

Hey! Bluebell!

**Twist**

To

Open

“RAEME is outstanding. If you are looking for Bluebell out in the field, look for the red, yellow and blue tri-colour above the largest taj mahoochie around. Even if the temperature is 40 degrees in the shade, there you’ll see a bunch of proud soldiers, who somehow have ice-cold goffas and gumpy. [‘gumpy’ is any type of ‘chocolate bar’. Fudd.]

They are some of the Army’s smartest soldiers, who work hard but don’t believe in doing it hard if they can help it. RAEME tradies are the first up in the mornings, to get the vehicles, equipment, or helicopters working ... and they work late into the night to ensure they are serviceable for the next day.

RAEME personnel drive trucks, armoured vehicles, crew aircraft, man machine guns and can fix them all when they stop working. If you bog your Bushmaster in a river, they will turn up with a Heavy Recovery Vehicle.

If your APC needs a powerpack change, they will turn up in an Armoured Recovery Vehicle with a new one and do a change-out in the field. If your aircraft radio has nothing but hash coming through, they’ll chase squiggly amps until it is fixed. Those guys can walk on water.”

[the] final piece of advice was that I must finish my welcome to you today, with the RAEME motto:

*Arte et Marte, is Latin, he tells me, for Twist to Open”.*

Extract from RAEME 75th Anniversary Address by Wing Commander (Ret’d) Sharon Bown, Friday, 1 December, 2017  
Parade Ground, Australian War Memorial, in RAEME Craftsman, Issue No.68 2017

**Greetings fellow 106ers and special thanks to all the contributors for what follows.**

Early 2011, prompted by the mention of 'Bluebell' by someone in the old Message Log, I asked myself the most ponderous question the answer to which I had no idea: **"Why Bluebell?"** Like everybody I guess, its usage was understood and taken for granted and I could not recall **ever** having it explained anywhere, but, after so many years, I decided that I **had to know**.

So I started casually asking around at opportune times and nobody knew or at best gave some modicum for an answer. Early February 2011, I contacted Bob Thompson (Art. Gun, SVN '68-'69, with whom I have had many educational exchanges prior to this and to make use of his library of contacts) and he too confessed ignorance but between us we decided to find out!

Well! What a journey it turned out to be!

In the following thirty-plus pages, you will find all the written correspondence that I have collected over the years and present chronologically. I was going to combine them all into a 'book type' presentation but I felt that it would be better to read the words, 'as writ', by the contributors; and besides, it suited this old Tels Slacker! You will need to read to the end to find out the answer to **"Why Bluebell?"**

I hope that you like the front cover and the extract on Page 2 – which I thought was the best I have ever heard describing all of us RAEME. (And for those who were able to be at the 'Windup Reunion', coming very close are the speeches by LTCOL Steve Cleggett and that by LTCOL Claude 'Rotor Button'\* Palmer (Retd.) at the same event – the script recorded for Claude were but 'notes' for his speech and do not do justice for what he said. To read their speeches, click this link: <http://www.106fdwksp.com/sites/default/files/content/2018ReunionReportVer3.pdf> and see Pages 5 & 8.

OK, back to 'Bluebell'. From the **RAEME Corps History And Ethos** publication by the Army, the following is all it says about 'Bluebell':

**"For the purposes of identification in military radio parlance, RAEME personnel are referred to as 'Bluebells'. A RAEME Craftsman is affectionately known as a 'Crafty' – only because of the 'Oz' military trait of abbreviating everything, not because he is! According to the average Crafty, RAEME actually is an abbreviation for:  
'RAEME Aids Everyone, Mends Everything.'"**

Well, so that's from our official history book! Here's something, I think, is more enlightening sourced from *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*

**"Bluebell" or, rather, bluebell. 'Metal polish, regardless of any brand name' (Granville): RN (and other Services': P.B.) coll.: since ca. 1910. Ex the brand name Bluebell.**



**Some claim that THIS is the ORIGIN**

And an indulgence – I always loved it when the chorus rang out “**Up the old red rooster and more piss!**” as we took on the Borlace Club whenever we could. Here is a bit of research as to its possible origin:

SMH, 8 Jan 2007. ***Straight out of the mess*** [Ralph Pridmore (Major, Retd.) Turramurra]

Concerning the recent hoo-hah about the origins of the Aussie cricket team's victory song ("Victory song goes soldiering on," January 6-7), I think Tom Keneally is on the right track, that it was an Australian Army song from World War II. In my 20 years in the regular army, in the 1960s and '70s, it was sung or shouted (it had no melody) with larrikin enthusiasm in the Royal Australian Engineers whenever things got too serious, for example during a formal dinner in the sergeants' or officers' mess, and it went like this:

*Two arms two hands-Two steely bands,  
Beneath the Southern Cross I stand-A hero of my native land, Australia!  
**Up the old red rooster-And more piss.***

And finally before you go and read about 'Bluebell', here it is for the *Old Bluebell Sunray* ...  
\* (Rotor Button); a little bit out of context, but here it is anyway ... straight from himself!

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**Re: Time to CONFESS

**Date:**Mon, 1 Oct 2018 17:58:07 +1000 (AEST)

**From:**claudpalmer claudpalmer <claudpalmer@bigpond.com>

**To:**elmer.varga@yahoo.com

Hi Elmer,

Like so many pseudonyms, actually lost in time (fair dinkum). But a colleague thought that, to limit unlawful use of vehicles in my first platoon (Recov Pl 101 Inf Wksp 1 Div), I removed the distributor rotors! I have nil recall of this, but another suggested that in my first LAD (1 Sig Regt), I inherited a slack unit, and my regular rounds to the shop were likened to the rotor arm delivering necessary sparks!

Cheers and Best,

Claude

----- Original Message -----

From: elmer.varga@yahoo.com

To: "RotorButton" <claudpalmer@bigpond.com>

Sent: Saturday, 29 Sep, 2018 At 3:58 PM

Subject: Time to CONFESS

Hi Claude,

[ cut ]

I am editing some Unit recollections (submitted by a 106er who will remain anon. for the time being) and he mentions you by proper name and then, of course, by, "Rotor Button". [ cut ] ... do you know WHY/HOW you got the 'gong? [ cut ]

Regards,

Elmer

Now, here follows the unedited, chronological, journey of the story behind “**Why Bluebell?**”

p.s. – “PUBLISHED TO LOG” was an automatic stamp applied to any message which was posted to the old Message Log

p.p.s – if anybody knows or finds out confirmed/substantive additions to the story ... contact RAEME!

**From:** EMEINFO [mailto:knowhow@raeme.info]  
**Sent:** 10 February 2011 03:21  
**To:** REME Museum Enquiries  
**Cc:** 'B & J Cameron'; boclair@boclair.com  
**Subject:** Birth of RAEME call sign Bluebell.

Good day and greetings from Australia,

My website, RAEME Knowhow, has been asked by Bruce Cameron MM who writes books on Armour, where did the call sign 'Bluebell' originate, and why Bluebell? I have searched and asked lots of Army people to have NOBODY have an answer. Can you help? I suspect we got it from you.

Kind Regards, Bob Thompson

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log  
**Date:**Sat, 12 Feb 2011 16:16:19 -0700  
**From:**knowhow@raeme.info  
**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Bob Thompson <Bob Thompson>  
knowhow@raeme.info  
Sun, 13Feb2011 - 0814

**Bluebell Cont. answer by Historian Mike Cecil.**

Mike Cecil, who till he recently retired, held a senior position at the AWM where he specialised in Military Technology, especially Military Vehicles and Ordnance. Among his writings are books: Field Artillery 1939 – 1945, Local Pattern Carriers 1939 – 1945; Australian Scout and Armoured cars 1933-1945; The M113 and M113A1 APC in Australian Service 1962-1972; Battle group Leopard; Australian Armour Exercises in the North and his latest; Mud and Dust Australian Army Vehicles and Artillery in Vietnam. **I asked Mike, an old friend, what he could tell me about our call sign Bluebell. He sent me the following:**

Hi Bob,

For your information, I've had a look at some British Signals Pams, and the 1943 list of 'appointments' in the Signal Training Pams lists REME as 'Bluebells' under 'Standard Code Names and Code Words'. In the 1968 British RAC training Pam Part 10: Tactical and Logistical Data, Appendix C: Appointments Code', the REME and Technical Engineer Representative (this is a joint code list for ARMY and Air Force, the TER being a RAF appointment) is still 'Bluebell'.

