Introduction

By Mick Malone

Gentlemen, welcome to the Portsmouth Field Gun Association Autumn newsletter.

Part way through preparing this edition we had the very sad news that our brother Danny Manners had lost his battle with cancer. Danny was held in the highest of esteem not just within the Portsmouth Field Gun, but also Devonport and Fleet Air Arm, by guys he played rugby with and those he served with in ships. Our thoughts go to Danny’s wife Laura and all members of his family.

In case anyone has missed the posts on Facebook and the web site, Danny’s funeral will be held at St Barbara’s church on Whale Island on Friday 27th October at 1100 followed by a service at The Oaks crematorium in Havant at 1300. Danny’s funeral will be conducted by The Bish, Rev Mike Brotherton. The GI's will be open for tea and coffee from 1030 with the bar open after the service until around 1600 when the plan is to move on to the White Horse in Southsea for ‘Laughter & Tears, Curry & Dits’. Let’s all give Danny a send-off to remember!

http://pfga.online/danny-manners-funeral
Moving on to more general stuff; I must mention how successful the 2017 reunion was. The attendance at the AGM was well over 180 and in the evening the best guess was that there were about 300 ex-field gunners in the White Horse. It was also good to see lots of our members with their beautiful wives/girlfriends/boyfriends/significant others (delete accordingly).

The more dapper members of the Association looked absolutely top notch in their stripy blazers. Well, nearly all of them. I think my old partner Bungy Williams had a bit of a sizing issue as his was long enough to fit Harry Wagg. However, that said, he still looked bloody smart!

It has been mentioned by many that this reunion had to be the best we’ve had since we finished on the track and it was absolutely brilliant to see loads of old mates swapping dits and sharing a few beers. Well, lots of beers to be precise, so many that we drank the pub out of Guinness! How cool is that?
In this edition there is a welcome note from the chairman and a dit from our president Bug Wrightson. There are also details of the Christmas social and heads’ ups for the summer reunion 2018, a Northern Reunion planned for February 2018 and details of the Army v Navy rugby match at Twickenham.

Finally, for long term planning purposes, Sparky Coombes has written a handy guide for going on tour with the British Lions in anticipation of the 2021 tour to South Africa.
President’s Forward

By Bug Wrightson

Shock, horror: The Chairman gave the President an action. That’s the last time I go to a Committee meeting!

Having said that, it gives me great pleasure to write a Foreword for this Newsletter as there are so many positive things to talk about regarding the Association. Following hot on the heels of a very successful AGM and Reunion (although I was a bit jet lagged having just got back from Vietnam), I want to give a very public Bravo Zulu to Tom and the Committee for everything they have done to take your Association forward. There are so many initiatives being taken forward but they include membership (large increase), clothing sales going very well, stripy blazers(!), huge public profile on the web, Twitter and Facebook, well organised social events, crew reunion dinners, and the Paypal payment system. In addition, the legacy for our kids/grandkids/great-grandkids is much improved following the gun refurbishment work and enhancements to the museum. The amount of work your Committee put in for your Association is immense and we are now reaping the benefits of that work. Please continue to support events and spread the word – there are still guys out there who manned the loops and not yet members of PFGA.

In short, the Portsmouth Field Gun Association is on the up and goes from strength to strength. It’s your Association; if you want anything different make sure you let the Committee know.

See you at the Christmas social.

Yours,

Bug

Bug Wrightson

President

The Field Gunners’ Association
From the Chairman...

by Tom Dooley


I was lucky enough to spend some quality time with Danny at last year’s Army v Navy and he was in good health and spirits sadly this was the last time I saw him so this is a Chairman’s address that I was hoping I would never have to write.

I count myself as very fortunate to have been PTI in 93 when Danny ran his first A crew and even more fortunate to have him run in 1997. A big, naturally strong, hard bastard who always had a big smile on his face. Danny would do anything for anyone. With a heart as big as a lion, a testament of which is that he was brave enough to face his fate and he even did that with that same smile on his face the last few messages he sent me sums up what a great man he was:

Danny was too poorly to attend 1997 Reunion in July, this is the message he sent that was read out to the crew amongst the speeches:

‘Gents, as you all know tonight is an occasion nobody would want to miss, unless they were an attention seeking girl. Well here I am, that girl. I really would love to be there with you all as I am sure it will be a cracking night. If you cast your minds back 20 years we were on the cusp of a great achievement it is only a shame that we were to be the last winning Pompey crew. I am sure in my mind that I could man the loops with you all again and recreate something, okay a 4 minute run isn’t that impressive by our standards but quicker than most old farts could achieve. Whilst not there in person believe me I am behind you all which is generally where me and Higgy were in gridders, not that we did that many. Have a great night tonight, a good reunion tomorrow and I hope to see some of you at next year’s Army v Navy. Danny Pompey A17 1997 the crew of legends.’

23/09/17 Reply from Danny after telling him the committee were going on a recce to Weymouth for next year’s reunion and we want him to be there:

‘That is my aim plus I want to see my eldest graduate next year. They may be running out of options but I am not running out of fight or determination. The thing is Tom apart from the hallucinations I would be fine’.

