

The Editor Writes

Here's wishing you and your families the best of years ahead. We all look forward to twelve months (at least) of health, happiness and peace. 2004 has not made the best of starts, with the world terrorist alarms, but, as always, hope springs eternal. When

we look back at the storms we have weathered during our lives, we have every reason to be optimistic.

A recent television series was called Grumpy Old Men and I bet there were very few of us who would disagree with most of their moans. Comparing how things are with how they were (in the 'good old days'!) is often a comforting pastime for Oldies. On the other hand, it is amazing how quickly modern aspects of life are absorbed by even the oldest amongst us.

Walking along Nelson Street the other day, I passed an elderly lady leaving her neighbour's house. "I'll pop in again later", she said, "or I'll text you." Not only had the lady mastered the mobile phone, but the art of sending text messages, too. Not so long ago I expect she would have banged on the wall!

My New Year message is really a plea. At the present time I have virtually no material for the next issue of *In Touch*. So, will you help me, please? I am aware that many people think that their story will not be of interest to anyone else. Wrong! Many people feel unable to write their story. No problem! As I have said before, you do the telling, I'll do the writing. That's life - it's horses for courses, you see.

Finally, another plea. As Tom Ashmore's review of the year showed in the November issue, there is plenty going on in the Branch. But there could be more and your ideas for social activities are always welcomed by the committee. Please let them know what you would like to see or do.



A good time was had by all at the Branch Christmas Lunch



Joan and Tom Ashmore



Tony Johnson and Bernard Halsall



Janet and Les Sewell



Youth Affiliation

The Youth Officer, Brian Marshall, announces that the presentation of the Affiliation Certificate to 1084 Squadron of the Air Training Corps will take place on at 8 pm on Wednesday, 25 February, at the ATC Headquarters in the Leisure Centre grounds. RBL County Officials have been invited and Brian hopes that that there will be a good turn-out by Members of the Branch. The Cadets will be wearing their new RBL Affiliate Badges, which will be provided from Branch funds.

Double Whammy!

There are two excellent reasons to be at the next Branch Meeting on Wednesday, 11th February. Definitely not to be missed is a talk by the irrepressible Bernard Halsall, intriguingly entitled, 'I Believe this Belongs to You!'. And that's not all - Bernard will be followed by an opportunity to feast upon the goodies tastefully laid on by Mary and Joan. Don't miss it.

81st Anniversary Dinner

The date: Friday, 26 March. The place: Market Harbour-ough Golf Club - with music by David Hawke. The cost: just £15. Make your booking as soon as possible, please, with Mary or Joan on MH 462143 and let them know your selection from the following menu:

- Starters:* Stilton & Broccoli Soup
or Prawn & Smoked Mackerel Platter
- Main:* Roast Lamb & Mint Sauce,
Poached Salmon or Vegetarian Dish
Choice of Sweet or Cheese & Biscuits
Coffee & Mints

Gurkha Welfare Trust

The Branch will donate the proceeds from a Coffee Morning, and possibly a Meeting Collection as well, to this deserving cause.

The Diary



Some dates to keep free.
Details of all Social Events are available from Joan McMillin on MH 462143. Joan welcomes your suggestions for events, outings, etc.

- 11 Feb Branch Meeting, with talk and refreshments
- 17 Feb Branch Lunch, Angel Hotel, Noon for 12.30pm.
- 21 Feb Mountbatten Concert with MH Royal Naval Assn.
- 10 Mar Branch Meeting
- 13 Mar RBL Central Band Concert, Fairfield Halls, Croydon
- 26 Mar Branch Anniversary Dinner
- 3 Apr Branch Coffee Morning

Would you like to attend Branch Meetings or other events but cannot because you have no transport?

If so, every effort will be made to help you.
Please telephone Vida or Barry (see front page) for assistance.

The date of the next meeting is February 11th

Branch meetings are held on the Second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm in the downstairs Function Room, Conservative Club Building, Fairfield Road, Market Harbour-ough.

The Branch Committee meets on the Thursday preceding the Branch Meeting at 7.30 pm in the upstairs Committee Room at the Conservative Club.



