

THE LISTENING POST

The Newsletter of the Langeleben Reunion Branch, Royal Signals Association



Issue No: 15



December 2013



THE PHANTOM OP

It was Christmas Day in the setroom
And all the reels were bare
The coffee percolator sang,
And snoring filled the air.
Hands lay limp on tuning knobs,
The printer never rang.
The Sup plugged into fibbies'
As the Herald Angels sang.



Then all at once a ghostly hush
Pervaded all the room,
A hideous and ghostly shape,
Transparent in the gloom,
Sat down beside Position 6,
And then began to knob,
The Phantom Operator
Had come to do his job.



Rack 4, Deck 6 began to turn,
The shift Sup's knees went weak
"What bearing are you on?" he cried
And "What's your flaming freq?"
The spectre answered not a word,
But silently did write,
All day he took his phantom log
And late into the night.

At midnight at the stroke of twelve,
The ghost lay down his pen,
Two hundred sheets of log lay stacked,
The work of twenty men.
And silently he turned around,
And silently he rose,
The shift Sup spilt his coffee
While the operators froze.

"I'm the ghost of spec ops past"
The spook was heard to say
"Forever cursed to sit and knob
Upon his holy day

My groups are always hard to log
The ten k's never works.
The cor light's always badly set,
And the coffee never perks'



"I once was human just like you
I used to skive as well,
And in repayment for my sins
I must endure the hell.
I always got a Christmas drop
And now, alas am I
Forever damned to try and log
The Dev group in the sky."

The ghost walked through the setroom door
And vanished in the air
But the words that the Phantom spoke to me
Forever will be there
So therefore, Christian men and true,
Don't fall down on the job
Or be condemned eternally
To sit around and knob.



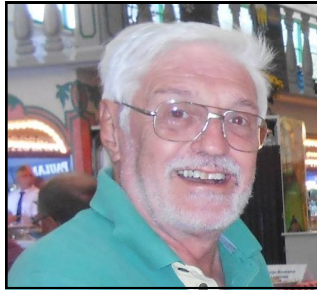
Here endeth a salutary lesson.
Submitted by Chris Moseley



"To foster and keep alive the comrade spirit of all those who served at Langeleben."

ANOTHER CHRISTMAS AT LANGELEBEN

I did not seem to have much luck with Christmas's at Langeleben, except some might say in the Sergeants mess Christmas draw.



In November 1968 I was joined by my wife and six week old daughter. We returned to the UK briefly for a course and arrived back at Langeleben a few weeks before Christmas 1969. Christmas Day came and passed uneventfully and it was only a day or two later that a 'panic' materialized.



A deployment was ordered and with minimal available personnel there was a bit of a raffle, some Comcen staff had to stay behind to maintain the comms links but most other people were deployed into the Dannenberg salient.

The weather was 'seasonal', very pretty but a bit on the cold side for 'green camping'. We did our best and found a relatively sheltered spot in the forest, that we were familiar with, and pitched camp. The vehicles and the 70' Clark's mast were camouflaged with the normal green netting but that very quickly blended in with a thick layer of hoar frost. The tents were 'a bit difficult' as they had previously been folded whilst still a bit damp and now it was rather like trying to open heavily starched blankets with cold fingers. The 10 man tents had to squeeze in a heater, initially just to make them habitable but I don't recall them ever being turned out. An attempt was made, and then abandoned, to dig the pit for the petrol burners and stands for the cook. There was an element of difficulty in getting water or fat warm when it was determined that the temperature had fallen to minus 25C. although being all above ground might have been part of the problem.

Inside the radio van box bodies it was 'comfortable' as long as the doors were kept shut but certain senior NCOs' took to using the box bodies as their personal ablutions which meant repeated opening and closing of the doors to fetch and dispose of bowls and mugs of hot water, one may imagine the comments from the shivering operators and the threats of repercussions if anyone complained about dodgy handwriting.