‘Ohh and if I could eat properly’.
Last message from Danny:

‘Thank you for the opportunity to be a winner. Danny’.

On behalf of the Association I have to say a big thank you and well done to Steve Rowlands, Cuz Curran, Leo Leeman, Florrie Ford and Kerry Packer who visited Danny in France shortly before he passed away and to everyone who has left messages and donated to the ‘Bring Danny home’ just giving page. The response has been absolutely amazing!

This is why we have an Association and if you ever manned the loops you should be a part of it.

We will miss you No 17…

1997 The 20 Year Reunion Dinner 28 July 2017

I received a letter from Commodore Tribe, the CO of HMS EXCELLENT from 1997 who with his wife Pamela was the Guest of Honour at 1997 Reunion Dinner. I think sums up the dinner and reunion weekend:

Tom,

How can we thank you enough for the generosity, warm welcome and kindness you and your great team of 1997 showed to Pamela and me over the Dinner especially, but also at the AGM yesterday.

From the pre-Dinner drinks right through the delicious meal, the copious wines, the speeches, Wayne’s regular 5 minute breaks (some needed them…), the continuous laughs, quick fire dits, and the general celebratory atmosphere, we thought the evening a resounding success. Your team was/is made up of strong individuals who went through so much together. some many times of course, and they came out on top in 97, with silver; Temfic.

The lighting of the candles (respectfully done by Gibbo), the speech by Olivia, Bill’s port fine picks, Neil’s cuffing it despite his problems...the memories that will linger are many.

Tim, Stevie and Nick (hi, Nick!) in particular showed amazing powers of recovery at breakfast, and continued to appear bright and breezy back in the GI’s mess. We caught up with many well remembered Field Gunners there, and had a good time catching up with your President, downed some delicious (to me at any rate) rum and had a good chat with Gabby over in the museum before setting off home.

No doubt the day went from strength to strength at the White Horse…and with the social programme your committee are putting together, it will be the same for the PFGA in the years to come.

It was in ’97, and again at the unveiling in ’07 and now at the 20 year point, a special privilege for Pamela and me to share something of the PFG spirit which carried you to...
victory, and, as I said, I am honoured to be an Honorary Field Gunner; despite being 5ft 8inches, 147 pounds and 73 years old.....might not make the crew these days?!

And now something from my C-in-C...

Dear Tom,

Just adding my own thanks for a splendid and memorable evening. We couldn’t have enjoyed it more, and were so impressed by all your careful organisation. It was a great pleasure to be with you and all the team including the wives and partners.

I feel we are piling up our port fine picks - will certainly have to bring some more rum when we see you next - what with arriving late at your AGM, and the terrible story of the Marquee. (Please pass on belated apologies from me to Bill! Must do better; will try harder!)

It was a very special evening for Peter and me, and was topped off by our visit to Whale Island and the AGM on Saturday morning. We have been touched by the warmth and friendship you all showed us and it brought back treasured memories of the amazing summer of 1997.

Please pass on our thanks and warmest good wishes to everyone.

Yours, Pamela.
CHRISTMAS SOCIAL

Start Time: 1900

Food: A choice of 3 dishes in the form of a hot buffet will be available from 2000

Entertainment: We will have a multi-talented Boot neck (if there is such an animal) singing, dancing, and serenading us with his instrument.

Carriages: 2359

As with the Summer Reunion David has kindly agreed to extend the 20% Bar discount to members who are wearing Field Gun Polos or Blazers.

There will be no charge for this function.

NORTHERN REUNION

We will be holding a fairly informal reunion in Bury (Lancs) on 24th February 2018, which just happens to be Calcutta Cup Day. It is also Tom Dooley’s birthday on the same day and he has promised to buy everyone who turns up a wet… to share between them!

Details will be made available closer to the time but for now we intend to stay at The Village Hotel just off the M66

ARMY v NAVY Twickenham Saturday 5th May 2018

Due to the popularity of this fixture you can no longer pre-book and tickets go on General Sale 01 Nov 2017. However, we have secured a limited number of tickets that will be available at 2 per MEMBER which will also include a pass to the Field Gun Bar in the Carling Suite. Cost will be £30 per ticket.

We also have 30 spaces reserved on a coach from the Phoenix pub which will include breakfast, transport, beer, buffet and entertainment on return along with match ticket and Carling Suite pass. Cost for this is £80.

Tickets will be sold via the shop on the Association website with payment through PayPal on a first come first serve basis and strictly limited to 2 per member so that everyone gets a fair crack.

Once live this will be advertised via Association social media.

There is a small surcharge on the face value of the tickets to cover PayPal commission,
postage and a donation to the Association.

In previous years there has been an issue with Carling Suite arm bands being duplicated which has led to the possibility of a withdrawal of this facility. Command Field Gun are the only RN contingent to be granted this privilege (even at £5.50 at pint!) I would expect any Portsmouth Association members to respect this.

