

C.

Jimmy Campbell

Details from a letter to the REA BD Branch from Jimmy Campbell, held in their archives.

96 BD Section, 25 BD Company, 26 BD Platoon.

My BD History is I joined 95 BD Section February 1942 and served with them till transferred to 25 BD Company at Tilshead in Wilts. I think that's the Company you were in Alan, after that we were called 26 BD Platoon.

We landed in Normandy on June 7 and I went through the campaign to Germany, where I was transferred to 11 Field Company just before I was demobbed.

Peter Chamberlain.

The details below are transcribed from a letter to the REA BD Branch from Peter Chamberlain, held in their archives.

4 and 20 BD Company, 11, 194 and 201 BD Section.

Served 1940 to 1946.

Called up or Hooray for the CRE.

I was called up on 30 September 1940 and ordered to report to 1 Stevedore Centre RE, Worthing, Sussex. With the call up notice was a travel warrant, this was to be exchanged for a railway ticket to Worthing, also enclosed with the warrant was a postal order for 4 shillings in respect of advance of service pay. Arriving at our destination, which turned out to be the local Territorial Drill Hall, we were enrolled into the Army, given a meal and our first F F I. After drawing full kit we were marched to our billets which turned out to be a row of empty houses on the sea front. Four our meals we were marched to the Drill Hall. Training periods took place mainly in empty streets, here we were taught to march, salute, arms drill including how to pile arms, and other various movements that make a trained soldier. After a long session of this we were next taught the basics of field engineering, that included knots and lashings, bridging etc etc. After working our way through that lot, we were then introduced to explosives. We were marched to an old sand quarry were we met an old RE Sergeant with the wonderful nickname of "Gun Cotton Bill", here began our education with explosives and detonators.

Well all good things come to an end, and so one day the sappers of this training battalion were paraded and told they were all being posted to various Bomb Disposal Company's. I with many others were told we were going to 20 BD Company, Royal Engineers, The Pantile, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. After a train journey to Tunbridge Wells, and a short march from the station, we arrived at Company Headquarters 20 BD Company the Pantiles. Here we were taken on Company strength and place in various Sections. We were allotted civy billets in Tunbridge Wells or on the out-skirts of the town. A party pf us were billeted in a little Hamlet called Rusthall just outside the town, every morning we would catch the bus to take us into Tunbridge Wells where we would parade in Company strength on the Pantiles in front of the Company Office. After Roll Call and inspection, we would en-bus onto the waiting trucks and take of to various bomb incidents that were waiting for us. After a period of time at Tunbridge Wells, my Section No 11 (later 201) with another were sent on detachment, working in various parts of Kent and Sussex. In these Counties we dealt with all types of German bombs and missiles, digging holes that ranged from 10 to 40 feet deep. Other items that were dealt with were unexploded 3.7 and 4.5 anti-aircraft shells, 40 mm UP rockets from Z battery's and German and British cannon shells. In fact any object that fell from the sky, not forgetting the various unexploded munitions that were left lying around by the Army or the Home guard.

Among other projects that my section was involved with was the clearing of Beach Mines from certain places at Dungeness for 'Pluto'. Clearing buried pipe mines from the ground where they had been placed, in the event of invasion. Building gun platforms for static anti-aircraft guns and other various jobs when there was a lull in German bombing.

During my service in BD, I attended various BD Courses that included Steam Trepanning and Associated Equipment, Burning out by Thermite, British, American and German Bomb Course., at SME Ripon.

In mid-1945 I was posted to 4 BD Company, Balham where I served for a time as Lance Corporal and then I was off to Egypt. Here I served till demobbed on 21 June 1946.

14634980 Sapper Harry Clark.

226 Bomb Disposal Section, 25 Bomb Disposal Company.

Born on 11 August 1904, in Sunderland, Durham.

Trade on enlistment Bricklayer/Labourer.

Married to Ellen Evans at Uxbridge 9 September 1933, father to 4 children.

Physical description on enlistment.

Height 4ft 7 ins.

Weight 137 lbs.

Eyes, blue.

Hair Fair.

Religion Church of England.

Transcribed from the BBC People War Archives. [BBC- WW2 People's War- Royal Engineers Bomb Disposal in WWII](#)

Date	Details	References
1943		
17 June	17th June Enlisted into the General Service Corps embodied Territorial Army and posted to 9 Primary Training Centre. From 1942 all recruits were enlisted in a General Service Corps in which they did their primary military training before being posted to their Corps. Training courses at the Royal Engineers training Battalions and depots were thus reduced to twelve weeks.	
29 July	29th July Transferred to Royal Engineers as Sapper 14634980 and posted to No 4 Training Battalion, which was originally located at Colchester, moved to Yorkshire in 1940 and to Preston in 1942. Disbanded in late 1943. In anticipation of the invasion of North-West Europe the intake of recruits in to the Corps in 1943 was exceptionally heavy, 51,000. In the short time available, twelve weeks, it was impossible to give recruits adequate training. Accordingly, a four-week continuation course was instituted which four weeks were spent with field companies of reserve divisions. This collective training and experience in practical bridging and road making were very valuable to any branch of the Corps in any place of the world. After 1941, due to the developments in Military Engineering as the war progressed the School of Military Engineering operated at Ripon, Yorkshire, formed a Bomb Disposal school.	
	7th October Posted to 1st Bomb Disposal Company Posted to 25th Bomb Disposal Company 25 BD Coy consisted of 225 / 226 / 240 / 241 / 242 / 244 / 245 and HQ	

	sections. Each company commanded 12 BD Sections. The basic unit of a Bomb Disposal Section consisted of one officer and fifteen other ranks, divided into two sub-sections, one for " removal" and one or "sterilization". Each was completely self-contained and mobile. By 1943, the total Army BD force amounted to 10,000 men and BD units were based in all theatres of operations. 25th BD Company Headquarters was based at 95 Court Road, Eltham, SE9 226 section billeted here prior to 8th May 1944. The role of the Company HQ was a very important one, not only to the Company sections but to the whole network of Bomb Disposal Companies spread all over the UK. Each section would provide input to disposal techniques through their own improvisation and were forever thinking of new ways or new equipment to help in their tasks. For example the removal of bombs, which were big and heavy, was passed on information from one section to another within the Company via the Company HQ. But the most important factor, was the central HQ in London who distributed all gathered information on an hourly basis which was a priority and distributed it to all other Company HQs in the fastest way possible. Major Bainbridge (123013) was awarded his George Medal on 30th September 1941 in the London Gazette.	
1943	25 Bomb Disposal Company's Locations. 1943 Jan- Dec. Woolwich / Lewisham / Farnborough / Bermondsey /Orpington / Bromley / Beckenham / Eltham- Command London District Till 5th July- Major J W Setchell, Captain Courtney After 5th July- Major Alexander George Bainbridge, Captain Draper	
1944	January Company Officer Strength: Major Bainbridge AG (GM) Officer Commanding Captain Draper JW 2nd in Command Lieutenant Williams DR E+M Lieutenant Bool MA Reconnaissance Lieutenant Weston F Reconnaissance Lieutenant Willson AA in Command of section Lieutenant Curry KE in Command of section Lieutenant Fairhall JF in Command of section Lieutenant Ross K in Command of section Lieutenant Eagle GW in Command of section Lieutenant Ward WF in Command of section Major Alexander George Bainbridge was awarded his George Medal for disposal work at Monk Street, Woolwich in September 1940 and at Southern Outfall Sewer and High Street, Plumstead in October 1940 at the rank of Temporary Captain. His award was published in the London Gazette on 30th September 1941.	
8 April	8th April 226 BD section came under command of 2nd Army.	
1 May	1st May 226 BD section sent for training. Not mentioned in war diary as to what subject.	
8 May	8th May 226 BD section (Lieut KE Curry) detached from Company HQ and moved to concentration point at Hobb's Barracks, Lingfield. Here they were tasked with making their vehicle's waterproof, a sure sign to those	

