everyone in my new unit made me feel so welcome! **(To be continued)**

CHARITY BIKE RIDE **BASINGSTOKE TO KENDAL**

Hello my name is Mick Drake and I am a former Laboratory Technician who served in the RAMC from 1972 to 1996.

For many years the family Birthday and Christmas gifts to my mum were donations to "Wateraid". Unfortunately she passed away last year, so in her memory I have decided to donate any sponsorship generated from my next cycling challenge to this cause. I have used the site "givey.com" as they do not take a percentage of donations like some other sites do.

My next ride is from Basingstoke to Kendal along the UK canals a distance of just over 400 miles. We (4 of us) are aiming to cover about 50 miles a day which after my recent Liverpool to Leeds trip will be reasonably difficult as the tow paths are often poor and quite lumpy.

If you would like to donate you can do so directly using the link below or via my blog (there is a link there)

<https://www.givey.com/micksmumsfavouritecharity>

I do not believe that anyone will have done this trip before and have uploaded my initial planning with some photos to my blog at

www.mickdrake.com

The finalised route is at the link below

<http://www.mickdrake.com/?p=1201>

If you are interested please take a look, feel free to comment!

During the trip which is planned for the first week in May 2015 I will update my blog daily as I did while doing Lands End to John O Groats (2012) and the Liverpool to Leeds Canal (2014).

Thank you for your support

Mick Drake

YOUR MONEY FRIEND®

Ted Yeates who served in the RAMC from 1961 to 1984 has recently come out of retirement to launch a number of new services through his company Your Money Friend.



Ted Yeates

**LATER LIFE PLANNING
CONSULTANT
WILL WRITING SERVICES
POWERS OF ATTORNEY
ADVANCE FUNERAL PLANNING
PROPERTY TRANSACTIONS**

These services can be seen in full on his new website which can be assessed by going to:

www.yourmoneyfriend.co.uk

Ted is keen to promote his services to ex RAMC members and their families whilst supporting the RAMC Reunited events. He has offered to pay £25 to our funds for every business transaction he carries out for any ex Corps member between now and 31 January 2016.

Why not join Ted on LinkedIn. You can make contact with him by either

email: info@yourmoneyfriend.co.uk

or

Telephone him for more details on the above services:

Telephone: 0844 556 1280 (local rate)
Mobile: 07539 645514

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

LIST OF ATTENDEES FOR RAMC REUNITED 2016 AS AT 05/03/2015

<u>NAME</u>	<u>5th Feb</u>	<u>6th Feb</u>	<u>7th Feb</u>
John Askins	2	2	2
Jim Carter	2	2	2
Jim Carroll	1	1	1
M Christopher	2	2	2
Harry Cooper	2	2	2
Joe Dolan	1	1	1
Dave Garbutt	2	2	2
Bryan Hair	2	2	2
Alan Harbour	2	2	2
Dai Leek	2	2	2
David Lowe	2	2	2
Mick McCran	2	2	2
Mac McHale	2	2	2
Alan Morton	2	2	2
G Mottley	2	2	2
David Natolie		1	
G Poole	2	2	2
S Price	2	2	2
D Proudfoot	2	2	2
Alan Rees	2	2	
Tony Smith	2	2	2
Ed Sutton	2	2	2
Ken Taylor	1	1	1
H Walker	1	1	1
M Wallace	2	2	
Bill Watt	1	1	1
Brian Wilson	2	2	2

**TURNING OF THE PAGE
CEREMONY – WESTMINSTER
ABBAY**

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

<u>DATE</u>	<u>UNIT</u>
4 April 2015	3 Med Regt 251 Med Sqn Sunderland
2 May 2015	5 Med Regt (Soldiers KIA during this month on Op TELIC were from the Sqn that is now part of 5 Med Regt)
4 July 2015	MDHU(N)
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?

**RAMC REUNITED LIVERPOOL 2016
POLO SHIRT**

Alan Morton has designed a Polo Shirt for the 2016 RAMC Reunited Reunion and has arranged for its production through Select Uniform.



Those members amongst us who would like one can place an order for the polo shirt with or without the year being displayed by going to:

http://selectuniform.co.uk/index.php?route=product%2Fproduct&product_id=119

When ordering please quote order code **RAMC2015**.

**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 various FB Groups and the Forum Section of the RAMC Reunited website - links to each of these is shown below. I have contacted Andy Sumpner the webmaster for the RAMC Reunited website requesting that he place the information on the Home Page of the site.

FB RAMC Reunited -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/306062782292/>

FB AMS Veterans -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/221516047928356/>

FB Proud to Have Served in the RAMC -

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/324539501456/>

RAMC Reunited website -

<http://www.ramcreunited.co.uk/>

(individuals who are not members of the Forum Section will need to register in order to access the information)

ABSENT BRETHERN

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

Dennis “Ginge” Alcott