



Editorial

On behalf of the officers, committee and members of this branch I send heartiest congratulation to the Market Harborough Branch of the Royal Naval Association on the award of a Rose Bowl. This was awarded for the recruitment of new members, calculated on a percentage basis for small branches. It is the first award this branch has won for many years. I understand the rose bowl will go on display in Market Harborough beside our own Haig Cup.

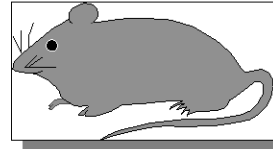
Some time ago, fellow member, Tony Johnson, gave a talk to the branch about his experiences as a prisoner of war his escape attempts and eventual success. The book he had written remained in manuscript form until recently but it has at last been published under the title *Escape to Freedom*.

Congratulations, Tony, and I for one am looking forward to a good read.

Enclosed with this issue of In Touch is a leaflet describing the book and inviting you to purchase! For this piece of advertising, the publishers have made a donation to the Branch of £20 (towards the cost of producing the newsletter). It also potentially helps to boost Tony's royalties!

And the Branch has received congratulations too. A member wrote following the award of the Haig Cup, "I must congratulate the Harbro' Branch of the Royal British Legion—all your hard work is rewarded. Thank you again for bringing 'In Touch'..." A most generous donation of £50 was enclosed.

A memorial garden in Richmond (Yorkshire) Castle has been opened. But it is causing great



Mighty Mouse

The heaviest tank ever to be built appeared in 1944. Hitler could not match the masses of

Russian tanks ranged against him, so he instructed Dr. Porsche (designer of the Volkswagen Beetle car) to design a land battleship that would pack an heavier punch than the Russian tanks, but was itself invulnerable.

De Porsche came up with a design that weighed 180 tons and stood almost 20 feet high. The armour at the front was 12 inches thick. It was powered by a 1500 hp diesel engine which fed power to two electric motors carried in each hub of the caterpillar tracks. It was christened The Mouse.

With hatches closed it was completely watertight, and could cross a river 40 feet deep with its engine switched off and its motors fed by cable from another tank on the river bank. Once the tank was across, the roles were reversed for the second tank to cross.

But its size and weight was the Mouse's undoing. With a top speed of only 12 mph, when driven along roads on test runs, the vibration smashed cobble stones, cracked foundations of buildings, and shattered windows in all the towns and villages it passed through. Although its tracks were one yard wide, the tank sank into anything but the very driest ground – so the project was dropped.

SUPERSTITIONS

according to Groucho Marx.

To carry a rabbit's foot shows you are a good shot who met an unlucky rabbit.

When a black cat crosses your path, it is not necessarily lucky, it just signifies that the cat is going somewhere.



Scrapbook

The next project to be undertaken by the Communications team is a branch scrapbook.

We are hoping that this scrapbook will largely consist of photographs and press cuttings that cannot be included in "official" records and minutes. To this end we are seeking anything relating to branch events such as coffee mornings, outings, presentations, ceremonies, etc. We are particularly anxious to have older material but anything you may have about the branch from its 1923 inception to the present day and which you would donate or lend for copying, will be eagerly received by Tom Ashmore or Bob England.

DID YOU KNOW . . .

. . . that braille was first put forward as a military aid?

Captain Charles Barbier de la Serre of the French Artillery tried to interest the Academy of Science in Paris with a system of what he called "Night Writing".

It consisted of a system of raised dots and dashes on a strip of cardboard, which soldiers could "read" with their finger tips when in action at night.

Because it was a complex arrangement of combinations of 12 dots for each letter, it was not a success.

It just so happened that at that time a certain Louise Braille was enrolled at the Academy and became interested in de la Serre's idea. From this he developed the now universally known braille system.



Bletchley Park

By Caroline Windsor

In 1938 the British Government's Code and Cypher School moved to Bletchley Park and started an organisation which was to have a profound effect on the course of WW II. From here they began to break Germany's Enigma codes and later Japanese and Italian codes. Some historians think that this very valuable work may have shortened the war by as much as two years and was instrumental in saving thousands of lives.

The very technical nature of the work which was done at Bletchley led to the development of scientific equipment including the first programmable computer, known as Colossus, Alan Turing's Bombes for code breaking, and the forerunner of the modern fax machine.

Although thousands of people worked at Bletchley Park on these and other secret projects, Station X as it came to be known was kept a top secret station throughout the war. It's primary function was to interpret the intelligence reports from radio stations up and down the country and overseas, which were known collectively as Station Y.

Among the many attractions now open to the public are the cryptology trail, vintage vehicles, extensive collections of memorabilia and the toy exhibition and Post Office. You can also enjoy a visit to the NAAFI and bar in Hut 4.

A party of us from the branch had a really enjoyable day at Bletchley Park, which ended with a re-enactment of the Fire Service and Home Guard "mopping-up" after an air raid.



