

SIX-NINETY NEWS

*The newsletter of Sedgford & District Branch – formed in 1926
Royal British Legion: Branch 0690*

Issue 105 – June 2022



Branch number 690 includes the villages of Brancaster, Brancaster Staithe, Choseley, Docking, Fring, Great Bircham, North and South Creake, Sedgford, Stanhoe, Thornham and Titchwell. *We also have many members from beyond these boundaries – keep coming!*

In the hope that we can continue to meet without a further onset of Covid, I have now provisionally booked the following venues for lunches this year, and look forward to an uninterrupted continuation of our "first Friday" social get-togethers, and possibly more – read on! Remember, we meet from 12 to eat around 12.30 each month....

1st July – The King's Head, Great Bircham

5th August – Lynn History walk & lunch at Marriott's Warehouse - *to be confirmed** - see supplement

2nd September – The Three Horseshoes, Warham

7th October – **AGM** Brancaster Staithe Sailing Club – *to be confirmed*

A list of possible outings was also circulated for consideration: please see the supplement attached.



CONGRATULATIONS

At our May lunch we were pleased to welcome back our branch Standard Bearer and Poppy Appeal Organiser, Steve, and his wife Megan, who have not attended a lunch for some time. Steve came to celebrate the 50 years since he joined the RAF Regiment, and the Royal British Legion, in May 1972.

In recognition of the latter, our branch Chairman, Terry, was pleased to present Steve with a certificate, recognising and commending his 50 years of Legion membership.

GOOD NEWS – THE COMMITTEE HAS DECIDED THAT IN VIEW OF REDUCED BRANCH COSTS, THE BRANCH SUBSCRIPTION SURCHARGE OF £3 APPLIED RECENTLY HAS BEEN REMOVED.

We have a bumper edition, and something of a change of style for this month's 690 News! One day, Terry gave me some typed pages to read, and these are reproduced below, as I thought that the style of it and the information contained within it would make something different from the usual newsletter.

I was, of course, aware of the involvement of my parents-in-law in the 'Six Day War', but it was particularly interesting to read Terry's mother's account of the entire experience, to which Terry had also added some photographs which he had taken, and I thought that branch members may also find it interesting.

1967

THE SIX DAY WAR – ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE

by Joyce Austin

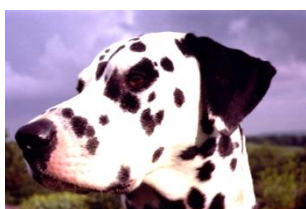


A fierce little war lasting only six days brought to an abrupt end, after five months, what should have been a two-year business trip with Peter, my husband, to the Holy Land.



That we went at all was a source of amazement to our family and friends as until then we had led a fairly hum-drum sort of life

and our only adventures were confined to trips to the Continent for holidays. It was, in fact, whilst we were sunning ourselves on the Italian Riviera in October 1966 that the Jordanian Government was making urgent requests to Britain for an adviser to its Industrial Development Bank. This plea was sent to Peter's firm –The Industrial and Commercial Finance Corporation and it thought he would be the man for the job. What a decision to face! To leave our family of three – a daughter of twenty-three,



married with two children, her twin brother preparing for his final exams in Chartered Accountancy and another son of nineteen in his second year at Kent University. Peter's mother was just approaching her eightieth year and last but not least we had Pluto – a gorgeous Dalmatian. We also had a rather lovely house – a terrace of four very old wee cottages converted into



one large one and this in a small Welsh village with views across rolling fields and woods and right over the Bristol Channel.

I suppose that it was just as well that our decision had to be made within a week, for as it was, we talked well into every night debating the pros and cons. It was a great temptation, and we fell, and had to set about resolving all these problems and many more.

We were told that we would be provided with a house in Jordan and basic furniture, but everything else we would have to send out from the UK. Fine, we had all these things but we would have to let our house furnished while we were away and our tenants would expect to find some degree of comfort, so we had to have an enormous shopping orgy. It was rather like getting married all over again, for when else do you go out and buy everything from sheets and blankets to pots and pans, cutlery, crockery, glassware, etc. One other major purchase was a new car as we were told that spares for our Rover would be almost impossible to get and we ought to have a car with a low compression engine. We decided on an Austin 1100 Countryman which had to be ready by early December to be sent by sea with all our other goods. Then there was Christmas to cope with which we felt ought to be extra special and had all the family home.