In fact, the entire British code words list was adopted by the Australian Army without variation, and is still current today (I checked!) Seems you can confidently tell Bruce it was directly adopted from the British codeword list at about the time of the formation of the AEME.

I doubt there is more of an 'origin' than convenience, as per the other names on the list, and without any deeper meaning, but will be interested to see what others come up with, nevertheless.

Best regards, Mike

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sat, 12 Feb 2011 18:30:15 -0700

**From:**normanden@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Dennis Norman <Dennis Norman>

normanden@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1024

**BLUEBELL what's in a name**

G'day All,

So the reason why BLUEBELL was chosen for RAEME seems to be lost in time or buried in a pamphlet somewhere, is it? Meanwhile, I have it on no good authority that it stands for:

*“Brilliant Little Units Eradicating Busted Equipment Like Legends”;*

Seriously, there seems to be some sense in calling an Armoured Representative IRONSIDE, an Army Air Corps Representative HAWKEYE and a Provost Representative WATCHDOG for example, so perhaps there are logical, emotional or hidden meanings and relationships between the other code word choices.

As a bluebell is a flower, could the answer lie in the meaning of the flower name? Under a list of flower names and meanings I found *“Bluebell: Gratitude, Constancy, Humility”*. That's appropriate, isn't it?

Now if my attempts are not enough for you, can someone else pleeeeeease tell us, in no uncertain terms, why BLUEBELL was chosen?

All the Best, Magic

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sat, 12 Feb 2011 19:12:30 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1104

**Bluebell**

I was told many years ago that blue bell and indeed the “Coronet of fleurs de lils” stemmed from the blue lilly of the Nile (which is really an agapantha) and that it was used to note the Corps first major repair task just before the battle at El Alemein.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sat, 12 Feb 2011 21:45:31 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1344

**Bluebell**

Laurie Lilly told us that back 69 at RTC

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sat, 12 Feb 2011 23:52:08 -0700

**From:**normanden@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Dennis Norman <Dennis Norman>

normanden@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1419

**Bluebell**

G'day again All, Got it this time. I knew it had to be the flower lead.

From the dictionary, bluebell refers to "any of several bulbous plants of the genus Hyacinthoides (syn. Endymion) in the lily family, native to western Europe and northwest Africa and having racemes of usually blue to pink bell-shaped flowers." (A raceme is a flower having short floral stalks). And so there it is "raceme", a word so similar to RAEME that due to a typo or a simple mistake by some early Crafty thinking the 'c' was silent, we got labelled bluebells! Also, note the EME ending (in raceme) was probably enough to clinch the relationship too.

Send the red Adelaide.

Regards, Magic

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 00:00:58 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1554

**Blue Bell.**

Great Magic maybe we should have been called Royal Australian Corps of Electrical and Mechanical Engineers. However Blue Bell is also used by REME, RNZEME, RCEME and a few other EME Corps around the world. It is interesting to note that the cap badges are almost the same in all Commonwealth countries, Pakistan replaced the crown with a crescent moon and India with the flower on their national flag. I think Malaysia has two lightning bolts supporting the scroll.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 00:34:41 -0700

**From:**boclair@boclair.com

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: John Sinclair <John Sinclair>

boclair@boclair.com

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1608

**Badge**

The *horse forcene* (rearing) chained to the earth used in the RAEME badge is taken from the Royal Charter of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers. For RAEME the world is of the Southern Hemisphere.

The Charter begins:

“George the fifth by the Grace of God of Great Britain, Ireland and the British Dominions beyond the Seas King Defender of the Faith Emperor of India. To all to whom these Presents shall come, Greeting!

Whereas the Association incorporated under the Companies Acts 1862 and 1867 and known as the Institution of Mechanical Engineers hath petitioned Us for a Charter of Incorporation such as is in and by these Presents granted.”

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 00:50:14 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1644

**bluebell**

The major repair was to make blown up Italian Tanks serviceable for use by the 8th army. Evidently the whole task was carried out in howling sand storm. If my memory serves correctly it also to the granting of the Royal title after WWII. Over to you John Sinclair for verification on that one.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 01:33:23 -0700

**From:**boclair@boclair.com

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: John Sinclair <John Sinclair>

boclair@boclair.com

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1714

**Creation of an EME service**

The need for dedicated EME service was indeed brought to a head by the Desert campaign. In the withdrawal before Rommel's army to Al Alamein, heavy losses of British equipment resulted from breakdown and lack of recovery. The British Government, under strain from having sufficient tradesmen for the Theatres as well as home front production, setup the Beveridge Committee which recommended the establishment of an EME service with two prongs, (1)repair and recovery and (2)inspection service as well as a training wing. In 1942 REME was formed drawing tradesmen from Ord, Supply and Transport and Engineers.

REME's first test was getting the tanks, guns and other fighting equipment to battle worthy condition for the Battle of El Alamein. Montgomery attributed to REME much of the success for the El Alamein battle and the subsequent advance which eventually resulted in the German and Italian forces being driven from North Africa. It was Montgomery who coined the phrase "The punch behind the Army's fist".

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 02:18:08 -0700

**From:**boclair@boclair.com

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: John Sinclair <John Sinclair>

boclair@boclair.com

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1811

**Bluebell**

How about this Terry? Agapanthus campanulatus (African bluebell, African Blue lily or Bell Agapanthus) but campanulatus means bell shaped apparently. Can't believe everything Laurie Lilley said or even Milton, talking of RSMs.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 02:45:31 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sun, 13Feb2011 - 1840

**Blue Bell**

I can't believe we are all talking about this so fervently. But then again I suppose we are now the Grandfathers of the Corps

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 12:53:11 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Mon, 14Feb2011 - 0451

**Blue Bell**

The POMS reckon it comes from Blue Bell Metal Polish, the forrunner to Brasso.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Sun, 13 Feb 2011 15:01:04 -0700

**From:**rossross@westnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Ross (Drac) Grant <Ross (Drac) Grant>

rossross@westnet.com.au

Mon, 14Feb2011 - 0637

**Bluebell (Origin of) callsign.**

The mind is boggled by the retirees' dedication to sourcing the origin of the Bluebell callsign. I realize that spanners have a plethora of comfort goodies in the field compared to the arms (e.g. tentage , generators , refrigerators , air conditioned modules ,specialist vehicles and equipment ) and our inherent skills and intelligence . Is the callsign Bluebell used because it is a delicate flower requiring tender care and quality nourishment and parallels our need for the same in the field? You know that when not furiously working to service equipment for return to the front we demand as much comfort as we can generate through our efforts . For your delectation and cogitation .I eagerly anticipate an avalanche of replies (not necessarily all "tongue in cheek").

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Mon, 14 Feb 2011 04:51:54 -0700

**From:**president@106fdwksp.com

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: John Strachan <John Strachan>

president@106fdwksp.com

Mon, 14Feb2011 - 1957

**Bluebell**

Interesting to read all the 'wise words' re this subject. I even had a bash at some research myself with no more success than anyone else EXCEPT I note from British records that WWII voice procedure nicknames were not necessarily single service. Most were for joint use - Navy, Marine, Army, Airforce and "other".

Bluebell was originally a designated joint use nickname relating to engineering representatives in Marine, Army and Airforce elements (It seems Navy did not adopt this nickname at that time). Any attempt therefore to align the origin of this nickname to REME or RAEME unfortunately is wide of the mark (sorry Dennis). It is more probable the word was randomly chosen on the basis Bluebells are prolific throughout England, was a word in common usage not only for the species of flower but also the fact many roads and inns in England also bear this title.

Bluebell was probably, as one contributor suggested, one of many common use easy to remember words nominated as nicknames. It is interesting that Bluebell is entrenched in the Australian Army more as a formal and procedural reference to RAEME. Whereas informally today, the word "spanners" is the preferred nickname for RAEME soldiers - a catchy easy to relate to word - a tool that some RAEME tradesmen use. A common use word of the day can, for some, morph into something more significant than the basic meaning of the word itself. The origin of the word in these cases seems to lose any particular relevance?

Cheers, John Strachan

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**FW: Birth of RAEME call sign Bluebell.