The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harbour-ough Branch

Founded in 1923



Branch Website
www.mktharbrorbl.ukvet.net

In Touch

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We got off the docks in Glasgow and went to a place called Bonhill and camped in a disused factory. All the blokes that I was with went there and when they had sorted us out, there was infantry and all sorts with us. They said you can have a fortnight's disembarkation leave. You can go home. Let them know at home that you are here.

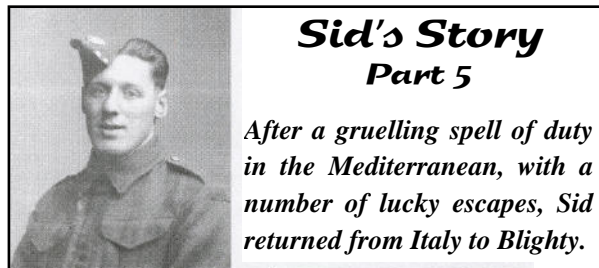
Me, like a fool, I didn't let anybody know. I thought I'll surprise everybody. If I had let them know that I was back home after all this time - nearly two years there'd be a lot of fuss, and I didn't want that. So I didn't let my wife know, but I know to this day that it was the wrong thing to do. I should have let her know, but I didn't. But anyway I came home and surprised them and my kids didn't know who I was. I only had a fortnight's disembarkation leave and they used to say to their mother, "When's that man going back Mummy?".

I often wonder today when I hear all these 'sob' stories about things, how you think we felt. How do you think I felt, because I was nearly a stranger to my wife and she was to me, but I still loved her and I do to this day?

But having had that leave we went back up to Scotland. We assembled in the factory and they said that a man named Lieutenant Colonel Arthur was coming to talk to us. He was a Royal Engineer, I suppose, and I can remember him coming into that big room where we were assembled as if it were yesterday.

He said, "1055 Company you have been brought back to England as battle experienced troops and whatever happens you are going to open the Second Front with the rest of the army, the infantry and everybody else." After we had had this lecture we looked at each other and said, "Well we've escaped so far, are we ever going to get away with it again?"

Anyway, I got on the phone and made contact somehow



with my wife. I told her what was going to happen and said, "If you can leave the two children with your mother, or someone, you can come up and spend a few more days with me before I go away again". So this happened and I went to the station and met her, and I can't explain to you how we felt.

I could stay with her through the day but they wouldn't let us go out at night, but I used to creep out. We were all friends, of course, and the officers knew that a lot of the blokes had done the same as I'd done. I used to get out at night and I think it was about a week before they said "You're confined to barracks. You can't go out any more." So I thought I've got to get out and let her know I can't see her any more and she had got to make her own way back. You can just imagine what that did to me and what it did to her. She was a country girl, and she was in a place like she was and she had to find her own way back and that was another thing that I can't explain to you how I felt, because I couldn't do anything about it.

After a few days we were moved to Weybridge and then to a place called Havant, I'm sure that's the name of the place. This was a concentrated area and we couldn't get out. But somehow, I don't know how, I managed to get away home for 24 hours. When I got back, somebody had reported me missing, so I had to go in front of the officer. I was a full Corporal, and I tried to explain to him why I did it, and he let me off with a caution, because he was a good man.

We then got on a boat in the harbour, waiting to go

across to France. They had postponed the invasion because it was too rough, so we were rocking about on this boat for 24 hours, until we moved off in the early morning when it was dark. When we were going across the Channel it started to get light and these tugs came through, and they had these great big iron things. We didn't know what they were - we couldn't believe what we were looking at, but they were towing them into the harbour and they had assembled them when we landed.

They tried to get the boat that I was on into the mouth of a canal, but it beached and we had to jump off and wade ashore. I remember pulling a Canadian out of the water with a bullet hole through his head, and there were many more bodies about. We ran up the beach and were told to disperse when we got there, so I jumped in a big hole that looked like somewhere out of the way, and there were about 14 dead Germans in it. It was a German trench that had been shelled. I thought, well I'm not stopping in here, and there were two more blokes with me and we ran and got under a wall. We had to stop there all night and then we were told we would be sorted out in daylight.

