

The History
of the **Royal**
Army
Veterinary
Corps

1961-1996

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R. G. Mares *MRCVS*

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*St Eloy (ex-situ) Westminster Abbey, Neg No. RPHG 1196
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The Patron Saint of the Corps is Saint Eligius (St. Loo or St Ledger) who RAVC share with the farriers. This saint shod a difficult horse by cutting off the leg, putting on the shoe, then restoring the leg by making the sign of the cross.

The Saint was depicted in the rood screen of Hempstead church in Norfolk, but this has sadly since been stolen. He survives as an alabaster relief in Freckenham church in Suffolk and in Potter Heigham church in Norfolk. He is also one of the carved saints in the roof of the Henry VI Chapel in Westminster Abbey: the photograph of this is reproduced with the kind permission of the Dean and Chapter.

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Foreword

IT is a great honour to have been invited to write the Foreword for Robert Mares' history of *The Royal Army Veterinary Corps 1961-1996*, and I do so as the current Chief Veterinary and Remount Officer and functional head of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps (RAVC).

The period of Robert's history covers the lead up to my own arrival into the Corps, and I have found the account hugely illuminating and thoroughly enjoyable. The account chimes with the stories I have heard of the period. However, his account goes much further. It provides detail and valuable context that, for the first time, sets out how the RAVC landscape that I first experienced as a junior veterinary officer was shaped. It also brings to life the careers of some of those with whom, as a junior officer, I had the privilege to serve. I am so pleased that this detail is now captured for the record.

Robert Mares was a distinguished veterinary surgeon, who demonstrated a lifelong commitment to public service. Graduating from the Royal Veterinary College London in 1941, he spent a short spell in private practice before joining the Armed Forces. His initial military service was with the Royal Navy in Iceland, but he spent two years with the RAVC from 1944 to 1946. During this period, he travelled the length and breadth of the British Middle East war zone; from Alexandria and Cairo, to Palestine and Syria in the North and back down to Shellal and Aswan in Upper Egypt. These will have been interesting times for Robert, but they have also given him an understanding and insight of the RAVC that makes this history both informed and authoritative.

Robert Mares' history of the RAVC draws on many unexploited documents, private testimonies and official documents. It will have taken a great deal of hard work and dedication to write and provides a detailed and accurate

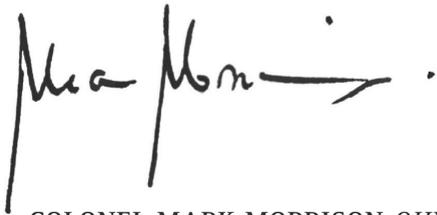


Foreword

description of the Corps and its activities during the period. It is fascinating to hear of remarks made many decades ago that still resonate today.

Before his solid foundation of work could be published, Robert Mares sadly passed away in April 2010, aged 91. His son Tim, working from his late father's transcripts, devotedly grasped the mantle and has concluded his father's labour. Despite not having served in the RAVC himself, Tim has painstakingly translated his father's toil, diligence and careful investigation into what is an excellent addition to RAVC History. In so doing, he must surely have made his father very proud.

Robert Mares was a highly respected veterinary surgeon, and one committed to advancing animal health. From the care and effort he has taken to bring this recent history of the RAVC to life in these pages, it seems likely that he would reflect on his military service as a very important time in his life and one that perhaps set some of the conditions for his later success. The narrative gives a real sense of some of the variety that a career in the RAVC can offer and I can relate to so much of it. I commend this volume to anyone with an interest in the vocational exploits of veterinary surgeons and it should be essential reading for RAVC veterinary officers. It will also be a valuable and interesting text for anyone wishing to understand how the RAVC, and veterinary medicine and military working animal capability in the round, has evolved to remain relevant to a modern military.



COLONEL MARK MORRISON *QHVS*
Chief Veterinary and Remount Officer
British Armed Forces

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Notes on Military Abbreviations

Some military histories write military terms in full; e.g Major General and not Maj Gen. They use only well known abbreviations such as RAF, or perhaps as acronyms e.g. the 'Raf', Nato. There are probably over 500 acronyms, abbreviations, nicknames and special terms used in HM Armed Forces, some of them are peculiar to individual theatres as in Northern Ireland. Those used in the text are listed here. The abbreviations are given in brackets after the first mention of the full title: eg Director of Army Veterinary and Remount Services (DAVRS) and thereafter only the abbreviation is used. Those with a strictly military connotation have been checked against *Staff Duties in the Field*.¹ No explanation is needed for well known abbreviations—the benefit of the doubt is given to the reader's common sense. For non-military readers the following may help.