After that we had just until January 6th to collect together all the clothes

we would need for the next two years and to have all those horrible inoculations necessary in the Middle East, and me at the age of forty-six to have my first ever smallpox vaccination.

Done at last – dog back at kindly breeder, one son in digs, tenants for house and us motoring through driving snow to London Airport. Up the gangway simply quaking in my shoes – having an absolute horror of flying and unable to really appreciate the luxury of travelling first class in a VC-10. Determined to hide my irrational fears, out came my knitting as soon as we settled in our seats, at least to give the appearance of a hardened traveller. Then with a rush we were airborne and up above all the grey wet clouds that had been covering London. After being served an excellent luncheon with caviar and champagne, the captain welcomed us and told us our height and speed and pointed out places of interest as we passed over. So, thanks be, an uneventful journey, but now for the worst part – landing at Amman.



The sun was just setting and the whole sky was glowing orange and this great aircraft had somehow to land on what seemed to be a very small patch of ground surrounded by hills. All was well, however, and we were soon out of this luxurious aeroplane and boarding the dirtiest, scruffiest, smelliest little bus, with standing room only, to transport us to the airport building. This seemed to be no more than a wooden shack and there we were face to face with Arabs for the first time and wondering just what

we had let ourselves in for. A bank official joined us at last and drove us through what appeared to be a very dirty, dingy Amman to the ultra modern Intercontinental Hotel, which was to be our home for the next three weeks whilst we looked for a place of our own. We were in a strange new world but in spite of that our first thoughts were for a nice cup of tea and fortunately they had already had the message there that English people can't live without this comforting beverage, even if we were stupid enough to spoil it with milk and sugar. So, refreshed with a drink and a bath and a good meal inside us we ventured out into the night for a short walk. It was bitterly cold, but clear and crisp and I was grateful for my sheepskin coat. By now, we were feeling the effects of the previous few weeks' hectic preparations and the journey and so to bed in our beautiful room only to be awakened at dawn, around half past four to the strident calls to prayer from three or four nearby mosques. Not having seen the place in daylight I was soon out of bed anxious to see what was around us and found it a very strange landscape. All the buildings were of stone with flat roofs and everywhere seemed dull and sand coloured with no green grass or trees to be seen. It being Sunday I thought it would just be a case of going to church and then doing whatever we fancied, but I had forgotten that we were now in a predominantly Muslim world where Sunday was an ordinary working day and Peter thought that he ought to put in appearance at the Bank. I was to be left quite alone in this great hotel, not daring to go out on my own, but once again my knitting came to the rescue and I spent all the morning in the enormous reception hall which had the air of a super main line railway station with so many people coming and going. People of all nationalities seemed to congregate there, and I was fascinated by the ceremonial coffee man in wonderful robes who came in and set up his little table and charcoal fire and dispensed tiny handleless cups of very strong coffee from beautiful brass coffee pots. With so much to interest me time went by quite quickly, but even so, I was glad when at last Peter joined me again after his first day's work. It was now just after two o'clock and the rest of the day was ours. It didn't take us long to appreciate these hours of business as it gave us plenty of time to explore our surroundings. Time too, to look for somewhere to live and within a week we came upon an as yet unfinished flat.

It was in a very good neighbourhood, being near the Queen Mother's palace and very modern and attractive. From the road it had the appearance of a semi-detached bungalow, but it and its neighbour were, in fact, on top of a pair of single-storey buildings built into the hillside below road level. In one of these lived our landlord to be – a dapper little Palestinian lawyer, his wife and three children and in the other, her sister and architect husband and little boy. Our neighbours to be had only just moved in and as they were a young American Army Captain and his wife who we took to immediately and, of course, who spoke almost the same language as ourselves, it made us feel that this was the place for us even though it meant waiting a couple of weeks for it to be finished. I rather liked the idea of a new house as so many of the places we had looked at seemed to be a bit dingy and had a most peculiar smell – besides, this had just the number of rooms we needed as well as a super kitchen, large sun lounge and two bathrooms.

