

Tony Denner and I joined the Army Apprentices School Chepstow as members of 60A Group on 13th January 1960. We were to train over three years as Electricians RE. We were in the same platoon throughout the three years and after one year in J (Junior) Company we became members of B Coy for the rest of our time at Beachley. Another member of the platoon was Ray Chalkley, also an electrician, who was with us in Thailand. We passed out of the AAS on 12th December 1962 as A3 Electricians RE. All the REs from 60A Group went on to basic sapper training in January 1963 at 1 Training Regt RE at Cove in Hampshire. We qualified as B3 Combat Engineers in one of the coldest winters on record. The photo on your website shows our troop at Cove. I am far left back row, Ray Chalkley is far right back row with Tony Denner far right front row. In April 1963 Tony, Ray and myself joined 36 Engineer Regt at the Barracks, Maidstone. After a few weeks we were sent to Gordon Barracks, Gillingham to work in a support troop at the Royal School of Military Engineering, Chatham. In September 1963 Ray, Tony and I began our A2 Electrician upgrading course at the RSME at Brompton Barracks, Chatham. We passed out, all having passed, in February 1964. After leave and a few days at Maidstone we flew to Singapore in early April 1964 to join 59 Field Squadron RE, based at (I think) Cloutman Lines. We were accommodated in Gilman Barracks a mile or so from the offices. After acclimatisation time in Singapore we flew to Thailand on 17th April. We arrived on the first day that the accommodation blocks were used and so we never had the pleasure of enjoying the delights of the tented camp. We were part of 2 Troop 59 Sqn, the Troop Sgt being S/SGT Farnsworth. Tony Denner, Ray Chalkley and me were assigned to work as electricians completing the wiring installation including all the overhead lines and various accommodation buildings. The Clerk of Works (Electrical) was our boss, He was WO2 Vic Sharples, a very pleasant chap. He was assisted on the electrical work by a sergeant, one Sgt Eastwood, who was an A3 Electrician only. I was working in the Sgts Mess on the morning that Tony Denner was electrocuted at the guardroom, some 150 yards away and saw the comings and goings from a distance. I believe you have a copy of the MOD letter sent to Mrs Sanders, Denner's mother, in August 1964. I also have one. I will offer some thoughts on what is stated in the letter. I have never seen the internal report which must have been produced by the Army enquiry. Firstly, Tony Denner, was nervous of climbing overhead lines and had scraped a pass on the A2 course. I think the overhead line adjacent to the guardroom carried a 4 wire three phase supply however, the MOD letter states that the sapper standing at the bottom of the ladder received an electric shock. This means that Tony Denner received a 240 volt line to earth shock and not a 415 volt phase to phase shock. I would guess that Denner must have gripped one of the live conductors rather than just brushing it. The question which has never been adequately explained is how did the pole at the Guardroom become live when it should have been disconnected? The MOD letter states that the south section of the network was switched off at the power station so that work could be carried out at the guardroom. The letter suggests that a fault occurred between the North and South networks in a trench where the conductors ran together. For the MOD contention to be true the fault

between sections had to occur in the few minutes between switching off the south network and Denner's accident. If the fault had occurred at any other time it is likely that the main switchgear at the Power Station would have tripped out immediately. There is of course the unlikely possibility that such a fault could be red to red phase, yellow to yellow phase, blue to blue phase and this would not trip the switchgear. However, there was only a few yards of cable between the Power Station and the first overhead line pole, which carried both north and south section conductors. To my knowledge the cables from the switchgear to the overhead line were not damaged or dug up or replaced. The MOD suggestion as to the cause is pretty weak. As this was a situation where field conditions were in force certain safety precautions were not present. In civil life you would expect the authorised person to issue a certificate to switch off switchgear and to ensure the switchgear is safely locked off. Such niceties do not exist in the field. In my view there is only one reason that the south section was live was that it had not been switched off as Denner believed it had. It was Sgt Eastwood who switched off the switchgear in the Power Station. It could be that the wrong half of camp was switched off or the switch was remade by mistake by someone. Once Eastwood had made sure both switches were off, there would be no way of knowing for certain the actual situation at the time of the accident. Fifty years on the truth of exactly what happened remains unclear to me. The Clerk of Works (Electrical), Vic Sharples, left Op Crown shortly after the death of Tony Denner and tragically died of a heart attack not long after. He was replaced by WO2 Don Crawford who died a couple of years ago. For my sins I am chairman of Trustees of the Army Apprentice National Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, which we dedicated in September 2011. To raise funds to build the memorial we invited ex-apprentices and their families to donate towards the project by sponsoring commemorative tablets built into the 10 metre circular base. Robin Sanders and his sister subscribed to a 'comtab' for their brother Tony Denner. I have attached a photo of Tony's plaque and one of the memorial. Tony was a quiet and pleasant lad who came from a good family. His middle name, Railton, was given him, I remember, because of his family's association of some kind with John Cobb and the Railton Special.