Military Ranks and Formations:

Field Marshall	Lieutenant-Colonel (Lt Col)
General (Gen)	Major (Maj)
Lieutenant-General (Lt Gen)	Captain (Capt)
Major-General (Maj Gen)	Lieutenant (Lt)
Brigadier (Brig)	Second Lieutenant (2nd Lt)
Colonel (Col)	

Every soldier belongs to a regiment or, in the case of supporting services and specialists, a corps:

- An Army: commanded by a general and is made up of three corps.
- A Corps: commanded by a Lt Gen and is made up of three divisions.
- A Division: commanded by a Maj Gen and is made up of three brigades.
- A Brigade: commanded by a Brigadier and is three battalions.
- A Battalion: commanded by a Lt Colonel and is three or four companies.
- A Company: commanded by a Major or Captain and is three platoons
- A Platoon: commanded by a Lt or 2nd Lt and has three sections of nine men under corporals.

¹ Ministry of Defence, March 1977.
Staff Duties in the Field PART I.
Army Code No: 71038.



Notes on Military Abbreviations

The non-commissioned ranks are warrant officers grade one or two. (WO I & WO II) and called regimental or company sergeant majors (RSM & CSM). Then come staff sergeant (SSgt), sergeant (Sgt), corporal (Cpl), lance corporal (LCpl) and private (Pte), who may be defined as driver (Dvr), gunner (Gnr) etc. In the Royal Army Veterinary Corps and other specialist corps there are specialist non-commissioned ranks dependent on satisfying certain requirements as a dog handler, a dog trainer, pharmacist etc. In all branches there are clerks, accountants, cooks and so on. In the modern army women rank with men according to function and there is no separate women's service.

Adjt: <i>Adjutant</i>	CBE: <i>Commander of the Order of the British Empire</i>	FARELf: <i>Far East Land Forces</i>
Adm: <i>Administration</i>	CO: <i>Commanding Officer</i>	FAO: <i>Food and Agricultural Office</i>
ADTS: <i>Army Dog Training School</i>	Comdt: <i>Commandant</i>	FLOSy: <i>Front for the Liberation of Occupied South Yemen</i>
ADVRS: <i>Assistant Director of Army Veterinary and Remount Services</i>	Coy: <i>Company</i>	GHQ: <i>General Headquarters</i>
AIMLT: <i>Associate of the Institute of medical Laboratory Technology</i>	CSM: <i>Company Sergeant Major</i>	GMP: <i>Gurkha Military Police</i>
AT: <i>Animal Transport</i>	DAC: <i>Defence Animal Centre</i>	GOC-in-C: <i>General Officer Commanding-in-Chief</i>
ATS: <i>Auxiliary Territorial Service</i>	DADAVS: <i>Deputy Assistant Director Army Veterinary Services</i>	GS: <i>General Service</i>
AVO: <i>Assistant Veterinary Officer</i>	DADAVRS: <i>Deputy Assistant Director Army Veterinary and Remount Services</i>	HC: <i>High Commissioner</i>
BAOR: <i>British Army of the Rhine</i>	DASU: <i>Defence Animal Support Unit</i>	HCR: <i>Household Cavalry Regiment</i>
BFAP: <i>British Forces Aden Protectorate</i>	DAVRS: <i>Director Army Veterinary and Remount Services</i>	HK DASU: <i>Hong Kong Defence Animal Support Unit</i>
Btn: <i>Battalion</i>	EAAW: <i>East Africa Army Wardens</i>	HKLF: <i>Hong Kong Land Forces</i>
Capt: <i>Captain</i>	EOKA: <i>A Greek-Cypriot terrorist group</i>	HQ: <i>Headquarters</i>
CBDE: <i>Chemical and Biological Defence Establishment</i>	FANY: <i>First Aid Nursing Yeomanry</i>	HQLF: <i>Headquarters Land Forces</i>
		KAR: <i>Kings African Rifles</i>