After three weeks of being waited upon, the life of ease that we were leading began to pall and the day we were to move into our new house couldn't come soon enough. But come it did, though not in quite the way we had hoped, for although our belongings had left England at the beginning of December, here we were into February and no sign of them. The British Embassy very kindly lent us some sheets and blankets, a couple of battered saucepans and some very odd crockery to enable us to do little more than camp out in our new home. We also found out that moving into a new house in Jordan is very little different from doing so in England with the many jobs not completed and the usual one hundred and one things that go wrong or don't work. One morning I found myself surrounded by no less than nine Arabs doing various jobs about the place, hammering, sawing, singing, smoking and not one of them speaking a word of English. This was one of the days when I sought refuge, almost in tears, with Judy my American neighbour. We had become great friends, as in spite of the differences in our ages, we had much in common. We swapped dress patterns and recipes and went on shopping expeditions together when we bought not only groceries but always ended up in the local antique and curio shop.

The day came when an enormous wooden crate – much too large to go through the double front doors – was dumped in our front garden and so had to be prised apart outside and each individual tea chest carried in from there. From then on it was rather like Christmas all over again. So many packages to open, so much we had bought in a hurry and could hardly remember what it was like, but oh dear, so much broken glass and china and so many things badly scratched through sheer bad packing on the part of our shipping agents. Quite a lot missing too – lovely new pastel-coloured blankets and super bath towels – we felt that someone back in Wales had received these as Christmas presents. All was

insured it's true, but replacing them in a place like Jordan was another matter and also, as yet, our car had not appeared.

Gradually all was sorted out and we settled into our new routine of a very early start to the day, a late lunch and then the afternoon to go shopping together or to walk and explore the town and many evenings to meet up with other British folk out there or go to cocktail parties or dinners connected either with the Embassy or the Bank. The highlight of these was a reception given at the British Ambassador's residence when the Duke of Edinburgh visited Jordan – this was a fairly informal occasion, and we all had an opportunity to speak to his Royal Highness.

The weather in Amman continued to be cold and at times very wet. We even had snow at Easter, but not far away in places like Jericho where we would often go on a Friday – our new weekend – it would be beautifully warm and sunny. In places as far away as Aqaba, where we spent a weekend in mid February, it was really hot and we could sunbathe and swim. From there we were taken out on an expedition down the Red Sea by some of the local fishermen who provided our lunch. This was flat bread like huge pancakes, spread with some odd sort of fish and goats' milk cheese, then rolled up and handed to us to cope with as best we could. To accompany this there were inevitable nuts, which fortunately I loved, as most of my bread, etc went surreptitiously over the side of the boat to feed the fishes.

Gradually we warmed to our new surroundings, the cold and the rain were past and were giving way to beautiful sunshine in cloudless skies and the countryside not only becoming green in parts, but full of the most beautiful wildflowers. Narcissi, black iris, tulips – in fact many flowers which we grow in our gardens in England grow in wild profusion in Jordan. At last, our car had arrived, so we were able to make many trips to places like Jerusalem, Jericho, Jerash or the Dead Sea, and how wonderful it was to see those places we had read about so often in the Bible. In my wildest dreams I had never thought I would see the spot on the Jordan where Our Lord was baptised – or go to the Inn of the Good Samaritan or look up at the Mount of Temptation. The Tomb of Lazarus and Jacob's Well were now real places to me. Then on Good Friday to walk from the Mount of Olives to the Garden of Gethsemane and to see the olive trees which are reputed to be the original ones. All these natural landmarks of our religion meant far more to us than all the churches, shrines and monuments in Jerusalem.

Unfortunately, we were now hearing more and more of the differences between Arab and Jew and we were very concerned that this would break into open conflict. Tension was building up and air raid precautions were being tested, and as we didn't understand all the announcements, which were of course in Arabic, our landlord would come up and explain what we had to do. One thing needed no explanation at all to those of us who had been in England during the Second World War – that was the detested air raid siren. At least we were pretty efficient at putting up blackouts, though fortunately most of the windows had heavy shutters outside really meant for keeping out the sun in the height of summer.

Then at about ten o'clock on Monday the 6th June, Peter arrived home unexpectedly to tell me it had started and that he wouldn't be going back to the Bank. All the American women and children had been packed off to Greece some couple of weeks previously and indeed some of the English community had elected to go home then, but here we were, well and truly caught up in it. There were several air raid alarms that day and we saw many planes zooming down in the direction of the airport and could hear their gunfire.