**Date:**Mon, 14 Feb 2011 11:40:50 -0000

**From:**Corps Archivist <archives@rememuseum.org.uk>

**To:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com, knowhow@raeme.info

**CC:**aoba-asstsec@btconnect.com, Technical Historian <techhist@rememuseum.org.uk>, Senior Curator <snrcur@rememuseum.org.uk>

Thank you both\* for your enquiry about the origins of the “Bluebell” ‘Call Sign’ for REME.

The swift answer to your query is that no one knows how the official Appointment Title of “Bluebell” came about. However, it was certainly mentioned at Sandhurst when I went through in 1968 and, being slightly embarrassed at the time about the title, I asked the ‘old sweat’ Royal Signals Sgt Instructor, who was taking us for voice procedure, why we (REME) were named after a flower!

He responded that the Appointment Title “Bluebell” came into being in 1942 when the Corps of REME was formed – the War Office was scratching around for an appropriate appointment title for the Corps and deemed that, because we were “bright new and shiny”, we would be named after “Bluebell Polish” which was used by soldiers at the time to clean their brasses (similar to “Brasso”) - see link below:

<http://www.robertopicollection.com/application/products/plan2GB.asp?scpl2=25CST59>

I hope you find this helpful

Many thanks, [Mike Sibbons](#)

**Colonel M E Sibbons** | Corps Archivist, REME Museum | Box R005 | Hazebrouck Barracks, Arborfield, READING RG2 9NJ |

☎ **Civ:** (0118) 9763469 | **Mil:** (94251) 2469 | ✉ **Civ:** [mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk)

- referring to Elmer ‘Fudd’ Varga ( Bob Thompson

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Tue, 15 Feb 2011 23:16:59 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Wed, 16Feb2011 - 1512

**Blue Bell**

Hi Fud, I on the REME past and present forum, posted the question on there and got the reply from 'Josh' ASM of various REME units. Since then had a beer with a pommy mate of mine, ex Royal Marine, and he thinks he remebers his father having a tin of Blue Bell grease in the garage, maybe Blue Bell was a company that made things like that. There is a Blue Bell lubricant comapny in India, but they only started in 1975!

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Tue, 15 Feb 2011 23:19:31 -0700

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Wed, 16Feb2011 - 1517

**Blue Bell.**

Just looking at the tin of metal polish, anyone else notice the colour scheme?

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Fri, 16 Sep 2011 20:03:55 -0500

**From:**terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Terry Jeisman <Terry Jeisman>

terryjeisman@optusnet.com.au

Sat, 17Sep2011 - 1156

**Blue Bell**

To hark back to this topic from some months ago The British Royal Automobile Club used to provide road side telephone boxes on most of the main roads in Britain for their members to call for assistance. Members were given a key to these boxes on joining the club. Interestingly these boxes were painted Royal Blue, and their location shown on road maps by a bell symbol in blue to dinguish them from the Automobile Association phones which were yellow. Food for thought guys.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Mon, 19 Sep 2011 19:45:27 -0500

**From:**putlandsparadise@westnet.com.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: John Putland <John Putland>  
putlandsparadise@westnet.com.au

Tue, 20Sep2011 - 1118

**Bluebell**

For your consideration. Imagine this: A deeply buried bunker below the Directorate of Signals, London, circa 1942. In this room are gathered the various Heads of Corps here to discuss the need for new callsigns (those nasty Germans have cracked the current code). All present know why they are here except the DEME ( REME/RAEME are always the last to know) and as the various Arms and Services trot out their most appropriate callsigns the poor DEME is left in a bit of a quandary, certainly Spanners is the obvious choice but a bit on the crude side, The DEME ponders his choices and coming under pressure for an answer his mind suddenly swings to the drive into London this morning and the farmer's fields with their preponderance of blue flowers, "Bluebell!" he blurts out and now you know the origin of that unusual callsign. Make mine a red, please, Fudd.

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**Fwd: The Origins of "Bluebell"

**Date:**Tue, 04 Oct 2011 10:36:22 +1000

**From:**JP <putlandsparadise@westnet.com.au>

**To:**elmer@stargazer.id.au

Hi Fudd, Sorry to come at you from this angle but I don't know how to send an attachment to the 106 Message Log. As is evident I tried the Brit REME Museum for an authoritative answer and this is the result. So I guess the problem remains. Cheers John

[see the following pages for John Putland's attachment]

----- Original Message -----

**Subject:**The Origins of "Bluebell"

**Date:**Mon, 3 Oct 2011 09:22:20 +0100

**From:**Corps Archivist <[archives@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:archives@rememuseum.org.uk)>

**To:**<[putlandsparadise@westnet.com.au](mailto:putlandsparadise@westnet.com.au)>

Mr Putland

I attach an article that I wrote on this very topic for the April 2011 edition of "Craftsman". To date, there have been no alternatives put forward so, as far as Corps history is concerned, by definition stands?!?

Many thanks, [Mike Sibbons](mailto:mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk) **Colonel M E Sibbons** I Corps Archivist, REME Museum I Box R005 I Hazebrouck Barracks, Arborfield, READING RG2 9NJ I **Civ:** (0118) 9763469 I **Mil:** (94251) 2469 I **Civ:** [mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk) I **Web:** [www.rememuseum.org.uk](http://www.rememuseum.org.uk) **Arte et Marte**

[next page]

## From the Corps Archives

(by Colonel (Retired) Mike Sibbons, Corps Archivist)

*The Corps Archives, which are located in the REME Museum at Arborfield, contain a wealth of information on the Corps' heritage. Over the past few months we have received a number of enquiries, particularly from Australia and Canada, about the origins of the Corps' Appointment Title "Bluebell" – this article is a plea for information which could help the Museum to solve the mystery*

### **"Fetch bluebell, over"!**

As any former member of a regimental or battalion Light Aid Detachment will instantly recognise, this was the call on the radio net (usually in the early hours of the morning) to summons REME assistance – but where did this appointment title for REME originate from?

Appointment titles were devised to avoid disclosing the nature of a headquarters by referring to specific appointments such as GSO1 or Adjutant. The title designated the senior representative or appointment holder of the branch of the headquarters or unit concerned and was not to be qualified in any way.

Examples of British Army appointments are:

Commander	SUNRAY
AQ Staff or QM	MOLAR
Armour	IRONSIDE
Aviation	HAWKEYE
Artillery	SHELDRAKE
Engineers	HOLDFAST
NBC	BOXWOOD
Infantry	FOXHOUND
Intelligence	ACORN
Medical	STARLIGHT
Ordnance	RICKSHAW
Provost	WATCHDOG
Maintenance	BLUEBELL
Signals	PRONTO
Transport	PLAYTIME

To indicate junior appointments, "minor" was added eg SUNRAY minor - the 2IC. Later more unofficial contemporary titles appeared (eg SKYPILOT for the Padre and even, for 'other halves' - wives or husbands, Sunray minor or Domestic Chief of Staff!)

In June 1984 voice procedure was revised, significantly, and, with one exception, Appointment Titles were no longer authorised for use on Army single service radio nets. The exception to this rule was SUNRAY, which could be qualified only by “minor” (to refer to the 2IC) and “my” or “your”. From this date on, when a caller needed to speak to a specific person who may not be manning the radio (eg the LAD commander), the pro-word “fetch” together with the callsign was used (eg if the CO wanted to speak to his EME the call would be “hello 98 this is 9 fetch SUNRAY over”).

So where does “bluebell” originate from. A quick glance at the dictionary shows bluebell as:

The common bluebell, *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, is a spring flowering bulbous perennial. The *non-scripta* part of the botanical names means "unlettered" or "unmarked" and was intended to distinguish this plant from the classical hyacinth of Greek mythology. This mythical flower sprang up from the blood of the dying prince Hyacinthus. His lover shed tears that marked the new flower's petals with the letters "AIAI" ("alas") as a sign of grief. Other names for the common bluebell include auld man's bell, calverkeys, culverkeys, jacinth, ring-o'-bells, wilde hyacint, and wood bells. No clue there then?!?



My only other source for the possible origins of the Appointment Title “Bluebell” came in 1968 when I was an Officer Cadet. Being the only person in my platoon joining the Corps and, being slightly embarrassed at the time about the title, I asked the ‘old sweat’ Royal Signals Sgt Instructor (PRONTO!), who was taking us for voice procedure, why REME was named after a flower! He growled that the Appointment Title “Bluebell” came into being in 1942 when the Corps of REME was formed – the War Office was scratching around for an appropriate appointment title for “Maintenance” and deemed that, because we were “new, bright and shiny”, we would be named after “Bluebell Polish” which was used by soldiers at the time to clean their brasses (similar to “Brasso”)? He punctuated his explanation with the statement “you had better get to grips with your history, Sir, before you are commissioned and join your first unit, or the RSM will have your ‘guts for garters’!!”



