

Letters to the Editor

Ex Elephant Walk (A True Story)

Dear Editor – In 1955, a nodding elephant, the property of Fremlin’s Brewery, was ‘acquired’, somewhat shadily, by 37 Fd Sqn, although they were subsequently allowed to keep it. ‘Noddy’ as the elephant became known, travelled all over the world with them, eventually finding a home in the Sgt’s Mess of 25 Engr Regt at Roberts Barracks, Osnabrück. 37 Sqn then moved to Hameln leaving Noddy behind. In March 1977, four stalwart Senior NCOs led by a certain WO2, went to get him back. They left Hameln at midnight and travelled to Osnabrück. They gained access to the Mess through a window previously left open on a recce, retrieved the said elephant and returned to Hameln. Thereafter Noddy was displayed in the Sgt’s Mess at Gordon Barracks, Hameln under the eagle eye and loving care of the RSM of 35 Engr Regt, WO1 Alan Skidmore. With Noddy on his green velvet pad lay the bolt cutters and hacksaw used to secure his release, and the padlock that had confined him. The four adventurers were Billy ‘Jock’ Smith, Tom ‘Jock’ Cheyne, Bill Hutchings and Tommy ‘Jock’ Murray. We know 37 Fd Sqn is now an Armd Engr Sqn, but do they still have ‘Noddy?’ Yours Sincerely, Catherine and Tommy Murray, 38B Oakbank Drive, Barrhead, G78 2PL. Tel: BT: 0141 580 0498



LtoR: Tommy Murray, Bill Hutchings and Tom Cheyne with “Noddy”

The Rotenburg Bailey Bridge

Dear Editor - I was interested to read Mr Kelly’s letter in the July SAPPER regarding the bridge at Rotenburg. As OC 48 Fd Sqn at the time, I remember the incident only too well! My wife and I were on our way to Kiel from Nienburg and saw the collapsed bridge. My wife thought I should report it, but I did not want to lose my sailing and in any case, I had every confidence in the officers and men of my squadron. I also had every confidence that the grapevine would ensure the news would soon reach the regiment! Jim Caton however is wrong about the origins of Gen ‘Splosh’ Jones’ nickname. It was earned much earlier in his career. Yours Sincerely, John Purser.

The 1951 Festival of Britain Bailey Bridge

Dear Editor – With regard to your editorial note on page 963 of the July SAPPER, I am afraid that Jim Caton is wrong. The bridge was built, not by ‘Splosh’ Jones but by Lt Col PA Easton OBE of 36 Corps Engr Regt (see the RE Journal for September 1951). I remember reading that the cause of the incident was due to a miscalculation by MEXE. The original design of the bridge included the use of chord reinforcements which were bolted to the bottom flanges of all the trusses. When the calculations for balancing the launching were done, the additional weight of the chord reinforcements was omitted, hence when the bridge was launched, it overbalanced. Yours Sincerely, Patrick Munro.

Gen Sir Charles ‘Splosh’ Jones GCB CBE MC

Dear Editor – I read with interest about the supposed connection with the Festival of Britain Bridge and General Jones’ nickname. I knew Gen Jones and his wife well and I understood there were two possible derivations of the name ‘Splosh’. One was that he was very good at the after-dinner game called “Splosh”, played on a billiards table. The other was that when asked how much tonic should be added to his gin, he always said “Just a splosh”. You can take your choice, but I’m certain it had nothing to do with bridges in rivers! Yours Sincerely, Fred Beringer.

Gen Sir Charles ‘Splosh’ Jones GCB CBE MC

Dear Editor – I am afraid that Jim Caton is wrong. The definitive explanation of Gen Jones’ nickname may be found in his obituary on pages 76 and 77 of the RE Journal of April 1988. Yours Sincerely, John Wilks.

Editor’s Note: Jim Caton is not the only one who is wrong on this point. The origin of Gen Jones’ nickname has been associated with the Festival of Britain Bridge by a whole generation of Sappers as acknowledged by Gen Sir Hugh Beach at Gen Jones’ Memorial Service in February 1988. The name actually derives from his time at the RMA Woolwich. In a boxing bout, he was paired off by weight, against a tall and gangling youth named Stack. The spectators christened Stack “Spider” and Jones, being shorter and more rotund, became “Splosh”. Both nicknames stuck for life.

Memorial at the Entrance to 1 TRRE, Cove

Dear Editor – With regard to Jim Harris’ letter about the memorial at Guillemont Barracks, I cannot answer his questions, but I do remember it was to the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, not the Royal Canadian Engineers. Yours Sincerely, FA Stevens.