

The Royal Engineers Association

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Patron: HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN



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19 October 2019

THE MINUTES OF 51st ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ROYAL ENGINEERS ASSOCIATION HELD IN THE VICTORY SERVICES CLUB, LONDON, ON 12th OCTOBER 2019

OPENING REMARKS

1.0 The Annual General Meeting was opened at 1600hrs by the President of the Association, Maj General Alastair Dickinson CBE, who welcomed all those present and thanked them for attending; he made special mention of those who had travelled long distances.

2.0 Apologies for absence had been received from:

- Jane Thompson – Trustee

3.0 The President introduced the Executive members of the Association seated at the top table. He thanked Julia Ferguson and Ann Richardson from HQ REA who had worked behind the scenes to ensure a successful AGM. The President reminded Branch Delegates to brief their Branches on the matters discussed at the meeting, and asked that once the Minutes had been published, Branches would ensure the widest distribution to all their members. The President thanked Mike Payne for his work in producing a new branch and group map.

4.0 In order to ensure correctness of the records, the President asked that whenever someone rose to speak, they would clearly announce their name and Branch or official position. The President also advised the meeting that in a change to previous procedures attendees would be invited to bring matters to the attention of the AGM under Any Other Business.

ITEM 1 - To confirm the Minutes of the 50th AGM held on Saturday 12th October 2019

5.0 The President emphasised that this Item was dealing only with the accuracy of the Minutes. The document had been widely circulated and HQ REA had not received any comments or proposed amendments. There were no comments from the floor.

Proposal: That the Minutes of the 50th AGM be accepted
Proposer: Lt Col John Rawlings – Deputy Group Director
Seconder: Mark Stevens – Chairman Solent Branch

Carried

ITEM 2 - Matters Arising from the Minutes of the 50th Annual General Meeting.

6.0 There were no Matters Arising.

ITEM 3 – To Receive the Council’s 51st Annual Report to the AGM

The President took this opportunity to thank Bev Kelly and Fiona Louch for their work on the annual report and the REA HQ team for the work throughout the year. He drew the meetings attention to the new annual report format and in particular the statistics relating to the Association performance identifying the numbers assisted by the welfare and benevolence support provided in the past year. He also highlighted the exceptional growth in membership over the past year with 716 new members. The president drew the meetings attention to the level of legacy received by the association at £86,077 and hoped that this could grow in the coming years and encouraged everyone to spread the word the option of leaving a legacy to the REA.

The president highlighted the current active membership and the evolution of the branch structure with new themed and national branches supporting a different style of membership. The President asked the controller to give a brief on the Welfare Grant for 2020. The controller explained that a grant of £250,000 had been allocated in 2020 and applications had been received from branches and units. The main request from branches had been for gazebos and for units there had been grants for Campervans, Cpls clubs and one area of particular improvement was funding for the communal areas in the single living accommodation to provide soldiers with adequate recreation areas.

The President then invited Andy Craig as Chairman of the benevolence committee to give a brief report on the work of the benevolence committee in 2019. AC highlighted two cases in particular:

Really sort of each end of the spectrum if I can put it that way. The first one is a serving Lance Corporal, still serving, age 27, four children under the age of seven, and his second son unfortunately has got severe autism.

And he currently attends a special school and so on. And this year, the MOD and the DIO, they made sure that he got an adapted quarter for his son, to help him. Also, within his

regiment the shifts and so on that he has to do are worked out so he can be there with his son and so on. This has made quite a tremendous difference to the boy. He has a sensory deficiency if I can put it that way, and at school although it's a special school, if they had that equipment in the school it would cost something in the order of £20,000. But what we have done is try to work out somewhere else where we could actually help him. So, the plan is that he has, and this already happened, sensory equipment in one of the rooms in this adapted quarter.

So, this is quite a good solution, and it's a good example of all the different agencies working together. That was £5,000, so we went to meet this cost with the Royal British Legion and with the Army Benevolent Fund. So, about a third, a third, a third. And it was just over £5,100 for the whole lot. And this already has made a significant difference to this young boy.

So, a very satisfactory case for somebody actually serving, youngster, still serving and in the army. Now, if I can go to the other end of the scale and we're talking about the older ex-Sapper's, well this second example is of Sapper P, aged 95, service from 42 to 47. Served in Italy, France, and Germany.

