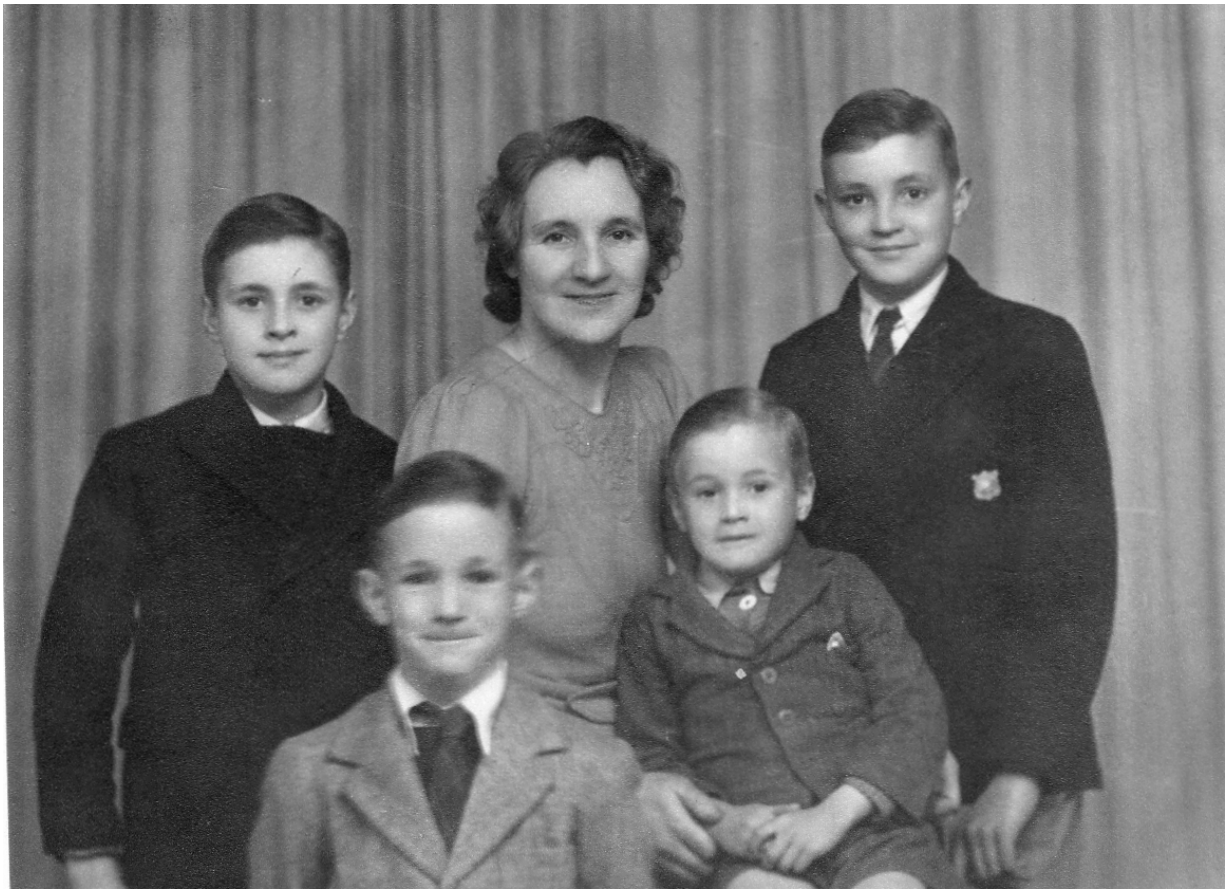
My Life and Times

The Recollections of an Army Brat

By Robert James Spreadbury

May You Live In Interesting Times



From left to Right - Richard, Peter, Mother Winifred, Brian and Bob (1945)

Chapter 1 1929 - 1939

I do not have many memories between 1929 and 1938.

I was born in Bangalore, India in the state of Mysore on the 26th Oct 1929 to Sgt and Ms. L. R. Spreadbury. My dad was in the Royal Engineers attached to the Madras Sappers and Miners for a 5-year engagement.

I am indebted to some notes made by my Mother, Winifred Margaret, for the accompanying passages.

A Serviceman's wife's memories

In December 1927 I became engaged to a serviceman, then a Corporal in the Royal Engineers. Within a month he was posted to India to the Queen Victoria's own Madras Sappers and Miners. Bans were arranged, we were married February 11, 1928 sailing for India March 8th on the troopship Nevasa.

Arriving Bombay, we transferred to a train to Bangalore, taking 3 days and nights, sharing an enamel plate and mug for meals, which consisted of a loaf, small tin of butter, bully beef stew, rashers floating in fat and small tin of cheese. Tea was brought around in a bucket. Our beds were the seats in the train and the luggage rack.

We were fortunate in that two families shared a first-class compartment, and after scouring the bath with sand collected by our husbands at the railway stations where we halted, we were able to bathe. Our fellow companions sharing, were a Sgt in the Royal West Kent's, his wife and two boys ages 5 and 7.

Arriving in Bangalore, we were met by the RSM and Qtr. master and taken to our married quarters. There were some single men who were taken to the barracks.

From then on it was a strange new life getting used to the money Rupee, anna pye and pice, and some language mostly Tamil. Urdu was the language the men had to study and pass as instructors to various dialects some coming from outlying districts.

There was very little social life apart from social evenings in the Sgt's mess occasionally. Sometimes our traveling companions from the Royal West Kent's came to visit, but it was a three mile walk and the nights dropped fully by 7 pm.

Shopping was done by our bearer (boy) by chit, and once a month we ordered a gharrie (horse and carriage) on pay day to pay any bills and doing any other shopping.

For the first few weeks furniture was rented until we found something suitable. Mail day was Sundays, letters then took 3 weeks from home as there was no airmail. A letter was greatly appreciated and any news from home. During our 5 years there my brother and two sisters were married.

A daughter who died the same day, and two sons were born in India. We returned to England in 1933 and were posted to Chatham. After 18 months my husband was promoted to Quartermaster and posted to Aldershot where two more sons were born. In 1938 we were sent to Bere Island of the SW coast Ireland as QM of an AA Company pending handing over to the Irish Free State. During this time the crisis arose with Germany. Orders were being changed almost hourly "man the guns, man the lights, cancel our movement to England" unpack our belongings.

At last go ahead as planned, but, without husbands, A boat journey to Castletown Bere, 100 mile train journey to Cork, boat to Fishguard, train to Paddington, taxi to Victoria, train (now filled with reservists being called up) to Chatham. Taxi to barracks where we were shown to our new quarters which were two condemned barrack rooms.

After 2 days the crisis passed and life continued until my husband returned from Bere Island to Preston Norfolk to continue closing down what had been an anti-aircraft company. He joined us a Chatham as Quartermaster early January and his first letter was his own posting to Malaya. We left England January 26, 1939 to sail to Singapore. During that year war was declared in Europe.

We spent the next 3 years in Singapore which was very pleasant until 1941 when the Japs struck.

Mum's Time Line

1928 – 1933	India
1933 – 1938	England
1938 – 1939	Bere Island
1939 – 1942	Singapore
1942 – 1945	Scotland
1945 – 1947	Portsmouth
1947 – 1951	Ashley
1951 - ????	New Milton

I personally have only vague memories of my life up until Dad was posted to Bere Island, in Bantry Bay in the SW corner of Ireland. I see that while we remember it as Bere Island, a recent AA map now shows it as Bear Island. Interestingly the small town on the mainland, where we went shopping for supplies not provided by the army is still called Castletown Bere.

The trip to Castletown Bere was done on a ferry and I have vivid memories of fishing with a hand line, heavy lead weight (about the size of a sausage) and a spinner with a triple hook. The back of the ferry was semi-circular (it might have been a tug boat in earlier times) however fishing off of them was very productive (mostly pollack and mackerel) and it was a very poor trip if we didn't have several to cart home. They were mostly about 18" – 24" long, a good meal, which we shared with other families on the island. I think it was then that I developed a taste of Mackerel, an oily fish but very tasty.

We were not destined to stay there long, Ireland was being roused up by De Valera and Bere Island became the last British outpost in Ireland. The partition, separating Southern Ireland and the Northern area, including Belfast and Dad was posted back to England.

Interestingly, Ireland was the first place I encountered where I was singled out for being English.

Bere Island was a paradise, as far as I was concerned. The island was very small, and the coast was very rugged, with lots of inlets, about, I would guess, 100ft long and 50 ft at the widest. The water was typically 10 to 20 feet deep and the bottom of the inlet was white sand. If you crawled up to the edge of the inlet you could look down and see the big fish swimming in the inlet. Standup and they would immediately swim back out to sea.

There were no paved roads on the island, mostly lanes with ditches on each side and hedges along the top. However, they were a wonderful source of bird's nests and we would spend hours finding them.

It was during one of these trips that we met up with ethnic problems when we were confronted by grown men who cursed at us and threw rocks at us. We were terrified and ran like mad. It was not to be the last contact I had with the hate for the English.

Once back in England, it wasn't long before Dad was posted to Singapore. A long trip by troopship via the Suez Canal.

Bere Island

Our family in England
prior to going to Singapore.

Swimming "PAGAR" on Changi Beach. Diving boards and walkway to the right.

Maternal grandparents family
Back row (L-R) Winifred, Harry, Edie, Lilly
Middle (L-R) Grand Dad Nicklen, Ethel, Grandma
Front (L-R) Duncan, Arthur, George

Paternal grandparents, Winifred and Leslie top center

Married quarters in Singapore. (Changi Area)

The Samaria had passenger accommodation for 315 passengers on 1st class, 350 2nd, and 1500 3rd clas had a crew of 434. Rigging : steel twin screw steamer : 2 steel decks; steel shelter deck partly sheathed w wood and steel shade deck sheathed in wood; 3rd steel deck in forward and after holds; 10 partly cement bulkheads to shelter deck; flat keel; equipped with wireless, electric light, submarine signaling device and refrigerating machinery; fitted for oil fuel with a flash point above 150° F. Tonnage : 19,602 tons gross, 14, under deck and 11,866 net. Bridge 284 feet long on shade deck. Propulsion : 4 steam turbines geared to 2 shafts; engine operating at 220 p.s.i.; 2,527 nominal horsepower; 3 double ended and 3 single ended boile corrugated furnaces; grate surface 746 sq. ft.; forced draught; engine built by the same company as the hu Owners : Cunard Steam Ship Co. Ltd. Port of registry : Liverpool. Flag : British Call sign : KLWD. Official registration # : 145923

S/S Samaria [old postcard]

Chapter 2 1940 - 1949

On our arrival in Singapore, we were installed in the married quarters in a district called Changi. We have very few photographs of our first 12 years. All the photos up to then were lost when we evacuated. Any shown have been from pictures that were sent home.

We were enrolled at the local army school. I can only remember that there were two teachers, a head mistress and a headmaster husband and wife, named Martin. I suppose I learned something there, but I can't remember much. Mum taught me at home, I think she always wanted to be a teacher, but she made sure that we all could read before infants' school. I was an avid reader, anything I could get my hands on. My earliest memories were of a history book, given to me by Uncle Tim (husband of Aunt Vera, Dads Sister). It was the "History of England", a hard read with it's very small print and copious footnotes and side notes, but it had the effect on me, in that I developed a love for thinking and I can still recall one footnote which described in detail, the execution of King Charles 1st, including how many strokes it took to sever his head, by which time the observing crowd were so upset by the cruel parody that they were shouting for the executioners head. He had to be escorted from the scene by the guards.

Life in pre-war Singapore was idealistic, while it was hot and humid, being a few degrees off the equator, it meant an early start and finish at school. As memory serves it was 7 am to 1 pm. The afternoons were for us to be enjoyed. Most days we spent at the Pagar, a fenced off section of Changi beach. I was taught to swim by Mrs. Martin when we finished early one day and the whole class went down to the Pagar.

She observed me paddling and not going all the way in, called me over to her, took me a bit further out, putting out her arms and told me to lie across them. Then she said, "kick and move your arms", so I started doing a dog paddle and she took her arms away and I was paddling, wonderful!! I learnt freestyle next and I was away. Have always enjoyed swimming and must admit that I have had many pleasant hours just floating on my back.