	curious of their movement and what may lay ahead. Hobb's Barracks was located next to the Hospital at Lingfield. Here No 347 Army Dental Centre was based. Also located at Lingfield (now the race course) was a Prisoner of War camp called Lingfield Internee Camp, where Italian's captured in South Africa were held from as early as 1941. Hobb's Barracks was in use until 1971 and has since been demolished and replaced by an industrial estate.	
14 May	14th May 226 BD section commenced separate war diary. No further reference to their activities mentioned in 25 BD Company war diary, although they will continue to be shown on unit strength, but detached. Section moved from Lingfield to Camp S8 (Weald Park, Brentwood). 14,000 men were marshalled into Weald and Thornden parks, where construction of tented camps were created by the 1st May. Vehicles were parked on adjoining roads to the camp. During the first week of May, 21 Army Group Exercise "FABIUS" took place. It involved actual handling of troops and transport through the area. 226 BD section strength was 1 Officer, 30 Other Ranks and 1 Army Catering Corps cook attached. "S" Marxhalling Area Camp locations: S1 — Golf Club House, Orsett S2 — Tilbury S3 — Purfleet S4 — Belitus Park, Aveley S5 — Thorndon Hall, Nr Warley S6 — Southend Halfway House Inn, Arterial Road S7 — Warley Barracks S8 — Weald Park, Brentwood	
25 May	Camp S8 sealed, no one allowed out. Camp perimeters were barbed wired and patrolled by the Military Police. Even after being sealed, troops often broke out of the camps to the local villages. Most of these troops, did not know the cause of their concentration so security was not a big issue. Those that did know or thought they knew were careful enough not to give away information. These camps were to remain out of bounds to the local civilian population and any unauthorised approached was soon dealt with. Even during the troop's movement to the docks, the natural enthusiasm of the civilians to give tea, etc to the troops convoy when they halted at the check points near the docks. This was overcome somewhat by the use of the civil police, who used loudspeakers to control their intrusion. The local civilian's must have realised that such a large build-up of troops, was to result in some action on one of the European fronts. With 500 men strong camps, hygiene was just as important as feeding the troops. First, mobile decontamination lorries were obtained from the ARP or the use of local bathing facilities, but were replaced later with 2 mobile bath units and a mobile laundry. Film and training shows were screened in mobile cinema's and live entertainment was also provided for all ranks within the camps, were the NAFFI services helped provide adequate breaks to other ranks only, from the daily preparation.	
29 May	29th May Officer Commanding Lieut. KE Curry, moved with Recce group consisting of Sgt. IA Maclachlan; L/Cpl PJ McGuire and Spr. JA Powell to Prested Hall, Kelvedon between Whitam and Colchester.	

	L/Cpl. McGuire was later wounded on the 20th September 1944 by a booby trap near Trun on the Falaise area, whilst in the process of battlefield clearance. Spr. Powell was wounded on the Normandy Beachhead on the 14th June 1944 and was shipped back to England in the same month as Spr. H Clark.	
31 May	31st May Remainder of section remain in Camp S8, whilst vehicles are Transported to Tilbury Docks for early embarkation on to MT25 (Military Troop Ship). Due to small detachments of units arriving at the camps without an officer, the issue of top-secret instructions was impracticable. Therefore, this was overcome by attaching them to a convenient detachment which was due to sail on the same ship.	
1 June	1st June Remainder of section move (marched with full equipment, if troop carrying 20 ton transporter vehicles not provided by 372 Transporter Company, Royal Army Service Corps. Troops often arrived rather fatigued) from Camp S8 to S7 (Warley Barracks, Brentwood) embarkation area under section Sgt JO Barker. Here each soldier was issued with 200 Francs (equal to £1) and the chance to change what English notes they had into foreign currency; landing rations; a lifebelt; vomit bags and a new set of clean underclothing. Also troops were fed on field service UK rations. It was important that all troops were well fed with a hot meal before embarkation. The issue of field rations was left to the last possible moment to transit troops, Prior to embarkation. Bread was baked in mobile kitchens of the ACC at field camps, where cooks were provided on the scale of 1 Sergeant and 11 men per 500-man camp. Sgt. Barker was later killed by a 'S' mine on 1st September 1944 near Caen, whilst removing casualties from a minefield. Sgt. Barker was the first member of 25 BD Coy and 226 BD Sec to be killed in action in Europe. He is buried at the Bayeux War Cemetery, plot XXVIII H20. He was 226 sections Sgt. at the age of 28. The troops were divided into three broad groups: The assault formations would board their assault ships with the first fleet. The pre-loaded, follow up formation of first line reinforcements would be on board their vessels in British ports, ready to follow ashore on D+1 or D+2 at the situation developed. Later forces, earmarked for deployment on D+3 or later, were concentration areas close to the embarkation ports and they would be fed in as space Permitted as the situation required.	File No WO 171 / 1959 25 BD Company June-Aug 1944 (Home Front / Normandy) File originally to remain closed till year 2045.
4 June	4th June Lieut. Curry, and section Recce team moved to Portsmouth for embarkation on HMS Eagle in preparation to cross the Channel with Naval Party 1502. Remaining section under Section Sergeant, proceeded by troop carrying vehicles to Tilbury docks at 04.00hrs, near Gravesend and embark on to ship MT25 at 10.00hrs. During the long stay onboard ship, troops were offered daily papers; cigarettes and odd welfare stores, so as to keep moral high and any repercussions of boredom at a low. This day was a Red letter day for the embarkation staff, when 18,000 troops were loaded into ships at Tilbury and Purfleet. Tilbury Passenger Landing Stage, did have its own railway station, which was used to move troops in from Southend. Today the station has disappeared and a large export/import car park takes its place.	