That night, we just lay on the bed in our clothes, not daring to undress in case there should be more air raids, but we didn't sleep very well. I could hear constant heavy gunfire from the direction of Jerusalem and wondered how long it would be before there would be fighting in Amman. Next day a messenger from the Embassy came to tell us that the airport was badly damaged, and it seemed as if the only way out would be a thousand-mile drive across the desert to Saudi Arabia. We were to make preparations for this arduous journey, and we gathered together tinned food, insulated food box and water container, first aid kit, water purifiers and a long length of canvas which we thought might be useful to provide some shade in what would be a very hot desert. We were to be prepared to leave at a moment's notice either by day or night, but as it happened this route was not eventually used.

Slowly the days went by – there was little we could do, we were confined to the house and had to keep all the shutters closed. We spent some time making ourselves a hideout in a huge cupboard high up over the kitchen ceiling as we had been warned not to show ourselves in case of street fighting. We had thought to put a huge Union Jack on our front door, but although we tried to draw one on a large

sheet of paper, it didn't look very effective as we had no red or blue paint. So, we thought the best thing would be to hide and in case it should prove to be a drawn-out affair we put cushions up there to sit on, a torch, some books, a tin of cookies, drinking water and a bucket, just in case!

By now the British were not very popular as the Arabs thought that there were British ships in the eastern Mediterranean aiding the Israelis, having picked up radar signals to that effect. Peter who had spent some of the war in the Mediterranean as a Radar Officer in the Navy knew that funny things could happen to radar in that area. It has, in fact, been accepted since, that they were indeed freak signals that the Arabs had picked up.

The days dragged by with not very much happening in our immediate vicinity until the Friday evening when daylight was just fading and we were washing up after tea. Suddenly all hell was let loose. We could hear aircraft zooming overhead and small-arms fire just outside in the street, so like a flash we dived for the floor still clutching plates and a tea cloth. Then a slight lull so we dashed downstairs to our landlord's flat – this being built into the hillside and so, much safer. Both families were there and in absolute terror as they felt quite sure it was Israeli paratroops in the street and feared they were going to be shot. We tried to calm them, if only for the children's sake, and set about trying to amuse four little Arabs between the ages of two and seven none of whom could speak a word of English. Gradually all became quiet once more and word came to us that it was in fact Jordanian soldiers who were responsible for the gunfire. They thought the Queen Mother's palace nearby was under attack and were out to give it the best possible protection. Some hours later it was a very dejected landlord that came to tell us that it was nearly all over and that the poor Arabs had suffered a terrible defeat, having lost many men and so much of their land – nearly all of it being that part of the country where they grew so much of their food. Jerusalem was lost too, and that was where most of his legal practice was – a practice which he had built up in the years since he had to leave Haifa in 1948. The thought of losing all this was too much for him and his wife and we sat with them until about three in the morning trying to give them some comfort. So – very little sleep that night and next morning I spent at a friend's house as Peter was needed at the Embassy to help organise a passenger list for a possible airlift and I didn't relish staying in the house on my own. When he and a colleague returned to a late lunch we were told "It's on". We were to assemble at the Intercontinental Hotel at half past three the following morning bringing only one suitcase each.

After a week with practically nothing to do I now had more than enough, as the contents of the house had to be sorted out so that if ever our own goods could be sent back to England the packers could tell what was what. By now I had also laid in vast stores of food, partly because of the war and partly for the entertaining we intended to do when our son came out to join us for his three months' summer vacation, so, beds were stripped, fridge emptied and defrosted and all the food given away to our Arab neighbours who, we felt sure, were going to have a pretty lean time. Then came some tearful good-byes and I went back to stay the night – or what there was left of it, with the friends I had been with in the morning. So, into bed just after midnight and we had to leave again in a little over three hours' time just as dawn was beginning to break. Only a few minutes' drive to the hotel and from there we had to make our own way to the airport. We saw no one on the twelve-mile drive through hilly desert surrounding Amman except at strategic points where there were truck loads of the colourful Bedouin soldiers – guns at the ready. We only hoped they were there for our protection and not for anything more sinister. There at last, to meet up with about a thousand people in all, still not knowing just how or when we were to get away. Work was still in progress on the damaged runways and even then, it wasn't certain if it was safe for planes to land or take off. We were gradually sorted out and given our order of departure – we were to be on the fifth plane to leave – only so far there weren't even any planes there. Then we heard a roar in the sky and we all held our breath as a great Globemaster lowered itself from the sky and touched down amongst vast clouds of cement dust. The first load of people was taken out in the old bus to board the plane and we gave them a loud cheer as that huge aircraft eased itself from the ground in another great cloud of dust. Three more to go and then it would be our turn. By now it was nearly eight o'clock and getting very hot and it was tiring just to stand around and wait. Then we were given the signal to get on the bus and were driven out to the aircraft. No cameras must be used and an armed soldier stood guard over us to make sure. All went as smoothly as clockwork and no wonder, for in-charge was the American Colonel who had organised all the airlifts in the Congo civil war a year or so previously, though now he was in United Nations gear as this airlift was only allowed by the Jordanians if done by that organisation. At a touch on the shoulder, we were to leave the bus, walk to the plane and board it through the enormous doors at the rear. No VC-10 luxury here, for these aircraft are