School discipline was strictly enforced by Mr. Martin and his whipping cane. I had my share as I sometimes can't avoid talking in class. Our school uniform was a white shirt and khaki shorts. It was always the same "bend over boy". The shorts were tight over your bottom, then Mr. Martin would give his whipping, rattan cane a couple of swishes and then lay on six of the best. Boy did it sting, you would go back to your desk, raise your bottom so that the sore part was in the space between the back and the seat of the desk. I didn't dare tell Dad afterwards, he would have given me a cuff as well.

Dad was a strict disciplinarian, "boys should be seen and not heard" was the dictum he was brought up with, but he was always fair.

I remember when I had my first bike and was coming down a steep hill far too fast and had to make a sharp right turn at the bottom of the hill. Too fast and too far in the wrong lane and found I was heading right for a truck in the oncoming lane. The next moment I was lying in the road, face down and pinned by the trucks front tire. The truck backed off and I got up and staggered to the side of the road. My shorts and underpants were hanging around me like a skirt. It wasn't until then that I lifted my skirt and found I was looking at a big hole in my right groin. Something had gone in at the hip, gouged out all the fat, skin and muscle in a hole about 5 inches in diameter. Amazingly enough it had not penetrated the membrane that enclosed the bowels, though I could see them moving, a most un-nerving sight.

Fortunately, the accident took place right outside of an army office and it wasn't long before I was in the local military hospital. The only boy in a ward full of men.

The next few weeks were a little traumatic. I had to lie on my back with a cage over my hips to keep the bed clothes off my pelvic area. Every day the staff would come in, lift off my scab and put hydrogen peroxide all around the edges of the wound.

This used to bubble and hiss and sting, but amazingly, slowly and steadily, new tissue grew in from the edges and after six weeks it was completely re-grown. A bit marbled of course, but complete.

Life was fairly uneventful through 1940. We knew of course, about the war in Europe and Mum and Dad were of course very worried about their families. It wasn't until mid-1941 that things started heating up. My Dad was involved in the setting up the number One Bomb Disposal Unit in Singapore. By this time, of course, plenty of experience had been gained in Britain on the art of bomb disposal and this was quickly disseminating around all Royal Engineering establishments.

At the end of 1941, Singapore itself was bombed and I remember standing outside our quarters in Changi on the opposite side of the island, with Dad, watching the flashes and Dad saying "It looks like the balloon has gone up" After that he was gone for long periods at a time, apparently defusing unexploded bombs. He would come home at intervals for a change of clothes and a meal while Mum took care of the boys.

I remember him telling me about one bomb which had come through the roof of a building, had split open and coated everything with what is called "Yellow Picnic Explosive". It had apparently hit a bed but didn't go through and had just disappeared. They searched the room for the bomb and then someone opened a wardrobe and there was the bomb. It had apparently bounced off the bed into the open wardrobe and the door closed behind it.

In Jan of 1942, military families were evacuated on a requisitioned Cunard Line ship called the Samana.

The ship was tightly packed, not only with families but also with the survivors of the "Repulse" and "Prince of Wales" battleships which had been sunk by a Japanese carrier aircraft on Dec 10, 1941.

We were not too heavily laden as we had only two suitcases for Mum and us four boys. Everything we had accumulated in 22 years as a family was lost.

The ship was unescorted and came across the Indian Ocean to Durban and Cape Town in South Africa. The ship then made a big sweep out into the Atlantic Ocean up and around Iceland to miss the U-boat packs in the English Channel and Bay of Biscay and then south into the Irish Sea between Scotland and Ireland, arriving in late Feb of 1942 in Liverpool. We essentially only had shirts and shorts and really felt the cold. However, we finally took a train down to London, crossed London on the Underground and then took another train to Woking in Surrey.

Particularly on the second train we passed great areas of bombed houses as we passed through the London suburbs.

My mum's parents lived in Chobham, a small village about 5 miles from Woking. Grand Dad and Grand Ma Nicklen lived in a small 3 bed room duplex, but they made us welcome and even though my Uncle George and Aunt Ethel were also living there, somehow or another we finally finished up in one

bedroom. There was four of us in one bed while Brian, the youngest just fitted into the bottom drawer of a chest of draws.

Dick, Peter and I were enrolled in the village school and it was at this point that a Ms. White came into our lives. During the war, ladies and gentlemen who were too old or infirm to work in factories volunteered in the social services. Ms. White heard about us and came to visit. What she sees horrifies here and spoke to a friend of hers, the Countess of Lauderdale, in Scotland.

The Countess had lost one of her estate workers to conscription and had an empty ½ duplex we could rent. So that Autumn we left Kings Cross Station in London with the overnight train to Edinburgh. We disembarked at Wayside Halt, about 30 miles from Edinburgh at about 7 in the morning and we were met by the Countess in her Rolls Royce and driven to her home, Thirlestane Castle in Lauder.

We were given breakfast and then we were driven down to Wyndhead Cottage in Lander.

Apparently, a girl's school in Edinburgh had their school requisitioned by the army and the girl's school had been moved to the castle. While it was normally a girl's school, apparently some of the local big wigs young sons had been enrolled as well. Initially the Countess had thought of enrolling us there but on seeing us had decided against it. Was I relieved, a girl's school!

In any event we were enrolled in the village school, what a shock that was. I had never realized how pitiful I was compared to the Scottish education system. It was miles better than the English equivalent and light years ahead of the army school. However, we did have one advantage. We had a much broader education due to our travels. However, my reading habits really paid off in that while my English grammar knowledge was pitiful, I always knew what was wrong with a paragraph or sentence, whatever it was it impressed the village headmaster.

In Scotland they take an Eleven Plus exam which decides whether a student goes on to secondary school (grammar), technical school, (crafts) or stay on at the village school up to age 15.

Somehow the headmaster made a special request to the school board and I was awarded a scholarship to attend the high school in Duns, which was the chief town in Berwickshire, about 35 miles away. This entailed a 7-mile taxi ride to the nearest railway station, Earlstown, a 20 mile ride by train to Duns and a 2 mile walk to the high school. I did this trip for 3 years.

It was while I was with this school that I had my second experience of anti-English. We had another boy in the class who came from Berwick on Tweed. His name was Lyle. The history master was an anglo-phobe and whenever a suitable point came up in his lectures, he would make Lyle and me stand up and we would be the Earl De Spreadbury and Baron De Lyle, and he would make snide remarks about us. All we could do was fume inside as they were very quick with the "Tawse", a heavy leather belt across your hands. A belting with that and you couldn't hold a pen or pencil for a couple of hours.

That was bad enough, but the worst was during break when you would be grabbed by several boys and "Tapped" which involved getting your head struck under cold water tap while they chanted "and that's for Flodden" or Andy, another battle which the Scots lost to England.

However, by and large, I have fond memories of Scotland. I made some very good friends and managed to get in some great experiences and skills.

I was shown how to “Guddle” and “Girn” for trout. Guddling involves lying on the side of a little stream or burn and sliding your hand under the bank against the water flow and gently getting your hand along the fish and then whipping it out on to the bank. Girning involves a bigger river (like the Leader which flowed in the private fishing grounds of the Thirlestane Castle). All that was required was a length of brass wire (used for snares) and a long pole. Tie a slip knot in the wire, tie it to the pole and walk in the river, going up stream. The river was fast flowing but relatively shallow and the trout tend to lie in pools, facing upstream. A slow approach and then pull the loop in the wire over the fish’s head and throw the pole, noose and fish out on the bank. I got a number of dinners that way, but the trick was not to be caught by the games keeper.

During the war the long summer holidays were split in two. The first half was a conventional summer holiday. The second half was delayed in Autumn as a “potato picking holiday”. As the name implies it entails going to a local farm growing potatoes (in our case, next door), being allocated about a 50ft stretch of the potato row and then waiting for the tractor pulling the potato digger to run down your row. The digger had a rotary set of tires at the back and would throw dirt, potatoes and stones into wide swash about 10ft wide in your 50ft section. They provided baskets and trick was to get the potatoes into the baskets before the tractor came back again. It was a frantic race, bent over all the time. However, they paid you by the hour and any income was a godsend. I can’t remember how much it was per hour though.

During the potato picking time they also had grain harvesting, essentially oats. We were not involved in the harvesting of the oats but in the harvesting of rabbits which thrived in the grain fields. Word would spread that there would be a “finishing” at a certain farm on a certain day and we would descend on the farm and set up a station on the outside of the field. The tractor, pulling the harvester, starts on the outside of the field and slowly starts to work in towards the center.

The rabbits, in the field first start to run towards the center but then realize they must get out and bolt outward. That’s when we used to get them, chasing them down and knocking them out with a stick. An old golf club with an iron head is ideal. I know it sounds cruel, but they used to destroy an awful amount of grain and the farmers were delighted to get rid of them. A friend of mine, Ian Forrest was extremely fast and could overtake a rabbit in a field. On a good finishing I might get 6 or 8 rabbits. They were a welcome addition to the rations. If memory serves, the meat ration for our person for one week was about 4ozs, (including kidney, liver and sausage), Mum served up the rabbits roasted, in a pie, or in a stew. Much appreciated.

My friend, Ian Forrest lived on a farm a few miles from Lander. The farm covered several square miles, much of it wild heather hills with many interspaced small woods. The shooting rights had been let out to a consortium of bigwigs from Edinburgh and they would descend some Saturdays for a day’s shooting. For this they needed beaters to beat up the game, which was pheasants, rabbits, partridge and the occasional snipe up on the moors.

It was wonderful opportunity to earn 7 shillings and sixpence (three half crowns) and a mullet pie (similar in size and shape to the ubiquitous Melton Mowbray pork pie you can buy in England now, about 3” in diameter, but still tasty).

The beaters also carried the game bags and retrieved the game. Some of the shooters were not very good and occasionally we got more rabbits with our sticks going through the woods than they did with the game that was flushed. I remember when Ian took 5 rabbits out of one hole in the ground.

My Mum found me a job in the local chemist shop, which also functioned as a post office. Five shilling a week, but unlimited access to a trove of National Graphics going back to the year dirt. I could take up to 2 at a time to read at home but had to return them to get another 2. I also delivered telegrams on the shop's bike up to about a 7-8 mile radius of Lander.

I September of 1944, my Mum had a letter from her sister Lilly, to say that her boy, John, a few months older than me had enlisted in the army as a boy apprentice.

There were relatively few prospects in Lander so we decided to investigate. It turned out it was for boys 14 ½ to 15 ½ and there were a number of trades available. John had enlisted as a trainee armorer. I was interested in instrument mechanic. I had always been interested in small mechanisms and had repaired a number of clocks. With Mum's blessing I went up to Edinburgh, took the exam and passed. In Feb 1945 (the war was still on) I met up with another lad called Scott and we made our way down to London and then to Wokingham, near Reading in Berkshire. We were met by truck and transferred to Arborfield where the school was established, I stayed for the next 3 years.

Thinking back on it, it was a wonderful learning experience. The first 3 months were purely military training. Drilling on the field until we started to look like soldiers.

The next six months were basic trade skills, such as fitting, sawing, drilling and then machines such as lathes, millers and shapers. We also learned welding, brazing, light smiting and black smiting. All great fun.

After this basic training we were split off into the primary trades and I spent many happy hours working on telescopes, binoculars, range finders, watches and clocks.

WWII finished in 1945, followed by the Japanese surrender and in Dec. 1945 my Dad was finally repatriated after being captured in Singapore, taken up north by cattle train and spent 3 years working on the Siam death railway. He went up country with, I believe about 130 men from his company but only about 27 survived. The delay in repatriation was caused by the severe malnutrition of the prisoners. They had to have special rations, in graded amounts to rehabilitate them. Dad was never over weight, but he was 6'2" and weighed on 96lbs.

During his captivity he had his front teeth knocked out by a rifle butt and survived dysentery, beriberi and other afflictions.

Though he did survive he was not a fit man and for several years was in and out of hospital.

He was initially stationed at Milldam Barracks in Portsmouth while they sorted through his demobilization. The biggest problem was where they would live. They knew that they would like to be near Milford-on-Sea, where his parents lived but needed some help in finding a house. To this end they applied to various small towns in the area for a council house. Like all council housing, there is always a waiting list. However, they had an offer from New Milton and finally had a place of their own on lower Ashley Road.

Unfortunately, the amoebic dysentery bug was well lodged in his liver and his eyes and skin were always yellow. His final hospitalization was in 1951 but when the operated they found he only had about one square inch of liver left. This was before liver transplants were available so all they did was sew him up and let him die. He was aged 51, taken too soon.

That was a quick digression from my boy's service exposition, but it seemed a good point to add a little background about my Dad.