Notes on Military Abbreviations

LEP: <i>Locally Enlisted Personnel</i>	QHVS: <i>Queen's Honorary Veterinary Surgeon</i>	SAS: <i>Special Air Service</i>
LST: <i>Landing Ship, Tank</i>	QM or Q: <i>Quartermaster</i>	2IC: <i>Second in Command</i>
MELF: <i>Middle East Land Forces</i>	QMG: <i>Quartermaster General</i>	Sgt: <i>Sergeant</i>
MoD: <i>Ministry of Defence</i>	RAF: <i>Royal Air Force</i>	SSgt: <i>Staff Sergeant</i>
NATO: <i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>	RAOC: <i>Royal Army Ordnance Corps</i>	Snr: <i>Senior</i>
NBC: <i>Nuclear, Biological and Chemical</i>	RAOS: <i>Royal Army Ordnance School</i>	SSC: <i>Short Service Commission</i>
NCO: <i>Non Commissioned Officer</i>	RASC: <i>Royal Army Service Corps</i>	SSVC: <i>Short Service Volunteer Commission</i>
NEARELF: <i>Near East Land Forces</i>	RAVC: <i>Royal Army Veterinary Corps</i>	TA: <i>Territorial Army</i>
NKNA: <i>North Kalimantan National Army</i>	RAVC SG: <i>RAVC Support Group</i>	Tp: <i>Troop</i>
NLF: <i>National Liberation Front</i>	RCT: <i>Royal Corps of Transport</i>	Tpt: <i>Transport</i>
OBE: <i>Order of the British Empire</i>	Regt: <i>Regiment</i>	VAD: <i>Voluntary Aid Detachment</i>
ORBAT: <i>Order of Battle</i>	REME: <i>Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers</i>	VO: <i>Veterinary Officer</i>
OC: <i>Officer Commanding</i>	RHA: <i>Royal Horse Artillery</i>	VSIT: <i>Veterinary Services Inspection Team</i>
Offrs: <i>Officers</i>	RM: <i>Royal Marines</i>	WAAC: <i>Women's Army Auxiliary Corps</i>
OR (s): <i>Other Rank (s), Applies to Army only</i>	RMP: <i>Royal Military Police</i>	WDTS: <i>War Dog Training School</i>
PRO: <i>Public Record Office</i>	RQMS: <i>Regimental Quartermaster Sergeant</i>	WDTU: <i>War Dog Training Unit</i>
QAIMNS: <i>Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service</i>	RSM: <i>Regimental Sergeant Major</i>	WO I: <i>Warrant Officer Grade I</i>
	RSPCA: <i>Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals</i>	WO II: <i>Warrant Officer Grade II</i>
		WRAC: <i>Women's Royal Army Corps</i>



Images

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Preface



*Ah; but a man's reach should exceed his grasp
Or what's a heaven for?*

THESE lines by Robert Browning, my husband's favourite poet and often quoted by him, are apt in the story of how this history came to be written and the many challenges along the way.

When Robert retired he prepared himself for a second career. He loved writing and went back to school to take A levels and then on to obtain a B.A. He had served in the RAVC during the war and had kept in touch with his profession. He was therefore delighted to accept an invitation from the RAVC to write a history of the Corps to carry on from where Brigadier Clabby's history finished in 1961. To complete such a work would be the culmination of his years of additional study and would fulfil a long held ambition to write a work of substance.

Robert did not spare himself in pursuit of this and travelled the United Kingdom widely in order to interview people, gather material, and look at existing primary and secondary sources of information. The magnitude of the task was greater than anyone had perhaps foreseen, especially given Robert's character with his determination to get things right and to remain true to what he observed and believed in. Robert may not have suffered fools gladly but at the same time he was a man of integrity, with a dogged ability to persevere in any task he set himself. Alongside this he was generous and caring and, throughout his career, was often sought out by staff and colleagues for help and advice.

Robert gave freely of his own time and money into writing this history but in the end advancing years and the unavailability of additional staff and financial support meant that he had to cease work on the project. He died in 2010 leaving behind a wealth of material which remained untouched until the family felt that, rather than so much energy, effort, talent, ambition going to waste, we would prepare the manuscript for publication ourselves. My son has been the principal mover in the editing and publication of his father's work and I am proud of them both.

