



NMBVA CHAIRMANS REPORT TO AGM 2010

This report dates from 11th May this year, the date that I took up the office of Chairman having been co-opted by your NEC in line with our Constitution. It is comprehensive; covers a lot of ground; so please bear with me; make notes of questions you may want to ask and I will try to answer them at the end. Copies of my Report will be available at our Reception desk in the foyer afterwards so there is no need to make jottings.

I want to start by introducing my Team, the NEC; to pay tribute to them and thank them for the tremendous support they have given me since I took over and for their enthusiasm and esprit de corps whilst going about their duties:

Malcolm White: who was co-opted as Vice Chairman of the Association in May this year. Malcolm has also accepted the tasks of co-Editor of the Keris (Kris) magazine and the Newsletter that we propose to introduce. He is also the Coordinator for Postal Members North.

Ted Williams: our erstwhile Secretary who keeps us all on our toes and is usually your first port of call on Association matters.

Graham Bamford: whom many or most of you know as our Treasurer and ensures we remain solvent. Graham has decided that he wishes to stand down at the end of this meeting and so this will be his last report. He has given this Association 7 years of loyal service for which he has our absolute gratitude. We give our best wishes to him and to Pauline for their loyal support over the years.

John McAulay: who has been our Membership Secretary for the past three years, has worked tirelessly with his wife Gillian to keep our volatile data base up to date, and is usually our first and therefore important contact with new members. He also has decided to stand down and so this will be his last report too. We are grateful to both him and to his good lady Gillian for the valuable service they have rendered to the Association and I am sure we will continue to hear from John and his Doncaster/South Yorkshire Branch.

Annie Burden: not just our fantastic webmaster but also our regalia officer, so if there is something you want see Annie. Her speed of response to help us make the website changes has been exemplary albeit she works full time also.

Brian Roche: A stalwart member of the NEC, Coordinator of Postal Members South, and co-editor of the Keris and proposed Newsletter. Brian contributes much, all to the good and benefit of Members.

And our three non-executive members of the NEC are:

Ron Blain: who is both our International Liaison Officer and Coordinator for Postal members overseas - I should add that postal members North, South, and overseas, together form a major slice of our Association numbering some 900 in all so our Coordinators are kept very busy.

Don Mott: who you all know as our Cenotaph Organiser. Don also looks after our Association contributions at the annual Westminster Abbey Field of Remembrance. I will be marching with Don at the Cenotaph this year.

And finally, one last non-executive member who is not present today, and whom we co-opted earlier this year:

George McKie: George lives in KL and we co-opted him in August this year as our NEC in-theatre representative so to speak. He will keep us informed about happenings in that part of the world and represent the Association at suitable activities when no Officers of the Association are visiting. He will for example be laying our wreath in KL on Remembrance Day during a British High Commission memorial service.

When I accepted the post of Chairman in May, I scratched my head, wondering where to start, and asked myself two vital questions: Who are we? What is it we want to do? So I looked first at our Constitution and website and reminded myself that **we are**:

Colleagues who have served in HM Forces, the Commonwealth Forces, the Royal Federation of Malaya Police, the Civil Service, St John Ambulance and Auxiliary Forces, during the Second World War, the Malayan Emergency, and the Borneo Indonesian confrontation and thereafter. That's who we are.

And what exactly is it we want to do? Well our Objectives are also set down in our Constitution, repeated on our website, and there are six (6). We have said that **we want**:

1. First; To bring together in true comradeship those who have served in Malaya, Borneo, Singapore and Brunei during the Second World War, the Malayan Emergency, the Confrontation and thereafter in the above countries.
2. Second; we want - To assist Members in their time of need.
3. Third; we want - To remember with pride, respect and gratitude those of all nationalities who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty and to ensure that those who fell [**are remembered**] and that the Association is represented on the day of Remembrance at Home and Abroad [**overseas**].

4. Fourth; we also want - To promote the Association and it's Aims throughout the Commonwealth of Nations and other Nations and to seek Affiliations with similar Organisations.
5. At five; we want -To strengthen our ties with Malaysia, The Republic of Singapore and Brunei Darussalam.
6. And finally – we want - To hold an annual reunion.

