

BROADSWORD ASSOCIATION



NEWSLETTER 2010

Chairmans Letter

I would like to take this opportunity to make an apology for the late publication of the newsletter. The reason has been trying to get Chester Town Hall which is still undergoing renovations this means a different venue has had to be arranged, Chester would not have been free even for us.

Your committee have looked at various venues. The Marriot Hotel Portsmouth HMS Drake & HMS Victory, the latter was far too expensive £1000+ and that was without food and drink, so as time is getting short Chester gave me a contact in the Crowne Plaza in the city centre. The hire of the rooms for the AGM and Dinner is £100, Marriot was £400 so the price is good.

The downside is room rates are high, but you do not have to stay in the hotel, if enough members choose to stay an arrangement would be made but I think it would still be high.

Members will be expected to pay for their meals as funds at this time are getting low.

Peter Phillips Chairman

Message from the Editor.

First of all may I sincerely apologise for the delay in this spring 2010 newsletter. As I am sure some of you are aware your committee have been working tirelessly over the past 6 months to arrange the venue and arrangements for this years AGM and Reunion.

After many an e-mail between Pete Phillips and the Town Hall in Chester it was eventually decided that the evening reunion would be a formal affair with a sit down meal. The venue for the evening dinner is The Crowne Plaza Hotel, Trinity Street, Chester.

The AGM will be held at 14:30 on Saturday 6th November at the Crowne Plaza Hotel. The committee would like all members attending the reunion to please attend the AGM as we have many issues to raise and would like as much feedback as possible. If you are not all aware our President Captain W R Canning was standing down from his post after this year's reunion, but has asked if he can stay on another 2 years.

A menu has been enclosed with this newsletter with a menu choice and where to send your replies and payment. The Association will subsidise the meal for members and associate members so if you have paid your membership please come along as it is your money. We have been allocated a suite which seats 96 so please return your menu choices, number of guests and payment at the earliest opportunity to avoid disappointment. Places will be filled on a first come first serve basis. The closing date for return of payment and menu choices is 1st October 2010.

The dress code for the evening is formal, gentlemen, lounge suits, black tie optional, Ladies trousers or dresses. Strictly no jeans/trainers. There will be a guest list on the door so if you haven't returned your acceptance and payment you will not be admitted, so please don't just turn up on the night. You can also add yourselves to the attendance list by logging on to www.hmsbroadsword.co.uk and go to the events link.

Dave Bracken
Editor

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My Sword for a Ploughshare

My journey to join the Royal Navy began on Exmoor when, on 6 Jan 1949, I caught a train from Barnstaple and, after a couple of changes, arrived at Kingswear station at the ripe old age of 18. From here the journey was completed by ferry across to the Dartmouth side of the river. Here my 20 or so colleagues were 'fell in' and marched to the College's accommodation for our bunch who were known as 'Special Entry' cadets. There was nothing very special about us but this title differentiated us from the 14 year old entry which was the normal age for cadets joining the Service in those days (unlike Nelson who first went to sea at the age of 12). Indeed, our short (one term) stay at Dartmouth was entirely conducted in separation from the rest of the College with our own accommodation down by the river at Sandquay.

The ensuing 34 years do not form part of this 'dit', neither do the 8 that I spent with British Aerospace on my retirement from the Navy. Suffice to say that I loved my time in the Service but found that BAe was infinitely less fulfilling and was happy to take early retirement from the latter at the age of 60.

It was at this stage that I felt a homing instinct and persuaded my wife Daphne to taste the land of my upbringing. Happily, this was a taste that she took to and we remained on Exmoor for the following 17 years or so. I had come home.

It didn't take me long to conclude that I needed to occupy some of my spare time and felt strongly drawn towards that truly beautiful part of the West Country that has been Exmoor National Park since 1954. The ability to mess around in ships and chase Soviet submarines around the Atlantic Ocean would appear to be totally unsuited to what I had in mind but, nevertheless, I knocked on the door of the National Park headquarters in Dulverton in Somerset one morning in 1990 and was ushered before the Head Ranger of the day. In answer to his gently probing questions, I said that I had a working knowledge of Exmoor and a chainsaw in the back of my car. This opening gambit brought a faint smile to his face but he clearly had some reservations even though I was volunteering my services.

It was planned that I should return the following day in order to meet the Ranger team. There was also a hint that my resolve would need to be tested. The upshot of this meeting was that I took a liking to the team and to one of them in particular who outbid his colleagues for my services.

Now for the 'exam'. This proved to be a considerable challenge and required me (on my own) to locate, open up and mark a long disused footpath in thick woodland and scrub. Fair enough I thought until I realised that this ancient path, which was an historic right of way, ran very steeply uphill in a gradient ~~in a gradient~~ close on 1 in 2. But, having accepted the challenge, I was not going to be put off by a bit of a climb. Thus, armed with map, compass, saw and axe I set about my task and was soon thinking of General

Slim's epic 14th Army task in the jungles of Burma during World War Two; but his men had mules to do much of the humping.

It took me several days to complete the task before I was able to report 'job done' to Head Ranger David Beasley and I was received with a broad grin and a warm handshake. I was 'in'.

It was agreed that I would put in two days a week and that I should be regarded as a voluntary ranger or rather, the voluntary ranger as I was the first and only one of the breed.

Thus started 17 years of most rewarding 'work'. My mentor, a truly delightful one time Exmoor farmer was one of four Area Rangers whose patch was virtually the central, high moor part of the National Park and this really appealed to me. Although half my age, Mike Leach (later to become Head Ranger) and I clicked immediately. Quietly spoken, strongly built and a countryman to his fingertips, Mike and I shared a love of the moor and a passionate interest in the huge diversity of wildlife encompassed by it.