So there we have it – a possible definition. However, is it correct? Now over to you! If you know the origins of the Appointment Title “Bluebell” and can provide us with, or point us to, the evidence to back it up to complete the history on this saga – the REME Museum will reward you!

*(If you know the history of the Appointment Title “Bluebell”, please contact the Corps Archivist on 0118 976 3469; military: 94251 2469; or email: [mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk) . The first person to provide the answer, with the evidence to support it, will be both mentioned in “The Craftsman” and awarded with Museum free entry for life in the form of a REME Museum Lifetime Admissions Card (the gold card)).*

[END attachment]

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**New Message posted to the Message Log

**Date:**Mon, 16 Sep 2013 04:55:04 -0500

**From:**ntwells@iinet.net.au

**To:**log@106fdwksp.com

From: Norm Wells <Norm Wells>

ntwells@iinet.net.au

Mon, 16Sep2013 - 1959

**The Term "BLUEBELL"**

Elmer the term "BLUEBELL" gets no mention or explanation in the Craftsman Story of RAEME book of 1992.

Might I suggest that BLUEBELL has its origins as the allocated Wireless (Radio) Appointment Title allocated by the Corp of Signals Radio Voice Procedure doctrine more likely originally by the Brits a long time ago that apply to all Commonwealth NATO SEATO Forces similarly, used to identify and refer to an Electrical and Mechanical Engineer located at a radio call sign position without identifying his business or level of rank or appointment. eg "Is Bluebell still at your loc? over." (could be a Cfn with a spanner a wrecker, or the Force EME, the level is not identified to the uninvited listener) Bluebell refers to the senior EME person at the call sign location.

All Corps have an allocated Radio Appt Title Armour IRONSIDES, Arty SHELLDRAKE, Engineers HOLDFAST, Infantry FOXHOUND, Ord RICKSHAW. Aviation HAWKEYE and many others SUNRAY is a wireless appointment title also. There are many more and their identity and correct use is listed and outlined in Radio Voice Procedure Instructions.

While we affectionately refer to one another as Bluebell's or Rickshaw's they are titles designed for radio veiled speech but not coded secure use by radio operators.

Hope this clarifys the international origins of BLUEBELL and the titles use in relation to our Corp.

Norm Wells

PUBLISHED TO LOG

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**FW: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'

**Date:**Fri, 24 Jan 2014 16:24:59 +1100

**From:**Bob Thompson <tommo\_30@bigpond.com>

**To:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**From:** knowhow@raeme.info [mailto:knowhow@raeme.info]

**Sent:** Friday, January 24, 2014 4:09 PM

**To:** 'raecatm@bigpond.net.au'

**Subject:** Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'

Good Afternoon,

I am seeking help in the quest of Maj. Keirin Joyce in his endeavor to find the origin of the RAEME call sign 'Bluebell' to be included in RAEME history, Mike Cecil and Bruce Cameron have expressed opinions with Bruce claiming that there might be more info in his research notes at the Tank Museum that he refers to in his email to me which starts 'I donated etc' I was wondering if it was possible to have those notes unearthed to check if there was more info re the origin of 'Bluebell'.

Kind Regards, 41961 WO1 Ret. R.C. Thompson, Bob

Hi Bob,

Best wishes for a healthy 2014.

**Re Bluebells ... my footnote is at p395 Vol 1 of COF.**

Being one of those who tends to ask "Why?" about everything, I was surprised when I couldn't get an answer from RAEME sources. My info resulted from enquiries I made in the UK. I might've provided a more detailed footnote, however, I had to edit 90,000 from my original manuscript and space became critical.

I donated all my research notes to the Tank Museum at Puckapunyal. A couple of the folders are in alphabetical order and I think there's quite a large section under RAEME. Copies of my emails etc re the Bluebell question could well be among them.

Best wishes for a healthy 2014.

Bruce

**From:** Mike Cecil [<mailto:mike@krystiimelaine.com>]  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 23, 2014 11:36 AM  
**To:** 'Bob Thompson'  
**Cc:** [keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)  
**Subject:** RE: Bluebell [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Hi Bob and Keirin,

As I understand it, the source of the name with the most 'traction' is the Bluebell Polish story. Bruce Cameron, in Canister! On! Fire! certainly puts that forward as the most likely source of the name in one of his footnotes, but I'm not quite as sure as he seems to be. The name appears to me to be a bit like the cart before the horse: a name decided, then later 'attributed' to Bluebell Polish. The more likely of the two stories is that the first DEME, Maj Gen Rowcroft, came up with it in conference as a name he knew, that was distinctive, and unique among existing call signs. Let's face it: when the 'boss' says 'let's use Bluebell', that's what you do!

However, other than conjecture and supposition, there is no definitive answer that I've been able to locate. I think it will always be a matter of discussion, unless someone can surface the minutes of the meeting where it, and other aspects of the new REME organization, were discussed. There is nothing in any of the wireless call-sign or AEME stuff I have that states an origin for the term, but then neither is there anything on the host of other names, either. Who came up with 'Sunray', or 'Ironsides', for example? I seem to remember I avoided the issue when I wrote the 'Man Behind the Man Inside the Turret' article for 'RAEME Knowhow'!!

What is the RAEME Corps History Project, please?

[cut] I also have a new book just released:

Aust Military Abbreviations, Acronyms and Codes. 10,500 entries, hardcover, 300 pages.

Details here:

[http://www.virtualbookworm.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product\\_Code=australian\\_military\\_abbreviations\\_acronyms\\_codes&Store\\_Code=bookstore](http://www.virtualbookworm.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=australian_military_abbreviations_acronyms_codes&Store_Code=bookstore)

Best regards

Mike

**From:** Bob Thompson [[mailto:tommo\\_30@bigpond.com](mailto:tommo_30@bigpond.com)]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 22, 2014 3:15 PM  
**To:** [mike@krystiimelaine.com](mailto:mike@krystiimelaine.com)  
**Cc:** [keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)  
**Subject:** FW: Bluebell [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

Good Morning Mike,

I hope all is well with you and your family. Could you help Keirin Joyce out. I have sent an email requesting info from the REME Museum in the UK but have not received a reply as of yet. [cut]

Kind Regards, Bob

**From:** Joyce, Keirin MAJ  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 7 January 2014 09:29  
**To:** '[tommo30@bigpond.com](mailto:tommo30@bigpond.com)'  
**Subject:** Bluebell [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

**UNCLASSIFIED**

G'day Bob,

My name is Major Keirin Joyce and I am working as part of the Australian RAEME Corps History Project as the Uniformed Editor. Ross Grant passed me your email address.

One of the research questions that has arisen is, 'What is the origin of the EME callsign 'Bluebell'?'

I have reviewed the REME (Kennett and Tatman, 1970), RAEME (Barker, 1992) and RNZEME (Cape, 1976) Corps Histories, asking the question of EME and Signals museum archivists here and in the UK, as well as many, many few hours searching the internet, and none of them offer an explanation/reference.

I have two loose links, but neither are confirmed:

- The first is to MAJGEN Rowcroft's (founder of REME) interest in the Bluebell Railway which has a link to his home town of Lyme Regis.
- The second is to a quote provided by the UK Museum of EME, "I asked the 'old sweat' Royal Signals Sgt Instructor (PRONTO), who was taking us for voice procedure, why REME was named after a flower! He growled that the Appointment Title "Bluebell" came into being in 1942 when the Corps of REME was formed – the War Office was scratching around for an appropriate appointment title for "Maintenance" and deemed that, because we were "new, bright and shiny", we would be named after 'Bluebell Polish' which was used by soldiers at the time to clean their brasses (similar to 'Brasso')."

Do your archives/people/references provide any substantiation to these links? Any help in answering this question (I am happy for this email to be forwarded) would be greatly appreciated.