I will return to these six objectives at the end of my report so that we can test if our eye is on the ball and how we are doing!

Soon after becoming Chairman I paid my respects to our Patron, General Sir Garry Johnson, who will join us this evening; and also to our Honorary President Frank Rhodes. You may know that Frank is not well at the moment and I have sent best wishes to him, on your behalf, for a speedy recovery. Your Agenda at Item 22 suggests that Frank will take the Chair through the election of Officers for the next year. However in the absence of Frank I have asked John McAulay to do that for us.

I have established contact with the Presidents of our International Malaya and North Borneo Associations in Australia; New Zealand; South Africa; Canada; Dato Thambipillay and the federation of Singapore-Brunei Darusallalam-Java-Sumatra Association.

I made contact with the new Defence Adviser at the Malaysian High Commission in London, Brig Gen Othman, who came into office in January 2010. We had arranged to meet in London on 29th September but an eleventh hour visit by the Prime Minister of Malaysia meant we had to abort to a later date.

Finally, I have sent a message of introduction to the Defence Adviser at our High Commission in Malaysia, Colonel Jacques Lemay who also came into office in January 2010.

I have had *many* messages from Branches and members since May and two prominent issues have featured in most of them: Top of the list was the need for better and more frequent **communication**. In close second place was a desire, and in some cases *a demand*, for **openness and access** to Association business and information.

The letters and messages I have received prompted me to recall a short story from my military experience and it is very relevant to this Association today. You will know that when Margaret Thatcher came to power she set about dismantling the nationalised industries and introducing a business culture. MOD was not exempt from this and in all military units we were required to produce our business plans with financial responsibility delegated downwards from formation headquarters. Some of these business plans were *enormous* and we were struggling with understanding exactly what was required. At that time we had an RMP TAVR unit recruited entirely from the Automobile Association and during a visit to Chichester which was at that time home of the RMP, the Director General of the AA, one Olaf Lambert, produced from his pocket a postcard on which he had set his business plan to be followed by his entire senior management of the AA as their future modus operandi. On the postcard were just three simple statements, nothing more:

1. Give the Members [of the AA] what they want.
2. Return accounts printed in black.
3. Keep the staff happy by giving them clear direction.

He kept this postcard in his pocket at all times so that he could keep reminding his subordinate management Team and I have long been an admirer of these simple statements that encompass everything:

- You will hear from our Treasurer later that our accounts are printed in black.
- I think of staff in our Association as the members of the NEC and Branch committees and in recent months we have been setting down clear direction which is hopefully keeping our staff happy, though there is more to do and, remembering that you cannot satisfy all of the members all of the time, we will try to satisfy most of the members most of the time!
- Therefore it is time now to 'Give the members, which means you, what you want' and this is the theme that I hope will run through this AGM and to this time next year when we can assess if we have achieved.

So we, and by that I mean your NEC, set about addressing the two issues of **better and more frequent communication and openness** as a matter of high priority, linking our efforts also to the need to 'give the members what they want.' Here is a summary of our recent activity:

1. I wrote to every single members of the Association and my letter was delivered with your copy of the Keris Magazine to all those named on our comprehensive data base – **this is an example of better communication!**
2. We created a new side folder on the home page of our website and posted my first message to members there in June. Two further messages have been posted in September including one welcoming back into the fold Tyneside Branch who are represented here today – **another example of better communication!** - and let us welcome Tyneside back into the fold.
3. In yet another website folder: we posted the Records of our NEC meetings in May and August of this year; the record of the Delegates meeting in April; the Minutes of the AGMs in 2008 and 2009; and the Agenda for this meeting which was posted on the website on the 16th September. [and despatched to those attending soon after]. This report that I make today will be on the website next week, and Minutes of this AGM will follow closely and promptly so that members who are unable to be with us this weekend can see what has been said and agreed. Relevant extracts will appear in our first Association-wide Newsletter and Keris magazine – **these are yet more examples of better communication and openness!**
4. We have provisionally determined a minimum need of at least one Keris magazine each year and at least one Newsletter distributed to every paid up member of the Association. I say provisionally because we will, of course, give the members what they want and you will hear more about the options of frequency, cost and distribution methods from the Vice Chairman in his report, which follows mine – **once again more examples of better communication!**