And his wife died in 2012, he's not in a particularly good way health wise but he's still living in his own home. Unfortunately, there is no downstairs loo or bathroom in his house, so he finds it quite difficult getting upstairs. Just to complicate matters, one of his daughters, 53 years old, she lives with him and she's got Downs Syndrome.

And one of his sons, who's 62 also lives with him and is a carer for both his sister and his father. And he's been doing this for the last five years. I've got to say when this case came up, we were all on the committee thinking well, why on earth haven't they come to us before, but they haven't, you know. And it is an example of pride and so on, and you don't want to go and ask for something and so forth.

Anyway, we have looked at that and a stair lift has been bought, has been fitted. £5,000 and in view of the, let's say the urgency in the fact that this gentleman is 95 years old, rather than us prolonging this and going to other agencies, the Royal Engineers Association, we gave them the £5,000 to put it in, it's already in and it's making a significant difference to him.

So, two examples there of cases where we've helped. But I also just want to tell you about some of the reach this year as well in overseas countries. So, just some headline figures I guess. Already this year we've helped over 20 people in ten different countries. And we've worked with other agencies. So, Royal British Legion Overseas, Sapper, Royal Commonwealth Ex-Service League and the Officer's Association.

And I'm not going to go into the details but we're talking about Fiji, Malta, Cyprus, France, Malaysia, Zimbabwe, Ecuador, Belize, Germany and Guernsey. So, we are reaching out across the globe and we are able to help these individuals. More often than not they tend to be relatively small sums.

But even so, we're still able to help them. Anybody got any questions at all? I might just add, and again I say this every year, but if you want to come along to one of the benevolence meetings then please come along. We now hold those at Chelsea Hospital and they're every quarter. Obviously we deal with stuff out of committee in between those meetings, but I think this year we've probably had more observers than we've ever had.

And we've been concentrating on keeping up this theme with the youngsters, of trying to get the youngsters in. So, the last committee meeting we had, we had I think must have been about five or six junior Sappers' in that came, very interesting to hear what they have to say. And you get that feedback, and also every single one of them said, hmmm didn't realise what the REA did, the benevolence and so on, so forth. So, it's spreading that word around and getting to the youngsters as well as the oldies.

The President thanked the Benevolence committee and the REA HQ Benevolence team for their hard work in 2019 and asked the meeting to accept the Boards 51st annual report.

Proposer: John Ettles Highlands and Islands

Secunder: Eric Hargreaves – Trustee Carried.

20.0 The President thanked the sub-committees and Trustees of the REA, without whom the REA would not function, and he was personally grateful for the support and effort they put in. He also thanked all REA members as it was their enthusiasm that got people involved and it was that involvement that enables us to maintain that wider network of comradeship. He recognised the diligence of the REA HQ staff and thanked them for all their hard work.

Proposal: That the 51st Annual Report of Council be accepted.

Proposer:

Secunder:

Carried

ITEM 4 – To receive the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the REA for the period 01 January to 31 December 2019

I don't intend to trawl through it by reading that all out, but I'd be happy to take some questions if you want. Ken covered the business of the welfare grant. Last year you agreed that the welfare grant would continue at 250k, in fact we decided, the trustees have decided that next year we should make it 100k.

This is all part of just keeping an eye on, although you all agreed, and the trustees agreed to reduce our capital reserves by £2m over five years, we're conscious of the awful B word, and that affects that will have upon our investments. We're conscious that the Corps is reducing, so our income is reducing from the day's pay scheme. And we're conscious of other impositions, if you like, on our funds.

While we're looking through the notes, a sort of transfer of responsibility of some expenditures that used to be covered by the Central Charitable Trust and has been looked at really as benevolence and] Corps.

So, for example the grants that the Central Charitable Trust used to make to, or do make to adventures training, to operational tours welfare, special grants for heavily caught patients, war memorials, the bits and pieces that recruits get like t-shirts and badges for their arms and stable belts at a certain stage of their training.

And sports scholarships, particularly relevant at the moment with the Olympics coming up. And we in the RECCT offered or gave 4k to international sports men and women.

There are six people at the moment benefiting from that. Those, if you like, budgetary responsibilities are devolved on to the RAE because they are benevolence, and [unclear] Corps. So, there's another whack of 133k that we have to just think about how we find the money for that. For those of you that were thinking of popping off, do fill in your legacy forms, because all the money that we get from legacy I promise is well spent.

Enough about the Welfare Grant. You've seen we have been supporting REVETT, essentially the organisation that is translating military qualifications into something that civilian organisations understand and that work is ongoing. Our support for the moment to REVETT has come to an end. We've given them 30k over the last three years.

