



Editorial

In this issue we have another instalment of Sid's Story, which, now that I have met the author, means so much more to me. Sid Read, now over eighty, lives a life of peaceful contentment in a Leicestershire village, as if to compensate, to some extent, for his awful wartime experiences as a young man.

I accompanied Tom Ashmore on his *In Touch* delivery run around the more rural parts of the county, and had the great pleasure of meeting Sid. Mrs Read greeted us at the gate and directed us to the summerhouse, where Sid was enjoying the early spring sunshine. Furnished with two armchairs and a radio and record player, Sid reckons the summerhouse was "the best thing I ever bought".

Sid recorded the reminiscences we are serialising as he sat in his garden 'studio', chatting into his microphone, and his daughter kindly typed the result. It is a fascinating story, told from the heart – and an excellent memory - with no preparation or script.

Reading Sid's words now surely makes us realise, yet again, the immense debt we owe to an entire generation for the sacrifices they made and the suffering they endured so that we could enjoy the freedom we now so often take for granted.

Sid, and those like him, who survive, would never expect or crave appreciation, of course. No doubt they would shrug their shoulders and mutter something about just doing their job. Nevertheless, we will remember them and give them our eternal thanks.

Which brings me neatly on to the Poppy Appeal. I must warn you that our intrepid organiser, Dougie McMeeken, is gearing up for another supreme effort this year when, if there is any justice in this world,

Oh, they did like to be beside the seaside



Meanwhile, back in Market Harborough, Freewheeling Gary represented the Branch and, with a little help from an Air Training Corps friend, helped to enliven the Town's Carnival procession.



Standard Bearer George Fleming and Mark Hudson on duty at the Annual Conference in Torquay.



Pause for a Smile

A man goes to the eye doctor and the receptionist asks what is wrong with him. "I keep seeing spots in front of my eyes", he says. The receptionist asks him if he has seen a doctor. "No, just spots", says the man.

The Royal British Legion Annual Conference

Although not featured in our photographs (she was behind the camera!), our Branch Secretary and Roving Reporter, Betty Ramsay, attended the Conference with our Chairman, Mark Hudson, and Standard Bearer George Fleming. This is Betty's report from Torquay.

There was a large attendance with 627 delegates on the first afternoon – and 590 were still there on the last morning! George joined ninety other Standard Bearers on parade at the opening ceremony. The National Award was won by the East Midlands, but, sadly, no cups came Market Harborough's way this year.

Some Conference points:

- The national Poppy Collection (after 51 weeks) stood at £20,927,405, around half a million down on last year. (However, the Conference Bucket Collection raised over two thousand pounds – up on last year.) The value of Gift Aid was emphasised.
- The Poppy Appeal, which is in the top twenty-five British charities, is planning a summer campaign called 'Poppy People', and 30,000 volunteers will be sought.
- RBL membership is below half a million for the first time in living memory.
- Spending on Welfare provision for ex-service personnel and dependents amounted to £50 million.
- SSAFA reported that 80,000 people were helped by 7,000 caseworkers.
- A talk on the Veterans' Initiative was given by the Under Secretary of State and Minister for Defence Procurement – a.k.a. Lord Bach of Lutterworth, and a member of that town's RBL branch.

Sid's Story continues

“On this boat was Montgomery, Eisenhower and Lord Louis Mountbatten. That is something that I shall never forget.

“The sea got rough before we got there, the boat was rocking about and it “put the wind up” us all because we were so loaded and we were low down in the water with all we had on the boat. Anyway the squall went by and in early morning the assault troops went in at a quarter past three and we were there at five o'clock behind them. They were shelling us from the shore and hitting the boats but, luck again, we didn't get hit. There were boats round about that got hit and the carnage that we saw you can't believe. I can't explain to you what it was like.

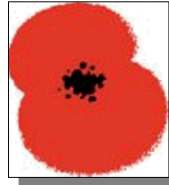
“At mid-day a monitor came alongside with two 15” guns firing at the shore batteries to try and stop them firing at us. Eventually they did, but at mid-day there were at least 24 German planes overhead and they dropped their bombs all around us. I can remember looking up and seeing these bombs coming down. I don't know why, or how, they didn't hit the boat that we were on, but they didn't, they dropped all around us. “And I escaped again!”

More of sid's wartime reminiscences soon.

Friends in Need

The Welfare Support Group, providing hospital visits, transport and other help, is the focus of the newly-formed Welfare Committee, and volunteers to carry out this caring and rewarding service are asked to come forward. The current committee members, Messrs McMeeken, Marshall and Cox, are seeking one more person to complete the Group.

If you know of a 'Friend in Need' who would benefit from the service, you are asked to contact the Group on 01858 463203. It is essential that the Group be kept informed in order that they may offer assistance to those in need.