5. The Association Secretary will distribute Information letters to Branches as required but possibly up to three per year. These will not at this time reach our postal members and we do need to make further considerations about that. In the short term they will be posted on the website too and we do need to encourage the use of electronic communications wherever we can – **another example of better communication!**
6. You will hear from the Treasurer later how we are laying on the table today an annual budget, for your approval. I understand this is a first for the Association. We then need to live within that budget or justify overspend in the same way that any business has to. Postage costs are being studied and the use of franking or other cost reduction methods is a consideration we are making. I must repeat again however the essential need to have good email communication with our Branches if we are to keep costs down and have swift passage of information. Naturally we rely on our Branches in turn to have their own fan-out arrangements to their members – **This budget will be yet another example of better communication and openness!**
7. Annie has been undertaking a major task of tidying up our website with new available information posted and an opportunity for members to exchange messages in the members Open Forum folder. Requests to post a message, other than in the open forum, should be sent to Annie, using your membership number – **this is better communication and openness once more!**

In May this year I set an exam question to the NEC: “What does a member of the Association get for their annual subscription?” At the meeting in August your NEC concluded, in no particular order of priority:

- Benevolence – when a member falls on hard times (at the behest of Branches or Postal Coordinators after inquiry and recommendation).
- A Keris Magazine - at least once per annum, possibly in May.
- A Members Newsletter - at least one per annum possibly in December.
- Secretary’s Information letters - as necessary but possibly three per annum.
- Website upkeep.
- Insurance for Branch Standards; members on parade; and third party (around £86 pa).
- **Donations to Charities selected and agreed at each AGM.**
- (Possible) contributions to attend specified meetings; **but more of that on the Agenda.**
- High postage cost for Postal members, though they contribute more subscription.
- Management costs of the Association: NEC incidental expenses including: reasonable travel and accommodation; printing and ink cartridges; postage; telephone calls; international contact.

Association Funds:

- The current state of play and the worth of the fund will be reported by Grahame. [Worth is in the region of £34k].
- I have asked the Treasurer to lay a budget before this AGM for approval covering the year from November 2010 to October 2011. I am proposing that this will be the norm at future AGMs. More of this from Grahame.
- The Constitution provides for accounts to be audited by a panel of Members and **we can explore the feasibility of that later today.**
- We cannot run a business without income and payment of subscriptions, our only income, is therefore vital. The Treasurer, in my experience since taking over, spends far too much time chasing subscriptions and so we need to look at better ways of achieving the objective, ways that you will all be happy with. **Your NEC will consider options and get back to you.** You will recall that at last year's AGM we resolved unanimously a proposal that there should be one payment date for subscriptions; that it should be 1st September for Branches, starting in 2010, and starting 2011 for postal members.
- One issue that Grahame made me aware of was that in order to ensure we can place audited accounts before you at our annual AGM in October each year, and making allowance for the extraordinary length of time auditors can take, we need to end our financial year earlier so that audited accounts can be presented. Grahame will bring forward a proposal later today. [FY currently 1 Sep to 31 Aug. Proposed 1 Jul to 30 Jun]

Keris Magazine: The feedback was all positive; there has been no opposition; yes, there are some lessons to learn, but minor; and as I said earlier you will hear from Malcolm White next.