They may ask for a little more I'm told, but they've been told to put a case together for that. The investment information is in the papers, Our investments actually are holding up quite well despite the uncertainties in the investment world and Black Rock are still giving us a very good return for our investments each year.

Trust me we're keeping an eye on it, there are no major difficulties at the moment. But if you have any questions then I'll be happy to look embarrassed.

22.0 The President thanked the honorary treasurer for his report.

Proposal: That the 2019 REA Annual Report and Financial Statements be accepted

Proposer: Larry Inge Trustee

Secunder: Bill Halloran North East Group Carried

ITEM 5 – To note the appointment of Kreston Reeves LLP (Formerly Reeves LLP) as the Auditors of the Association

23.0 The President advised those assembled that the responsibility for appointing auditors to the Corps charities rests with the Chief Royal's Committee. At the last Chief Royal's Committee meeting, Kreston Reeves LLP were approved as auditors of the Corps' charities. REA Council has approved the appointment.

ITEM – 6 - Appointment of Honorary Treasurer 2019

24.0 The President said that Colonel Chris Davies had kindly agreed to continue as the REA Hon Treasurer. He took the opportunity to thank publicly Colonel Chris for his work. He reminded those assembled that being the Honorary Treasurer was a considerable commitment and that we were extremely fortunate to have such a diligent and hard-working treasurer and that the management of REA finances had benefitted significantly from his input.

Proposal: That Col Chris Davies is appointed as REA Honorary Treasurer for 2019.
Proposer: Maj Phil Gill MBE JP South West Group
Secunder: Mr Bill Halloran Ripon and District
Carried

ITEM 7 – Date of next meeting

25.0 The date of the next AGM will be Saturday 10th October 2020 at the Victory Services Club, London. The President raised the possibility of considering alternative venues in future however it was agreed that VSC would be used in 2020 with further consideration for 2022

ITEM 8 A presentation by the Corps SM on Corps Activities

It's been another significantly busy year across the Corps of Royal Engineers. We've seen successful operations in training and across various sports and activities. As a snapshot of Corps activity today, I can report across the various formations. Sappers are deployed on over 30 operations, or overseas training missions, we truly are unique. With over 1400 troops committed or deployed to overseas operations and training missions around the globe, away from the enduring commitments such as the Falkland Islands, Canada, Kenya and other overseas missions, the following is a flavour of the less known deployments.

United Nations Missions Africa sees over 200 RE troops deployed in South Sudan. The current taskforce deployed in South Sudan; Operation Trenton is led by 32 Engineer Regiment with a focus on the construction of a second UN Level 2 Hospital in Malakal. Whilst also developing several refugee facilities and other aid related construction projects. The threat in Eastern Europe continues and the Corps have 140 troops from 22 Engineer Regiment in the region on Op Kubritz [?].

Conducting multi-national live exercises from battle group level and upwards. The most recent commitment has seen the crisis response troops from 24 Commando Royal Engineers deploy to Barbados on RFA Mount Bay to assist in the UK government humanitarian aid and disaster relief mission post the devastating autumn hurricanes. The Corps delivered a wide range of skills including distribution of aid, basic construction skills, but also deep specialist engineering capability from across the technical roster.

Routine activities. It is hopefully widely understood that the Army has been focussed on sizeable change programmes aimed at reshaping and restructuring to meet future operational requirements and threats.

A specific area of growth within the Corps has seen the reformation of 28 Engineer Regiment. The regiment now deliver the defence capability for counter chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear warfare. I won't be able to say that later. And they're now based out of Woodbridge in Suffolk.

In addition, 23 Amphibious Squadron has reformed as a hybrid regular and reserve squadron to enable the Corps to grow its wide wet gap crossing capability. This also increases the attractive opportunity for some to remain or serve in Germany. Current Corps strengths 9,300 personnel. This includes 2,200 reservists.

Recruiting across the Army is improving. As the success of the Belonging Campaign is now turning those initial interests into phase one recruits.

We remain confident that the Chief Royal, Lieutenant General Urch in his guise as Commander Home Command is successfully turning around the Army's recruiting, with significant improvements already being made in the time it takes someone to join the Army being the most crucial.

Offering a wide and varied career across several capabilities and professionalisms, the Corps continues to be a very attractive offer. The offer of continuous professional development and professional accreditation via the Institution of Royal Engineers to the serving and veteran community is growing in popularity.