The Poppy Appeal 2003/04
Appeal Organiser,
Dougie McMeeken Reports

Thanks once again to all who contributed to the magnificent total for 2002/03. A photograph of leading Poppy Appeal Branch personalities taken at the June meeting will hopefully appear in the local newspapers.

This being the Branch's 80th Anniversary Year, I am planning a lunchtime get-together on October to launch the new Poppy Year. This will be held in the Working Men's Club and will include the presentation of awards to Poppy helpers and Cadet Affiliation, linked to the Lord Lieutenant's Award Scheme.

I make no apologies for repeating my appeal for more volunteers and ask you to rope in as many of your friends as you can. Remember that many hands make light work - as Del Boy would say, “You know it makes sense”.

Events and Arrivals in June

- 1801 The Census (first in Britain)
- 1842 Queen Victoria (first Royal on train)
- 1855 The Daily Telegraph (first published)
- 1890 Stan Laurel (comedian - born Uk)
- 1906 Catherine Cookson (author born - UK)
- 1909 Le Mans (first Grand Prix)
- 1916 Sir Leonard Hutton (cricketer - bornUK)
- 1926 Marilyn Monroe (film star - born USA)
- 1936 Gatwick Airport (opened)
- 1937 Supermarket Trolley (first - in Oklahoma)
- 1946 Barry Manilow (singer - born USA)
- 1950 Kidney Transplant (first - in Chicago)
- 1954 Lester Piggott (first Derby win)
- 1968 Jason Donovan (singer - born Australia)
- 1979 Zimbabwe (was Rhodesia)
- 1981 Shergar (won the Derby)

past records will be beaten. *In Touch* will feature regular reports from Dougie, and it is inevitable that he will use his Scottish charm and a certain amount of gentle persuasion to achieve his aims. I have a feeling you won't let him down!

I have received several offers of stories for *In Touch* and I would like more. It is not just me being greedy, but there is a lot of space to fill in the newsletter and I need your help to do it. Remember, you don't have to write your story, so if you have a tale to tell, just let me know (my telephone number is on the front of the newsletter) and we can get together for a chat.

A final thought. In July it will be fourteen years since I moved to Market Harborough and I am as much in love with our delightful town as the day I arrived. Like the majority, of course, I am saddened by the odd case of unsociable behaviour, but compared with many parts of the country, our lifestyle is generally untroubled.

So, as we stroll through our town on these beautiful summer days, admiring the colourful floral displays, let us be grateful for our good fortune to be living in Market Harborough, truly a fine piece of God's own country.

Presentation

Thirty-five members were present at the June meeting when Barry Peck received his membership badge from Branch President, Peter Wilson.

A Message from Irene

After waiting over two years for an operation, Irene Blissett is out of hospital with a brand new knee. Now living in Fleckney, Irene says she is making slow progress and has to get around on crutches. Cheerful as ever, Irene looks forward to coming to a meeting when she feels better and, meanwhile, sends greetings to her many friends in the Branch.



Sid's Story

Part Three

"When I think about it, there were 95 Bofors around the harbour in Benghazi, and 3.7's behind and at night when there was any aircraft above all these guns opened up. I can't begin to describe the noise."

The Germans had fallen back to Tripoli, so Sid moved there from Benghazi. The guns were defending the harbour and Sid had another funny experience. "We were billeted in a school and again the German aircraft came over at night and, though they missed most times, there were times when they didn't. This particular night they must have hit a boat full of TNT and high explosives. We'd been working all day and we got into bed, double bunkers, when there was an almighty explosion that blew out all the windows and "dropped" us on the floor. We were crawling about on the floor wondering what was going to happen next but we had got away with it again.

"There were 400 men in our company, all dockers, working day and night shifts. One night, we were on the night shift, we were going out on an A Lighter to go alongside a boat to discharge shells and high explosives, everything the forward troops needed. We got halfway across the harbour when the air-raid siren sounded. We didn't know, but they had dropped anchor. We were in army boots, topcoat, tin hat and a respirator round our necks. I thought 'It's a long way to the shore if we get hit and I have to swim with all this kit on'. On the back of the craft was a six pounder under the galley where we had all run for a bit of cover. The A Lighter wasn't supposed to fire unless attacked. I stood facing my mate Fred Palmer, an older guy than me, and all of a sudden with all the ack ack firing, they fired the six pounder. Well, we were

"high and dry" with nothing under our feet clinging together. We eventually got our feet back on the deck and recovered and I can laugh about it now but it was serious at the time!"

Sid was working in the docks for quite a while and being bombed every night. "They were awful experiences. I can't explain to you how I felt because I knew that if the boat was hit that I was on we had to swim to get away, if we ever got that chance. Anyway, I escaped all that.