designed to carry paratroops and all their equipment. Rows of webbing seats lengthwise down the plane and there we sat, back-to-back, knee-to-knee, shoulder-to-shoulder for the next five hours. We were being taken to Iran but were having to go a very long way round as Iraq would not allow us to fly over any of their territory. Some of the other planes were even "buzzed", presumably because they ventured too near Iraqi air space. The heat was intense and the noise unbearable – it was so noisy that conversation was impossible. The first few hours were uneventful but then we were told to fasten our safety belts as we were in for a rough passage over the mountains and the last hour was pretty nightmarish. How glad we were when at last we touched down at Tehran and could get out to stretch our cramped limbs, but for some reason our plane had landed us in the wrong spot, miles from anywhere, and we had to wait over an hour in the glaring mid-day sun before transport arrived to take us to the airport building. The strain and lack of sleep of the last few days was now taking its toll and I felt terrible. It seemed hours before another car came to take us to the hotel where we were to spend night and all I wanted was to crawl into bed. Somehow, with much help from Peter, I managed to have a bath as the day's travel had left its mark and so to bed to sleep soundly till the morning.



I now felt surprisingly refreshed and since I'd had practically no food the previous day, I was more than ready for breakfast which was served on the hotel terrace. Within an hour or so we were on our way back to the airport and it wasn't long before we were aboard an RAF Britannia which was to bring us home. We made a stop in Cyprus where we had lunch and then

we were on the last leg of this tedious journey. How lovely and welcoming was our first glimpse of the English coastline seen through the dusky haze of the setting sun at the end of this long summer's day. But thankful though we were to be home, we just couldn't help thinking about that new car we had left at Amman airport and the several hundred pounds worth of goods in our flat – would we ever see them again? (Fortunately, all was returned, apart from a couple of ornaments, and the car's courtesy light switches – thought to be useful for booby traps!) Our thoughts and prayers were also with the many Arab friends we had made, and we wondered what life held in store for them.



Photographs – Terry Austin



WARTIME EXPERIENCES – AIREY NEAVE DSO OBE MC TD

I saw and bought a book by Airey Neave primarily because I had never heard of 'M.I.9', which he joined after the war, and I was interested to know more, however I didn't learn anything about M.I.9 because when the book was written, the Official Secrets Act still prevented the dissemination of information! Look out for more in a future edition – I have now done the research..... However, I thought that some more tales of wartime escape wouldn't go amiss.

In the afternoon of 24th May 1940, Neave was hit in the side by a machine gun bullet: the wound was painful but not dangerous and he was able to crawl away from the stream of tracer bullets fired by encircling German tanks. Until the morning of 26th he lay in a French hospital cellar under heavy shell fire and dive-bombing, and as the Germans moved in and cornered the garrison, he evaded the hospital staff, but became a PoW, remaining in hospital in Calais until the end of July. However, in June, a French soldier with a Red Cross armband appeared, and suggested a plan to substitute Neave for the corpse of a prisoner who had died, and drive him out of the hospital in an ambulance. The loyal Frenchman had avoided being taken prisoner himself by his disguise as a medical orderly, and for many months had acted as a guide to British soldiers who had not been captured after Dunkirk, taking them across the demarcation line to Unoccupied France. He was eventually arrested by the Gestapo, and spent four terrible years in prison and Buchenwald concentration camp.

