



'Arte et Marte' By Skill and by Fighting

At the outset of WW2, the maintenance and repair of equipment was largely in the hands of individual Regiments and several of the then extant Corps. Such as the Royal Army Ordnance Corps, the Royal Army Service Corps, Royal Engineers and so on.

This led to much conflict of interest, some ridiculous and very ingenious indenting for spares and tools and very disparate standards of efficiency from Unit to Unit. It was almost impossible to enforce best practices under such circumstances and efficiency was falling off rapidly at a time when a uniformly high standard was desperately needed.

As a result of decisions made by a Cabinet Committee formed to overcome this problem, chaired by Sir William Beveridge. It was decided that a single Corps should be set up to deal with maintenance and repair of all Army equipment. To that end, the nexus of the Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers was formed in 1942. From the very beginning the newly formed Corps was designated Royal, a significant honour and indicative of the faith engendered in its innate ability to deliver the goods as required.

Many Tradesmen from the RAOC, RASC and the RE's were transferred to the newly minted REME, immediate steps were also taken to provide trade training and even Apprentice facilities for the new Corps. Because of the exigencies of the War and the difficulties in separating everything at once, with resultant chaos and resentment from established chains of command, it was decided to implement the changeover in two phases.

Initially, in Phase one, each Regiment kept a small cadre of personnel on strength to do running repairs to vehicles and equipment. RASC Transport Company's kept, for the time being, their own Base Workshops and the RE's continued to maintain their own specialised equipment such as Construction plant and Railway Rolling stock. All Regiments and other units were affiliated to a Field or Base Workshop run by REME for their secondary and major repairs.

REME's first test came in the form of the Battle of El Alamein and its ability to rapidly restore damaged vehicles and equipment to battle readiness was sorely tested but emerged triumphant. This was instrumental in enabling Monty's lads to keep up the pressure that soon broke the Afrika Korps and the Italian Army's ability to stand and slog it out. REME's policy of providing repair facilities, known as Field Workshops, as close to the "Front" as possible was a great success.

As a direct result of this success, REME continued to expand throughout the remainder of WW2 and soon became the biggest Corps in the British Army, reaching its maximum personnel strength of 160,000 all ranks in May 1945. Another result of the successful transition of the new Corps was the appearance of identical Formations within all Empire and Commonwealth Armed forces, modelled exactly on the original REME concept.

In 1949, Phase two of the reforms was implemented and this was completed by 1952. This saw all Regimental light repair facilities come under REME aegis and all workshops and vessel repair facilities of RASC vehicle and boat Company's under REME control.

In 1958 the RAF relinquished control of Army Light Aviation repair and maintenance to REME. After a slow start, the Army Air Corps component of REME stands today at 9% of total personnel.

Gradually all other repair and maintenance facilities, with the singular exception of the RE's Construction plant, have come under REME's umbrella. So today's Craftsman may be a Technician in the Information Technology field, or a Locomotive Engineer, Vehicle Mechanic of various sorts, Airframe/Engine Technician, even a Maritime Tradesman. Clerks and Storemen play vital roles too, as do Armourers and Instrument Technicians, Radar Tech's, Recovery Mechanics and so on.

The Royal Electrical & Mechanical Engineers encompasses as wide a range of Trades and skills as does any comparable organisation in the World. It was and is, without a shadow of a doubt, the driving force behind the British Army as we know it today.

The Army during World War II established the Corps of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers in October 1942 to deal with the increased use of complex technical equipment

One of its first missions was the Battle of El Alamein, the British Army's first major operation after the Corps was formed. It has since evolved into a highly skilled and specialised Corps that's capable of meeting the toughest of challenges anywhere in the world.

Over the past 60 years REME has played a vital role in all of the Army's operations, being present in Palestine, Korea, Kenya, Malaya, Suez, Cyprus, Northern Ireland, the Falklands, Afghanistan and both Gulf Wars.

It has also been involved in peacekeeping duties all over the globe, from the Balkans to Sierra Leone. In the former republic of Yugoslavia, REME has been present since 1992, often relying on its ingenuity rather than technology in the early years when conditions were more challenging.

The nature of the job means that REME often finds itself at the sharp end of an Army operation - on or close to the front line and reacting to whatever situation arises.

Army equipment is built to cope in the most punishing of environments, but when breakdowns happen it's REME's job to get things moving again.

Whether it's on exercise or just general daily use, the Army's kit needs to be maintained 24/7. Thousands of pieces of equipment are used by the Army every day - rifles to rocket launchers, helicopters to armoured vehicles - and as you would expect, REME doesn't sit around waiting for things to go wrong.

Equipment needs to be ready for action when the Army needs it, so a key part of the job is regular inspection and maintenance.

REME detachments are part of the make-up of every combat, service or support unit in the Army and wherever the unit goes, REME goes too. During action this could mean being a part of a Rapid Response Unit where a Vehicle Mechanic may be called upon to change a power pack of a Challenger 2 tank close to the front line.

Meanwhile REME's second line close and General Support companies work in mobile or static workshops and its Forward Repair Teams are on hand to repair any equipment that has been recovered. It is their job to get it back into action as soon as possible. Back at barracks, REME work is carried out in modern workshops equipped with all the latest technology.

The Corps also helps to develop future military equipment. Teams of REME specialists work alongside designers and engineers in research establishments and contribute vital 'real-life' technical expertise and comment on how it might perform in the field.

REME's involvement means that all new kit is reliable and easy to repair and it also allows the Corps to plan and organise how it should be supported and maintained once it's in use. The technology may have advanced since REME's baptism of fire on the World War II battlefields of El Alamein, but the Corps' mission remains the same: to ensure the Army's equipment - and therefore the Army itself - is working to maximum effect at all times.

REME FACTS

- REME is over 9500 strong.
- The Corps has the rare distinction of being a 'Royal' Corps since the day of its formation.
- REME's first chance to prove itself was the Battle of El Alamein in World War II
- It was a REME major who rebuilt the VW factory after World War II and secured the production of the VW Beetle.
- Our motto is 'Arte et Marte' By Skill and by Fighting

AROUND THE WORLD

When it's not involved in operations or exercises however, there's still scope for travel as REME detachments are present at every permanent British Army base around the world.

The biggest of these is at the training ground in Suffield on the Canadian prairie, which is the stage for regular live firing exercises that utilise every last piece of Army kit available.

Smaller but nonetheless vital REME workshops can be found in Belize, Brunei, Nepal, the Falklands, Africa and Eastern Europe. It also has a significant presence in the Army's larger bases in Germany and Cyprus.