When I arrived at Arborfield, I was installed in "C" Company. There were four companies, A, B, C and D housed in barracks laid out in the form of a "spider", ie. 6 barrack rooms arranged 3 per each side of a central bathroom, washroom, shower and toilet block, looking a bit like a spider. A and B companies were four spiders on the right side of the parade ground, C and D were on the left side.

The cookhouse/dining room were at the bottom of the square (parade ground). Each barrack room held about 24 beds, 12 each side, the beds themselves were made of steel with a wire mesh. The bottom half of the bed slid up into the top section and reassembled into a chair. We had 3 "biscuits" which were square "mattresses" about 2ft square, so 3 biscuits covered the whole bed. We had 4 blankets, 2 sheets and a pillow. Every day beds had to be made up arm chair fashion, with the 3 biscuits on top of each other and then a neat pile of 3 blankets, interweaving in the 2 sheets, all folded neatly and enclosed in the 4th blanket with the pillow on top. The rooms were inspected each day and any infraction or sloppy bed making were punished. The floors were wood and were swept out every morning and then the center of the room and the spaces between each bed had to be polished with a "bumper" (a padded block with a heavy metal weight on top and carried on a long pole. One thing they did provide was floor polish. Other wise we had to supply anything extra (excluding food and clothing). As boys we were paid 4 shillings per day, at 12 pence per shilling. In practice we were paid 4 shillings per week and the rest was kept back and given to us when we went on leave, Xmas, Easter and Summer. However, that had to pay for boot polish, blanco (khaki and white) for our webbing and white dress belt, writing paper, stamps, toothpaste, soap and if anything was left over, we'd buy "tea and a wad" down in the N.A.A.F.I in camp (Navy, Army and Air Force Institutions).

We were always hungry; the food has edible but a bit un-adventurous. You could fill up on potato and cabbage, but meat was minimal. The bread ration was 2 slices for breakfast and 2 for tea, but since the margarine was in one piece, a 1-inch square for each 2 slices of bread didn't go far.

Once a month your platoon would be delegated for fatigues. After the morning parade at 8 am, while everyone else would march off, the fatigue platoon would be allocated. So many is the officer's men, so many is the sergeant's men, so many to the cookhouse while the remainder would be allocated to agriculture. During the war, most of the playing fields around the camp were converted to growing food which finally finished up in the cook houses. This camp had 2 shire cart horses, Bob and Gilbert.

I don't know why but I always finished up on agriculture. Not that I minded, we were out in the fresh air and supervision was at a minimal. The only fly in the ointment was that agriculture was supervised by the Captain Quartermaster, a Ben Cook, ex guard and reputed to have the loudest voice in the British Army, when Ben shouted, everyone jumped.

The guardroom, at the camp's front gate, was run by a Sargent Drainfield, a tyrant who made anyone on "jankers" (confined to barracks) a miserable hell. I always seem to get on ok with Ben Cook and I

remember that we were at the far end of the camp, by the hospital and back gate and Ben, who also didn't like Dransfield, would stand up, face the guard room (about a ½ mile away) and bellow "SARGENT DRANSFIELD"!!

Dransfield would run out of the guard room and squeak, "Sir" – Ben would then bellow "WHAT'S THE TIME". Dransfield would look at the guardroom clock, get on his bike and peddle all the way up to Ben and tell him the time. Ben was always polite, but we knew that Dransfield was annoyed.

Another time, I was waiting for Ben and he comes up, sitting on Bob and with Gilbert walking behind. "GET ON THE 'ORSE" bellows Ben. I look back at the monstrous beast, no saddle, no reins, I was petrified, however by grabbing the mane I finally got up on the horse. It was like riding a door, it was so wide.

Anyway, Ben gives a couple of clicks and off goes Bob, one more click and Gilbert follows and we head up to the far end of the camp where there was a gate. "OPEN THE GATE" bellows Ben and I slid off Gilbert, hit the ground and immediately hit by cramps in both legs. So there I am, looking like a frog. Ben doesn't even crack a smile, "OPEN THE GATE" he bellows again. In sheer terror I hopped like a frog to the gate, unlatching it, Ben goes through with the two horses, and I finally can stand up and follow him through. I never went up on Gilbert again and walked from then on. In honesty I can say that I have never been on a horse since.

However, Ben could be very kind and I remember one weekend afternoon we (a couple of us) had walked down to Wokingham, the nearest town. I should point out that we were originally walking to the Army Technical School, and we had brass letters on our uniforms "ATS". Unfortunately, during the war, the army recruited woman and girls into the Auxiliary Territorial Services, also known as the ATS (it subsequently became the Women's Royal Army Corps) or WRAC for short and even the present Queen Elizabeth served in its ranks.

However, the local cabbies in Wokingham liked to poke fun at the ATS boys, calling them "girls" and that led to some bloody fisticuffs and in due course our school became the Army Apprentices School or AAS for short.

Anyway, I am digressing. It was in this later, peaceful time that we were just approaching the guardroom when we heard Ben bellow, "YOU BOYS COME HERE". We never knew that he and his family lived in a cottage, just outside the main gate.

We frantically rushed over to the gate of the cottage, quickly checking our uniforms to check if we were improperly dressed a moment later we were lined up outside Ben's garden gate, standing to attention and wondering what we've done. However, Ben bellowed, "DO YOU LIKE APPLES"? We nodded yes and he beckoned us in and showed us a big box full of apples. "TAKE THEM AWAY" says Ben – we gasped our thanks and then started off to the front gate – where we were met by Sgt. Dransfield. "Have you been stealing apples" says Dransfield – "no" we gasp, "Captain Cook gave them to us" "A likely story" says Dransfield – and at that his staff comes out of the guard room and they take half the apples.

However, we still had plenty to share with our roommates afterwards.

There were 2 intakes each year, if February and September. I enlisted in the Feb 1945 intake. For the first 6 months we were called "Jeeps" and the lows were picked on by every senior intake and we

dreaded the time just before the next passing out parade because the 18 year olds who would be leaving in the next week would descend on the barrack rooms, after lights out (10 pm) and cause chaos. The favorite was to grab the end of the bed and lift it up vertically. At which point the bottom half of the bed would slide into the top section and you would slide into the top section and you would be lying in the middle of a great tangle of biscuits, blankets, sheets and pillows.

Sometimes they'll get really inventive and I remember we had one, very small boy called Titch Rowell, no more than 5ft high. We had steel lockers on the wall just over the bed for all of our kits. They pulled his kit out of the top section, folded him up and stuffed him into his locker. Poor lad, he couldn't move, we had a dickens of a job getting him out in one piece.

We had three bands in the school, a Military, Scottish pipe band and the Drum and Fife, affectionally known as the Spit and Dribbles.

Sunday morning was always a Church Parade in the morning, with a march past. On Saturday and Sunday afternoons you were free to leave camp (if you wanted to) but in full uniform, of course. As you didn't have to make your bed up Sunday, it was a nice time to snooze.

In October 1947 I reached 18 and my regular army service theoretically started. Initially I was enlisted in the GSC (General Service Corps) but carried on at the school until February 1988 when we had our passing out parade. Mum and Dad came up for the occasion and I was awarded the trade prize (a book on watch repairing which I still have).

After passing out we were allocated to our different camps. In my case if was the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME for short) and we were passed out to the different training battalions to be taught the specialized skills which you might need, much on vehicle driving (motorcycles, 1 ton and 3-ton trucks) Setting up a workshop in the field, recovery of disabled vehicles and the extent of R.E.M.E Installations.

R.E.M.E has base workshops where major strip down and repairs are done, command workshops which handle all repairs short of a complete strip down and L.A.Ds (Light Aide Detachments) which are small assemblies of tradesmen, up to about 130 men which are attached to regiment to handle all small repairs to the regiments equipment. Thus, for example, my first posting was to a command workshop (21 command), as a Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment in the Royal Artillery.

During this compressed training in instrument mechanics we were sent on coast artillery instrument courses. One of these was at the Citadel in Plymouth, Devon. When Drake finished his game of bowls before setting off to defeat the Spanish Armada. This was a great services station, as it is one of the depots of the Royal Navy, so there was plenty of service places to see and enjoy.

At the end of this training session we were finally posted to our first stations in R.E.M.E. I was sent to the 21 Command Workshops in Burscough, Lancashire, about 20 miles north of Liverpool. That was a fun time in my trade from 3 to 2 to 1 and I was promoted to Lance Corporal, then to Corporal and finally to Sargent.

While as a Corporal I used to go out to all of the Army establishments in our command area to do inspections of all of the instruments, do small repairs and otherwise arrange for them to be sent back to the workshop for major repairs.

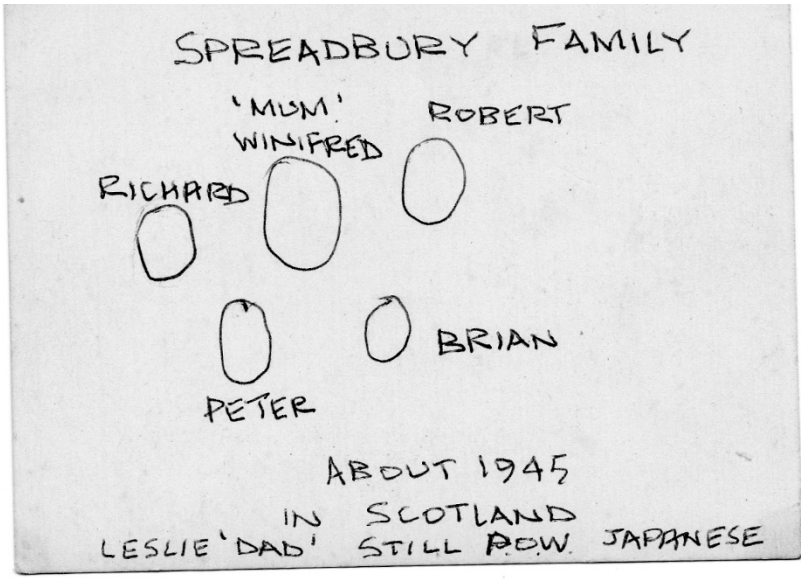
I also had a memory quality experience. The workshop was very close to a railway station on the main line to Liverpool and the main gate to the camp was staffed, during the day, by civilian guards. However, from 6 pm to 7 am, the military provided a guard of one Corporal and six men. The Corporal stayed up all night and changed the guard, both every 2 hours, to give 2 hours on and 4 hours off.

When we were relieved. We got breakfast and the men went off into the workshops while the Guard Command could sleep until midday but was then expected to report to the workshops. A great idea, except, for a while, there were only 2 Corporals, me and one other. After three weeks of this we were walking zombies until the upper brass realized what was going on and started making the Sargent's do it as well.

One other job I remembered was at the Easter weekend, in 1949., when I was detailed to take 2 men down to Liverpool. We were informed that we had to collect 2 prisoners off a troopship that had just arrived from Egypt. Apparently the two prisoners had been court martialed for steeling Army equipment and selling it to the Arabs. They had been sentenced to military prison in England.

On Good Friday we were trucked down to the docks, collected the prisoners, they were handcuffed to my two lads and brought back to the barracks where the two prisoners were placed in a cell in the guardroom and we were free until Sunday evening. At that time we collected the prisoners and were transported to the main line station and were locked into a compartment, by ourselves, by the station staff and set off, just after midnight for the number one Army prison, known as the "Glasshouse", in the small Somerset village of Shepton Mallet. We arrived there about seven in the morning and as it was close to the station, walked down to it. A forbiddingly grim place, high walls and a large wooden gate, with a small door set in to it. By this time our two prisoners were shaking in their boots and we were not much better.

I banged on the little door and a small window opened. A quick question from the gate, my reply, "two prisoners and escort". At this point, the small door opened, two more guards appeared, my lads and the prisoners were whisked inside, the handcuffs were off, and my 2 lads were shot back out and the door closed, we could hear the two prisoners being screamed at and they were off at the double. We had, had no breakfast but neither my 2 lads nor I fancied hanging around, so we went back to the station to wait for the next train back.



Mum and Dad - Front window at Lower Ashley Road

Coast Artillery Instrument Course

Parade day

Boys Service around 1946

Feb 45, Intake, passing out parade
Apprentice Sergeant Major Olley behind General

Apprentice sergeants and apprentice sergeant Major Olly (front middle)
I am sixth from the right, behind Olly.

In parade, I am right marker, front rank. Military band in rear.