The Air Despatch Dakota

John Cox recently attended an unusual ceremony at RAF Lyneham. The following is taken from the programme of events for the day, which John kindly passed to me. (Ed.)

The Air Despatch Dakota Project was established in order to procure a Douglas C47 Dakota aircraft, to stand as a Gate Guardian outside the Headquarters of 47 Air Despatch Squadron Royal Logistics Corps, B Site, RAF Lyneham.

The Dakota has long been associated with Air Despatch and is still worn as an emblem on the uniform of all serving Air Despatchers. It was deemed that this would act as a fitting tribute to all Air Despatchers who made the ultimate sacrifice around the world.

Following negotiations with the Chairman of Air Atlantique, a Dakota (G-AMPO) was finally obtained in July 2001 for £10,000.

The Dakota was originally designated KN566. It was not involved in the Second World War but did fly missions in the Far East, dropping stores to troops in the jungle. It was also very much involved in the Berlin Airlift. In 1952 it went into civilian service and was designated G-AMPO 16438/331186.

Primarily, this Dakota is a tribute to all Air Despatchers. Secondly, it was thought fitting to commemorate the crew who flew Dakota FZ626 lost during Operation Market Garden. They took off from Down Ampney and flew over the church, which coincidentally is already adopted by the Squadron. Using the number FZ262 on the Gate Guardian and painting it in Normandy invasion colours acknowledges the bravery of the crew and many like them at the time.

We hope to include the story of Dakota FZ262 in a future issue of In Touch. (Ed)

controversy, as it is to honour 16 conscientious objectors who refused to fight in the 1914-18 war.

English Heritage, who used £90,000 of taxpayers' money to set-up the garden, said that it was not intended to glorify the objectors, but to incorporate the history of Richmond Castle into the garden's design. The 16 objectors were imprisoned in the castle for the duration of the war.

Members of the Richmond Branch of the Royal British Legion who are also English Heritage members have threatened to resign from the conservation body over the matter and are supported in their protest by many townspeople, some of whom regard it as an insult to the town which has a rich military history and is only two miles from Britain's biggest Army garrison, Catterick.

General Sir Douglas Haig had wanted the objectors executed to discourage young men from trying to avoid the draft as the Battle of the Somme approached in 1916, but the sentences were commuted to 10 years hard labour on the intervention of a local Liberal MP.

The conscientious objectors included Quakers, Methodists and Jehovah's Witnesses.

While the first reaction is one of disgust that such people should be "honoured" in this way, where does the question of human rights come into the equation? How does one sort out the genuinely religious men from the "dodgers"?

It is a very similar problem to the one which arose last year over whether a memorial should contain the names of soldiers shot for "desertion".

What do you feel about it? Write and let me know your opinion for the next issue.



Wartime Leicestershire

By Bob England

A few issues back I mentioned a book I had seen previewed entitled *Birds Eye Wartime, Leicestershire*, by Terence C. Cartwright. I have now managed to obtain a copy (via the local library).

It is quite an interesting book, but consists mainly of aerial photographs and maps which I found difficult to interpret with my untrained eye. Many of these photographs are actually those taken by the Luftwaffe for use by their squadrons.

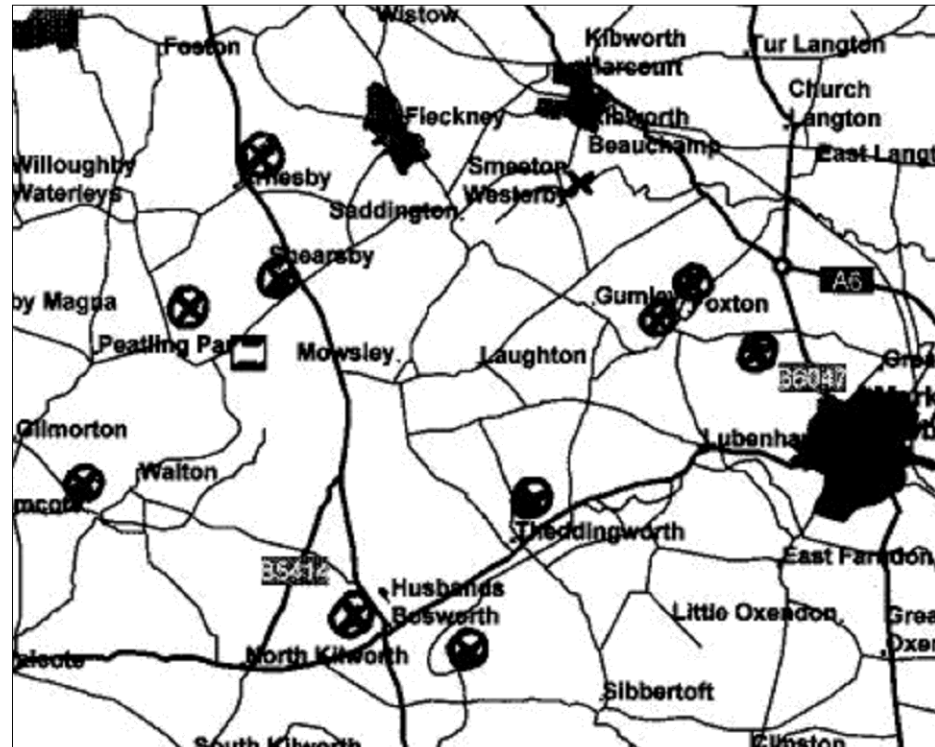
A map of the country pin-points where bombs fell (these are further split down into high explosive bombs, oil bombs, incendiaries and unexploded bombs). It also shows the airfields within the county borders, searchlight and anti-aircraft gun sites.