	All troops assigned to D-Day Operation "Overlord", France Liberation Force. When the troops arrived at the Tilbury embarkation area, they were told to only take with them a mess tin; knife; fork and spoon so as they could be fed a hot meal before embarkation. A haversack ration for all troops was issued before embarkation on MT ships. This was for consumption early after embarkation and tides the interim period onboard until voyage rations had been prepared and cooked. It is interesting to note, that there was infact no Royal Navy ship called HMS Eagle in service at this time. HMS Eagle was sunk near Malta in 1942 and the next ship of this name was cancelled in 1944-45. This war diary entry must have been an error and the ship may have had a different name or extended name.	
5 June	Lieut Curry with Recce team embark on HMS Eagle, whilst section on MT25 sailed from Tilbury to Southend where it stood anchored awaiting convoy movement on D-Day. Tilbury Passenger Landing Stage was an ideal London port facility for the embarkation of thousands of troops with rail and road connections. The use of the landing stage made sure that any vessels did not have to enter the docks itself, but berth at the stage at any state of the tide. During peacetime, this stage could handle hundreds of thousands of passengers every year, so the mass embarkation of troops would not have posed insolule problems. Tilbury Basin and Cargo Jetty were also to be used. D-DAY HMS Eagle and ship MT25 sailed into the Channel for the French Coast on D-Day. This sailing route was a very dangerous one to undertake, due 6th June to the number of enemy Motor Torpedo boats that patrolled the eastern entrance to the English Channel. This floatilla of ships with the support waves of the landing forces sailing from Tilbury, would have had a strong guard of protection vessels of destroyers and frigates from such threats. The convoy would have proceeded round the Kent coastline and through the straights of Dover at approximately 13.00hrs. The Germans coastal artillery guns which were located near Calais, would fire at the passing convoy, but had no recorded hits. The convoy would navigate, hugging the English coastline; while the Navy and Air Force lied down a heavy smoke screen at the narrowest stretch of the channel. Number of troops embarked through Tilbury: Force "L" (First wave of troops from Tilbury to land D-Day, consisting of 2 Anti-Tank Brigades armed with Churchill tanks). Embarked D-2 Number of vessels Personnel Vehicle's Landing Craft Tank 90 4950 990 Landing ShipTank 19 5700 1140 Landing Craft Infantry 12 2400 Total 13050 2130 British Infantry Division follow up force of 3 Assault Brigade Groups, Embarked D-1. Number of vessels Personnel Vehicle's MT Ship 14 7560 1890 MT Coasters 25 3500 875 Landing Craft Infantry —light 8 1600 Total 12660 2765 Embarked D-Day.	

	Number of vessels Personnel Vehicle's MT Ship 10 5400 1350 Personnel Ship 1 1500 Total 6900 1350	
7 June	HMS Eagle and MT25 anchored off shore of landing beaches late morning. Weather too rough to board landing crafts alongside the ships. By late afternoon the ships proceeded west to Port-en Bessin between GOLD and OMAHA beaches where they tried to enter the port, but due to heavy enemy fire from cliff top defences, did not continue. Whilst the invasion of Normandy continued around them, HMS Eagle and MT25 remained at anchor off shore out of range at Port-en Bessin for the rest of the night. Could not land, due to delay in 47 Royal Marine Commando not yet attaching their objective of capturing the port and its high cliff defences. September 12th 1942, after the disastrous attempted invasion by Canadian troops at Dieppe in France, British Commandos raid Port en Bessin. 10 raiders kill 7 Germans they find, but the shooting and noise alerts other defenders, who charge towards the attack. The Germans kill all but 1 attacker, a Private Hayes. Hayes swims along the coast and is aided by a French family, who passes him down to Spain. However, Hayes' luck ends there, as Generalissimo Francisco Franco's Guardia Civil arrests the hapless Commando and send him back to France. The Gestapo interrogates and later shoots Hayes, acting under the notorious 'Kugel' order, signed by Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, that orders execution for all captured British Commandos. That order will in turn send Keitel to the gallows after the war. . The fishing port of Port-en Bessin was set as the dividing line between the Anglo-American armies and was to be captured by No 47 Royal Marine Commando, who had landed on Gold beach at 08.25hrs. 47 Commando would land on the west flank of the British Second Army who had landed on Gold beach at the earlier H-Hour of 07.30hrs at Arromanches. Their task was to make a ten mile advance through enemy territory to attack Port-en Bessin from the rear on D-Day. Port-en Bessin was important as it was a designated point for the petrol terminal of PLUTO, the pipe line under the ocean. The 1st Infantry Division of the US IV Corps were to swing east to link up with the British at the port. Port-en Bessin was defended by at least one company of German infantry from the 726th Infantry Regt, 716th Infantry Division entrenched in pillboxes overlooking the town and in strongpoints within the town. 47 Commando troubles began that day as they approached the landing beaches on JIG GREEN EAST sector, with an estimated strength of 300, nearly an hour after the main assault forces on Gold beach. 3 LCA's (Landing Craft, Assault) were sunk on the way in and on landing at Le Hamel, which should by then have been quiet. The Commando found the 1st Hampshires still fighting for a foothold. They found their intended assembly area held by a company of Germans and suffered 40 casualties, before they cleared them out of it. They did however, take 60 prisoners, whose weapons served to re-equip those men from the sunk LCA's who had to abandon their own equipment and swim ashore. 47 Commando reached Port-en Bessin late on D-Day. On the cliffs overlooking the port, there were several gun emplacements and bunkers. These formidable positions were attacked at dawn on D+1 by 47 Commando. Two of the strongpoints were taken with the help of a	

	naval bombardment from HMS Emerald's 6-inch guns, rocket firing Typhoons and artillery smoke. A German counter attack, supported by flak-ships in the harbour, re-took one of the hills but at late afternoon on D+1, the German Commander and 100 men surrendered, only after 47 Commando had lost nearly 50% of its strength. The Commandos had captured a port which was to play an important role in maintaining the flow of vital supplies and they had secured the junction between the British 50th Division on Gold beach and the US 1st Division on OMAHA beach. By the 14th June, the port was handling more than 1,000 tons of supplies a day, much more than it had ever done in peacetime. Port en Bessin was used extensively in the filming of the war epic "The Longest Day", where the centre of the town was used as a reenactment of the attack of Ouistreham Casino. The Casino was attacked by the Free French Commando troops attached to No 4 Commando. The Casino had infact been destroyed by the Germans in 1941 and replaced by a strongpoint that covered Sword Beach. The capture of this strongpoint was important for the further safety of landing troops on Sword Beach.	
8 June	Lieut. Curry and Recce team entered Port-en Bessin Harbour early in morning, to inspect harbour for explosives. Recce team moved east to contact 73 Field Company RE and came under fire from enemy positions. MT25 with main party arrives to be disembarked. Over 200 ships could be sighted from the deck of the ship, along only this part of the Normandy beaches. 9th June Partial party of section disembarks MT25 to Landing Craft Infantry which the majority were manned by Canadian troops. From the LCI men were transferred to a Landing Craft Assault, typically manned by American Navy personnel. Only those responsible for the section vehicles would land with them, on a LCT. Section made a wet landing 50 yards out, having to wade through 1 foot of water on to the beach area between Asnelles and Ver-sur-mer with a 3 ton Leyland Lynx truck with Austin Utility trailer and proceeded to Kipling Assembly Area. This truck was driven by Driver Day J C and Cpl. Clubley BP. Drv. Day was killed in action (KIA) whilst clearing the battlefield close to Falaise on 22/9/44. Second party of section with another 3-ton Leyland tried to disembark by landing craft, but because of a heavy air raid this was postponed. This truck was driven by Dvr. Allen J R and Cpl Thorbes F. Lt. General Montgomery visits Commes, just 1 mile from Port-en Bessin.	
10 June	3-ton Leyland that could not land on the 9th, was ordered off the landing craft and 'drowned' in deep water. This truck consisted of the following members of 226 sec Drv. Allen JR; Cpl. Thorbes F; Sprs. Arrowsmith J; Evans WW; Parker J and Watson R. Spr Evans was later KIA whilst clearing the battlefield close to Falaise on 22/9/44. Personnel were picked up by Royal Marines and placed to safety on a wrecked boat to await low tide. They remained there for 7 hours. The truck was salvaged later, but was written off with the loss of a radar trailer, electronic and personnel kit. Third party section with 3-ton truck and 15CWT truck, made wet landing	