Chapter 3 1950 -1959

Life at 21 Command workshops was rosy, by and large. Burscough, while small, had two railway stations. The main line, North - South line which had a station just outside our workshop gate and a smaller one about a ½ mile away on East – West line which terminated at the sea side resort town of Blackpool.

This was a favorite destination at weekends. Besides the famous tower, it had beaches, amusement arcades and things like that and of course any number of young girls on holiday!! Ah memories.

I remember once while in camp, wondering whether I should be doing something more exciting. I applied to join the Airborne section of R.E.M.E.

A few weeks after submitting this application, I was in Blackpool and went up the tower, looked down at those little ants walking about down there and thought "what have I done?" Fortunately, a few weeks later I found out that I was in a restricted trade and couldn't apply. Big sigh of relief.

My brother, Richard sent them the same query, but his trade Gun and General Fitter was not restricted as he was selected. He told me later that he never got over the fright of jumping out of an airplane.

As I had reached the top level in my trade, any further progress would require applying to be an Armament Artificer, or Arm Art for short.

The name is a hangover from the days of cannons, horses and sabers. Every regiment would have its Armament Artificer. Minimum rank was Staff Sergeant and he was, effectively, 'god' in the regiment as he took care of all the guns, carriages and any other wheeled transportation.

Obviously, as the Army changed, so the equipment got more complex until, as it is now, we have radar, radios, instruments, tanks, armored cars, motor cycles and a whole heap more. No one man could possibly cover it all.

The individual trades now had their own Artificers. So, I applied to take the Artificer instruments test. This is a two-week test in Arborfield and there they hammer you day in, day out. Not so much on your trade but on Military training intelligence tests, leadership and problem solving.

After two weeks, six days a week, it can be a grind and the usual failure rate is 50% is not to reassuring.

However, all things end and in due course I marched in to the final board consisting of 3 officers and awaited with trepidation.

"Stand at ease", says the board leader, "relax, you have passed"

"But", says he, "we think you are in the wrong trade"

I must have expressed my surprise but then he informs be that, based on my results, I should have been an electrical engineer.

He then tells me that there was a new trade opening called Electronic Control Equipment or E.C.E for short and a course will be forming up in Arborfield in about 3 months but in the interim we would be attached to a Leading Artisan Sergeant course which was starting straight away. This course was designed for three draftees who had opted to go to University rather than getting drafted at 18. (Hoping the draft would be over by the time they graduated) However, being University trained, after basic

training, they were put in front of a war office selection board (W.O.S.B), where many of them failed. However, as R.E.M.E worked on the principle that anyone with a degree could be taught, they finished up at the 5 training battalion in where they got a short session on electrical theory and then were trained on the equipment. Three of us “wrong trade” appointee’s Dicky Yarlup, Jack Devlin and I joined this L.A.S.S course, what a shock of course, all of the draftees knew their electrical engineering, ac and dc theory, ac and dc machines and the mathematics to cover it all. We essentially, started from scratch and had to work our little butts off. What a course that was!

In our course, the Arm Art course we were scheduled for formed up and we joined them and did all the same engineering again. However, this time it was easy, we had learned so much from our draftee colleagues.

In 1952 we finished the course and I was selected to stay on as an instructor. This was a great way to consolidate all my training.

The equipment we covered was all the control systems used on the anti-aircraft guns, (mostly hydraulic) which tracked the planes and calculated range, elevation, beaming and time of flight, the radars which fed range, elevation and beaming to the predictors. At this time there were two electronic predictors, the number 10, which was dc operated and the number 11, which was ac. An earlier predictor, the Vickers, was all mechanical, was still around but was being phased out.

We also covered searchlights, gun stabilizers and tanks.

At this time, 1952, I was wondering whether any of our training had any relevance to a civilian career. This thought came up as I remember a university man on the L.A.S.S courses had said it was about Bachelor’s Degree level. To this end, another one of my colleagues and I drove into Reading Technical College, with a complete breakdown of the course material we were giving at 5 Training Battalion.

He was most dismissive and said it had no relevance to the courses he supervised.

This was a bit of a setback but rather then taking it at face value, my colleague and I went up to Twickingham, about 20 miles away on the outskirts of London. There we had an interview with the principal, a Mr. Webb, who was most gracious, took all our curriculum papers and said he would check with the Institute of Electrical Engineers (I.E.E) as they set and marked the exams for the Ordinary National Certificate (O.N.C) and the Higher National Certificate. These exams were common to all Technical Colleges and Universities in the country and were required for a bachelor’s Degree in the University.

Imagine our delight when he contacted us a few weeks later to say that our training would allow us to miss the first year of the O.M.C, if we took the machine drawing exam for the first year.

While we didn’t instruct on machine drawing, it was one of the classes we took in Boys Service, so it was no problem. With a couple more instructors interested, the Colonel of 5 Training Battalion very kindly agreed to provide railway travel warrants for three nights a week up to Twickingham for us all.

After two years we took and passed the O.N.C exams which now allowed us to proceed on to the H.M.C. By this time, we had been joined by several instructors from our sister training battalion, 3 Training Battalion which specializes in telecommunications. So about 7 or 8 of us now commuted up to Twickingham. The principal and staff there were tickled pink to have us we consistently passed all the

exams and completed all the courses. The normal failure and noncompletion of the regular students was up near 50% so this was a great boost for the college.

In fact, one of the instructors from 3 Battalion took to I.E.E.E prize that year for the highest marks in the country for the H.N.C. A wonderful achievement.

After I finished my courses I heard over the grapevine that the Principal of Reading Technical College made a special presentation to the two Colonels to persuade them to send their students to Reading instead of Twickingham. It made me sense of course, as Reading was only seven miles away but it was obvious why he wanted us.

To obtain I.E.E membership, one had to take more additional courses and in 1954, I obtained endorsements in Physics. Higher Math, Engines and Mechanical Engineering, all taken at Twickingham. I needed one more, which I took, in 1955 from the Farmborogh (R.A.E) Technical College in Control Systems.

I just managed to finish this course before I was posted to Singapore. I had already married my sweetheart Jeannie in 1955 and welcomed our beautiful daughter Susan in 1956, so all three of us set off on a new adventure.

At this time, they were flying replacements in old, noisy, propjet aircraft and it took four days and three nights to Singapore.

London to Brindisi to Beirut to Bahrain to Karachi to Delhi to Calcutta to Singapore.

We had two nights in hotels in Karachi and Calcutta. Flew overnight from Beirut to Karachi. Susan was spoilt rotten by the stewardesses and we had her in a cot fixed to the wall in front of our seats, but the vibration kept her asleep for most of the journey.

I had been posted to the R.E.M.E Training Centre, Far East and were settled into a civilian rental bungalow in an estate called Serangoon Garden Estate about 10 miles from the training center. We were picked up by truck every morning and dropped back off every evening.

Singapore was a fun place with lots to see and do. Besides the beaches one could also picnic at one of the reservoirs in the middle of the island. There was a bustling social life between all the Brits. I was in charge of the electrical section and taught the British and the Malay Army. The Malay Army consisted of both indigenous Malay and Chinese immigrants.

I taught electrical theory, both as and dc, electrical machines (ac and dc), vehicle electrical systems and battery maintenance. Essentially, I lectured 8 hours a day, assisted by two British civilians.

Hong Kong, on the Chinese mainland was part of the command and, instead of sending their electrical people down to us for lectures and trade testing, we would send a small group up to Hong Kong. They usually flew up there on an R.A.F transport aircraft. No seats to sit on. However, in 1957 there was a cyclone threatening the area, so the flights were cancelled. Instead we were sent on a troop ship which had docked in Singapore and was heading for Hong Kong.

We had two great weeks in Hong Kong. Thoroughly explored the main island and as we were stationed at a Base Workshop at the mainland and got a great introduction to the congestion that existed there. Mainland Chinese used to come across the boarder in the thousands to try to leave the destitution of

Communist China. We got the opportunity to go out with a Gurkha Platoon who were going up to the western end of the boarder. We went up by launch and the platoon disembarked and started off on a hike right across the peninsular. It would take a day or so and they would be picked up on the Eastern end. Obviously, a daily patrol wouldn't keep out the immigrants, but it served to present that a boarder existed.

While there, we made the acquaintance of a Sergeant in the machine shop who was a scuba enthusiast. Scuba diving was in its infancy then, but he made up some diving gear to allow us to swim underwater. He took us up to a place called Clearwater Bay. A beautiful place, well named. The water was crystal clear and about 20 feet deep, packed with fish. He gave us a short lesson on what to do, gave us some led filled belts to cancel out buoyancy and sent me in. What a revelation! It was just as though we were fish. Unfortunately, at some point in the adventure, my breathing gear stopped working and all I could get was water.

Frantically trying to swim back to the surface I was certain I was going to drown and only by dumping the lead belt was I able to make it back to the surface. Ah excitement!

We returned to Singapore by plane this time, a rousing ride.

In Feb 1957 I was notified that the I.E.E had confirmed my exam results and that I was non-grad I.E.E. I also confirmed that any higher grading to A.M.I.E.E could only be as an officer in the Army. I therefore applied for a short service commission, got recommendation from two Colonels (one in the Royal Engineers, who apparently had served with Dad).

Commissioned applicants had to attend a War Office Selection Board (W.O.S.B) which was based in England. So, in due course, I set off by plane for England, leaving Jeannie and Susan behind, because if I failed I would have to come back to complete my tour in Singapore.

As it was, I attended W.O.S.B., passed and sent a telegram to Jeannie to say "Passed, start packing". At which point everything went downhill. The Suez crisis came up. France and Britain invaded Egypt to seize the Suez Canal. All flights were stopped, and Jeannie and Susan finally came home on a requisitioned troopship, the Captain Cook, an emigrant ship taking Britons to Australia and New Zealand.

I cooled me heals at the R.E.M.E Depot for a few months, awaiting instructions to attend the officers school. Finally got instructions to report in September 1959. At that time, I had disembarkation leave and privilege leave piled up, so I took off home to my mother for 2 whole months. Obviously, I couldn't hang around for that long, so I took a job at Edgar's Dairy in New Milton, initially as a bottle washer, finishing 8 bottles at a time into a crate which then went into a bottle washing machine. However, I found that I had some expertise in repairing the bottle washing machine and then any other machine which broke down. In addition, I drove the dairy truck around stops in the town and beyond. After a month of this, my mother wanted some painting done and I gave in my notice. It didn't last long though within a week, Mr. Edgar was knocking on our kitchen door "could I come back". So, I went back for another 2 weeks.

Got notification that the Captain Cook would be docking in Southampton on the evening before I was due back in camp. I went down to the docks and spoke to the senior officers on the ship. Since Jeannie

had no large luggage and only a couple of suit cases she was given permission to disembark that evening while all the rest had to wait until the next day.

Next day I reported back to camp and from there to officer's school in Aldershot. A three-month grind to say the least. I was about the oldest in the squad but enjoyed the comradery with the lads. Some stuff was easy, because of my previous service, but a lot was new. Finished up with three days of exercises on the Brecon Beacons in South Wales. Boy was it cold there. Ice on all of the water and hard frosts every night. I appreciated what the invading troops endured in Europe in 1945. At least our trenches only had water and ice in them, we didn't have to worry about being shot at or shelled.

We had one cadet in our squad called Drew (right hand side, second row of our squad photo) who was a ballet dancer from the Festival Ballet in London. Jeepers, was he agile, two feet (or more) higher than us when jumping in the gym. At our passing out parade, my mum and dad came up, he invited all the girl dancers from the ballet. When they trooped in to the bleachers later in the gym, they caused quite a stir. They don't walk, they bounced!! They must have been 8 or 9 of them.

After graduation we were posted back to our final depot, for three of us, it was back to R.E.M.E.

Here we went through another officer's course very similar to what I had done in a junior leader course, but much more refined. We get to pull tanks out of holes in vehicle recovery section.

In Feb 1959 we finished, and I was posted to 21 Light Antiaircraft Regiment as second in command to a light aid detachment attached to the regiment. The L.A.D was commanded by a Major Frater and was about 130 men strong.

We took care of the vehicles, instruments and wheeled transportation. Maintenance on the light anti-aircraft guns (B.O.F.R.S.) was done by the R.A, but we could provide any small machine work or welding as required. It didn't last too long. In March the regiment and us, were ordered to go to a place called Omagh in Northern Ireland for six weeks to replace a regiment which was going to Germany. The replacement regiment from Germany would not arrive for six weeks.

