THE JUNIOR LEADERS
ARMY APPRENTICES COLLEGE RAOC
DEEPCUT
THE END OF AN ERA

By Lt Colonel Jiggens

On 31st December 1985 the Junior Leaders/Army Apprentices College RAOC which was based at Deepcut Surrey, was disbanded. This marked the end of an era in which the Royal Army Ordnance Corps has had its own cap badged junior service unit.

Junior, or boy, service in armed forces is as old as warfare itself, Alexander the Great commanded his first army at the age of sixteen. The existence of a minimum age for armed service is a relatively new concept that has developed with society. The boy soldier, however, has had a particular place in the history of the British Army since early medieval times. Richard I, in the twelfth century took boy soldiers to war with him as minstrels; these minstrels performed a vital function in indicating by their sound the rallying point of the army, which often could not be seen. He also took with him apprentice saddlers, harness makers and like trades. In these beginnings eight hundred years ago we can see the predecessors of our RAOC tradesmen of today, and even the College Corps of Drums!

As armies were raised, from them as boys continued to be used for similar functions. In Elizabethan times companies of soldiers had about a dozen boys, known as Comarados, added to them. It was the task of these boys to forage for firewood, prepare food and generally acquire the local provisions of the soldiers. There is in this function a direct ancestor of some of our activities today.