	on beach, without incident. This section was led by Sgt. Barker JO and driven by Drv. Pope G. The 15CWT was led by L/Cpl. Wilson H and driven by Drv. Coleman R G. All other members of 226 sec accompanied this section, so probably Spr. Clark would have been in this section as no other mention of his name is made. Drv. Coleman was the third member of 226 sec to be KIA whilst clearing the battlefield close to Falaise on 22/9/44. All sections reported to Lieut. Curry at Port-en Bessin, but third-party truck led by Sgt. Barker overturned on route to Port-en Bessin. All stores were off loaded and the lorry righted before proceeding to Port area, where they bivouacked with the rest of 226 BD section. One casualty from this incident, Spr.Naysmith R who was injured slightly when the lorry over turned. Enemy sniper fire was a constant danger and the section assisted many times in the search and elimination of this threat. During the Invasion of Europe, 5 BD Companies were deployed and between them disposed of 939,061 UXB's. Bomb Disposal units though not much concerned with enemy aircraft bombs, the Luftwaffe being chiefly noticeable for its absence, found much to do when the extension of the area covered that on which the brunt of the Allies bombing fell and had failed to explode. These obviously needed to be cleared as well. They also assisted formations in the clearance of mines and booby-traps.	
12 June	Port- en Bessin was at this time still being continually bombed by the Luftwaffe most nights, to cease to Ports activity. No damage was ever sustained. Last members of 226 sec, L/Cpl. O'Neill J and Drv. Price J C make dry landing and report to Port-en Bessin. Drv. Price J C was later a casualty in a road accident on 26/1/45. 226 BD section under command of 10 Garrison, 21st Army Group. 136 BD section (under command of Officer Commanding 226 section, remain in area for general BD. In this sub area come under direct command of 19 Chief Royal Engineer works, particular responsibilities being Port en Bessin Harbour containing the petrol installations of PLUTO and Mulberry 'B'.	
14 June	General Charles de Gaulle makes his first liberation speech on French soil at Bayeux, the first French City to be liberated.	
16 June	Sapper Clark and other members of 226sec helped assist in the rescue of casualties and bodies of 73rd Field Company who were injured or killed whilst clearing mines. (Mentioned in unit war diary). 73rd Field Company had landed on D-Day, with the remainder of their support coming ashore on Jig beach on the D+3 and their transport disembarking on King Green sector on the 11th June. 17th June Those killed were buried in Monceaux en Bessin War Cemetery, 5km south of Bayeux, from the previous day's incident. All the following who were killed on the 16/6/44, were later reburied at the Bayeux War Cemetery, south-west of Bayeux: Cpl. Dixon T, plot XI A6 age 30. Spr. Dickinson A, plot XI A7 age 24. Spr. Close A, plot XI A4 age 24. (later posthumously awarded the Military Medal for his actions on D-Day) Spr. Rodman, no Commonwealth War Grave recorded in France. Spr. Reece W J, plot XI A5 age 36.	73 Field Company war diary WO 171 / 1530 June- December 1944 File originally to remain closed till year 2045.

	L/Cpl. Nicholls E, plot XI A3 age 34. Nicholls was killed on the 14/6/44 whilst mine clearing and had been originally buried on the 15/6/44. King George IV makes a visit to the beachheads at Courseulles, 10 miles away D+6	
19 June	Gale hits beachhead and continues till the 21st June. Results in the American Mulberry harbour having to be abandoned. Due to the severe weather conditions the Allied Authority, authorised a rum ration to be distributed to all troops.	
2 July	2nd July Section moved from Port-en Bessin to Tilly-sur Seulles, 20km south-east of Bayeux on the D6. Tilly-sur Seulles fell into Allied hands on the 17th June, after a tremendous tank and street battle between 7th Armoured Div and 21st Panzer Lehr Regiment. During the struggle, the village was reduced to ruins.	
7 July	Section moved from Tilly-sur Seulles to Blary, 6km south of Bayeux. 9th July Section moved from Blary to Gheron, 5 km south of Bayeux on the D67.	
10 July	Casualty, Sapper Clark H 14634980, while handling heavy equipment. Severed finger on left hand. This could well have resulted in the building of Bailey Bridges that RE were crossed trained in. (Mentioned in war diary) He would have been treated locally at an FDS — field dressing station on his injury, but was requested to be sent back to hospital in England on the 15th July by Officer Commanding 226 BD, 243600 Lieut K.E. Curry RE. Most wounded troops were sent back across the Channel by ship from Ostend back to Tilbury. He may well have been sent to the 86th (BR) General Hospital before being embarked at Ostend. Casualty Receiving Hospitals in the UK were located at Lowestoff & North Suffolk Hospital; Great Yarmouth General Hospital and Gorleston Hospital. Official Cabinet figures on wounded between D-Day and 31st August 1944: Killed 12412 Wounded 44604 Missing / POW 6671 Total 63687 Identified along with a Sapper Powell who was also injured, as members of the units diving crew. Training for the diving crews was conducted at Chatham under Royal Navy tuition and would consist of wearing and use of Siebe-Gorman pressure diving suits for deep water work and American light diving suits for river and beach work. The task was to locate and remove underwater mines and demolition depth charges. Consistent diving for mine and ice packed waters would often result with hands and limbs being effected from ill effects. At Chatham, basic training was conducted in a large water tank, where trainee divers were given the job of cutting through a steel hawser, with a hacksaw and a plank of wood. It was always a strange experience to see the sawdust rising to the surface when cutting. In winter, the Royal Navy personnel broke the ice on the tank, put in a steam hose and a thermometer - when it read 38f, they were in.	