In the interim we would provide patrols along the boarder and security in the town. We drove up from Pembroke Dock in a convoy, so we had all of our own vehicles. However, as all wives and children had been left behind in Pembroke, the C.O. was very generous in providing weekend leaves for us married officers and I was able to get back to Pembroke Dock in March.

The stay in Ireland was uneventful but I did manage to take some of the lads up to Belfast for a weekend photography course at the University of Belfast. I don't think the lads were that interested in photography, but it did give them a weekend out of Omagh.

While there we bunked at the barracks occupied by the 17/21 Lancers, a cavalry regiment, now converted to armored cars.

I was bunking in a room normally occupied by a major on leave. It was a wonderful chance to explore their officers mess, with the Regimental Standards all around the room. Lots with bullet holes and burn marks, what a sight. It gave me an in sight into the Regimental Pride that these old established regiments had.

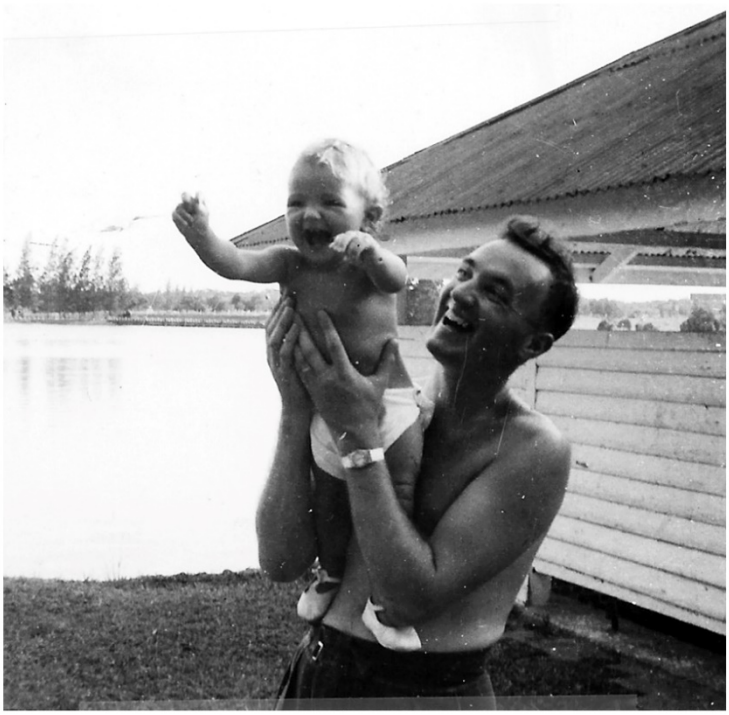
R.E.M.E didn't exist before World War II and, in any case, we never serve for long with any one establishment.

At this point in time I didn't know about George, brother of my grandmother Nicklen. Apparently, he was in the 17th Lancers (then with horses) in the Boer War and was killed in South Africa. If I had only known, I could have been more thorough in my examination.

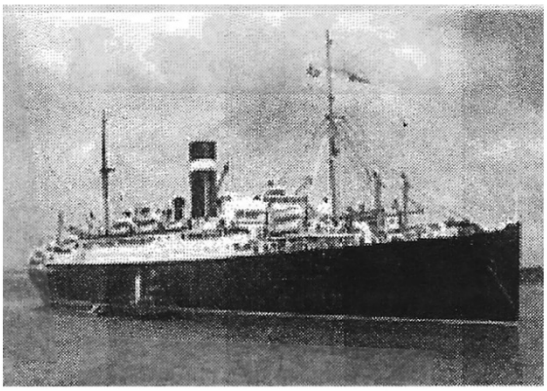
At the end of 1959 I was posted to the school of antiaircraft artillery as second in Command to their somewhat larger L.A.D. The school was stationed at Manorbier, about 15 miles back up the coast from Llanion Barracks. Here antiaircraft regiments of R.A. came to fire their guns at aircraft towed out across the Bristol Channel.

Gun calibers vary from light 40mm Bofors to 3.7 inch. They had radar equipment so that the L.A.D. had to service electronics equipment as well as predictors which probably prompted my posting.

(L – R) Brian, Peter, Jeannie, Me, Mum Winifred and Richard



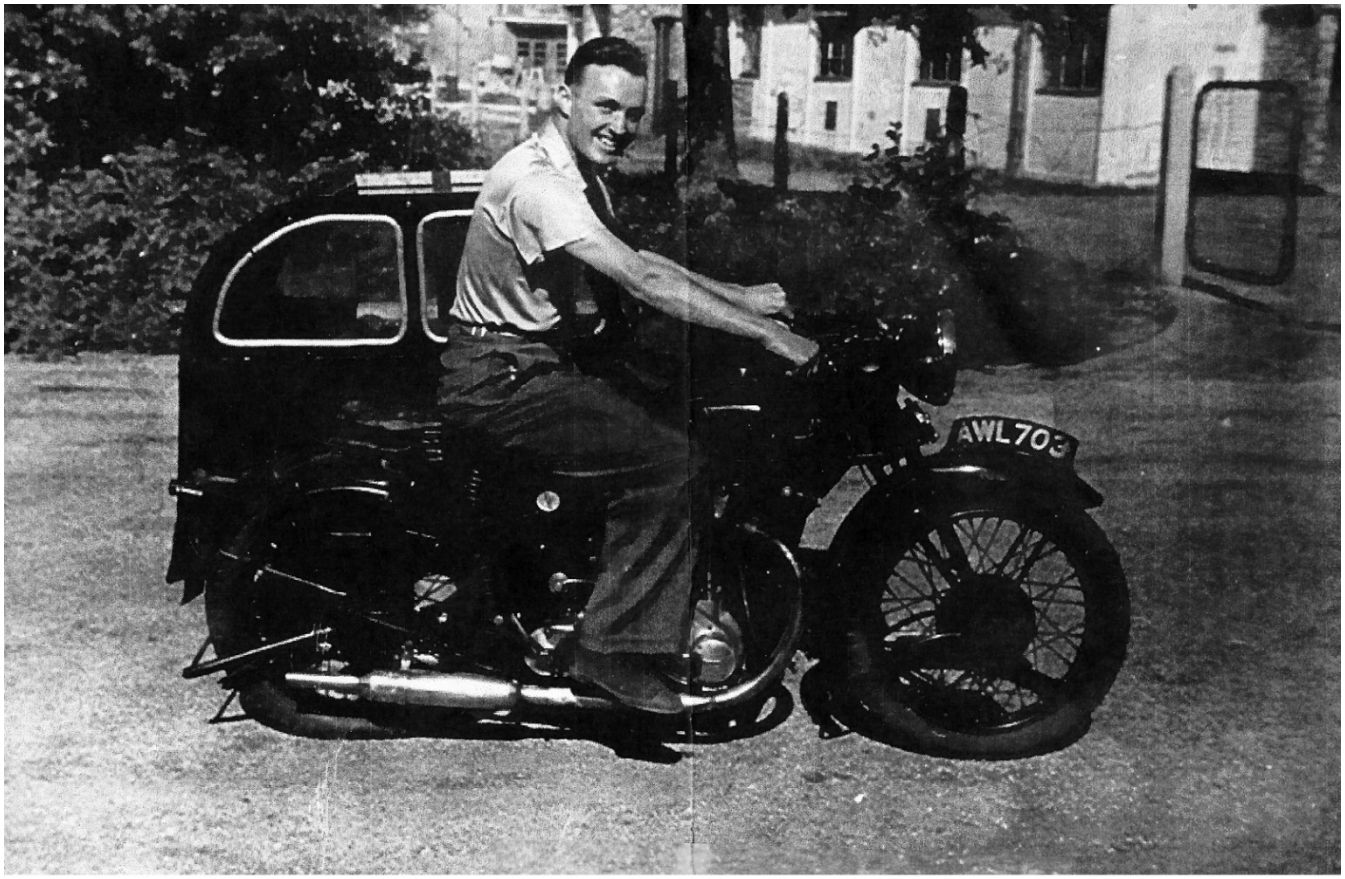
Susan and I at a
reservoir in Singapore



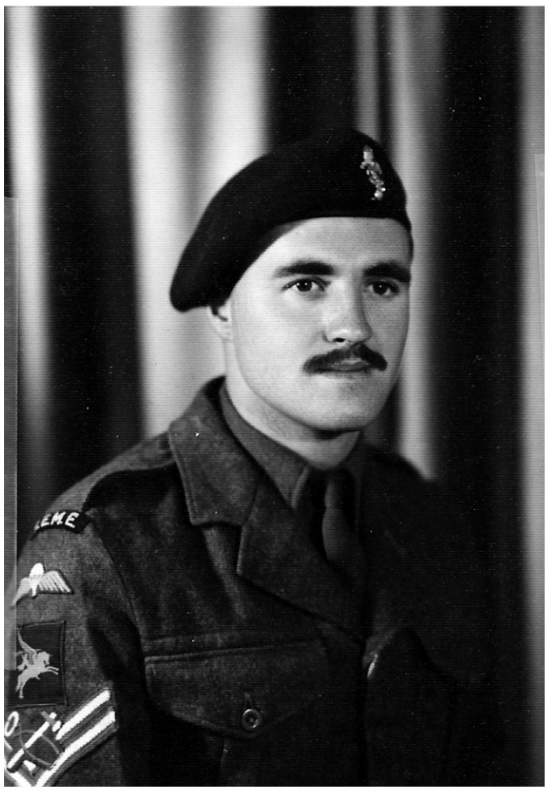
The Captain Cook

TSS "Captain Cook" - Corridor Lounge

The corridor lounge on the port side of the Captain Cook.
The Captain Cook brought assisted immigrants to New Zealand via the Panama Canal from 1952 to 1960.



My first motorcycle, a 1934 Triumph with homemade sidecar. I called her “Ermyntrude”, very simple bike but utterly reliable completed ACU 24Hr. National Rally. Originally 350cc, but I put in a 500cc cylinder.



Brother Dick with his REME Airborne Insignia

At 21 Command Workshops, Burscough,

ARM. ART (1952)

George Lowrey Ken Roberts Myself

Vehicle Recovery Course. REME Training Center

MONS OFFICER CADET SCHOOL

COMMISSIONING PARADE

11.30 A.M., 15 JANUARY, 1959

Taken by

Major General E. B. de FONBLANQUE, *C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O.*
Representative Colonel Commandant 1959, *Royal Artillery*

Commandant .. .. .. Colonel A. H. G. FORTESCUE, *M.B.E., M.C.*
Adjutant .. Captain L. H. J. TOLLEMACHE, Coldstream Guards (*Parade Commander*)
Regimental Sergeant Major .. R.S.M. D. T. LYNCH, *D.C.M.*, Irish Guards
Officer Cadet Parade Commander J.U.O. G. L. P. WELLS
Stick Orderlies .. .. .. Officer Cadet R. W. HORTON
Officer Cadet P. J. MAYNARD

DETAILS OF PARADE

1. The parade marches on in column of threes and is formed up by the Sergeant Major.
2. The Inspecting Officer is received at the saluting base by a General Salute.
3. The Parade is reported to the Inspecting Officer who inspects the Officer Cadets, preceded by the two Stick Orderlies.
4. The Parade marches past in quick time.
5. The Parade advances in Review Order and gives the General Salute.
6. The Commissioning Detachment marches off in slow time.
7. The Officer Cadet Parade Commander then marches the remainder off parade.