Postal Members: They are the biggest 'Branches' [some 900 members in all] and regular communication is expensive if we don't have electronic means, so it is essential that we encourage electronic communication as much as we can and also develop a buddy-buddy system where that is possible so that those who do have electronic means may communicate with those that do not, a sort of military fan-out warning system! **We are proposing also that we should invite attendance of two postal members at each Delegates meeting so that we can take a view of their unique circumstances.**

Medals:

- Let me deal first with the PJM. It has been the catalyst for increasing membership to our Association and will probably continue to be so. But we are all irked by the lack of permission, by the last government, to wear the PJM. Fred Burden will bring us all up to date at Item 18 of the Agenda and will take questions of a general nature, but personal questions should be addressed to him separately. This has been for Fred an enormous undertaking and we should all be grateful to him for what he has done and is continuing to do. As an aside, the 2010 programme of presentation ceremonies is on our website.

- And then there is the question of a Rosette for those who are outside the criteria for the PJM. I wrote last week to the DA at the BHC in KL and asked if he could test the water with the Malaysian Government on the feasibility of awarding a rosette to those who fell outside of the criteria for the PJM. I have also raised questions about not overlooking Veterans when government starts to consider the award of the coming Queens Diamond Jubilee medal. And finally, as put to me by one of our members, 'what about a National Defence medal for those who made sacrifice and contributed in their own way to the success of operations but who were not actually in the operational theatres and therefore received no recognition at all?'

At the recent Conservative Party Conference I had hoped to ask a question on these four matters from the floor and was invited to contribute. However the Agenda for the Defence and Foreign Affairs debate was such that it concentrated in the main on defence cuts which hijacked the allotted time. Nevertheless, in the 'corridors' afterwards I handed personally to William Hague, Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary, and to Liam Fox, Secretary of State for Defence, a copy of my submission and in conversation with them, both said they would look closely at the issues. There was much talk in the debate about rebuilding the covenant and I had included that in my submission and made reference to the recent headline by General Sir Richard Dannatt, late CGS, when he said, whilst talking about the covenant, ".....but what about the Veterans?" Understandably, the cuts announced on 19th and 20th October will have a bearing on affordability and conflict of other priorities on any submissions we make, but permission to wear the PJM, which is recognition of contribution and sacrifice by the Malaysian government; and would be similar recognition by our *own* government; would cost our Treasury nothing and be a feather in the cap of those wishing to repair the covenant!

Some relevant snippets of the Conference debate covered:

- A 24 hour veteran's helpline, announced on 8th October [check the Veterans Agency site].
- Ensuring that service personnel in uniform are *not* turned away from establishments.
- The welfare of veterans is a high priority with government.
- A government determination to work with charities and Associations and not reinvent the wheel.
- A recognition that the duty of care does not end when one leaves the services.

I have every intention, with my political connections, and on your behalf, of holding this government to account for these messages and I was subsequently invited to copy my submission to the PPS of William Hague which I have done. I will post my submission on our website for your perusal [if I have not already done so?].

Administration: We have done some work to standardise and tidy up our headed paper so that we are all using the same, at least at NEC level, to improve our professionalism and image as seen by other organisations. The Association Secretary has made the template available to Branches.

International Relations: I said earlier that I had made contact with the leaders of our International Associations and I have proposed to them a federation of our Associations which should give us a stronger International profile and a greater defence against copy. **This issue is work in progress.** I am concerned however to learn of the fragmentation of the NMBVAA with Australian States breaking away from the national body. We are standing neutral, not taking sides, and watching carefully whilst they sort their business out. I have had a number of communications from both the National body and the Incorporated Independent State bodies. When their business is concluded we must take a view and then reconnect with our colleagues in the most appropriate way. This will be an Agenda Item at our next NEC on 19th November by which time the situation in Australia might hopefully be clear.

Whilst talking of breakaways, I must make mention of our own recent troubles, though I prefer always to look forwards and never favour looking backwards. Colleagues, I hope that what you see here today and what you hear from your NEC here today will filter back to those former Branches that are no longer a part of our national body, so that they can see there is no reason why they should not return to the fold as our Tyneside Branch has done. There is no loss of face for anyone and I do hold out an olive branch and say the door is open for your return. Surely there can be no reason now why you should not?