15 July	Spr Clark Service in North West Europe theatre ends, after 42 days. 226, 240 and 243 BD section were responsible for areas: 5 (Bayeux) sub area and all activities in 101 beach sub area, stretching to Caen and Falaise.	PRO File No WO 171 / 1979 226 BD section June-Aug 1944 (D-Day landing / Normandy) File originally to remain closed till year 2045.
10 August	10th August 25 BD Company under the command of Major Bainbridge, disembarked on Juno beach and moved by night to set up HQ at La Villeneuve (Caen-Bayeux Road). 25 BD Company had been bombed out of their quarters just a few weeks before, by V1 flying bombs. In August, Lt. General Bernard Montgomery had his Tactical HQ at Blay, only 20 km south-west of Port-en Bessin.	
15 August	226 BD section move to Manvieux, west of Arromanches.	
16 August	16th August 226BD section back under 25 BD Company command and move to Planet, 5 km east of Port-en Bessin. 25 BD Company's first base in France was Caen. In September the Company was moved to Brussels where they were clearing UXB's and mines in the Falaise Battlefield, Ghent, Bruges and Louvain areas. Hospitalized at Hillingdon Hospital, Uxbridge to treat injuries sustained in France. Convalesced at Home whilst having to visit Hillingdon Hospital. Any invalided servicemen who had not been discharged and still on active service would wear their battle blouses as normal, but with white shirt and red tie.	
1 September	226BD section Sgt. Barker J O killed in action near Caen, clearing mines. Buried in Bayeux War Cemetery, plot XXVIII H20.	
22 September	3 original members of 226 sec who landed in Normandy, killed whilst clearing battlefield remains in the Falaise Gap area. They were to be the last KIA of 226BD section of the war in Europe and post war clear up. All following members are buried in Hottot-les-Bagues War Cemetery, south of Tilly-sur Seullès. L/Sgt. Reeve G W, plot II B8 age 29. Spr. Evans W N, plot II B9 age 37. Drv. Coleman R G, plot II B7 age 25.	
20 October	20th October Posted to 2nd Depot Halifax, Yorkshire.	
25 October	Posted to 7th Training Battalion located at Chatham. May have been for further ordnance training ?	
28 October	Posted again to 2nd Depot.	
1945		
January	January Company Officer Strength:	

	Major Bainbridge AG (GM) Officer Commanding aged - 38 Captain Melrose J (Jimmy) 2nd in Command aged - 30 Lieutenant William DR E+M aged - 28 Lieutenant Bool MA Reconnaissance (Discharged 3/4/1945) Lieutenant Weston F Reconnaissance aged - 36 Lieutenant Willson AA in Command of section aged - 39 (243 sec) Lieutenant Curry KE in Command of section aged - 34 (226 sec) Lieutenant Ross K in Command of section aged - 24 Lieutenant Boorman RA in Command of section aged - 39 (242 sec) Lieutenant McClune JT in Command of section aged - 26 (240 sec) In April 1945 Lieutenant Bool (Ferdy); then a Captain, was posted to HQ 1st Corps in Germany, as Senior Officer, Royal Engineers Grade 3 (SORE 3) 16th January 226 BD section transporting enemy bombs to the coast for use as demolition charges in destruction of enemy defences in and around the Brussels area.	
17 January	Embarked for service in France as part of the newly formed British Liberation Army.	
19 January	Half of 226BD section attached to 21st Army Group RE Training School, Knocke, near Zeebrugge, for emptying mines of explosives. Approx 5000 mines of all types have to be treated, boiling method to be used. Finished 20th Feb- Number of mines treated 2,300.	
22 January	Posted back to 25 BD Company, 226 BD section	
23 January	Rejoined section on Bomb disposal work in the Brussels area. 25 BD Company HQ at 3 Rue Charles Legrelle, Brussels.	
28 February	226 BD section preparing enemy bombs for transport to Sittard to use as demo charges in destruction of enemy defences. Work ordered by Chief Engineering 21 Army Group.	
12 March	226 BD section bomb disposal at Faux. 8 bombs dropped by Allied aircraft, 6 unexploded.	
28 March	Half of 226 BD section to 21 Army Group RE School, Knocke. Authority CE L of C to empty 700 enemy mines for training purposes.	
12 April	226 BD section sent BD squad to 3 British Army District to render safe approx 170 German bombs. April Count - BD during April included: Enemy and Allied 44 (12 long delay fuses) Enemy bombs in Ammunition dumps 176 Enemy bombs used as democharges 14 Miscellaneous explosive objects 207 S "mines lifted 27 25 BD Company responsible for areas: 4 and 16 (Ghent) line of communication sub areas 7 (Antwerp) and 8 (Bruges) Base sub areas	
22 May	Movement control warns 226 and 243 BD sections to stand by to move.	
24 May	226, 240, 243 BD sections leave location for Hamburg on "Scheme Apostle".	

25 May	Staged at Wildeshausen, on route to Hamburg.	
26 May	Arrive Hamburg and marshalled in concentration area for 4 days.	
28 May	226, 240 and 243 BD section struck off 25 BD Company strength. Company strength down to 104 from 201. The remainder of 25 BD Company went on to Germany and Berlin.	
31 May	Embarked US LST (Landing Ship, Tank) 519, which was anchored in Hamburg. Later on the 1st June anchored off Brunsbüttel until sailing on the 2nd June. LST- 519: LST-519 was laid down on 17th September 1943 at Seneca, Ill, USA, by the Chicago Bridge & Iron Co; launched on 25th January 1944; sponsored by Miss Bonnie Faye Catherwood; and commissioned on 17th February 1944. During World War II, LST-519 was assigned to the European theatre and participated in the movements of convoy UGS-36 in April 1944 and the invasion of Normandy in June 1944. Following the war, she served with the Atlantic Fleet. Her primary mission was to dispose of condemned ammunition and radioactive waste material in deep water. LST-519 returned to the United States and was named Calhoun County (LST-519) on 1st July 1955 after counties in 11 states of the United States. She was decommissioned on 8th November 1962 and struck from the US Navy list that same day. LST-519 received 2 battle stars for World War II service. This was high for a LST service. Bomb Disposal for May included: Enemy and Allied bombs 112 Miscellaneous objects 1511 (including 61 Rine mines) Holty? mines 40	
3 June	Left British Liberation Army in Germany.	
4 June	Service in Norway begins, landing in Oslo. First stationed at Stavanger, then on to Egersund. First stationed at Fagerborg Skole where Platoon HQ was established. Areas of work carried out in Norway by 226 BD section: Vallo Oil Refinery, near Tonsberg. Fredikstad Lillestrom Sandefjord Lillestrom Rjukan Salpeter factory - July Holmsbu Terningen German Reservation, west of Elverum - August	
7 June	King of Norway Returns to Norway.	
13 August	25 BD Company disbanded in Berlin.	
30 August	Embarked on ship called "Empire Dirk " to sail back to England. This ship could well have been a Merchant Navy Vessel.	