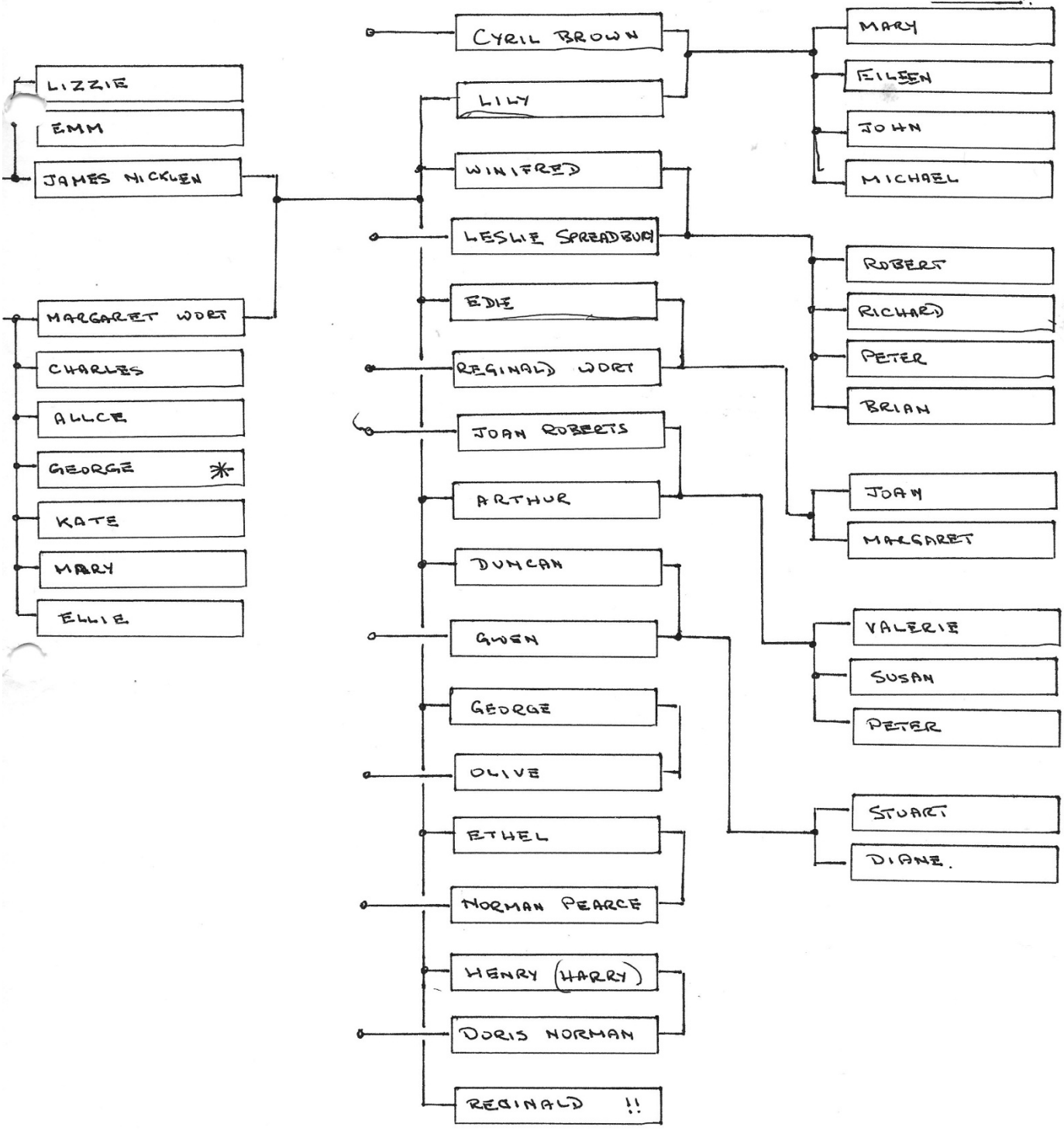
PROGRAMME OF MUSIC *by the*
BAND OF THE ROYAL ARMY SERVICE CORPS
Director of Music: Major J. F. DEAN, *M.B.E., A.R.C.M., p.s.m.*, R.A.S.C.
By Permission of THE OFFICERS OF THE CORPS

March On		"On the Square"	*Panella*
Incidental Music ..	(*a*)	"Great Little Army"	*Alford*
	(*b*)	"Light of Foot"	*Latan*
General Salute		"Cavalry Brigade"	*Anon.*
Inspection Music ..	(*a*)	"May Blossom"	*Weir*
	(*b*)	"Royal Artillery Slow March" ..	*Anon.*
	(*c*)	"Under the Allied Banner" ..	*Ollerenshaw*
	(*d*)	"Review"	*Bonnisseau*
	(*e*)	"Gold and Silver"	*Lehar*
March Past		"The Bond of Friendship"	*Mackenzie-Rogan*
		(*March Past of Mons Officer Cadet School*)	
		"Milanollo"	*Hamm*
Advance in Review Order ..		"British Grenadiers"	*Anon.*
General Salute		"Cavalry Brigade"	*Anon.*
March Off—Passing Out Troop		"Auld Lang Syne"	*Anon.*
March Off		"On the Quarterdeck"	*Alford*

NOTE.—It is customary for spectators to stand during the General Salute (Serials 2 and 5). There will be a short, undenominational Service in the Marlborough Lines Garrison Church immediately after the Parade. The Service ends at 12.30 p.m. approximately.

WM. MAY & CO. LTD., ALDERSHOT 403

FIRST & SECOND GENERATIONS OF DESCENDANTS OF JAMES & MARGARET NICKLEN.



* GEORGE'S UNCLE - SGT IN 17th LANCERS. KILLED IN THE BOER WAR SEPT 17th 1901.

!! REGINALD - GEORGE'S BROTHER. ROYAL NAVY.

Chapter 4 1960 – 1969

While at the School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery at Manorbier, the only outstanding thing that comes to mind was when the school was given the Freedom of Tenby, a resort town a few miles up the coast from the school. It was decided that July 1960, the school would exercise it's might to march through Tenby with bayonets fixed and the band playing. My O.C., a major should have led the R.E.M.E detachment, but he had been stricken with a kidney stone and was in agony. Anyway, I got the job, borrowed a sword from a major at the school who gave me a quick lesson in sword drill (it is not a requirement in officers' school). There we were, two hours before the parade formed in columns, in our best dress blues in the pouring rain. We were all soaked through and I recall watching the rust form on the sword blade as it rested on my shoulder.

By this time, I had concluded that I had no future in the army. I was on what was called a "short Service Commission". With this form of commission, one re-engages for three years at a time. As I already had 14 years of service, (from Oct 1946 to Oct 1960) I questioned whether I could get to 22 years (required for pension) but could get no satisfaction. What I did find was that if I waited to 1962, the next time I could re-enlist they were refusing to extend short service commissioned if there was a likelihood of you qualifying for a pension.

So, at this time, I decided I had had enough and I applied for a discharge, preferring to take my chances out of uniform.

The army did provide a three-month paid period if you could find a company that would take you on as a trainee. So, before I left I sent out letters to several companies giving them my resume. I had two responses, one with English Electric just north of London and one from Associated Electrical Industries (A.E.I) in Trafford Park, Manchester.

I interviewed with both, was turned down by English Electric (to my delight, I didn't like the atmosphere there) and got an offer from A.E.I as a trainee.

So, in Sept 1960 I went up to Manchester and started in the Servo and Defense Department, what a change that was. I initially helped with design of some servo amplifiers for the Navy. Transistors were just coming in then and the Navy was a little hesitant about their introduction. I knew nothing about them but had a crash course to get up to speed.

I was particularly impressed with the controlled rectifiers know as SCR's and managed to get familiar with their characteristics and uses.

Anyway, after my three-month trainee experience, the manager of the department made me an offer as a design engineer at the princely salary of $1,100 per annum. I was tickled pink. In due course, we left Pembroke Dock and travelled up to Manchester where we found a suitable flat in Didsbury on the outskirts of Manchester. I was able to get a bus from there to central Manchester and then another out to Trafford Park.

The work was for the Navy primarily and I designed a power supply for the standard 21-inch torpedo and then a series of inverters (changing dc to ac). The largest was for an investor to drive a 100 hp ac motor which drove a pump which kept a liquid seal between the radio active cooling system and the

outside cooling water. This was for Calder Hall Nuclear Station and the dc source was the 220v station battery.

The SCR's we had then were made by A.E.I but were primitive by todays standards, they had to be selected for a short turn off time and were limited to 600v, not much margin for safety.

We had a number of failures in the field and it took some detective work to find out that the SCR's which originally had a 600v capability were down to only 300v. It was finally determined that the equipment was located close to the reactor enclosure and the radiation strength there was irritating the SCR's and reducing their voltage withstand.

Few other projects still come to mind. One came down from a company bigwig. The Shah of Iran wanted an inverter to operate from a 12v battery and run a small refrigeration on the Shah's yacht.

The other was for the Army which had introduced a range of hand held power tools, including a rock hammer. Running off a 3 phase 400hz supply. Could we make an inverter to operate from a 24v battery. I built one and went down to the Military Experimental Establishment (M.E.X.E) in Christchurch, not far from my mother's home, to test it.

They had a great lump of concrete available, I connected the inverter to the rock drill (hammer) and got it going. Most impressive, lumps of concrete going everywhere and a cloud of dust.

In 1964 I was called in and asked whether I would like to take the position of Section Engineering Manager at the Industrial Electronics Section at one of our sister companies in Leicester. The plant was known as New Parks and housed the radar group and the Industrial Electronics group.

The electronics group had a thriving business in the freighter ship industry. Most of these older ships still need 220v dc supply, obtained from a dc generator to supply all the power on the ship. With the advent of air conditioning, a number of relatively small commercial air conditioning units which were usually fed from 220v, 60hz.

The inverters were relatively simple units, using 4 SCR's and were widely sold, as they merely chopped the 220v dc into 220v ac at 60hz.

Sales and marketing had, however observed a growing market in standby and no break ac supplies for electrical loads.

As the name implies, the standby units have an integrated rectifier and a battery, it's supplied by the mains, with an inverter just sitting there. In the event of a main failure, a contactor connects the electrical load to the inverter, which operating from the battery, now supplies the load. There is a momentary break in the supply to the load.

The no break, as its name implies, has no break in supply to the load. There is still a rectifier, fed from the mains and a battery but the inverter feeds the load continuously.

Over the next three years, my three engineers and I designed and developed a range of standby and no break units up to 125hp rating.

At the end of 1967 our company was taken over (with the financial help of the government) by General Electric of Great Britain. It was a monumental disaster, G.E had been a competitor of A.E.I and had

roughly the same range of equipment from big generators, motors, transformers, semiconductors, lamps and lighting to start with.

An aspiring manager managed to marry the managing director's daughter. His name was Weinstock. He, apparently, convinced his father in law that selling off some of the G.E divisions, he could improve the cash flow.

Apparently, this worked, for a while, but when you have sold off some of your prime property, you have little left to sell.

Somehow, or another, he convinced the government that only the British electrical industry could complete with the US giants, G.E and Westinghouse, by combining G.E of Britain with English Electric, A.E.I and a few other smaller companies.

With the governments money the takeover was blessed, with, of course, G.E of Great Britain as the holding company. Anyway, in the dining hall for a presentation by a G.E representative. I can still hear him. As part of his speech he bellows "It's people that cost money, do you get my message", I certainly got the message.

A shot time later we were informed that A.E.I New Parks was going to be closed and that we're going to be transferred to a sister division in Rugby. There would be no assistance in moving and Rugby was a major railway line to London and while only about 30 miles from Leicester, the bus service was nonexistent as it was, essentially, cross country.

I started looking for another job. At this time, one of my colleagues showed me a copy of the Times of London. Skimming through this I noticed an advert for engineers in the USA.

Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I applied to the advert address. A couple of weeks later, having come home late and was eating dinner when the phone rang and a American girls voice came on. "Mr. Spreadbury" "yes" "Mr. Robert Spreadbury" "yes", "this is Westinghouse Research Laboratories, Mr Walker, our Division Manager, will be in London in two weeks' time, will you be available for a interview?" "yes", then we were cut off. I had no number to call and wondered what happened.

I needn't worry, a few days later I received a confirmatory letter giving me a time and place in London.

In due course I presented myself at his big London hotel room at the appointed time. I was made very welcome by Mr. A.H.B. Walker, Division Manager of the Electronics Technology Division of the Westinghouse Research and Development Center in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA.

It turned out to be the longest interview I had ever had. Two hours which included a written exam. During it we had a free ranging discussion on technology.

He seemed surprised that I had some knowledge of a magnetic simulation called a magnetic cross. Anyway, at the end of the interview he took my photo and said that he was not yet offering me a job, as he had interviews setup in France and Germany and some more in the UK, but if I did get an offer, it would be as a Senior Engineer at $16,000 per annum. I nearly fell through the floor. At the time I was making about £2000 a year.

He then told me that the Imperial Preference would be ending that year (when there was no limit to emigrants from the UK, all other nationalities had to fit in a quota).

He recommended that I go around to the US Embassy (just around the corner) and collect forms to immigrate to the US. “Fill them out and send them in”. I was not committed to that point and could always decline.

A couple of weeks later I received a written offer of employment at the level he had mentioned, together with the offer of free airplane tickets from London to Pittsburgh and free shipping of our household effects up to, if I remember 1000lb.