When it got light we started wandering about and a Jeep came along the beach with two officers who said, "What do you think you're doing wandering about, you want to find somewhere to get out of the way because they will be strafing this beach any time". So we wandered about a bit longer and found the officers and the company and they had these what they called R.E. shovels that they dished out to us, to dig trenches to get in out of the way. And we dug in just off the beach under a wall and I can remember there were three dead cows and two horses in this field that had been killed by shellfire.

When we got up the next morning we lay in these

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Branch News

County Annual Conference

Betty Ramsay is our delegate but other Branch members are welcome to attend the Conference, which will be held from 2pm on January 31 at the Mountsorrel Working Men's Club.

Harborough Town Centre - Water works disruption.

The Chairman has been assured by local council representatives that the forthcoming work, which will affect the Memorial Garden, would not impinge on the Remembrancetide events. The Branch will be shown the plans for the work.

War Memorial Portico.

The future of the memorial in the Cottage Hospital, should the NHS cease to own the building, is the subject of discussions between Messrs Ashmore, Hudson and Mrs Cox of the Primary Care Trust. Mrs Cox is very supportive of the Legion's concern.

Mr Chris Gibson

The family of the late Mr Gibson thanked members, particularly the Standard Bearer, for their support at the funeral, and have donated £100 to the Branch in his memory.

A Presentation

The Branch President welcomed new Member, Mrs Joan Tooms, and formally presented her badge.

Christmas Welfare

John Liddell is grateful to all who helped compile the list of recipients, which totalled twenty-one having been widened to include those recently widowed. He thanked Vida Edwards and Charles Freer for their help with the distribution.



The Poppy Appeal 2003/04

Because of personal commitments, Douggie McMeeken has announced with regret that he will be unable to continue as Appeal Organiser, a role he performed so admirably last year. The Chairman expressed appreciation for Douggie's work, which contributed to the raising, to date, of £17,713.84. In announcing this figure, Dick Fulford said the fund will remain open until the end of the Poppy Appeal Year in May.

The Chairman asks Members if they know of someone - or maybe a couple or a family - who would be prepared to take over as Organiser. Thanks to Douggie's work and the sterling efforts of Renie and Dick Fulford and Marion Vine, a comprehensive organisation structure is now in place.

Sid's Story

Continued from page 5

trenches with what bit of kit we had and an aircraft came over the top of the hill strafing. I jumped back in the hole and everybody else did the same thing and they dropped four bombs in the field where we were buried us in the sand in the hole. We climbed out of it to see if anybody was hurt, and nobody was - we were lucky again. After this had happened they started to shell us, and we could hear the shells coming over and you could hear the whistle and the whine and then a crack. We got away with it again don't know how, but we did.

The final part of Sid's fascinating story will appear shortly.

What more could you ask?

May you live as long as you want
And never want as long as you live.

WALKING THE SOMME

Jim Livermore

I was walking the fields of the Somme today,
There was a dampness in the morning air,
There were others, too many to mention.
We had arrived from all over the country,
Total strangers for the first hour or so,
Lads from Manchester, another from Chester.
Together for a common cause, a respectful visit,
Each with a respectful attitude to the fallen,
Some to see the fields of destruction and waste,
Others to find the final resting place of a loved one.
Altogether as one happy family, tinged with sorrow,
We survey the now silent, killing fields together.
Yeomen of Britain, you have not been forgotten,
Not for now, not by these respectful folk,
They will remember longer, for their coming,
To sally forth onto this hallowed turf, and see,
Well kept graves of those that had fallen,
Indelibly etched into their thoughts and memories.
Our little family will soon break up and scatter,
Many hoping to return on another day,
Again to stand in silent prayer and respect,
Continuing the tryst of this happy, respectful, family.

Jim Livermore, who lives in Market Harborough, has privately published four collections of his poetry. If you would like to purchase one of his books, please speak to the editor.

'So You Want a Coat of Arms?'

That was the title of a fascinating talk given at the January meeting by Brian Marshall. Twenty years ago, Brian made his personal entry into the field of heraldry and he told of the long, drawn-out processes involved in the granting of a coat of arms.