Memorial: At last year's AGM there were complaints about the Association Memorial at the National Arboretum and John McAulay gave us a resume of the problems, majoring on the need for maintenance; some restoration; and a rethink on what to do about the Keris. You may recall that a Memorial sub-committee led by Grantham Branch [Ian Newton] looked at our memorial; concluded that there was no support for structural changes and the sub-committee was disbanded. We are grateful to Grantham for their Report but unfortunately, following the severest winter for many a year, I regret to say that the Keris plinth has suffered even more and I have been receiving critical comment, from members, about its condition, asking what we are going to do. Therefore, we need to take yet another radical look at the memorial and come up with a sustainable solution. I have invited Chas Timms, the Chairman of Surrey Branch to do that for us. He will be making contact with Branches to seek your ideas and will then submit to us a costed proposal for consideration. I hope that by this time next year we may have resolved at least the design issue once and for all and are well on the way with an agreed improvement plan. If anyone would like to make a contribution to considerations, please contact Chas Timms at Surrey Branch.

Future Meetings: I can announce today the dates of future meetings:

- NEC Meetings: 19th November 2010; 8th April 2011; 5th August 2011.
- Delegates Meeting: 9th April 2011 starting at 1030 Yew Lodge Kegworth.
- Reunion weekend and AGM 21 to 23 October 2011 with AGM on 22 October 2011. [Venue to be determined by Secretary in vote taken at Item 23].

The Key issues: After what has been a fairly hectic 5 months, I see the current key issues to be addressed as:

- Wearing the PJM, but who isn't?
- Copyright – who control or offends?
- Returning former Branches and members to the fold – why not?

- International relationships and possible federation.
- New Branches if we can group our many postal members?
- Recruiting more members.

Meritorious Service: I have made an award to John Martland 1st Lincolnshire Branch for his hard work loyalty and dedication to the Association over many years and during his time as National Secretary. I will be making two other awards at the end of this meeting and our Patron will make two further awards at dinner this evening. [From me after meeting: Grahame Bamford who has been our National Treasurer for 7 years, with flowers for Pauline; George Tullis who was National Secretary for some 4 years but cannot be with us today so I will ask Ted Williams to accept on his behalf and deliver on the way home. From Patron this evening: Fred Burden who was Membership Secretary for 7 years, Vice Chairman for 2 years and has been PJM Coordinator for 6 years, with flowers for Annie Burden; and John McAulay who has been our National Membership Secretary for 3 years, with flowers for Gillian]

Conclusion:

I said at the start that I would return to our 6 objectives set down in our Constitution to determine if we have kept a close eye upon them to point us in the direction we believe we should be going:

- Are we bringing together in true comradeship those who served in the countries our Association is aligned to? Our Branch meetings; our AGM; and our proposed improvements to communication will ensure that we are.
- Are we assisting Members in their time of need? [paupers grave avoided by the actions of John McAulay for example and subscriptions waved for a member who simply cannot afford]
- Are we remembering with pride and respect those who have made the ultimate sacrifice? At every Branch meeting we remember; and at Remembrance days in UK and overseas and other suitable occasions; at Wooton Bassett repatriations we are almost always represented and with our standards. There are so many other Branch involvements too.
- Are we promoting the Association and its aims throughout the Commonwealth of Nations and seeking affiliations with similar organisations? You have heard of my own contacts with our International colleagues and you will hear more from Ron Blain later.
- Are we strengthening our ties with Malaysia the republic of Singapore and Brunei Darussalam? We have appointed a satellite Member of the NEC who is resident in KL and so strengthening our ties and ensuring we are represented, and our Association is even more visible.
- Are we holding an annual reunion? This is it and it has been suggested to me that we rename the weekend 'annual reunion' during which we hold an AGM'

And so the answer to all those questions is yes, we are indeed focussed on our Constitution and the aims and objectives we have set ourselves. Your NEC has covered a lot of ground in just 5 months.....

But there is more to do!

So join with me colleagues and together let us make our Association the envy of *all* Veterans.

Thank You

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tex Pemberton." The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Lieutenant Colonel Tex Pemberton OBE
Chairman
National Malaya & Borneo Veterans Association

23 October 2010 – 1200hrs.