Life went on and very quickly a routine was established of Land-Rover trips down into the village in the evenings. The chosen few would take advantage of the hospitality to have a thorough strip wash, to a greater or lesser degree depending upon custom in the toilets whilst the others ordered the beers and, usually the ham/sausage, eggs and chips and a few more beers until everyone was fragrant or beyond caring. This trip was memorable as the local landlord introduced us to the 'anti-freeze' properties of Ratzeputz, the local 'rocket fuel' that tasted more like medicine than a liqueur, or re-distilled Underberg. Nevertheless after a plate of warm food and a few beers topped off with the above mentioned spirit it was prudent to return to camp quietly and slide into sleeping bags

rather than show any signs of inebriation amongst those less fortunate who had been trying to cook in the open air with barely warm fat or water. I recall a major struggle with a block of corned beef one day. it had been extricated from a badly mangled can but defied all attempts to slice it. My last-ing memory is of this block of black, mangled leaf and soot covered mess being hurled into the woods with suggestions as to its future. I doubt it got over the border.

The routine continued for a long period with only occasional resupply visits of food and the 'odd' message from wives who had bumped into the 'postie' in the mail room or NAAFI at Wolfenbüttel. There were some comments and enquiries about what the families should live on as most of the Christmas booze and food had been eaten and the pantries were getting bare. I recall there was nothing much we could do as all our ready cash was going to the pub in town and we had no idea how long we would have to make it last.

Eventually we got word that the 'troops' were back. I confess there were some opinions expressed, but not much sympathy, when we heard that the men had got off the aircraft onto four tonners etc whilst the wives and children were conveyed by green bus. The men, or most of them, we were told, would be joining us immediately. There was an influx of personnel, mainly of Senior NCOs who expanded the ab-lution facilities inside the Ops vehicles and took over the evening 'comfort' runs. Luckily the novelty soon wore off and possibly the 'bods' on the other side had had enough also and the decision was taken to return to camp.

The recent arrivals seemed to have pressing engagements and admin work back at camp or at home and rapidly disappeared into the snow. We took our time; we had no choice, in breaking camp, we had to leave the tents and cooking facilities until we could persuade the Clark's mast to unfreeze and telescope back into its storage mode and the other various bits of wire, metal and rope to collapse and get back into their storage. Some encouragement in the form of naked flames was required until the mast submitted to brute force and bad language and some extra duties required later replacing the seals (in case we had to deploy again quickly). I suspect a few rigid cam nets and lengths of D10 cable were lost in the snow but I do not recall any great pangs of guilt.

Luckily the post corporal, and the influx of the first wave of returnees had alerted the wives and the water boilers were all hot and the heating was turned up. The NAAFI shelves and friends' and neighbours' pantries had been raided and within a few hours we were bathed, scraped and fed enough to re-join the human race just in time to find out the details of the resumption of shift duties with effect from the mid-watch that night.

This was one of the more 'fun' deployments but it stuck in my memory and I promised myself never to go camping or to any more holiday camps ever again.

Steve Lawrence



To you all,

I am delighted to have the opportunity to wish you all the Season's Greetings.



I am sorry that Gail and I could not be with you this year. That was my fault – I was “7 days bed-down” in our parlance!” The only worry I have is the likelihood of a recurrence, but we will meet that if and when it comes.

I take pride in our two reunions and recognise that we are a kind of family who care for one another and enjoy our mutual friendship.

If I had been at the Reunion, I would, as I always do, heap praise on the Secretary who keeps us all together and so well informed about matters which concern us. Whatever changes occur in the future, I nevertheless offer my grateful thanks on your behalf to Ernie and his colleagues.

I hope my attendance record will be 100% next year. In the meantime, Gail joins me in wishing you a Happy Christmas and a trouble-free New Year.

Peter Baldwin.