From then on, after I wrote to accept things everything went in to a blur. Confirm the emigration to the embassy. Notice to my company. Sell the house, no problem there, had two families fighting for it, the winner took our car (with a spare engine), a Wolseley, 1550 ex police car, my pride and joy, as well.

A removal company contracted by Westinghouse arrived and packed all the furnishings in a container and we were off to my mother’s home in New Milton for the last couple of days.

On the 11th of Aug 1968 we took a taxi up to Heathrow and set off on our new adventure.

I had heard stories about the steel mills of Pittsburgh and the desolation, but as we flew in low on our approach to Pittsburgh airport I was astonished to see the beautiful green forests.

Before we left Leicester, I had a letter from a fellow English engineer at Pittsburgh (a John Reeves) who had been delegated to liaise with us and help where he could.

Through him, we had fixed up a rental home in Penn Hills, not far from the labs and he met us at the airport and took us for our fist meal in the USA (huge by our standards) and then to a motel for the night.

Next morning, he picked me up and took me into the laboratories. Showed me around the department and introduced me to the other engineers. They were a diverse lot, some American but a cross section of European and Asian. Quite a number of UK origin.

The next day I met with Mr. Walker and he told me that I would be working directly for him and would not be attached to the other sections. As it turned out, ultimately, I never did work in one of the four sections, though I did get some work from them.

At this point I found out why he was interested in the Magnetic Cross that he had questioned me at the interview. It appeared that a company called Wanlass had approached one of the Westinghouse divisions, called the Specialty Transformer Division to see if they would be interested in making, under license, an ac stabilizing transformer they called a paraformer. A stabilizing transformer that converts a 60 hz ac which can vary by +/- 1%. Essential for some critical loads.

Mr. Walker had contracted with a University of Pittsburgh professor, a Dr Meiksin is examining this paraformer during the summer break. Dr. Meiksin had done a marvelous math electrical analysis and had confirmed that the device was a parameter oscillator which means that a parameter of the device, in this case, the inductance was varied twice each cycle to maintain the oscillation. Mr. Walker had a feeling that it could be duplicated and yet, would bypass the patent. “Have a look”, he said to me.

As the mathematical analysis did not indicate any way of synthesizing the simulation, I went over to the laboratory library, which had a micro film library of all patents and each one exploited a different application such as frequency multiapplication and division and phase shifting.

It didn't take too long before I realized that none of these four path structures were unique. By bending and stretching the magnetic structure of each application I could convert one to another. Obviously, this was not the way to go.

Then I had my moment, I was looking at the original Magnetic Cross structure and realized that if I folded it, I could make a three-path structure. This was obviously different and what is more, uniquely united to the strip wound cores made by the Specialty Transformer Division. The only question was, will it work. We had a workshop attached to our division and they had winding facilities, a range of different sizes of strip wound cores and copper wire.

I didn't take long to find a suitable three phase (3 leg) core and to get it wound. Now for the moment of truth.

Imagine my delight when the structure exhibited all the characteristics of the paraformer, i.e. a jump start, switch off on over load and a stabilized output. The only problem was that they all occurred at the wrong points, that didn't take long to correct by changing winding turns and leg dimensions. Once done, the unit performed just like the paraformer, but better, in that the output always came up with the same 90 degrees lead or lag in the input.

With help from the patent department, I was able to get no less than 4 patents issued, one for the basic device and 3 more for applications using the device.

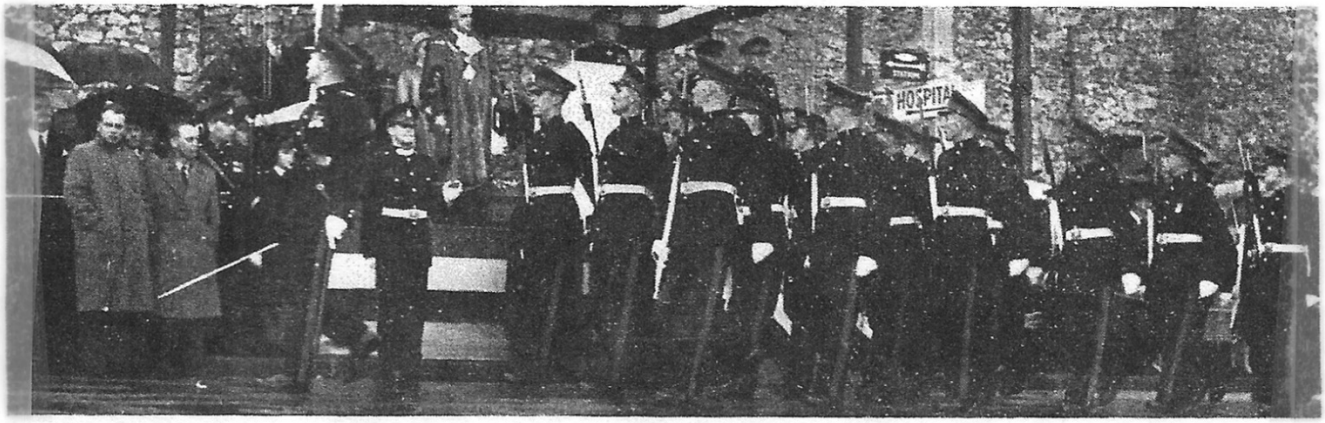
In Aug 1969 we bought a 2 bedroom house at 3515 Logans Ferry Road in Murrysville about 9 miles from the labs. It came with about 2 ¼ acres of land.

(L – R) Mum Winifred with little David, Richard, Rosemary, Susan, Steve, Jeannie,

Me, Barbara, Brian, Diana, Peter

FREEDOM OF TENBY *Continued from page* 289

The Illuminated Scroll was received by the Representative Colonel Commandant of the Royal Regt of Artillery, Lt-General Sir Brian Kimmins, K.B.E., C.B., who handed it into the custody of Brigadier C. C. Garthwaite, Commandant of the School. After the inspection of the Guard of Honour by the Mayor, the School were invited to exercise their new privileges within the Borough for the first time.



Led by the Scroll, its escort and the RA Band Plymouth, representative detachments of RA, REME and WRAC marched past, the RA Colours being represented by Thunderbird Missiles and Bofors. The REME detachment consisted of 30 NCOs and men commanded by Captain R. J. Spreadbury, REME.

FREEDOM OF TENBY

SCHOOL OF ANTI-AIRCRAFT ARTILLERY - MANORBIER

EARLY this year Tenby Borough Council passed the resolution that the Freedom of the Borough be conferred upon the School of Anti-Aircraft Artillery in recognition of the long and cordial relations between the School and the Loyal and Ancient Borough of Tenby.

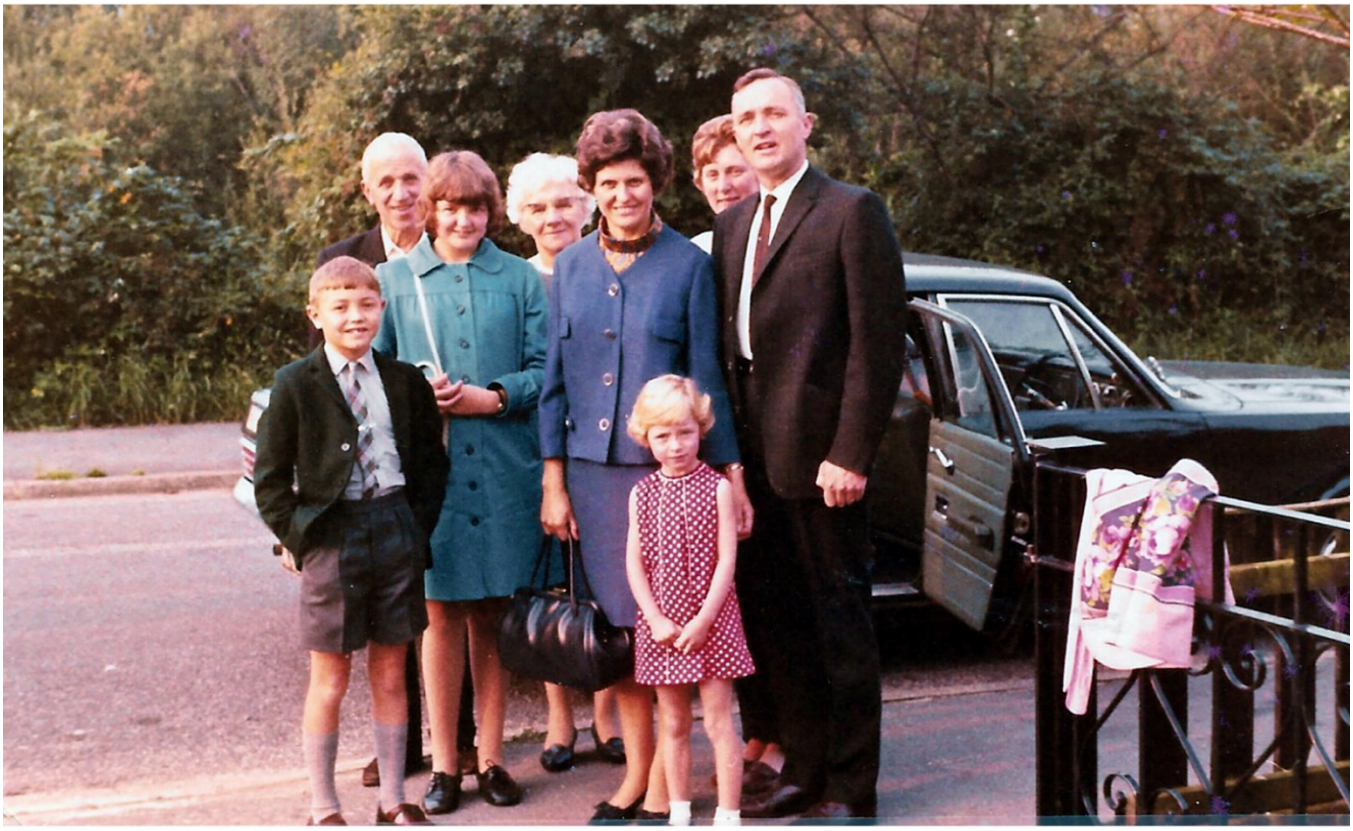
The first and perhaps rather unexpected result of this resolution was that the permission of Her Majesty The Queen, as Captain-General of the Royal Regiment of Artillery, had to be obtained before this honour could be accepted. This permission was graciously given.

Then followed the preparations for 'Freedom Day' with the tempo increasing rapidly as the day drew near. REME personnel attached to the School became rapidly acquainted with the new rifle drill, whilst the Officers were introduced into the intricacies of Sword Drill. Fortunately the only casualty of this hazardous occupation was a dog who failed to move at the regulation pace. (This fault was soon corrected). In addition to participating in the Ceremony, the Wksp was also given the task of making the presentation writing desk for use by the Mayor at Council meetings. Several designs for this desk were produced from which the final design came into being and into production.

The 'Freedom' Ceremony took place on the 27 July, at a time when Tenby was crowded with holiday makers. In spite of the continual rain throughout the morning, it was obvious that the rain had done little to dampen the interest of the large number of spectators witnessing the ceremony. Amongst the Official Guests were Brigadier C. H. Sanderson, O.B.E., DDEME Western Comd, and five previous Commandants of the School.

Continued on page 297

I'm in front with my sword on a very rainy day, later watching it rust as it sat on my shoulder



11th Aug.1968 All ready for the taxi ride up to Heathrow, standing outside Mums house.
Steve, Tim, Sue, Mum, Jean, Wendy, Diana, Me

Chapter 5 1970 – 1979

The next 10 years at the labs were the most transformative of my life.

The successful first two years had opened a number of possible jobs. I was still primarily working directly with Mr. Walker but found that I had enough independence to find jobs myself or by recommendation.

I flitted from job to job, working for the Transportation Division on fault analysis on traction systems and solving the defect on the hydraulic brake activators on San Francisco "Bay Area Regional Transit System".

I also worked for the Lamp and Lighting Division on ballasts for High Pressure Sodium and Metal Halide Street lighting lamps.

I did a design study for Westinghouse Canada, based in Hamilton, Ontario. The city of Toronto wanted bids for a new electric transit system using the existing 600v dc electrical system, using synchronous ac motors and they only had six weeks.