Mavis Mars.

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*The memorial tablet to John Shipp,
the first Army Veterinary Officer,
at the old RAVC Headquarters,
Galwey Road, Aldershot*

Introduction and acknowledgements

'Any civilian who attempts to write a military history is of necessity guilty of an act of presumption' ¹

'What matters in history is the great outline...what must be avoided is the deadly mass of irrelevant detail' ²

I asked which was the most effective charity in the world. The answer came back, 'The British Army' ³

IN an attempt to find a theme or line of argument for converting a narrative into a thesis, the evolution of military thinking from methods of killing to means of winning hearts and minds was considered worthy of development. This idea emerged from the words quoted above from an article by Ian Hislop in the Sunday Telegraph magazine. The first hints of changes in military thinking about methods of winning a war came from the horror produced in the public mind at the death toll on the Western Front during World War One (WWI). The process was on-going from the ideas of Hague in WWI to those of the NATO commanders in the recent interventions in Bosnian and Kosovo. In the shorter period to be covered in this history (1961–1996) we may observe too the same changing emphasis in the development and uses of the army veterinary services. Along with all the other technical services of the army, they were assuming greater and greater importance as compared with those involved with the killing.

When the Royal Army Veterinary Corps (RAVC) celebrated its bi-centenary in 1996 it was proposed that a suitable way to commemorate would be to bring its history up to date with a third volume to complement those of Sir Frederick Smith from 1796 to 1919⁴ and of Brigadier John Clabby 1919 to 1961⁵.

The history of Lever Brothers owes something to documents found in a broom cupboard at Port Sunlight. A room full of letters in shoe boxes will contribute to the biography of Dame Margery Perham.⁶ Some sources for this book have been taken from a room full of old correspondence files at Aldershot. This room, appropriately enough, was once used

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to house calves used in the production of small pox vaccine. This is doubly appropriate when it is recalled that the bicentenary of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps is also the bicentenary of Jenner's first recorded vaccination: James Phipps was vaccinated on 14 May 1796⁷. It is also the centenary of the invasion of Natal by the Great Cattle Plague, or rinderpest, when, 'For the first time Africa South united to combat a common crisis'.⁸

Collecting material for a book of this nature is like collecting the pieces for a jigsaw puzzle when neither the final picture nor where the pieces are to be found is known. Some motivation must have come from the memory of Bryan Forgrave and his enthusiasm for the Corps history because much of the work took place in the Library named after him.⁹

In this library hangs the splendid full length portrait of Sir Frederick Fitzwygram which once graced the previous Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons' premises in Belgrave Square. Sir Frederick was a one time cavalry officer who qualified later as a veterinary surgeon in 1854 and became President of the Royal Collage of Veterinary Surgeons and held that position for four years. The buildings from whence the RAVC is now administered are named after him because he was instrumental in founding the then Army Veterinary School at Aldershot: they are the only buildings left there still used to a large extent for the purposes for which they were originally built in 1904. In the grounds just outside the entrance may be seen the memorial tablet to John Shipp the first veterinary surgeon to be commissioned into a cavalry regiment in 1796 and so, in effect, the first Officer of what was to become the Army Veterinary Corps and later, of course, the Royal Army Veterinary Corps (RAVC).¹⁰

More important of course is to acknowledge suggestions and help from the living. To name them all here is impossible so the names of those interviewed or who sent letters of information are given as primary sources and listed in the notes and bibliography. These kind colleagues were told that, if they supplied information, the right to quote it was assumed and that the inclusion of their names in the bibliography or notes must be considered acknowledgement enough. Special mention must however be made to those more closely involved and they are named here more or less in the chronological order in which they came into the picture.

Brigadier Paul Jepson first suggested that the continuation of Brigadier Clabby's history from 1961 to the present time was appropriate.

Later the idea was confirmed in writing in a letter dated 19 September 1995 from Lieutenant Colonel (Retd.) P. A. Roffey, DL, Regimental Secretary.



Introduction and acknowledgements

Every would-be veterinary historian has to thank Miss Benita Horder and her successor Mr Tom Roper and the staff in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons Wellcome Library.