Neave did escape, and eventually made it to France, wandering unguarded through the streets of Calais, appreciating the French spirit of resistance with food, wine, and offers to hide him being pressed on him. However, he ended up in hospital again, in Lille, where a pretty French girl was ready to help him and another to disappear from the hospital. But after a grim march through Belgium, he reached

German territory in a coal barge which passed beneath the bridge at Nijmegen in Holland – the scene four years later of operations to rescue men of the First Airborne Division after the Battle of Arnhem – and became a prisoner in Spangenburg, where he started to write a novel, then an essay, and a study of Shakespeare's sonnets to keep himself occupied. He also began to plan to 'transfer' himself to a Stalag (camps for non-commissioned officers).

Prisoners' spirits improved in the autumn with the arrival of the first Red Cross parcels, and then the prisoners were moved to a fort, where a Stalag a few miles away enabled communication and then an escape plan, which involved escapees entering the Stalag with the assistance of British prisoners there, where they stayed for five days while the Germans searched for them, eventually telling other prisoners that they had been captured and mauled by Alsations! Leaving the camp at 10pm, they set off for Warsaw, but after four days, were arrested at a control point – where the Gestapo found on him a sketch of an airfield, which convinced them (wrongly) that he was taking information to the Russians, just two months before the war between Germany and the Soviet Union would commence.

Ultimately, Neave was transferred to Colditz, where the German High Command collected all the most determined escapees: however, this was a miscalculation with inevitable results, as half of all the successful escapes by British officers, before the Allied invasion of Germany and the ensuing confusion, were made from Colditz, Airey Neave's being one of them. His first attempt was 'theatrical', marching past the sentry at the gate wearing a home-made 'German corporal's uniform', and he was threatened with the death penalty, but sentenced to a month in the town jail. To reach the jail, he was marched across a drawbridge over a dry moat, and hence discovered a new method of escaping from the castle.

On 9th January 1942 at 9pm, in heavy snow, Neave and a Dutch Army officer, dressed as German officers, broke into a loft above the guardhouse adjoining the prisoners' quarters, crept down a staircase past the German Officers' Mess (where the strains of 'Lili Marlene' muffled their footsteps), and passed the guardroom, sentries mistaking them for German officers. Reaching the drawbridge, they opened the gate which Neave had noticed on his return from the jail, climbed into the moat and up the far bank, over a high paling, and then, with difficulty, scaling the 12 foot outer wall of the castle. Burying their mock German uniforms, they changed into a mixture of converted uniform samples, to pass as Dutch electrical workers, and later Polish workers, with papers forged in the camp, and 84 hours and 700 miles after escaping Colditz, they entered Switzerland. When Airey Neave arrived in London after his escape from Colditz, he was appointed to M.I.9, the department responsible for setting up future 'escape lines' for escaping personnel.

The creation of an entirely novel form of secret service was by then necessary to maintain regular escape lines to neutral territory, and the top secret M.I.9 was formed under Brigadier Norman Crockatt, and operated in the War Office, achieving remarkable success in 'evasion' - the avoidance of capture. The total number of British and Commonwealth servicemen who reached the Allied front line in western Europe, including Italy, between the outbreak of war and June 1945 was 3,631; for the same period, the number of Americans was 3,415 and this grand total of 7,046 included those who escaped from prison camps or in the battle zone, were brought to neutral territory via escape routes, evacuation by sea or air, or by operational rescue during the Allied invasion of Europe. After 1941 the large majority of those who never became prisoners returned by organised escape lines.

The struggle to achieve justice for British victims of Nazi brutality was a long one. For many years, with other members of the House of Commons, Airey Neave reproached the Foreign Office for their failure to make a financial settlement with the Germans, and the campaign ended in June 1964 with agreement by the Federal German Republic to pay £1,000,000 in compensation, but for many it came twenty years too late.

'Saturday at M.I.9' – Airey Neave



A THOUGHT FOR FUTURE NEWSLETTERS....

I already know what some of our members did for a living, and there are some interesting ones out there, many of which are nothing to do with the military. If you would like to tell me what you did,

with some detail of variations, length of time, locations, and anything else of interest, I will publish a resumé in a few months' time – all of them strictly anonymous – for other members' information and entertainment. If you did more than one interesting job, I'll take the lot! In anticipation..... -Ed