As we continue to develop how the Corps delivers through life support from Cadet to Veteran, the Sapper family, we hope the move of the Sapper network to the REA will not only assist service leavers but also the veteran community in obtaining gainful employment.

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The Corps of Royal Engineers continues to recruit the very best soldiers and officers available. Retaining our excellent people always remains challenging, especially when considering how well armed they are in terms of professional accreditation and qualification. Sappers are desirable candidates for our competitors outside the military. We must be smart as an organisation if we want to hold on to them. Sports. At elite level, the Corps has six athletes employed in the Talented Athlete Scholarship Scheme.

An incredible number noting that the army liability sits at 45 athletes in total. Since this sporting season began, the Corps has won a total of 67 individual or team awards at unit level or above. Clearly with too many to list, I've picked the following as stand out achievements.

We are again the Army Inter-Corps athletic champions. No mean feat considering the type group the RLC has had on the event in the recent years. Apart from last year obviously when we won. In football, the Corps team have had a successful season and won the Army Quads tournament earlier in the year.

The Corps Ladies Team also won the Army competition. However, the standout achievement in this area has come from 21 Engineer Regiment, winning five trophies including the Army Challenge Cup which hasn't been won by the Sappers for 17 years.

They were also, this is the only one they didn't win, runners up in the Unit League Champions Cup, however on a positive note, and they were beaten by 3 [Unclear] Regiment. 24 Commando are the Army Mountain Bike Champions for 2019.

Impressive considering the commitments the regiment have had over the past 12 months. The Royal Engineers Winter Sports, is the dominant force across eight disciplines of winter sports, with a fantastic season in early 2019, expectations are high for the pending winter season ahead.

And in adaptive sport, Micky Yule has won silver in the Tokyo World Para Powerlifting World Cup. The sporting highlights since the last AGM must be Sapper Games 2019, hosted by 42 Engineer Regiment in RAF Wyton. We saw 1,300 competitors fiercely compete in 22 sports,

mostly in the rain. The overall victors of Sapper Games 2019 were 42 Engineer Regiment, and notably the home team also managed an impressive win in MGB competition. Much to the disappointment and surprise of 32 Engineer Regiment. The event offered a great opportunity for the Corps to get together not only in the sporting arena but also socially during the evenings in the Big Top. If you haven't seen pictures of the Big Top, it was truly impressive and to be honest saved the whole event.

On behalf of those who competed in Sapper Games I would like to give a personal thanks to the Royal Engineers Association Committee for their continued financial support towards Sapper Games. The 2020 games will be held at 32 Engineer Regiment in Catterick.

With the home team no doubt training already for the potential grudge match in the MGB competition. The Corps continues to drive a sport for all ethos for all serving members and officers. Social media. As a Corps we continue to have a strong presence across all social media platforms.

The Corps headquarters runs the Corps very own YouTube channel. I strongly recommend you access this site and save it to your favourites. The latest video feeds, operational updates, sports, and activity plus many other streams are all present.

It is the fastest and most up to date point of reference for information on the Corps online.

The headquarters also run a number of popular social media accounts on Twitter, Facebook and for your grandchildren, Instagram.

To summarise then, as my first AGM in the post of Corps Sergeant Major I would like to thank you all for your very kind welcome and look forward to continuing to assist the REA in all areas. We are one Sapper family. Once a Sapper, always a Sapper.

Sirs, this concludes the Corps of Royal Engineers update 2019.

Item 9 Any other Business

General Alastair, gentlemen. Kevin Bailey from the Chesterfield branch. I'm conscious that this subject may come up later on this evening.

Some of you may know that I have more than a passing interest in the life of a National Memorial Arboretum, in particular the Corps life. Over the last 18 months, we saw the plot very badly bruised by the building that went on alongside us.

Which was a [unclear] building as it turns out. And I'm very conscious, or I was very conscious that people like Ken and Ian were subjected to a huge amount of abuse over the last 18 months because of what was going on, through no fault of their own, in the armouries.

Anyway, all sorts went on and the Memorial now looks super-duper. The benches that had disappeared should be back in place by Remembrance Sunday. And I'd like to propose a vote of thanks to Ken and to Ian, to Corps Colonel, to the then Corps Sergeant Major and of course the Corps Secretary for what turned out to be an absolutely fantastic day on 28th May.

And I think that day showed the amount of work that they had all personally put into bringing the Corps plot at the National Memorial Arboretum back to the standard, and better perhaps than it's ever enjoyed before. Thank you very much gentlemen.