Arte et marte,

Major Keirin Joyce, Major, RAEME Corps History Project, Uniformed Editor, M: 0410 685 260, E: [keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**FW: The use of Bluebell

**Date:**Thu, 6 Feb 2014 07:14:05 +1100

**From:**Bob Thompson <tommo\_30@bigpond.com>

**To:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**From:** Bruce Cameron [mailto:cameronshome@bigpond.com]

**Sent:** Wednesday, February 05, 2014 11:52 PM

**To:** Bob Thompson

**Subject: Re: The use of Bluebell**

Hi Bob,

I thought that I might still have had some of my research notes here, but this proved not to be the case after I went through the boxes ... sorry.

Best wishes, Bruce

On 5 Feb 2014, at 8:14 pm, Bob Thompson <[tommo\\_30@bigpond.com](mailto:tommo_30@bigpond.com)> wrote:

Hi Bruce,

Have you any more info re the RAEME use of Bluebell. Hope you are well.

Regards Bob

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:**FW: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'

**Date:**Thu, 6 Feb 2014 10:48:01 +1100

**From:**knowhow@raeme.info

**To:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**CC:**'Bruce Cameron' <cameronshome@bigpond.com>, mike@krystiimelaine.com, raacatm@bigpond.net.au, keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au

Hi Elmer,

I think its worth a look at Bruce Cameron's files But with Paul Handel being so through in his search and knowledge and the fact that he got a result from REME Museum, thanks Paul, that bore out what Mike Cecil said along with others I wouldn't spend too much time and effort on this project. If you can get someone close to Pucka to go and look at the files that would save you coming from SA. Mike, would there be any info in your files at Pucka and if so How would you feel about us getting someone to have a look and if that's OK with you where would they look?

I certainly like the comment about the Call Sign Bluebell, When I first heard it I thought RAEME was a corp that carried handbags. Thanks everyone

Regards

Bob Thompson

**From:** Army Tank Museum Puckapunyal [mailto:raacatm@bigpond.net.au]  
**Sent:** Wednesday, January 29, 2014 11:26 AM  
**To:** knowhow@raeme.info  
**Subject:** RE: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'

Hello Bob

I had one of my volunteers, Paul Handel, do a bit of research on this matter, he is a retired spanner and has very good contacts with the pommy spanners museum.

Hello Joe,

I have had a response from my man at the REME Museum. It is certainly not cut and dried.

As to the term 'bluebell', this subject has been raised a number of times over the last few years, including by Canadian EME. Despite detailed research no one has so far discovered the answer. There are two possible:

1. that the EME Directorate staff or DME himself were asked to pick a word and took one based on one of the Corps colours, or
2. the name was allocated by a Signals branch in the War Office at random as the 'new' corps would have to be given one anyway.

Sadly the only people who would know are almost certainly beyond telegraphic communication. "

Sorry it is not a definitive answer, but at least it comes directly from REME.

Regards, Paul

Bluebell is only a radio call sign and as with the colour of Tac signs, composition of code words, design of colour patches etc many believe that they must have a significance, whereas they may have only been randomly picked. As bluebell was English choice I don't think you would find its origin in the papers you have mentioned.

I bet if us Aussies had a chance to pick a call sign it would not have been "Bluebell".

Cheers, Joe Linford

Curator, APS 5, Australian Army Tank Museum, 0357357285

[www.armytankmuseum.com.au](http://www.armytankmuseum.com.au)

**From:** Joyce, Keirin MAJ  
**Sent:** Tuesday, 7 January 2014 09:29  
**To:** '[tommo30@bigpond.com](mailto:tommo30@bigpond.com)'  
**Subject:** Bluebell [SEC=UNCLASSIFIED]

**UNCLASSIFIED**

G'day Bob,

My name is Major Keirin Joyce and I am working as part of the Australian RAEME Corps History Project as the Uniformed Editor. Ross Grant passed me your email address.

One of the research questions that has arisen is, 'What is the origin of the EME callsign 'Bluebell'?'

I have reviewed the REME (Kennett and Tatman, 1970), RAEME (Barker, 1992) and RNZEME (Cape, 1976) Corps Histories, asking the question of EME and Signals museum archivists here and in the UK, as well as many, many few hours searching the internet, and none of them offer an explanation/reference.

I have two loose links, but neither are confirmed:

- The first is to MAJGEN Rowcroft's (founder of REME) interest in the Bluebell Railway which has a link to his home town of Lyme Regis.
- The second is to a quote provided by the UK Museum of EME, "I asked the 'old sweat' Royal Signals Sgt Instructor (PRONTO), who was taking us for voice procedure, why REME was named after a flower! He growled that the Appointment Title "Bluebell" came into being in 1942 when the Corps of REME was formed – the War Office was scratching around for an appropriate appointment title for "Maintenance" and deemed that, because we were "new, bright and shiny", we would be named after 'Bluebell Polish' which was used by soldiers at the time to clean their brasses (similar to 'Brasso')."

Do your archives/people/references provide any substantiation to these links?

Any help in answering this question (I am happy for this email to be forwarded) would be greatly appreciated.

Arte et marte,

Major Keirin Joyce

**Keirin Joyce**

Major

RAEME Corps History Project, Uniformed Editor

M: 0410 685 260

E: [keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:RE: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'**

**Date:**Wed, 5 Feb 2014 16:05:41 -0800

**From:**Mike Cecil <mike@krystiimelaine.com>

**Reply-To:**mike@krystiimelaine.com

**To:**knowhow@raeme.info, elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**CC:**'Bruce Cameron' <cameronshome@bigpond.com>, raacatm@bigpond.net.au,  
keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au

Hi Bob,

I have no files at Pucka – I think you might be getting me confused with Bruce's Canister! On! Fire! files that he donated to the AHU, and that now reside at the Army Tank Museum. It was Bruce who undertook some research into this matter a few years back in relation to Canister! On! Fire!. I was on the periphery of that, and did some digging within my own resources, the very limited results of which you received in an earlier email.

Bruce will be able to tell you how he structured the donation and where someone should look for the 'Bluebell' information he compiled. Seems a long way to go (South Australia to Pucka and back) just to look at a few emails and notes, though, especially when you already have some pretty good feedback that the matter is far from 'cut and dried'.

Best regards

Mike

**From:** knowhow@raeme.info [mailto:knowhow@raeme.info]

**Sent:** Wednesday, February 5, 2014 3:48 PM

**To:** elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**Cc:** 'Bruce Cameron'; mike@krystiimelaine.com; raacatm@bigpond.net.au; keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au

Hi Elmer,

I think its worth a look at Bruce Cameron's files But with Paul Handel being so through in his search and knowledge and the fact that he got a result from REME Museum, thanks Paul, that bore out what Mike Cecil said along with others I wouldn't spend too much time and effort on this project. If you can get someone close to Pucka to go and look at the files that would save you coming from SA. Mike, would there be any info in your files at Pucka and if so How would you feel about us getting someone to have a look and if that's OK with you where would they look?

I certainly like the comment about the Call Sign Bluebell, When I first heard it I thought RAEME was a corp that carried handbags. Thanks everyone

Regards

Bob Thompson

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:FW: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'**

**Date:**Thu, 6 Feb 2014 13:08:42 +1100

**From:**Bob Thompson <tommo\_30@bigpond.com>

**To:**'Bruce Cameron' <cameronshome@bigpond.com>

**CC:**keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au, elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

Hi Bruce,

Thanks for that I will keep you in the picture.

Best Bob

**From:** B & J Cameron [mailto:cameronshome@bigpond.com]

**Sent:** Thursday, February 06, 2014 11:46 AM

**To:** knowhow@raeme.info

**Subject: Re: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'**

Hi Bob,

My info re Bluebell (as mentioned in COF) came from the UK (REME museum, I think). Some of my research notes (files) at the ATM relate directly to the book, others are assembled on a topic by topic basis, in alphabetical order. With luck, the info re the origin of Bluebell will be under 'B'.

Best wishes, Bruce

----- Original Message -----

**From:** [knowhow@raeme.info](mailto:knowhow@raeme.info)

**To:** [elmer\\_varga@106fdwksp.com](mailto:elmer_varga@106fdwksp.com)

**Cc:** 'Bruce Cameron' ; [mike@krystiimelaine.com](mailto:mike@krystiimelaine.com) ; [raacatm@bigpond.net.au](mailto:raacatm@bigpond.net.au) ; [keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)

**Sent:** Thursday, February 06, 2014 10:48 AM

**Subject: FW: Help requested re call sign 'Bluebell'**

Hi Elmer,

I think its worth a look at Bruce Cameron's files But with Paul Handel being so through in his search and knowledge and the fact that he got a result from REME Museum, thanks Paul, that bore out what Mike Cecil said along with others I wouldn't spend too much time and effort on this project. If you can get someone close to Pucka to go and look at the files that would save you coming from SA. Mike, would there be any info in your files at Pucka and if so How would you feel about us getting someone to have a look and if that's OK with you where would they look?