Many persons offered their help in the early stages but my progress was so slow that in the course of time their contributions became fewer and fewer; Among those who gave welcome encouragement were. Major D. A. Parks, Captain R. N. Phillips RAVC, and Martin Wood. David Parks was originally of the now defunct Duke of Edinburgh's Royal Regiment, and a career soldier who also served in Intelligence. Richard Phillips served in India and Burma during the 1939-1945 war and maintained a life-long interest in military affairs and had an association with the Territorial Army. Mr Martin Wood is a local historian with a special interest in American emigrants from East Anglia in the seventeenth century. All read the opening portions of drafts and the first two named provided a useful background of military detail. Martin Wood has been an assiduous proof reader.

The officers and staff at the RAVC Headquarters, Laboratory and Stores and Support Group at Aldershot have proved unfailingly helpful. The Brigadiers' secretary, Allyson Gray, deserves an especial mention in this respect. Captain C. Ham (formerly inspector of War Dog units with the Support Group at Aldershot) helped both with his expert knowledge and his photographic expertise. Others have included several past Directors of the Corps, in particular Brig G. R. Durrant, who read portions of the text and offered helpful suggestions and amendments. Finally mention must be made of the History Department of Birkbeck College which accepted this history as a potential Masters of Philosophy dissertation, gave their support and the provision of their services.

It was first suggested that some chapters might be completed before 1997. But this proved far too optimistic. Other regimental histories have been many years in gestation. Some have been written by a committee of retired Major Generals, while others had to be completed by other hands after the original author had died. All regimental histories have to cope with the limitations of dealing with restricted information, particularly with regard to chapters written of recent times when material had not been released under the thirty year rule.

To understand the reasons for the deployment of RAVC personnel in the various theatres of war and undeclared war in the period to be covered in this book some reference to the events which demanded the use of British security forces up to 1996 is required. For the

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sake of continuity mention is also made to events immediately preceding the year 1961. For example *Chapter 2* has to start with a note on the Malayan 'Emergency'; *Chapter 3* starts in 1958 with Oman. To give a full account of all British military engagements in the period is to write a history of the British Army at the expense of the RAVC. To make no mention of any historical, political, social or technological background, particularly the last named, would create its own problems: it is hoped that this book adopts a reasonable balance.

The early part of the period is dominated by the decolonisation of the former British Empire and the localisation of both the civil and armed services of former dependencies. In this context, when writing history of the times of change in the former British Empire, a problem arises with spelling place names. The lazy way of spelling them in the way spelt in any particular source quoted has been used, only adding a later alternative if it seems needed for clarity. As Lord Alport said: 'There is no political significance in my choice of terminology, although I have tried to avoid hurting any legitimate susceptibilities'.¹¹

The method of citation of sources was found problematical: veterinary surgeons are used to the Harvard, or Author-Date system.¹² The advantage of this is that the alphabetical list of references serves the dual purpose of footnote and bibliography.¹³ But historians and literati use footnotes and usually add a bibliography. Those who write popular history use neither, but perhaps add a list of suggested reading. The extensive use of notes may be restricted by the publisher for reasons of cost. Publishers can use a different method even for the same author. With respect both Smith's and Clabby's books would have benefited from bibliographies.

In effect there is a requirement for two documents. The first priority is for an account of the achievements of the Royal Army Veterinary Corps in the years 1961 to 1996. This account must be acceptable to the Corps Council and suitable for publication. Although this has priority it cannot be achieved without first producing a document extensively annotated to serve as a reference source for future historians. In preparing this book footnotes have been used at the drafting stages. But, so as not to interrupt the flow of the narrative, they will be used as sparingly as possible for publication.

A note as to the use of military abbreviations is relevant. Some military histories are disfigured, if it may be put so baldly, by a plethora of such acronyms and abbreviations. Some are so well known as to require no explanation such as RAF, and, in this work, RAVC. The solution adopted is to give the most frequently used military terms their name



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in full when it first appears followed by the abbreviation in brackets to be used thereafter, e.g. Far East Land Forces (FARELF). No abbreviation is given if the term is used only a few times. Abbreviated army ranks are presumably sufficiently well understood to require no comment. To spare the reader turning back too often the abbreviations most commonly used are given after the introduction.