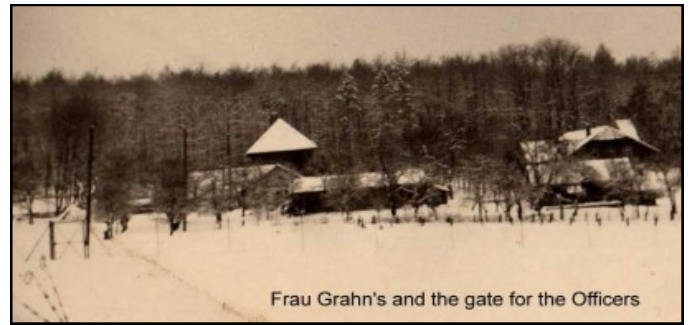
The ‘Social Club’

No matter how you look at it, a twenty four-hour shift system quickly gets boring. The Welfare department at Langeleben did it's bit with visits to places of interest — in my short sojourn there, I got to visit the Volkswagen works for instance. About thirty of us, all loaded in the back of a three tonner. I know, they call ‘em four tonners now, but it's still the same vehicle! Anyway, there were still the long gaps between shifts to fill up, and there's only so much you can do to while away the hours. One of my mates for instance, worked out how to tune his guitar using maths! He was cleverer than I, that's for sure.



One time when it had snowed a bit, we decided to take the mile-long trek through the forest to an American camp similar to ours where there was a long-standing invitation to visit. The big perk was that their tents had wooden walls about four feet high and came equipped with roaring, wood-burning stoves. That they also had a bar there was of only ‘minor significance’. Their beer was a bit thin mind you!!!

The principal lifesaver for everyone at Langeleben was Frau Grahn's. It was literally a short walk away — a typical German bar tucked into the roadside. It was mainly bare boards and it was ruled over by Frau Grahn herself, a severe, grey-



haired little lady who didn't smile a lot. But she did do good grub! Her Wiener Schnitzel was to die for and her beer was anything but ‘thin’.

I think it must have been the second or third evening of my stay that I was introduced. ‘Come on,’ insisted the guys in the tent, she's very reasonable. ‘But when you're broke, you're broke’, I wailed. ‘Ah, forget that,’ the gang said, ‘Frau Grahn does tick!’ And that was how my vocabulary expanded. The gang coached me to say, ‘Anschreiben, bizahlen Donnerstag’ until I was quite fluent, or was it convincing? Actually, I suspect the dear lady had the admin. office bugged and knew who the new boys were almost before they did. Anyway, it was a useful place to while away a few hours of boredom and ‘keep the wolf from the door’ — we were all growing lads after all! Frau Grahn was never all that friendly, but she sure knew how to make a ‘buck’ and protect her assets. And the lads, typical of squaddies all over the world, quickly learned to take advantage. On one occasion one of the mechs produced a four inch nail onto which he'd carefully soldered a one pfennig piece. Some sort of diversion was provided — hobnail boot dancing or something of the like that made a lot of noise — and while this racket was going on under Frau Grahn's suspicious eyes, the mech hammered the nail with the pfennig on it into the floor. Next time she came past to serve someone, her beady eye lamped the coin at once and she quickly manoeuvred herself so she could cover the pfennig with her foot, the intention being to slide it behind a chair perhaps; so she could pick it up without being observed. She made two or three attempts to slide that coin during the course of the evening, naturally without success. So, after a while, rather puzzled, she left it alone. Those who went over to her place next morning for coffee swore the coin had gone! It certainly wasn't there that evening when I called in.

On another occasion, some evil soul came up with a ‘hot foot’ idea. He spent a long period tucked away behind the others with a one pfennig piece in a pair of snipe-nosed pliers heating it up with the contents of a large box of matches. Then he dropped it on the floor right where she would see it just as she came out of the kitchen. Quick as a flash, her foot covered the coin. We were sure we could hear a sizzling sound, and when we looked at the Gnädige Frau's face, there was a distinctly pained expression there. But we never saw that coin again either! Shortly afterwards, I left Langeleben, never to return I'm afraid.

Dennis Teesdale

Secretary's Report.



As those of you who attended the AGM during the Königsutter reunion will already know, I have taken over the role of Branch Secretary from Ernie Callaghan, to whom I strongly believe we should all express our thanks for the excellent job he has done in this role since Rod Goddard and I were in short trousers. I feel very honoured to have the confidence of branch members in my new role and hope that I can undertake this role to the satisfaction of all members.