*Sid Read's account of his Second World War experiences in the Royal Engineers, continues with further edited extracts from his account of life in the Eighth Army. In April we left Sid celebrating his escape from a close shave in Benghazi.
(Further extracts from Sid's Story will appear in In Touch. A copy of the full transcript is available on loan from the Editor.)*

"Then from Tripoli, when the Germans had to get out of Africa, we got up as far as Sfax, where we were unloading ammunition for the infantry. We had to load all this stuff back onto boats to go back to Alexandria - and then they decided to send us back as well. We went back to Tripoli harbour to get on the boat. The boat was called the Newrailia. It was an Indian mail and cargo boat and I was sent back with the advance party to Alex with the Sergeant and Sergeant Major to find a billet for the company.

"When we got back to Alex we learned that the main company was on a boat called the Omah, the same sort as the Newrailia. We don't know what happened, whether it struck a mine or if it was torpedoed, because German

U-Boats were in the Mediterranean, but it went down in about 10 minutes. I lost all the mates that I had been with through the desert. I don't know how many we lost but there were so many more not in our company, but other companies, infantry and artillery. They all went down with the boat."

After all this a company was formed called 11055 Stevedore Battalion. In the harbour at Alex boats were loaded with Bren carriers, tanks, ammunition, etc. When the boats had all been loaded, Sid boarded a Canadian cargo boat called the Ocean Vision. "It had a 70 tonne LCI lighter on the main deck, as well as lorries and other things on it. We went out of the harbour at Alexandria and dropped anchor about five miles out to wait to see what was going to happen. From what I can gather now, we were waiting for the assault troops to come through and we were going to follow them.

"This happened in the night when we moved off. I can remember when we sailed that the officer in charge of our company was Captain Powell. I can see him as well as if it were yesterday. He called us all onto the main deck to stand around where he could talk to us and said, 'Now I don't doubt that you don't know what is going to happen to you, or what it is all about, but I have received a telegram to tell me what is going to happen, so I'll tell you now. We are going to invade Sicily and we are expecting on this invasion 90% casualties'.

"I can assure you that when he said that we didn't think we would survive. We were all looking at one another and wondering what it was going to be like when we got there. And then he said, 'If you look to the starboard side of the boat you will see the assault troops coming in. They are going in front of us and there's a boat there coming through the convoy flying the good luck flags to all of you'.

Continued overleaf



Carnival Day Display

The first requisite for erecting a gazebo would seem to be a surface into which supporting posts can be driven. In the Market Square no such surface was available to Tom Ashmore, whose ingenuity was considerably taxed when faced with building a shelter to house the Branch display stand. Needless to say, he succeeded admirably and passers-by showed interest.

July Meeting - Local Author to Speak

Derek Seaton, author of 'Leicestershire VC Heroes', will give a talk at the July 9 meeting entitled 'For Valour: The History of the Victoria Cross'.

Iraq Conflict Documentary

Concern of the Branch Committee about a recent BBC documentary has been passed to County. There is no RBL view on the matter but the County Chairman has registered disapproval with BBC.

Historic Photograph

A copy of a photograph of former Branch Chairman, Lt Col Hignett, with Sir Winston Churchill has been obtained for the Branch.

Memories are Made of This

Donations of £75.50 have been received from the sale of this excellent book. If there are any members who have not purchased a copy, please place your order with the publisher, Tom Ashmore, on 01858 433108.

Ball Game Ban

Mrs Halsall has asked if the Branch could request the Council to place a 'No Ball Games' notice in the Memorial Gardens.

Press Representative

Liaison between the Branch and local newspapers will now be undertaken by George Seward.



Diary Reminders for July & some other dates to keep free

- 4 Jul Branch Committee meeting
- 9 Jul Branch meeting and talk
- 12 Jul Open-air Concert - Beaumanor Hall
- 15 Jul Branch Lunch - Angel Hotel MH
- 2 Aug Poppy Race Day - Newmarket
- 22/6 Aug Holland visit - Standard Bearers' Association
- 19 Sep Branch Autumn Dinner - Bull's Head Clipston
- 17 Oct RNA Trafalgar Day Dinner
- 25 Oct Branch Coffee Morning - Harborough Theatre
- 26 Oct Poppy Appeal - start House-to-house collections
- 1 Nov De Montfort Hall - Festival of Remembrance
- 8 Nov Branch Remembrance Concert - Baptist Church

Note. Details of all social events from Joan McMillin on MH 462143.

Meetings

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 Harborough. The next meeting is on 9th July.

The Branch Committee meets on the Thursday before the Branch Meeting.

Directory Amendment

Farnsworth, Gary. Phone number - 0773 276 2968



The Royal British Legion



Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch



Founded in 1923

In Touch

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