It points out that up to 1939 there were three airfields in Leicestershire, and these increased to 14 during the war. Of these, three airfields were local to Market Harborough: RAF Bruntingthorpe; the airfield near Foxton which was known as RAF Market Harborough; and RAF Husbands Bosworth. There was also a bombing range between Mowsley and Theddingworth.

During the period 1939-44, 143 aircraft crashed in Leicestershire. Of these, amazingly, only one was an enemy craft – a Dornier which came down at Burton-on-the-Wold on November 14th, 1940.

Taking a local area of Bruntingthorpe to the

west, Tur Langton to the north, Welham to the east and the Northamptonshire county border to the south, 22 planes crashed in these few square miles. Of this total, 13 were Wellington bombers, either taking off or returning from missions. One assumes that these were the main type of planes flown from these fields.



Five Wellington crashed at or near Bruntingthorpe (Aug. 1943, one in Jan. 43, two in Oct. 44 and the last in Feb. 45). Another four crashed on or near Market Harborough Airfield (May 41, Feb. 43, March 44 and Feb. 45).

The Foxton area was the scene of three crashes: A Blenheim crashed in Oct. 40, a Lancaster in April 45 (which is well documented in the records of this

branch), and a Mosquito fighter/bomber in May of the same year.

The other Wellington bombers came down at or near Husbands Bosworth (Sept. 43), near Theddingworth (Sept. 44), near Gumley (Oct. 43), near Welham (Aug. 44), near Kimcote (Jan. 45) and near Shearsby (Feb. 45).

The other crashes were a Tomahawk near Arnesby (Mar 43), an Anson near North Kilworth (Sept. 40), an Oxford near Smeeton Westerby (Mar. 44), a Miles Master at Husbands Bosworth Airfield (Aug.42) and a Hawker Hart near Theddingworth (Mar. 40).

Not many of these disasters would have been known outside the local areas because during the war the Press was censored against stories of Allied losses in order to keep the enemy unaware of such losses, and also to keep up the morale of the populace.

Reports of these accidents were also very sketchy and most are gleaned from reports from ARP personnel or observers.

There could be other aircraft incidents relatively near by, as the book only covers up to the Leics./Northants. border, so we are not given information from “over there”.

I have yet to meet or even hear of anyone local who can recall seeing any of these happenings.



NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATE

As agreed at Annual Conference, the Affiliation fee is to be increased to £10

but the branch fee will remain at £1 making the Subscription due on 1st October, £11.

AN APPEAL

Did you take any photographs at the recent Standard Bearers' Parade? Did any of them include a picture of the Market Harborough Standard dressed with the black ribbons of mourning for the late Sam Shutt?

If so, Sam's family would like a copy. If you can help, please contact the Editor.

INVENTORY

It was proposed at the June branch meeting that an inventory be drawn up of equipment and other items belonging to the branch, where they are stored and which could be available for loan to members (e.g. wheel-chairs, etc.).

If you do have any branch property that you are storing, can you please let our Secretary, Betty Ramsay have details.

COMMITTEE CHANGE

The passing of Mr Sam Shutt left a vacancy on the Branch Committee. Mr George Fleming has agreed to fill this post and was co-opted at the last committee meeting. The appointment means that George will provide a link between the Branch Committee and the County Executive Committee.



Diary

Reminders for August with some other dates to keep free

- 8 Aug Branch Committee meeting
- 14 Aug Branch Meeting & Buffet
- 5 Sep Branch Committee meeting
- 11 Sep Branch Meeting
- 17 Sep Pub lunch—venue to be announced
- 1 Oct Start of Legion Year 2002/3 and Subscriptions become due
- 18 Oct Annual Dinner—MH Golf Club
- 26 Oct Poppy Appeal House-to-House collections start
- 2 Nov Branch Remembrance Concert
- 2 Nov County Festival of Remembrance at de Montfort Hall
- 4 Nov Garden of Remembrance opens

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 14th August & will be followed by a buffet.

The Branch Committee meets each month on the **Thursday** before the Branch Meeting at 7.30 pm in the upstairs lounge of the Conservative Club Building.



The Royal British Legion



Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch



Founded in 1923

In Touch

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