I certainly like the comment about the Call Sign Bluebell, When I first heard it I thought RAEME was a corp that carried handbags. Thanks everyone

Regards, Bob Thompson

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:Bluebell**

**Date:**Tue, 27 May 2014 12:15:48 +1000

**From:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**To:**mike.sibbons@rememuseum.org.uk

Sir, We have been trying to come to terms with the origins of "Bluebell" through our RAEME Corps HQ and so far it's a blank. I am not aware that anybody has contacted you regarding the attached, but one can be hopeful!

Looking fwd to hearing from you and best wishes,

Elmer Varga

ps - should you wish to look at our site, being in the UK you may not be able to get in through the front door, so try this: <http://www.106fdwksp.com/main/links.php?link=unit> once there, you should be able to navigate around.

--

Elmer 'Fudd' Varga

106 Fd Wksp SVN; 70-71 Tels.

Website Maintenance Crew

[the ATTACHMENT (not presented again) WAS PREVIOUSLY SEEN with John Putland's email earlier]

----- Forwarded Message -----

**Subject:FW: Colonel (Retired) Mike Sibbons, Corps Archivist**

**Date:**Tue, 27 May 2014 12:35:37 +0100

**From:**Archives <archives@rememuseum.org.uk>

**To:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com



Dear Elmer, We are no further forward on the origins of "Bluebell" **and have therefore adapted the "Bluebell Polish" story as depicted in my attached article.** [emphasis/underline inserted by Fudd]

Mike Sibbons , ***Colonel (Retd) M E Sibbons CEng FIET*** | Corps Archivist, REME Museum | Box R005 | Hazebrouck Barracks, Arborfield, READING RG2 9NJ | ( **Civ:** (0118) 9763469 | **Mil:** (94251) 2469 | **Civ:** [archives@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:archives@rememuseum.org.uk) | **Web:** [www.rememuseum.org.uk](http://www.rememuseum.org.uk) **Arte et Marte**

**AND TO CLOSE IT ALL, here's a summary of things that I sent off to the UK in June 2014 – I cannot recall receiving a response, but may have either misplaced it or never got one.**

**Subject:**Re: FW: Colonel (Retired) Mike Sibbons, Corps Archivist

**Date:**Wed, 04 Jun 2014 19:09:45 +1000

**From:**elmer\_varga@106fdwksp.com

**To:**Archives <archives@rememuseum.org.uk>

Dear Colonel (Mike), greetings from the Antipodes!

Thank you for your response ... I very much appreciate your time and effort in this quest! I seems that unless we can somehow find a way to communicate with the departed, we will never know.

For some recent years, I have been 'intrepid' wrt finding out the origins of Bluebell and I have to date some great collected 'recollections and opinions' (including the boot polish) which I have not yet published on the 106 site for want of some extra/definitive info (...that intangible hope..?).

For your information, I include below *\*some\** extracts of emails/corresp that I have received over recent years ... in some I have edited out personal details, but in others, should you wish, I am sure the personnel would not mind if you contacted them.

So, oldest -> most recent:

**1.: =====**

*My name is Major Keirin Joyce and I am working as part of the Australian RAEME Corps History Project as the Uniformed Editor. Ross Grant passed me your email address.*

*One of the research questions that has arisen is, 'What is the origin of the EME callsign 'Bluebell'?' I have reviewed the REME (Kennett and Tatman, 1970), RAEME (Barker, 1992) and RNZEME (Cape, 1976) Corps Histories, asking the question of EME and Signals museum archivists here and in the UK, as well as many, many few hours searching the internet, and none of them offer an explanation/reference.*

*I have two loose links, but neither are confirmed:*

- The first is to MAJGEN Rowcroft's (founder of REME) interest in the Bluebell Railway which has a link to his home town of Lyme Regis.*
- The second is to a quote provided by the UK Museum of EME, "I asked the 'old sweat' Royal Signals Sgt Instructor (PRONTO), who was taking us for voice procedure, why REME was named after a flower! He growled that the Appointment Title "Bluebell" came into being in 1942 when the Corps of REME was formed – the War Office was scratching around for an appropriate appointment title for "Maintenance" and deemed that, because we were "new, bright and shiny", we would be named after 'Bluebell Polish' which was used by soldiers at the time to clean their brasses (similar to 'Brasso')."*

*Do your archives/people/references provide any substantiation to these links? Any help in answering this question (I am happy for this email to be forwarded) would be greatly appreciated. Arte et marte,*

**Keirin Joyce**, Major, RAEME Corps History Project, Uniformed Editor, M: 0410 685 260, E:

[keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au](mailto:keirin.joyce@defence.gov.au)

2.:=====

Hi Bob and Keirin,

As I understand it, the source of the name with the most 'traction' is the Bluebell Polish story. Bruce Cameron, in *Canister! On! Fire!* certainly puts that forward as the most likely source of the name in one of his footnotes, but I'm not quite as sure as he seems to be. The name appears to me to be a bit like the cart before the horse: a name decided, then later 'attributed' to Bluebell Polish. The more likely of the two stories is that the first DEME, Maj Gen Rowcroft, came up with it in conference as a name he knew, that was distinctive, and unique among existing call signs. Let's face it: when the 'boss' says 'let's use Bluebell', that's what you do!

However, other than conjecture and supposition, there is no definitive answer that I've been able to locate. I think it will always be a matter of discussion, unless someone can surface the minutes of the meeting where it, and other aspects of the new REME organization, were discussed. There is nothing in any of the wireless call-sign or AEME stuff I have that states an origin for the term, but then neither is there anything on the host of other names, either. Who came up with 'Sunray', or 'Ironsides', for example? I seem to remember I avoided the issue when I wrote the 'Man Behind the Man Inside the Turret' article for 'RAEME Knowhow'!!

[cut] ... I also have a new book just released: *Aust Military Abbreviations, Acronyms and Codes*. 10,500 entries, hardcover, 300 pages. Details here:

[http://www.virtualbookworm.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product\\_Code=australian\\_military\\_abbreviations\\_acronyms\\_codes&Store\\_Code=bookstore](http://www.virtualbookworm.com/mm5/merchant.mvc?Screen=PROD&Product_Code=australian_military_abbreviations_acronyms_codes&Store_Code=bookstore)

3.:=====

Re Bluebells ... my footnote is at p395 Vol 1 of COF.

Being one of those who tends to ask "Why?" about everything, I was surprised when I couldn't get an answer from RAEME sources. My info resulted from enquiries I made in the UK. I might've provided a more detailed footnote, however, I had to edit 90,000 from my original manuscript and space became critical. I donated all my research notes to the Tank Museum at Puckapunyal. A couple of the folders are in alphabetical order and I think there's quite a large section under RAEME. Copies of my emails etc re the Bluebell question could well be among them.... [..]

#3 above is the most recent and 'hottest' that I have to hand ... unfortunately, I am too far away geographically (and means) to get to the Tank Museum (located in the Puckapunyal area of Aus) so I have put out a general alert on the 106 Field Workshop site to any caravan/holiday travellers who might be going through 'Pucka' to contact me as I have introductions ready to go so that these donated notes could be perused for an hour or two by some traveller going thru' the region.

I would dearly love to get a better answer and IF no one this year goes past Pucka, I am determined to go there myself in 2015\* in an attempt to read these 'notes' - and if you will give me an email address (in addition to your current in case you leave) I sincerely undertake to let you know what the outcome is - you never know ... the answer might be there! Should you have any comments, ideas, suggestions arising from the above, I'd love to hear!

With kindest regards & appreciation,  
Elmer Varga *Arte et Marte*

\* this never came to pass!

So, as at 2018, the answer to “WHY BLUEBELL?” is ..... !