I am also very lucky to have two volunteers to act a points-of-contact with the organizing of the Loughborough and Königsutter reunions. Dickie Pickup will be arranging the Loughborough reunion in 2014 and John Richardson will work on the Königsutter reunion in 2015.

Hopefully, we can all work to make these reunions as successful as this year's splendid success.

I would like to send my best Christmas Wishes to all members and their families and hope they have an excellent New Year and 2014

My contact details: whcsanders@hotmail.com or telephone: 01460 64512

It was good to speak to our President Major General Peter Baldwin recently and I am sure you all join me in our wishes for his continued health in the New Year.



Our new committee is getting up a head of steam, they have already made a definite booking for the 5th-7th September for next year's reunion at Burleigh Court Loughborough, Please don't forget to contact a Langeleben friend, to encourage them to attend the 2014 reunion. There will be more details in the next issue of the Listening Post.

I would like to take this opportunity to wish all our members a very Merry Christmas and a prosperous New Year.

Rod Goddard.
Vice President



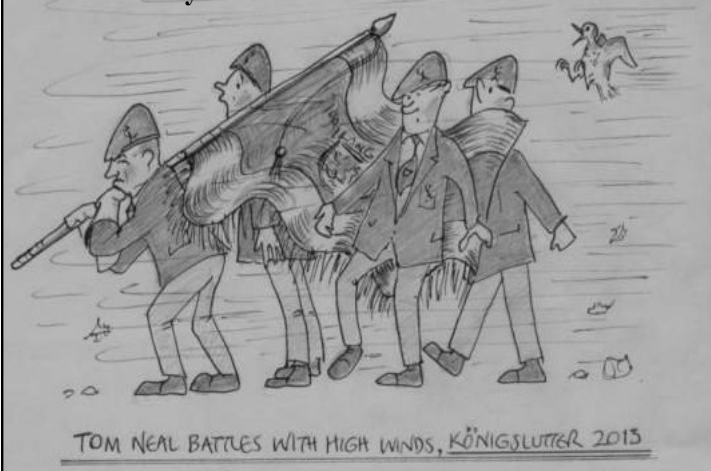
Grandad Was Sleeping

by Clive Sanders



Grandad was sleeping and starting to snore,
After Christmas day lunch, served at quarter to four.
Surrounded by family, sprawled all over the floor,
Who noticed that Grandad, had dropped open his jaw.
Jack was the grandson, who old Grandad was sure,
Would become a proud soldier, like he had before.
He poked Grandad sharply, and said "I'd like to implore,
That you tell us some stories, of what you did in the war."
"Hold on!" said Grandad, "You seem to ignore,
That I served in Army, long after the war.
I was just very lucky and don't want you to bore,
I served at Langeleben, and worked in a store."
"But although it was cushy, many dangers I saw,
Like razor sharp pencils, and holes in the floor,
I could easily have trapped my foot in a door,
And all of that writing really made my hand sore."
"And a night in the NAAFI, with its deafening roar,
Where we drank lots of Carlsberg, and shots by the score,
Was not a safe place, there were dangers galore.
The world should give thanks, it's not there anymore."
Then Grandad sat back, as he had heretofore,
And he noticed the smile that his grandson now wore,
So he told young Jack, "If your friends ask for more,
Just tell them your Grandad, won't talk of the war."

Cartoon by Clive Inman



IMPORTANT

If you received this newsletter from a volunteer buddy, please do let him know it has been received so we are aware you are well and happy to continue to receive it. Your reunion (or other) memories are welcomed for our next newsletter. Please send to:
Marlene Brooks. 167 Fold Croft, Harlow CM20 1SL
Or email to: langelebennews@yahoo.co.uk



Last Post

We will remember them



Peter Wilson (1960-62) John Edney (1961-63)
Jim C Jones (1958-61 62-64 75-77) Laurie Hudson (1960-61)