5 September	Embarkation back to UK from Norway. Service in Norway totalling 3 months	PRO File No WO 171/ 8521 226th BD Platoon May-Aug 1945(Norway) File originally to remain closed till year 2046.
27 September	226 BD section posted to and under the command of Officer Commanding 9 BD Company, which was based in the Manchester area, under Major Alex Cleghorn RE and Captain BHP Price (GM) RE 2 i/c. 9 BD Company (consisting already of their HQ; 68; 69 sections. 81 section had been stationed in Manchester since January 1945) was stationed in a hutted camp at Spath road, Didsbury, Manchester and covered the North-West of England. Their main task in Manchester was to commence AA (Anti-Aircraft) and UXB recovery, that still remained a threat since the cease of hostilities. Spath Road, is now a residential road and no evidence of a field where a hutted camp exists.	PRO File No WO 166/ 16938 9th BD Company January- September 1945
6 October	Admitted to hospital due to some kind of injury ? As the Company was stationed in Manchester, he may well have been taken to either Manchester Royal Infirmary or Crumpsall Hospital, which were local to Didsbury in Manchester. Investigation found no medical records at these hospitals.	
12 December	Admitted to Hillingdon hospital again as M.P. 47 (Military Personal No: 47), due to the location to Cowley at the age of 41. He was admitted by Ambulance on the 12th with the diagnosis of Arthritis and placed on Ward An.8 where he was identified as having bed baths only. On the admission page it also states Order: E.O. (Caused by Explosive Ordinance perhaps). London Metropolitan Archives Ref: HLU/HIL/23, admissions book page 49. Again during this period he was able to recover at home, whilst still remaining under the care of the Hospital. Again when required, he would have worn the distinctive red tie and white shirt with his battledress.	
1946		
15 May	Hospital discharge book states M.P. 47 being invalided from the service on this date. Following medical decision to invalid from the service.	
2 July	LMA date as discharge from Ward An.5 Hillingdon hospital of M.P. 47 record no: 46/320. Diagnosis was Polyarthritis, inflammation of muscles in several joints at the same time. Treatment would have been made over a slow, extensive period with the prescription of high doses of steroids. Once the advisable bed rest had been completed and the acute inflammation had died down, active exercise was necessary to build up the strength of the muscles again. Although full recovery will conclude, many have to stay on full treatment for 2 or more years, due to the risk of relapse (inflammatory condition flaring up again). What caused this case of Polyarthritis is unknown, but it is thought to be an 'autoimmune' condition in which the body's defence system over-reacts and causes	London Metropolitan Archives Ref: HLU/HIL/23, discharge book page 73.

	damage to tissues in the body. It could be brought about by a traumatic injury, notably in athletes and industrial workers, especially if the injuries have been ignored (which injuries to the feet tended to be). Any of the work carried out by a RE Bomb Disposal Company could fall into the category of an industrial worker, with the hard heavy manual labouring that they had to perform in digging down to UXB's or unloading heavy plant equipment. Another cause, which could create this condition, was nerve damage! Perhaps a result of UXB work ?	
4 July	Hospital discharge book states the disposal of M.P. 47 to Blackpool, possibly back to a RE evaluation centre for medical examination.	
5 July	Ministry of Defence date as discharged from hospital and back to the ranks	
8 September	Discharged from the Army due to permanently unfit for any form of Military service. This was a normal discharge for someone who had been injured and was no longer required to do any Military service.	
8 September	Service with the colours: 17th June 1943 to 8th September 1946. Testimonial on leaving the service : A conscientious and hardworking man. He has always carried out his duties assigned to him in an efficient and satisfactory manner. Military Conduct: Very Good Medals issued: 1939-45 Star France and Germany Star Defence Medal War Medal 1939-45	

It was revealed in May 1945, that 235 Officers and men of Bomb Disposal Companies, Royal Engineers, were killed during the 6 years of bomb disposal work on the British Mainland alone.

A surprisingly low number, considering the vast geography of the UK that was under air raid assault and the high volume of Unexploded Bombs that fell on Greater London alone.

Royal Engineer Bomb Disposal Sections Disembarked in Normandy June 1944

(This listing of Bomb Disposal Sections is not an entire list of all sections that saw service in Normandy, but a list of sections with existing war diaries that is still held by the Public Records Office In Kew).

Section Number Disembarkation date and Information

HQ 25 BD Coy Based in Eltham. Sailed from Tilbury on 9th August and disembarked on 10th August at Juno Beach D+66. Based at La Villeneuve, where they set up the Company Headquarters.

26 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Sailed from Felixstowe and disembarked on the 7th June at 16.30 hrs on Jig Green sector, and moved to Meuvaines. Section later went on to clear Nijmegen Bridge of demolition charges.

48 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford. Sailed from Gosport on 10th June and disembarked on the 11th June at 19.30 hrs at Le Hamel. Assembly area Buhot. Based at Courseilles / St Aubin-sur-mer .

49 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford. Sailed from Gosport and disembarked on the 7th June at Queen Red sector. Diving crew of section later sent to Nijmegen Bridge to clear underwater demolition charges and other explosives.

53 BD Sec, 19 BD Coy Canadian troops landed on English mainland from Toronto at Avonmouth 6th January 1944. Marshalling Area in London.

Disembarked on the 14th July at Courseilles and based at Manvieux

Later in September 1944, the unit was posted to clearing mines at Port-en Bessin.

58 BD Sec, 19 BD Coy Canadian troops who landed on the English mainland in early 1944 and originally based in Nottingham.

No landing information. Based at Manvieux.

95 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford, then Norfolk. Sailed on the 9th June and anchored off Southend.

Disembarked on the 12th June 21.00hrs at Gravel-sur-Mer. Section was dive bombed and based at Banville.

Section later went on to clear charges from the Palais de Justice, Ecole Militaire (Military Academy) and Theatre Royal in Brussels in September 1944.

96 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford. Marshalling area S8/5. Embarked Leopoldville troopship 2nd June.

Disembarked on the 8th June 11.00hrs at La Riviere.

Based at Tracy-sur-Mer / Manvieux.

103 BD Sec, 5 BD Coy Based at Hamstead, London. Sailed from Southampton on 10th July and disembarked on the 11th July at Arromanches. Based at Coulombs.

108 BD Sec, 1 BD Coy Based at Hampstead, London. Marshalling area camp D, Southampton. Sailed from Southampton on 5th June 10.35 hrs and disembarked on the 6th June at Juno Beach. Based Ellon. Main task was airfield clearance.

136 BD Sec, 19 BD Coy Based in London. Sailed from Selsey and disembarked on the 8th June 14.00hrs at Arromanches. Cleared mines of Red Beach. Based at Arromanches / Manvieux.

141 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford / Chatham. Marshalling area camp T5. Sailed from Royal Albert docks on MT 16 on the 8th June and disembarked on the 11th June at Item Red sector. Based at Banville. Section suffered 40% casualties in November 1944.

147 BD Sec, 23 BD Coy Based at Ashford / Hasketon, Suffolk. Marshalling area camp T3. Sailed from Victoria docks, Silvertown on the 14th June and disembarked on the 23rd June. Based at Conde-sur-Seulles.

223 BD Sec, 25 BD Coy Based at Chiswick. Marshalling area camp at Botley. Sailed from Southampton on 7th July and disembarked on the 8th July 17.00hrs at Juno Beach. Based at Pierrepont / Rosel.

224 BD Sec, 25 BD Coy Based at Chiswick. Marshalling area camp C3. Sailed from Southampton on 8th July and disembarked on the 9th July. Based at Secqueville-en-Bessin. Attached to 24 Airforce Construction Group.

225 BD Sec, 25 BD Coy Based at Eltham. Marshalling area camp C2. Sailed from Southampton on 10th July and disembarked on the 11th July at Le Hamel.

14453030 Staff Sergeant B Cottam.

Details transcribed from a letter to the REA BD Branch from B Cottam in 1997, held in their archives.

20 Bomb Disposal Company, 194, 196 and 199 Bomb Disposal Sections.

Served 1945 to 1960.

I am an ex-Regular "Sapper" who after finishing training at Hall Heath Camp, Lockerbie in February 1945 was posted to 20 BD Company RE in Kent. Our Headquarters, at Sevenoaks, were in several private houses behind Tubbs Hill, railway station but personally I served in, or with, 194, 196 and 199 Sections, billeted at:

1. Singleton Manor, Great Chart, Ashford.
2. The Grand Redoubt, Dymchurch.
3. A private house near the golf course at Sandwich.
4. A country house near Burgess Hill in Sussex.