On 27/05/2014 9:35 PM, Archives wrote:

Dear Elmer, We are no further forward on the origins of “Bluebell” **and have therefore adapted the “Bluebell Polish” story as depicted in my attached article.** [emphasis/underline inserted by Fudd]

Mike Sibbons , **Colonel (Retd) M E Sibbons CEng FIET** | Corps Archivist, REME Museum | Box R005 | Hazebrouck Barracks, Arborfield, READING RG2 9NJ | ( Civ: (0118) 9763469 | Mil: (94251) 2469 |8 Civ: [archives@rememuseum.org.uk](mailto:archives@rememuseum.org.uk) |8 Web: [www.rememuseum.org.uk](http://www.rememuseum.org.uk) *Arte et Marte*



Elmer ‘Fudd’ Varga, Tels. SVN ’70-’71

1st October 2018



+++++ THAT’S ALL FOLKS +++++

**BUT READ ON FOR A BONUS SUPPLEMENT**



RAEME

# CRAFTSMAN

The Corps of Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers

75th Anniversary

Issue No. 68 2017



# RAEME 75th Anniversary Parade

## Australian War Memorial ,1 December 2017



The Corps paraded on the 1st of December 2017 at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra in commemoration and celebration of 75 Years of service to the Australian Army.

The personnel on parade represented the history and the future of the Corps, with the officers and senior NCOs representing our shared history, and the trainees of ASEME, RAMS and RAAF STT representing our future.

As part of the ceremony, a plaque dedicated to Craftsmen that had made the ultimate sacrifice. The plaque was dedicated by the Corps Padre, CHAP Peter Price, and unveiled by the Head of Corps, BRIG Andrew Freeman.

The plaque will be placed in the grounds of the AWM in 2018.

Those in attendance included: MAJGEN Burr, DSC, AM, MVO (Reviewing Officer), BRIG Freeman (Plaque Unveiling), LTCOL Nelson, CSM (Host to the Reviewing Officer), LTCOL Bouloukos, CSM (Parade Commander), MAJ Arnold, MAJ Hajenko, MAJ Jackson, CAPT Bird, CAPT Condon (Host to BRIG Freeman), CAPT MacDonald, LT Boneh, LT Gray (Banner Ensign), LT Kent, LT Lorenz, LT Penniford, WO1 Colefax (Parade Regimental Sergeant Major), WO2 Frost (Senior Banner Escort), WO2 Green, WO2 Mesken, WO2 Tynan, SGT Adnum, SGT Lette (Junior Banner Escort), SGT Neleman, SGT Sutherland, CPL Collins, CPL Dean, CPL Keillor, CPL Saunders, LCPL Colfs, CFN Adams, CFN Alexander, CFN Allen, CFN Bain, CFN Bartlett, CFN Barton, CFN Barton, CFN Baumann, CFN Beckx, CFN Beckett, CFN Bell, CFN Bohn, CFN Bolton, CFN Boyce, CFN Bridgeford, CFN Brook, CFN Buddeke, CFN Bygate, CFN Callow, CFN Carter, CFN Cox, CFN Dixon, CFN Downes, CFN Felton, CFN Finck, CFN Finneran, CFN Fisher, CFN Fogarty, CFN Foot, CFN Gadsden, CFN

Gallagher, CFN Garnier, CFN Gregory, CFN Hede, CFN Henry, CFN Hermitage, CFN Hicks, CFN Hollowood, CFN Hutchinson, CFN Jafari, CFN Jenkins, CFN Johnson, CFN Jones, CFN Jonker, CFN Justins, CFN Kennedy, CFN Kester, CFN Lanfranchi, CFN Lewis, CFN Li, CFN Lukins, TPR Lusher, CFN Macsweeney, CFN Matheson, CFN Matthew, CFN Matthews, CFN McIvor, CFN McKinnon, CFN McLennan, CFN McNair, CFN Monnik, CFN Moore, CFN Neil, CFN Peters, CFN Phan, CFN Pink, CFN Pollard, CFN Porter, CFN Potter, CFN Power, CFN Price, CFN Prigge, CFN Putnam, CFN Reiman-Wells, CFN Reinbott, CFN Retimana, CFN Rigoni, CFN Rix, CFN Robertson, SIG Roche, CFN Serbatoio, PTE Sheridan, CFN Shields, CFN Simpson, CFN Singh, CFN Smith, CFN Spray, CFN Stewart, PTE Stone, CFN Sweetman, CFN Thawanont, CFN Thomson Zeschke, CFN Traill, CFN Tran, CFN Tullberg, CFN Tymoshenko, SGT Vagg, CFN Wegner, CFN Whitbread, CFN Wood, CFN Worth, CFN Zhou.



Banner on Parade.



HOC BRIG A Freeman unveiling and viewing RAEME Plaque.



Chap Price dedicating RAEME Plaque.



RAEME Plaque.



BRIG McGahey & BRIG Grant with RAEME Plaque.



Officers on Parade.



DCA addresses the Parade.



Parade MC COL A Adams.



Wing Commander Sharon Bown, Member of the Council of the AWM, delivers welcome address.



DCA Speech.



RAEME Parade.



RAEME Banner Party.

# 106 Fd Wksp Coy

## MAJ Julian Fleming

2017 commenced with the introduction of a new workshop structure and new maintenance philosophy designed to best respond to changes to the Brigade maintenance concept implemented under CSS CONOPS. Concurrently, 106 Fd Wksp Coy prepared for the acceptance of the new MAN 40M and HX77 vehicles into the 7th Combat Brigade. This required a very deliberate effort to qualify maintainers and operators on mass to ensure that 7 CSSB was best positioned to support this exciting new fleet of heavy and medium vehicles. While it is difficult to imagine when a better time would have been, pursuing these priorities was made all the more challenging with the demolition of much of the workshop infrastructure to make way for the new facility that is currently being built.

Quite auspiciously, WO1 Dave Poulsen commenced his tenure as ASM 106 Fd Wksp Coy this year. His blend of varied experience and his innovative approach has been a welcome addition to the team and made a significant impact to date. There was little time to ease into the year though, as it was only a short time until the Battalion embarked on the first field exercise of the year, Ex ECHIDNA CRAWL. While ECHIDNA CRAWL was structured around foundation warfighting, of note it was the first time that the new 40M and HX77 vehicles would be rolled out as the primary vehicle type.

Mother Nature was to ensure that lessons would be learnt the hard way, with the prelude weather system of Tropical Cyclone Debbie saturating the Wide Bay Training Area on arrival. The conditions ensured that the 106 Fd Wksp Coy Recovery Mechanics were working around the clock, but most importantly the true capability of the vehicles was put to the test, with impressive results to say the least. Both the 40M and HX77 proved to be highly capable on and off road, though the radically increased weight of each type will continue to influence how the fleet is employed in the field and in determining what the future field workshop will look like in a tactical setting.



Following Ex ECHIDNA CRAWL, the 106 Fd Wksp Coy focus reverted to ensuring that the remainder of the RESET period was invested in maximising individual trade training opportunities in preparation for the myriad of new equipment being introduced across the Brigade, including M113 AS4 and the M1A1 Abrams tank. This period also afforded the opportunity to collaborate with the PLAN CENTAUR team through a series of Lean Maintenance initiatives and reviews. From a command perspective, it was imperative that the end-to-end maintenance system was efficient and effective if the Brigade units were to be supported to best affect during this vulnerable period while the physical capacity of the workshop remained significantly reduced and while we navigated through the cultural challenges that

presented under CSS CONOPS. Owing full credit to all involved, 106 Fd Wksp Coy exceeded expectations with maintenance output and equipment availability rates remained consistently high across the Brigade.

TALISMAN SABRE '17 was soon to arrive, and while the 7th Combat Brigade was committed largely in an exercise support role, 106 Fd Wksp Coy deployed a highly capable Forward Repair Group to support a diverse dependency of both 'white' and 'red' forces. LT Ben Kluckhohn and WO2 Terry Lemmon led the push to Shoal Water Bay and the contingent proved on every occasion that there was rarely a technical issue that could not be resolved or a task that could not be complete regardless of the complexity, the time of day or otherwise. At every juncture, the ingenuity and the resilience of the RAEME soldier was on display, motivated only by the innate desire to keep the Brigade fighting and in the knowledge that a tri-colour flag would be proudly flying somewhere across every echelon.

The conclusion of TALISMAN SABRE marked the transition from RESET to READY for the 7th Combat Brigade, prompting 106 Fd Wksp Coy to re-posture to generate two deployable Forward Repair Groups in support of the Ready Battle Group and the remainder of the deployed Brigade. These organisations were to be tested throughout October in what was the Brigade's major training activity of the year, Ex DIAMOND RUN. Ex DIAMOND RUN, while challenged again by extremes in weather, was an excellent hit-out and provided a valuable opportunity for the online FRG to integrate with the 8/9 RAR Ready Battle Group.