General, Members of the Committee, gentlemen. Mark Baker, Commanding Officer, 22 Engineer Regiment. I would just like to record my own thanks, if possible please, on behalf of the Regiment for the Associations support to purchase of the regimental camper van, and to the refurbishment of the soldiers living accommodation, the communal rooms which Ken referred to earlier on during the meeting.

They've both been exceptionally well received with gratitude by the Regiment and are making a significant difference to the living experience of Sappers.

So, thank you very much on behalf of the Regiment.

President's Closing Remarks

Firstly, can I thank on your behalf, the work that... The incredible amount of work that's

done, gross in favour, by the two gentlemen on my left. The gentleman on my right constantly fires out ideas and bits for advice. And he gets very quickly back some sage words, not from me, but from Andy and Chris.

And running the Benevolence Committee and running the Finance Committee, is a day job in itself, but the extra mile that they go to make sure that the Association is run in a way that you'd expect is worthy of me mentioning in here, and I'm very grateful. So, I just wanted to make that point and... He's not writing. Notice... There's a body language there, wasn't there eh? So, I just wanted to make that point formally.

So, thank you very much indeed.

Quite right. Can I also thank the outgoing Council? I mentioned this last year that we were moving from a Council to a Board running your Association, and the hard work that outgoing Council put in is absolutely worth of note.

What is even more noteworthy is that they voted to stop doing what they know and love. And every member of that Council, whenever I met them, thoroughly enjoyed being a member of being the Council and being involved. But actually, at the end of the day we needed to move on for this Association to become a professional organisation that it is, managing the money of our soldiers and our veterans in the way that it needs to be.

And as a result of that we move from the Council, which was a lot of good men and women, true, into a more focussed Board. So, thank you to those Councillors who were members up until we dissolved it about eight months ago. In addition, we then took on as an Association, three what we call External Trustees.

And two of them are on my left on the front row here. One is a former Lance Corporal in the Royal Engineers, who he won't mind me saying, probably didn't do as much work at school as he should have done, and found himself sat on a scheme in Germany I don't know how many years ago, looking at a newspaper, I'll make it up, it probably was The Sun.

And it said, so you think you're clever do you? Try this puzzle. And so, he tried this puzzle and did it, and went oh, maybe I can do a bit more than sit in the rain on scheme.

Left the Sappers and is now a Barrister in London. Working in one of the London Chambers. Geoffrey, we're very grateful, thank you very much indeed. I wish I had half your brains, all I did was hang around in the Army, and you know you stay in long enough you get promoted, that's how it works. We're very grateful to have you here. The second chap is nervous as anything because he doesn't know what I'm going to say about him.

Basically, Colin and I go back a way, a way. We spent a lot of time in the Ministry of Defence together, jousting when it came to how much money was going to be given the Airforce, Navy, and the Army. And what we did realise was that if the Army didn't get it, and the Airforce didn't get it, sure as anything we made sure that the Navy didn't get it. Colin is now a non-exec director of the Charitable Trustee, within the Airforce and so what we get from him is an idea of how other services run their charities. We also get a very shrewd and sage mind on the Board. So, Colin thank you very much indeed for joining us. Jane as I said, couldn't be with us, but Jane, as I said is a... She is a Chairman of a Parole Board. So, essentially we've got someone that's looking after us legally.

We've got someone who's got an idea of how other people in the third sector operate. And we've got someone who has an idea of where our soldiers and deserving families might end up, i.e. in need of assistance, either in jail, in drugs, homelessness etc.

And we've now got a much more powerful organisation running our charity. So, thank you. I just thought I'd make that point and I hope I've not laboured it too much.

The final point that I wanted to make was to thank the selfless work of the groups and the branches, the chaps and chapesses in front of me. It cannot go without saying just how much work that you do, and how much the people that you support appreciate what you do. I won't say it's a thankless task, because there's a lot of goodness that comes out of it.

But when you look at that figure of how much benevolence that we have fired out as an organisation, what matters is that we've identified the individuals who needed it in the first place and a lot of that is down to the hard work of the branches, creating the antenna so we can seek people and identify them, and bring them to help as and when.

So, I thank you all for the hard work that you do. All those that aren't staying for supper... Have we got many that aren't staying for supper? Have a safe trip home.

19th t October 2019

KmKirk
Controller
Mr Kenneth Kirk

Minutes Approved

Dated

President
Major General Alastair Dickinson CBE