Actual "Bomb Disposal" I never did because we were principally employed on "Minefield Clearance" and cleared the Minefields at Lydd, Camber Sands and behind the Rifle Ranges at Hythe (here we could only work in the afternoons due to the fact that the ranges were used in the mornings – our Reveille was mid-day and breakfast was one o'clock and in addition, for a rest, cleared some pipe-mines from the Golf Course at Sandwich.

Principally we used the PMD and the Mark IV? Detectors but for Camber Sands were trained to use the ERA (Electrical Research Apparatus) which I remember as being rather cumbersome.

As more than 50 years have passed since my time with 20 Company, I cannot remember the names of everyone with whom I served but quote below details of some of the personnel which I have dredged from my memory:

Captain French 2 i/c Sevenoaks.

Lieutenant Catt 199 Section, Great Chart.

Lieutenant R S King (Dick) 194 Section Great Chart and Dymchurch.

Lieutenant W Wye (Willie) 194 Section Dymchurch.

194 Section.

Lance Sergeant R Borthwick (Bobbie).

Corporal White (Chalky).

Sapper Kelly (Joe).

Sapper Thompson (Rueben?).

Sapper Jeffreys (Joe) a driver.

Sapper Aylett (Eddie).

Sapper Hampton (David).

Sapper Taylor (Geordie).

Bexhill Section, I cannot remember the number.

Sapper K L Jones (Ken). Who left BD with me, on our being posted to 3 Training Battalion RE, Guillemot Barracks, Cove, Hats in July 1946 and with who I lost contact in January 1950, when I was posted to Fortress Engineer Regiment, Gibraltar.

My service from that date was very varied but suffice to say that I did a tour in Nigeria (36 Fld Sqn RWAFF) and then another with (25 Fld Engineer Regiment) on Christmas Island (the November 1957 "H Bomb Test) before being posted to the War Office (RE Branch) where I worked until my discharge on "Reduction of Establishment" in May 1960

I lived in Married Quarters at 6 Ford Close, Bushey.

Bye the bye, I did not receive my MBE for Army Service but for being British Vice Consul at Malaga.

Overview of Military Service.

Regular Army. 1 September 1944 to 31 August 1956.

1944 Aged 17 General Service Corps, Private.

1944 Aged 17 Royal Engineer, Sapper.

1944 Aged 18 Royal Engineers, Lance Corporal.

1945 Aged 19 Royal Engineers, Reverted to Sapper on Posting.

1945 Aged 19 Royal Engineers, Lance Corporal.

1947 Aged 20 Royal Engineers, Corporal.

1948 Aged 21 Royal Engineers, Sergeant.

1955 Aged 22 Royal Engineers, Staff Sergeant.

Units.

GSC, Glasgow.

Training Centre RE, Lockerbie.

20 BD Company, HQ BD Section, Sevenoaks: 194 Section, Great Chart, Ashford:

Railway Training Centre RE, Longmoor (Clerical Course).

20 BD Company, HQ BD Section, Great Chart, Ashford: 194/199 BD Section, Dymchurch: 196 BD Section, Sandwich: HQ BD Section, Burgess Hill.

3 Training Battalion RE Cove Hants, HQ Company: D Company: C Squadron: HQ Squadron.

RAPC Training Centre, Aldershot (Pay Course).

RE Records, Brighton (Administration Course).

RAPC Training Regiment, Devices, (Regimental Funds Course).

Troopships.

Empress of Australia, Liverpool to Gibraltar.

Fortress Engineer Regiment, HQ Squadron Gibraltar.

Travelled Southern Coast of Spain and Married a Spanish Girl from Malaga.

On Termination of tour was flown back to K via Bordeaux.

RE Depot Barton Stacey.

HQ Army Emergency Reserve, Permanent Staff, Ripon.

Due to my having been employed for my 3 years on Gibraltar on Pay Duties (RAPC Work) and having been made responsible for the pay and allowances of the Reservists during the summer of 1953 (RAPC Work again) I requested a posting.

Trans Training Regiment, Marchwood, RE Depot, Barton Stacey.

1954 having volunteered for overseas service was placed on draft for Korea.

Instead of leaving wife and 2 young children alone in UK, I took them to Malaga and then returned to RE Depot. Draft for Korea was cancelled and I was seconded to RWAFF.

Flew to Nigeria via North Africa, 36 Fld Squadron RWAFF, Kaduna. Although officially clerical staff, assisted in launching of a Bailey Bridge over a chasm on the Vom Plateau. Flown back to UK VIS West Coast of Africa.

RE Depot, Barton Stacey.

AEC, Aldershot (Resettlement Course).

Billeted with 3 Training Regiment RE, Cove.

Also visited Tripoli, Kaho, Lagos (overnight), Bathurst, Freetown (overnight), Amadan, Villa Cisneros (Spanish Morocco)

Termination Leave.

Travelled to Malaga to re-encounter my family and after two years get to know my daughters.

Service due to end 31 August 1956.

RE Records informed me I was on Reserve and could not be discharged.

Returned to Sheffield (my hometown) and signed for S Type engagement.

Medals

War Medal 1939.45

GSM and Clasp Bomb and Mine Clearance 1945 to 1949.

Service December 56 to May 1960.

Rejoined with rank of Staff Sergeant service number 23246781

1 Training Regiment, Malvern Wells.

25 Fd Engr Regt, 46 Field Park, Maidstone.

On draft for Cyprus, travelled to Spain brought family back to the UK.

Whilst on embarkation leave in Sheffield re-called to Maidstone and invited to accompany Regt to Christmas Islands.

Family allotted married quarters at Invicta Lines.

25 Fd Engr Regt and other Army Units attached therefore to Christmas Islands.

Regt was flown out by regular airlines via USA except for one flight which being charter went via East. I was on this one.

We went via Brindis (overnight), Ahkara, Basra (overnight), Karachi (overnight), Colombo (overnight) Singapore (two nights), Djakarta, Port Darwin (overnight), Brisbane (2 nights), Fiji (overnight) and Canton Islands.

November 1957 the bomb test was like nothing I had imagined, despite my time in Bomb Disposal.

With our backs to the drop out, some 50 mile away, with eyes closed, wearing dark glasses and our hands covering our faces and eyes. We still say the flash of the explosion followed by a burning sensation on our bodies.

The Regt was relieved at the end of January 1958 our families accompanied the relieving Regt. The press coverage was rather extensive and we returned to the UK on board the MV Dumera, visiting Honolulu, Panama, the Canal and Curacao.

I believe I am one of the very few who has actually done a complete round the world trip at the Governments expense, whilst doing military service.

War Office E in C Dept, London.

Discharged on reduction of establishment and came out to Spain.

Army Trade,

Field Engineer, 25 Fd Engr Regt, 46 Field Park, Maidstone.

Clerk GD.

Axeman.

Len Curran.

Details from a letter sent to the REA BD Branch by Len Curran in 2003, held in their archives.