A similar scheme is adopted for the use of personal names. When the name of the officer or other rank is first given, and his or her importance justifies it, a note will give brief biographical details. Subsequent mention of the character, if required, may have a further note referring back to the appropriate chapter. It has been a problem to decide how much detail is justified. For example the names and biographical details of civil servants in MoD and of the regular army officers in whose areas the Corps was serving at any particular time may or may not be of interest. The list of qualified veterinary surgeons who served as officers in the Corps during the period 1961 to 1996 is intended to be inclusive; The list of other ranks and other associated personalities is not comprehensive; but no omissions are deliberate.

A decision on what items might be left out had to be made. Some very minor items were so appealing that they were included to lighten the narrative as well as contributions to history. For example on 27 November 1918 'King George V was graciously pleased to confer upon the Army Veterinary Corps the title of 'Royal' in recognition of the skill and devotion to duty shown by it during World War I, whereby animal wastage and suffering were reduced to a level unknown in previous years'.¹⁴ The approved regimental march for the Corps is a combination of 'Drink Puppy Drink' and 'A hunting we will go'.¹⁵ On 25 January 1966 Lieutenant Colonel Orr signed a letter on the Director's behalf to all officers saying that Corps Day was 5 October 1903, when King Edward VII signed the warrant of official recognition of the Corps.¹⁶ In 1962 the Corps was asked to look after a horse cemetery in Aldershot containing (among others) the remains of a favourite charger of the Duke of Connaught.

In 1966 the Corps was approached for the hire of chargers and troopers for use in the film 'Far From the Madding Crowd', but the company eventually got their requirements elsewhere.

The patron saint of the Corps is Saint Eligius (St. Loo or St Ledger) who veterinary surgeons share with the farriers. This saint was adopted on the suggestion of a meeting with Brigadier Clabby shortly after his retirement¹⁷ shod a difficult horse by cutting off the leg, putting on the shoe, then restoring the leg by making the sign of the cross.

Introduction and acknowledgements

There are two or three villages in Belgium and France bearing his name, the one near Limoges being associated with the miracle.¹⁸ The Saint was depicted in the rood screen of Hempstead church in Norfolk, but this has sadly since been stolen. He survives as an alabaster relief in Freckenham church in Suffolk and in Potter Heigham church in Norfolk. He is also one of the carved saints in the roof of the Henry VI Chapel in Westminster Abbey: the photograph of this is reproduced with the kind permission of the Dean and Chapter.

Sadly the files are rich in rather petty attempts at economising, commonly at the expense of soldiers using horses. An example is the Provost Marshall's draft paper asking for the retention of the only two horses of the Mounted Section Royal Military Police at Aldershot. The paper rejected the suggestion that the duties of the Military Police could be covered by civilian range wardens and civil police and that the troop's only justification was 'tradition and sentiment'. The minutes on the file reveal differences of opinion as to the usefulness of horses and indicated that motor vehicles and foot patrols could do the work just as well. Among the papers was a query as to why forage was still being drawn for a horse removed from a Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers' (REME) unit the previous year.¹⁹

The years from 1962 to 1996 have seen officers and other ranks of the Corps serving in Aden, America, Ascension, Belize, Borneo, Bosnia, Brunei, Cyprus, the Falklands, Germany, Hong Kong, Kenya, Korea, Kuwait, Libya, Malaya, Malta, Northern Ireland, Oman, Sarawak, Singapore, the Yemen and of course at home. In spite of this world-wide deployment and the value of the veterinary profession to the army, more than one attempt has been made to abolish the Corps altogether; of these attempts details will follow in later chapters.

There were no women officers in 1962 and the first few women in other ranks since the war years joined the War Dog units with the ending of National Service. When, in the 1960s, two officers addressed the students at Bristol on the RAVC as a career, women were not invited. In 1976 when a similar meeting was addressed at Edinburgh a woman student was accepted as a candidate.²⁰ By the end of 1997 that same woman held the rank of Colonel Commandant at the RAVC Defence Animal Centre at Melton Mowbray.²¹ The increasing importance of women both in the veterinary profession and in the armed services in the last thirty years or more has justified the inclusion of a special chapter 'Women in the Royal Army Veterinary Corps'.