For the next 10 years or so, Mike and I did prodigious things together before the dead hand of Health and Safety imposed itself in such a supine way on our activities. I was often on my own if our resources needed to be split but lone working also had an unique appeal although even this practice is now hedged about by petty rule and regulation.

Our 'work' was infinitely variable but, in general terms, focussed on all aspects of maintenance within a national park that included 600 miles of right of way footpaths and bridleways, about 90 footbridges and umpteen gates and stiles all of which had to be kept safe and serviceable. Leading guided walks, burying dead animals and looking for the odd lost soul also had their place. The chainsaw was perhaps our main armament but pickaxe, spade and crowbar all had their place. I had owned a chainsaw for about 10 years but was happy to have my bad habits ironed out by way of two courses and an exam. It quickly dawned on me that, after all, seamanship practices did have an application in some of our heavy work and I was able to introduce block and tackle, leading blocks and strops – invaluable in towing fallen trees and the like out of the way.

But sweat, toil and profanity were not always the order of the day. There were many periods of tranquillity spent checking out the local wildlife. Exmoor's rich heritage includes two unique species – the two and a half thousand or so wild red deer which have ranged the moor for centuries and which are the only truly wild red deer in England, and the semi wild Exmoor ponies which date back to the ice age and which were close to extinction not long past. Some less common birds, beasts and butterflies added a further rich dimension to our activities.

It became apparent to me quite quickly that the Rangers needed to be able to communicate with each other from their various patches. Some hand held VHF radios were acquired and dog watch instruction in their use commenced; callsigns were allocated and the phonetic alphabet mastered. This proved very useful although there

Subsequently found to contain mustard gas

were many 'blind spots' on the moor due to topography. The mobile phone also arrived on the scene although these too suffered from the same limitations.

Leading guided walks was also a stimulating activity. These occurred about once a week and varied in distance from a 3 mile saunter (usually of a specialist nature – deer, ponies, fungi, butterflies, birds and so on) to an all day march with a picnic lunch in some well chosen spot. Numbers of walkers varied between single figures and several dozen.

Exmoor had been extensively used by the allied armies prior to D-Day and, despite major clearance work after the war, some interesting items were not uncovered. By and large, few of the national park staff knew much about 'bombs and things' and I was thus able to coordinate events following a discovery on the basis of my Service experience. Lethal items found were usually unexploded shells and some mortar bombs but, on one occasion two rather sinister heavy metal, liquid filled containers came to light. In all such cases EOD teams were called in (sometimes from the Navy) and this always provided interest, to the extent that Rangers were able to take it in turn to press the tit. Other, non lethal items of military hardware were also regularly found, not to mention shell and bomb splinters, expended cartridge cases and so on. Endless fun!

My company car was a 4-wheel drive vehicle (which I bought) which was essential for the job as my work took me all over the moor and often required carrying heavy kit or towing a trailer. Needless to say, the vehicle was stuffed with kit and I rarely had room for more than one passenger.

Another delight in those early days was the ability to ring up RNAS Yeovilton to seek

(see see p 4 which follows)

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26th April 2009.

Dear Phil,

I recently attended the AGM of SAMA(82). It was a well attended and encouraging affair. The Chairman, Lt. Col. Tony Davies, (ex-RSM 1 Welsh Guards) handled it extremely well. I suggested that he sends you all, whether SAMA members or not, a copy of the latest newsletter. It may have arrived already.

I am very aware that most of you still hold reunions and some may feel that is enough. This letter is not intended to discourage you from keeping your own reunions going. They will, I hope, be great fun but I suggest they serve a very different purpose. Many of your ship's company might also benefit from the wider membership/comradeship and clout of SAMA.

What I found most encouraging is that Col. Davies has managed to draw most of the Falkland's veterans' associations together, as against fighting each other. The following points summarise the situation as I see it and you may wish to bring them to the attention of your people. They are expanded in the newsletter.

1. SAMA is seen as the main Falkland veteran's contact by the Government, the Service Personnel and Veterans' Agency, British Legion, Combat Stress and most other 'general' service charities.
2. It is well funded and well managed.
3. The Board has RN, MN and Army members
4. Its membership is quite large but could, with advantage, be larger.
5. SAMA has area Reps who may help individuals and organise local events, not just the annual Cenotaph and 25th anniversary celebrations.
6. It is now the contact for Indulgence Flights to the Falklands which are available to all veterans.

7. Liberty House is up and running in Stanley. It was the brainchild of P.O. Derek (Smokey) Cole who started the Falklands Veterans Association (FVF) in Gosport. The house has several double rooms and can be booked/rented via SAMA. SAMA and the FVF are no longer in competition.

8. SAMA can assist/advise on veterans issues/problems and support such as Outreach Support, Concessionary Travel Schemes, Reaching Veterans in Prison, MoD discount schemes for veterans and their families and

9. What constantly surprises me is the fact that on almost every occasion that I have attended SAMA meetings, I have found officers, sailors and troops who need to talk with senior officers, (COs and Staff) and rid themselves of 'gremlins' that have pursued them for over twenty-seven years. There are an amazing number who need such simple help from people who were often not of their unit and so saw a different side to the story.

I hope you will encourage your people to join.

I also hope that we may see you at the San Carlos dinner in May. Please also let all your officers know that they would be welcome to attend too. Either ask them to contact me or Colour Sergeant Chapman.

With my best wishes,

Do hope you are both well.

Yours As.

Michael C.

Michael C Clapp