Need less to say, it was dropped in my lap and I had to pull out all the stops to get it done in time, at which point, I had to go up to Hamilton to present the scheme to them. They were delighted with the detail. Toronto thought it a little too ambitious and turned it down. However, the engineering manager in Hamilton, wrote a most appreciative letter to Mr. Walker, extolling the design and the short time taken.

I did a fair amount of work for the Gas Physics Department on pulsars for small laser systems, culminating in a large military scheme in 1980, of which, we won.

One job, of which I am most proud of was for a design to make a hydraulic brake actuator for a rapid transit system.

Apparently, this existing hydraulic brake can "grab", causing some consternation with the passengers (and injuries). A Dr. Putnam of another dept. had come up with the idea of an acceleration / deceleration purpose. For that he needed someone with hydraulic system experience, hence me!!

Though I had never designed a hydraulic actuator it was a great experience and I was able to demonstrate a working unit to him.

During this 10 years I had 12 more patent disclosures filed and 7 more patents issued, making 11 in all.

In about 1973, I had come home late (as usual) and sat down to a late dinner when I noticed that Susan, was being most attentive to my every request.

Finally, I asked the "what's up", at which point she burst into her story. Apparently, a friend of hers at school, Alison Hamm, had been invited by her grandfather in Hawaii to visit. Since grandfather lived on his own, Alison's father wanted someone to accompany her, "could she go?"

Fortunately, that very day I had received a $200 patent award, so it was a no brainer to say "yes".

Her father was a scientist at the labs and she had an older brother who was a perpetual student. He must have been in his late twenties and already had 3 doctorates and was working on his 4th. Imagine, no work experience at all, still living at home.

Sue never got over the experience, jumbo jet with upstairs bar. Drinks bought for them by smitten younger passengers.

In about 1975, I was sharing an office with a Chinese Engineer, named Shan Sun. He was then working on his M.S. at the University of Pittsburgh and recommended it to me. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, I and another engineer Ian Whyte, also English went down to the college to find out what we could do. Ian had no problem as he had a degree from an English University, but they were a bit mystified about me. I was then an A.M.I.E.E so I remembered Mr. Webb at Twickingham Technical College and wrote to him explaining the situation. He apparently was just about to retire but remembered us well and he sent an explanation letter detailing the equivalent to a B.S.

With this in hand, I went back to the University and was accepted.

This entailed 2 years of 3 nights a week at the University, with the home work done at the weekends. At the end of the initial course work I opted to provide a thesis instead of further course work and wrote a thesis on “Magnetic Devices”.

It so happed that one of the thesis examiners was the same Dr. Meiksin who had worked with me in 1968.

Anyway, this thesis was accepted and approved and in 1977 I got my M.S. (In Power Engineering, as I thought I already knew enough about Electrical Engineering). I should, perhaps point out that Westinghouse was very motivated for further education. As long as you maintain a B+ or A in each course, they would compensate the initial outlay so, in effect, all the classes were paid for.

In about 1977 I was given the project of covering the field of electrical pulse generation, with reference to laser application. I did an exhaustive search and wrote a full report, which, is to my surprise, was given a Property Class 1 designation, with extremely limited distribution. Shortly afterwards, the manager of Gas Physics Group, another scientist and I were requested to attend a meeting with the Defense Group in Baltimore. We flew down in the early morning and made our way to the Westinghouse Division. Then, to my surprise, I found that, since I didn’t have Secret Classification I wouldn’t be able to attend the meeting room all morning while they discussed my report.

On our return, I was directed to apply for Security Clearance and in due course obtained my secret classification. I found out later, that people from the Embassy in England had been up in Scotland checking on my references.

In 1978 we had a preview of the disaster that was coming for Westinghouse.

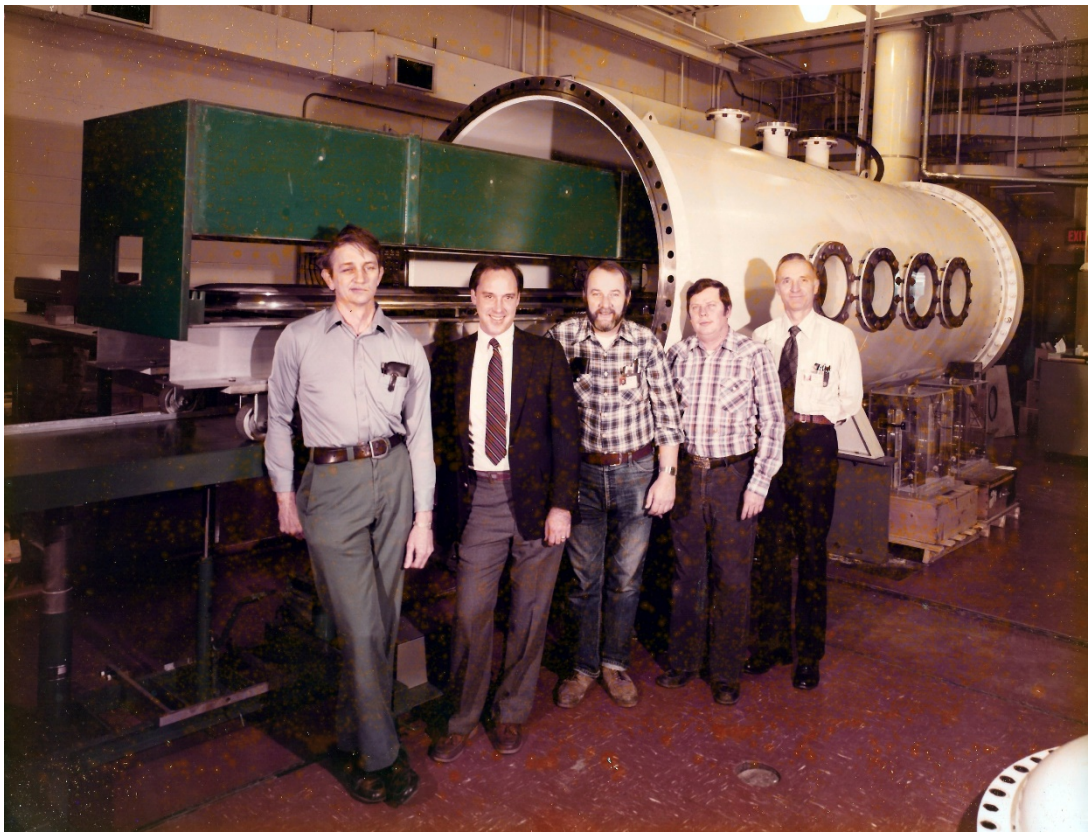
They distributed around the labs a brochure from the Westinghouse Credit Corp. A stand-alone group that invested in land, housing tracts and similar. They had a number of housing estates in South Central and South Western Florida and were offering building lots at a big discount to Westinghouse employees. Jeannie had always wanted a place in Florida, so I signed up, and in due course, found I had been allocated a lot on an estate not far from Sebring. I called to say that I would be in the area in about 2 weeks and whether I could select one myself. “no” they told me, “if you want to select your own plot then the Westinghouse discount did not apply”. I immediately told them to cancel my application.

Sure enough, in about 2 weeks’ time we drove down to Florida, spent 3 days at the Magic Kingdom and went on to West Palm Beach to stay with my Uncle Harry and Auntie Dolly.

While with them, Harry wanted to take me up to Cypress Gardens, not too far from Disney. We had a great day there and as Sebring was almost on the way back I persuaded Harry to drop by the Sebring address. What a surprise!! They had a rather wet summer and the great archway and the road going straight back were the only things clear of water. There were a couple of homes on the raised lots, but all the rest was under water. I'm afraid I laughed all the rest of the way back to West Palm Beach.

As it was, it was a sign of what was to come to Westinghouse. In 1990, the Credit Corporation lost over 1 billion dollars in bad loans, Westinghouse sold off all the Engineering Divisions, keeping only the Broadcasting Division and finally renamed itself in 1997 as the CBS Corporation. What a downfall. I remember reading one analysis of why the Credit Corp failed. Apparently, when they bought the land, they valued it on what they thought it would be worth, rather than its actual purchase value and they were rather optimistic in their forecasts. The enhanced evaluations made them the golden division and senior management were totally deceived.

During this 10 years, we added an extension to the house, measuring the size of the bedrooms, opening the attic into a third bedroom and fully finished half of the basement and a toilet and shower upstairs. We converted the oil-fired furnace to natural gas, by bringing in a gas line from the road front. Converted the septic system to a city sewage system and added city water to the existing deep well self-contained system. If memory serves we paid about $24,000 for the house and land but the upgrades didn't come cheap, though I was able to do quite a bit on my own.



Co2 UV Pre-ionized Laser (Westinghouse R & D Division in Pittsburgh, PA)

Chapter 6 1980 – 1983

In early 1982 we had a request from the Lamp Division in Bloomfield as to whether it was feasible to control street light lamps which had been exhibiting an early failure rate. The new lamps demonstrated good colour and was, in general fed from the so called “head peaked ballast” which was generally available from a number of suppliers. This meant that the two manufacturers ballasts were identical, hence the failure rate of the lamps.

The general characters were that the early failure lamps would get extremely bright dissipating more than their rated wattage. This overheat, sent up the voltage of the lamp until the ballasts wouldn’t supply the required voltage at which point the lamp would turn off, cool down and restart and keep on doing it.

I found a way to control the overheat problem using some commercial control circuits, but they would have been too expensive. So, I spoke to the manager of one of our sections who had been experimenting with a “do it yourself” integrated circuit. He quickly devised a circuit, obtained a prototype unit and was able to demonstrate a small modular control, fitting into a capacitor can with just 3 external leads which could be clamped on to existing points in the lighting fixture.

We were able to get a patent on the unit particularly as it was capable of automatic late-night dimming to conserve energy.

For the remainder of 1982 and into 1983 I worked primarily with the Gas Physics Dept. who were developing the largest Carbon Dioxide Laser in the world at that time. The laser itself was in a cyclonical pressure vessel with viewing points at each end. The laser itself was pulse energized and required an ultra violet pulse about 2 microseconds before the main pulse was applied. I devised a special array which would generate 1 million volts for 10 microseconds.

The result was most gratifying, with a fully reflecting mirror at one end of the pressure vessel and a reflecting mirror at the other end, the physicists were able to extract a laser bolt, which, when reflected and focused on to a target of furnace bricks would melt a hole right through them. The final customer was for military for anti-missile defense.

In about March of 1983 I came home late, as usual, and bought all my waiting mail to read while eating dinner, Jeannie leafed through my mail and found a general letter from our department manager asking for volunteers to join a small company in Florida which had just been bought by Westinghouse. The companies name was Vectrol and was based in Oldsmar, near Clearwater.

Needless to say, Jeannie was most excited and asked me to apply. I was a bit dismissive and said they probably needed young engineers. However, she persisted, and I promised to check into it the next day. So, in the morning I shuffled up to the managers office and spoke to the secretary, who informed me that, at that moment, I was the only one to apply.

Imagine my surprise when, about a week later, I was called up to the manager’s office to meet with Mr. Bob Sikora, the Chief Engineer of Vectrol.

He quizzed me as to why I wanted the job and I explained the reason, and after some discussing we agreed that:

a. I was too old
b. I was too expensive (as a fellow engineer)

On that note I left, feeling much happier, thinking I had scorched the idea.

It was not to be. About 3 weeks later I got a call to come to the manager's office. There was Mr. Sikora.

"The jobs yours" he tells me.

I blurted out "I thought I was too old and expensive"

"You are" he says "but the management here tells he that I should grab you while I can"

To say the least of it, I was dumb founded. I couldn't go back on my request, Jeannie would never have forgiven me.

They invited me down to the plant and I took them up on the offer.

The next thing was to take Jeannie down to Florida, but they pointed out that only one visit with spouse for house hunting was included, so one Friday we paid for ourselves to fly down and look around for 2 days. What we saw made Jeannie very happy and, on our next official visit we started house hunting in earnest or to be more accurate, Jeannie went off with a realtor everyday to find something she liked (she was never happy with our choice in Murrysville) while I went into the plant and familiarize myself with the Engineering and Manufacturing facilities and the range of equipment offered.

Sorry, that's as far as Dad got on his biography.

The picture above is Dad at the Oldsmar, Westinghouse Motor Control Division in Florida, he spent 13 happy years there and retired in 1996. After retirement he and his friend and colleague, fellow engineer Derek Paice worked on several engineering projects together for many years. My Mum (Jeannie) passed away on 3 Apr, 2017 and Dad passed away on 28 Jan. 2018, after 62 happy years of marriage.