9 Bomb Disposal Company.

It is good news about the Roll of Honour being established.

About the men who lost their lives in Coventry in 1940, before the 9 BD Company was formed.

I am sending you the names of the men who lost their lives.

I was working on a bomb in Coventry when a huge came from the hole and we had such a shock. That another squad was sent to relieve us and then lost their lives with the Officer.

I sent you a letter some years ago, which I had from Coventry Cathedral, the new one of course. The details are on it explains what happened, you should have it somewhere, (not in the archives).

The list of names who I knew them all.

2 Lieutenant AF Gibson GC.

Sergeant M Gibson GC.

Sapper W Gibson.

Sapper R Gilcrest.

Sapper J Plumb.

Sapper R H Skelton.

Driver E E Taylor.

All buried in Coventry.

While unloading the bomb at the dump it exploded, we heard it while having dinner at the Coventry Barracks.

The funeral consisted of two coffins, one for the officer one for the other six men, we heard they had to be filled with sand for weight, as they found nothing but some ribbons from the officer's uniform, so sorry to finish the letter on a sad note.

Sergeant Jack Curtis

Letter sent to the REA BD Branch from Jack Curtis in 1997, kept in the Branch archives.

2 Bomb Disposal Squad, 12 Bomb Disposal Company.

Army Emergence Reserve, Bomb Disposal.

Whilst held up in St Marys Barracks, Chatham, I volunteered and joined 2 Bomb Disposal squad in Dartford (my home town). The OC was Lieutenant Ricketts. Date of joining May 1940.

Later in the year 12 Bomb Disposal Company was formed and we moved to Graffham, West Sussex. Most of the work was around Chichester. The South Downs and South Coast.

On promotion I was posted to ? Surrey, under Lieutenant Revis and later to Brighton. In June 1942 I was posted overseas to Trinidad BWI and attached to Works Services on Construction work.

Later posted to St Vincent n camp construction work.

Returned to UK in about July 1945. Posted to 1 Corp, Iserlohn, Germany Oct 1945 to Feb 1946. Demobbed as Sergeant.

Sergeant K Cushen.

Details from two letters sent the REA BD Branch from Ken Cushen and held in their archive.

1949 to 1973.

Letter 1.

I joined the Royal Engineers in 1949 and after training at Elgin and Aldershot, was posted to Lanark (The Cameroonians Barracks), to a newly formed Battle Area Clearance Team. This unit did not consist of just RE personnel, the officers were infantry, we had TRR, RASC etc, I think all the SNCO's were RE. We also had 200 EVW (European Volunteer Workers, there were actually displaced person who had to work as directed, I think for 2 years initially.

Our task was to clear and make fit for normal peacetime use, live training areas mainly shell, mortar and grenade, although some beach defence work was undertaken.

Over the next few years we carried out visual searches over hundreds of acres and detector sweeps of a few more. These tasks were carried out, summer and winter, with pretty basic clothing and equipment. Our protective clothing was leather jerkins, MT gauntlets and wellies.

We travelled up and down the country working from bases at Carlisle, Catterick, Rhyl, Hereford and Lanark.

The host regiments whose camp we were working from usually were not too pleased to see us. This was in no small way due to having to house our EVWs as well.

As we were usually in the training regimens i.e. 8 RTR at Catterick, 67 Training Regiment RAC at Carlisle, Royal Artillery training at Rimmel Park, Rhyl, its not surprising we were called some nasty names.

How big the organisation was, I do not know, but I served in two different units 13/19 BACT and 20/22 BACT, I think. Sometime in the middle 50s this unit amalgamated into Bomb Disposal and I think are, or were until recently still going strong.

At times it was a really nasty job, but as always, it had lighter moments.

I left to continue serving in Assault Engineers and Field Squadrons until 1973. Even after 23 years' service and 23 years since I have never met anyone who served in BACT.

Most people in the Corps say "a what, I have never heard of that".

There must have been hundreds of thousands of acres of ranges and beaches to be cleared. So who out there did the rest. I would like to know if anyone actually served with me.

I have another connection to BD with which to amuse readers.

After I left the Army, I worked for the engineers dept of a large psychiatric hospital (not a lot of change many might say).

We had a Land Rover to tow emergency generators etc round various units. Also on strength was a member of Portland United Football Club staff, occasionally he would ask me to tow the heavy roller over the pitch. "Not a problem ignorance is bliss" Of course he neglected to mention the 500kg HE nestling under the centre circle. I wonder just how many, players, groundsmen, mowers etc went over it before it was eventually dug up. One of the Blues matches could have ended with a bang.

Thanks to Captain Mike Lobb and his gallant team, that danger is now removed.

Letter 2.

I have a confession to make; I was never in Bomb Disposal. I joined as a National Serviceman in 49. My first posting was to a Battle Area Clearance Team (yes, they were teams then). No 20 to 22 were in Winston Barracks in Lanark A later posting was to 17 BACT in Carlisle (Hadrian's Camp).

From there I went to 13 then 16 and back to 17. Our task was to clear training area of unexploded stuff EOD had not yet been invented.

We were not part of BD and had a separate HQ in Newhaven in Sussex, BD was in Horsham. The teams consisted of ex Regimental employed officers, we had three infantry Captains and a Major as OC RE, Senior NCOs and a mixture of ERE Gunners, Troopers, Drivers and of course The Ubiquitous Sappers, EVW (European Volunteer Workers, formed the work force and 200 of them travelled with us and shared the same accommodation as us.

Our sphere of operations covered some of Britains most spectacular scenery, Lalkin Tarn Cumbria, Wensleydale, Snowdonia and the Yorkshire Moors.

To the dismay of many a RSM we shared camps with The Cameroonians (Lanark), 67 Training Regiment RAC (Carlisle) another RAC Regt (Catterick), The Royal Artillery (Kimmel Park, Rhyl) and Stirling Lines in Hereford, no the SAS were not there then.

We did mainly mortar ranges, hand grenade areas some shell ranges. The method was walk over the area in a line and pick up !!! anything dodgy. We did not have the benefit of sophisticated metal detection equipment. The mine detectors we had picked up everything, from a large shell to a small piece of shrapnel. If used a continuous whistle accompanied you all day. Of course I had to extend my service to manage all this (23 years)!!

Was it enjoyable, well er, yes, cold, wet, muddy and cold, yes rewarding, yes 4 shillings a day a bit of hard lying money, and an even more occasional tot of rum.

Dangerous, at the time when we were young and foolish, no. Now in the light of later experience, how the hell did we get away with it with no serious accidents.

In later years I saw what mines etc can do to bodies, also careless use of weapons and explosives.

I think that BACT was taken over by BD in the early 60s and then to EOD and still going on in a similar form over 50 years on.

Is there anyone out there.

In all the years and vets' meetings I have attended at :- Ripon, Chatham, Aldershot, Tidworth and Carver Barracks, I have never met or heard of anyone who was in the original 13 to 22 BAC Teams late 40s early 50s.

I am proud to be a Royal Engineer (retired) I am glad to be allowed in the BD Branch and wear an EOD tie. I have immense respect for the original BDS.

The EVS who were with us were mainly from the Balkan States and were good workers and even better at socialising.