Due to ongoing improvements at Twickenham the West car park no longer accepts coaches.

**SUMMER REUNION 2018**

The summer reunion for next year will be held in Weymouth. The committee paid a quick visit on Saturday 23 September to check out a few possible venues after Nige Swinden did a bit of research for us in advance.

We also had an opportunity to meet up with a couple of our locals, with Dave McGarel and Pincher Martin joining us along with Don Philpott (of FAA fame). We all behaved ourselves and it went well until some clown decided to buy a round of shots and it all went down-hill from then.

Rumour has it that at the end of the night Dave got the bus home to Portland, fell asleep, did a lap of the island and the bus was just about to head back over the causeway to Weymouth when he woke up. Good skills!

**Going to Ladysmith**

**By** Mark Coombes

Although many of the committee are now veterans of two successful Lions tours a lot of the members won’t be aware of this or the complexities involved as we don’t mention these tours very much. However, for those thinking of following in our well-trodden footsteps and putting their own flag in the ground, we have compiled a short list of things which you may wish to bear in mind when organising your expedition.

In addition, we will pass on information on the trips and accommodation we are intending to book and dates of availability of things such as flights and tickets for South Africa, together with other important information as and when it becomes available. It would be great to have as many association members as possible involved around June & July of 2021, especially when we get to Ladysmith which could be one of the best photo opportunities ever.

It’s my intention to carry out a series of trips to reconnoitre the Itinerary we may choose over the next few years and I will report back accordingly.

We by no means profess to be experts but we have learned a lot over the last two tours, and we hope that what we have discovered helps.
**Top Tips for a successful Lions tour**

1. **Choose your touring party carefully**

   Remember you will be spending the best part of 3 weeks with these people and regardless of the mode of accommodation & transport you choose you’re going to spend a great deal of time with these people most of which will be spent discussing drill and pissing up obviously but there will be a certain amount of time that you may have to put up with you telling you all what a great shag they are etc.

   Two tours and hardly anyone got filled in.

   NB. If you invite any WAFUs or Oggies (we did) always make sure you outnumber them at least five to one otherwise they can become very annoying.

2. **Saving,**

   Virtually nothing can be booked until a year out which gives you a great excuse for lots of planning meetings and plenty of time to save, If you break the likely cost of the trip down over 4 years (about £5.5K including spending money) then it becomes far more affordable than you think.

3. **Itinerary**

   Think about what you will do in-between games (make the most of the tour as you may not be returning to that particular continent any time soon) try to be imaginative whilst forming your Itinerary, trust me it is possible to mix a bit of culture with the inevitable visit to a colonial hostelry.

4. **Mode of travel and accommodation Pro’s & Cons**

   I. Camper vans are great fun when the weather is good and you are parked up by the beach but remember a Lions tour will always take place in the Southern Hemisphere Winter & the chances are that a lot of your daylight hours will be lost on the road.

   II. Hotels are very comfortable but not great value for money because you won't want to be sat in your room with your roommate all day (I refer you back to tip No 1).

   III. Airbnb's allow you to have all the comforts of home whilst being able to congregate in a ready-made mess square where you can discuss drill amongst other things, word of warning though no matter how big the Airbnb is you may end up sharing a pit with your oppo.

5. **Getting There**

   With the possible exception of South Africa where flights are shorter and the time difference is negligible, we would always recommend a one or two day stop over half way to your destination, as a whole day in the air and the associated jet lag takes its toll now that we are no longer track fit it also helps with bonding. When choosing your flight look for a reputable mid-range flight and invest in extra leg room, quite inexpensive but worth every penny when you are in the air for 13 hours.
6. Daily Routine

Don’t leave it to fate or expect things to happen through the process of an Irish parliament, by all means put it to the vote and remember you can always decide to do your own thing and meet up with the main group later on, but you need to elect a tribal elder or LHOM (and probably a different one each day) just to pull together the main itinerary of the day for the majority to follow.

7. Booking

When it comes to booking then make sure that you not only spread the jobs around but match the task to the persons own particular skill set.

Having chosen your flight which we always booked 364 days & 23 hours before the off, organised your transport to the airport, sorted transport at the other end (we never had more than 3 to a vehicle for obvious reasons), and decided where you’re going to stay then the only major decision left is the purchase of tickets for the three tests and any midweek games you might fit in.

Although it would be ideal to try and purchase the tickets separately having done everything else without the aid of someone like Gulliver’s travel, on both occasions the only way we have been able to ensure that we all had tickets together or otherwise is to buy them as part of a package.

In Australia we paid £1800.00 which included 2 nights in a hotel, really good two hour hospitality session prior to the game and great tickets for all three tests.

In NZ we paid £975.00 for hospitality and tickets although the hospitality wasn’t great and we only went to one of them and used the Airbnb to socialise before the game.

These are the main points however there is obviously a lot more that happens behind the scenes prior to, and once you arrive at your destination which are jobs that are shared out at the planning meeting along the way, things such as Gym locations and access, day trips, and AT.