With the major Brigade exercises behind us for 2017, focus was quick to switch to organising the South East Queensland RAEME Birthday celebration. Being the 75th, we were highly motivated to make this RAEME birthday activity a memorable one. Thanks to the outstanding commitment and effort from CPL Steven Gill in leading the planning and coordination of the day, this activity surpassed all expectation and all in attendance will attest to the fact that it was one of the best celebrations of the Corps that they had attended. Although the billy cart race will go down in the annals of history as being one of the most fiercely contested races of its kind, other highlights included a plethora of military and trade displays from across the maintenance community; a bevy of food trucks and mobile bars; and, a carnival-like atmosphere that bled pride and esprit de corps. The day also served as an excellent opportunity to recognise some outstanding personal achievements, most notably SGT Chris Brown who was awarded the Corps Regimental Award and also promoted to his current rank.



In signing off from my appointment as OC 106 Fd Wksp Coy, I will say that it has been an absolute privilege and pleasure. While it almost sounds cliché, it has been the people within the organisation that has made the journey as enjoyable as it has been.

I cannot speak highly enough of the soldiers and officers of 106 Fd Wksp Coy and I will cherish the memories for many years to come. I will also offer the most sincere of farewells to the outgoing CSM,

WO2 Kevin 'Buck' Rogers. As Buck will commence his transition next year, I would like to acknowledge his near 35 years of service to the Corps and wish him all the best for the future.

PS.: ASM 106 Field Workshop provided the following photos. 106 Field Workshop of the 1st Unit to do a PMV pack change using the crane on the new MAN 40M. Whilst the PMV was in the Workshop it got a name change as well! Good work boys!



# 106 Fd Wksp RAEME

106 Fd Wksp RAEME was established on the 1st November 1968 as a response to improve the battle worthiness and damage recovery of the fighting equipment of the 1st Australian Task Force operating from their forward operational base at Nui Dat in Phuoc Tuy Province of South Vietnam (SVN).

The workshop earned a high reputation in the SVN operational theatre between 1968 and 1971. This reputation was founded in the strength, conviction, sacrifice and successful performance of the regular soldiers and national servicemen who manned the unit during those years.

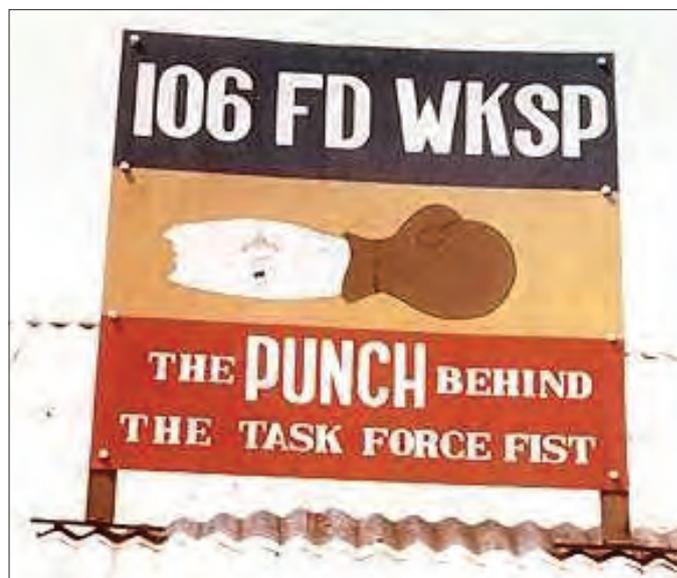
The following points describe the composite elements of the workshop:

- Most of the unit's soldiers were from the Royal Corps of Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (RAEME) - these included tradesmen, recovery mechanics and Corps administrative support staff.
- The RAEME soldiers were supported by soldiers from the Royal Australian Army Ordnance Corps (RAAOC) for the supply of repair parts and other trade ancillaries.
- The Royal Australian Army Medical Corps (RAAMC) provided an in-house medical orderly,
- The Australian Army Catering Corps (AACC) provided the cooks to service the workshop's needs in base or in the field, and
- Other miscellaneous Army Corps personnel aided from time to time.

The normal service period for a soldier was for a tour of 12 months.

In Australian Army historical terms, 106 Fd Wksp was the only Australian unit to be raised in an active theatre since World War II. This historical fact has not changed in the ensuing years.

Over its more recent history within Australia, the unit has had to endure disbandment then reinstatement, as well as substantial organisational and role changes. Regardless, it remains proud of



what it achieved in its short history in SVN. The 106 Association supports that stance.

Post SVN, 106's successor elements located in Australia initially had limited repair and support responsibilities but these were always executed with a lot of heart and sweat to meet past reputational standards.

Today, the high performance traits of 106 developed in its foundation years in SVN have been adopted as the standard guidelines for the workshop now formally established as 106 Fd Wksp - a titled sub-unit of 7 Combat Services Support Battalion (7CSSB) located at Enoggera in Brisbane. 7CSSB supports 7 Bde, a three Infantry Battalion ARA/ARES motorised formation located at Enoggera.

2018 will mark the 50th Anniversary of 106 Field Workshop and this will be celebrated in Brisbane over the period 25 - 28 April. Information on how to get involved is in this magazine or visit the 106 Association's website at [www.106fdwksp.com](http://www.106fdwksp.com)

# 75th Birthday Parade – RAEME Welcome Address

Wing Commander (Ret'd) Sharon Bown

Friday, 1 December, 2017 – Parade Ground, Australian War Memorial

MAJGEN Burr, Deputy Chief Army, Distinguished guests.

To the men, women and families, past and present, of the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

On behalf of the Director, Dr Brendan Nelson and the Chairman of the Council, Mr Kerry Stokes, Welcome to the AWM on this momentous occasion – the 75th Birthday Parade of the Corps of the Royal Australian Electrical and Mechanical Engineers.

In conducting my research to deliver speeches such as this, I have the very privileged access to Australia's finest military historians. Men and women who work tirelessly to aid the Memorial in its mission to assist Australians to remember, interpret and understand the Australian experience of war and its enduring impact upon Australian society. Men and women who work to ensure that your record of service is recorded, and preserved in perpetuity.

Despite that incredible privilege, I decided that I would speak with those whose work was dependent upon the skill of RAEME tradesmen. I didn't have to search too hard.

Over a family dinner one evening, I mentioned to my husband – an Army helicopter pilot and veteran of 27 years' service, that I would be delivering the welcome address for the upcoming RAEME 75th Birthday Parade.

I kid you not, but his face lit up as he began to tell me stories of his time as a Chinook pilot and his close work with RAEME. He told me that:

"RAEME is outstanding. If you are looking for Bluebell out in the field, look for the red, yellow and blue tri-colour above the largest taj mahoochie around. Even if the temperature is 40 degrees in the shade, there you'll see a bunch of proud soldiers, who somehow have ice-cold goffas and gumpy. They are some of the Army's

smartest soldiers, who work hard but don't believe in doing it hard if they can help it."

As a former Nursing Officer of the Royal Australian Air Force, I began to think that a soldier with an ability to create such a level of comfort in the field, should have joined the Air Force!

As if reading my mind, he went on to add:

RAEME tradies are the first up in the mornings, to get the vehicles, equipment, or helicopters working ... and they work late into the night to ensure they are serviceable for the next day. RAEME personnel drive trucks, armoured vehicles, crew aircraft, man machine guns and can fix them all when they stop working. If you bog your Bushmaster in a river, they will turn up with a Heavy Recovery Vehicle. If your APC needs a powerpack change, they will turn up in an Armoured Recovery Vehicle with a new one and do a change-out in the field. If your aircraft radio has nothing but hash coming through, they'll chase squiggly amps until it is fixed. Those guys can walk on water."

His final piece of advice was that I must finish my welcome to you today, with the RAEME motto:

'Arte et Marte.' – Latin he tells me for 'Twist to Open'.

So to our friends who are here today – on behalf of the Australian War Memorial – Welcome to the spiritual home of Australia's fighting men and women. Welcome to your home.

To those amongst you who claim a proud association with RAEME let me finish with the true translation of the RAEME motto: With Skill and Fighting.

Thank you and welcome to the Australian War Memorial.

