



Editorial

WELL, JULY WILL be almost over by the time this copy of In Touch is in your hand and a really peculiar month it has been weather-wise. We have experienced hot, humid days, right through the spectrum to torrential rain and floods! We can but hope that the rest of the summer in August and September will be kind of summer we all dream of, so that we can all get a nice tan colour before winter comes round once again.

The last branch meeting got off to a most unusual start, in that following the Act of Homage, our vice-chairman informed the meeting that he was about to leave!! He explained that it was his wedding anniversary, and unbeknown to his wife, Joan, who was also present, he had planned an evening out with her!!

So off they went, after Chairman, Con Halsall, had given Tom and Joan congratulations on behalf of the branch. Tom then offered his own congratulations to Con and Bernard whose own anniversary had been a week previously.—We are getting a romantic bunch here in Market Harborough.

The meeting then turned to more serious matters, and once again our chairman pointed out that we were still in need of a volunteer to take on the office of Poppy Organiser. Please, if you feel you could take on this important post, or perhaps even head a small team to carry out and spread the task, please apply.

Members should bear in mind also that the chairman and treasurer will not be standing for re-election at the AGM, and so should perhaps



The Regiments of the British Army and their exploits are already pretty widely documented; but the corps very rarely get a mention. From time to time I hope to present articles showing the importance of the roles of the corps and their purpose in the greater picture. And we start with the ROYAL ENGINEERS

THE CORPS OF ROYAL ENGINEERS claim direct descent from the military engineers brought to



England by William the Conqueror over 900 years ago. Soon after his conquest, William brought over a young monk from Bec, called Gundulph. It was he who was responsible for building the White Tower within the Tower of London, and is regarded as the founding father of the corps.

The corps was granted the title "Royal" in 1787, and although it has no battle honours, it has taken part in every battle fought by the British Army in all parts of the world.

In the First World War the Royal Engineers raised many specialist units and undertook the maintenance of camps, stores and depots, provided water and sanitation, built and operated docks and railways and manufactured many items required by the army. Responsibilities also included gas and chemical warfare, air defence searchlights, tunnelling, postal services and wireless communication. This last service became so large that in 1920 a new corps was raised for the purpose -- the Royal Corps of Signals.

The Royal Engineers

The Second World War saw a great expansion of the corps. Searchlights were handed over to the Royal Artillery; mines and booby traps were extensively used, and it was usually Sappers who breached the enemy minefields.

The blitz early in the war brought a new responsibility--bomb disposal; a field in which 55 officers and 339 soldiers were killed and 13 George Crosses were won.

Perhaps the best known feat of the Royal Engineers was during Normandy Landings when specialist engineers led the assault to breach the sea wall; and the construction of the Mulberry Harbour, the famous "artificial port".



During the advance across Europe that followed, the Royal Engineers' skill with the multiple span Bailey Bridges played a very significant part in the ultimate success.

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We are pleased to acknowledge that the images in this article are taken from the RE pages of the Army Website.



A Friend is Laid to Rest

By Kenneth J. West

UNDER THE COVER of darkness we reached the farmhouse by the side of the dyke, to establish contact with the forward Canadian unit with which we were to liaise prior to the attack on Arnhem. We quickly sorted out a duty rota, the Canadians taking the first part of the night and we'd continue until dawn. I found myself a spot on the floor beneath a table. Placing my No.18 wireless set above me alongside my half filled mug of tea for later refreshment and retired for the night.

Cruuummmp..... an almighty blast awoke me in an instant. In the semi-darkness North American expletives rent the air. "Stay here with the wireless Jock", shouted the sergeant, "I'll take my guys and sort this lot out", and disappeared into the night.

The explosion had been caused by a panzerfaust (anti-tank missile) being fired at the front of the farmhouse, fortunately for us, the missile had hit a large chestnut tree by the front door. Shrapnel had shattered the window and glass shards had splattered the room resulting in just one casualty. Something dripped from the edge of the table on to my hand, and I feared the worst. Getting to my knees, I looked on the table to find that a piece of shrapnel had pierced the side of my mug and the remainder of my night-time tea was seeping out onto the table. As I clasped "Toby" my trusty brown friend in my hands, the last dregs of tea ebbed from his mortal wounds.

"Toby", my faithful brown enamelled mug who

had brought me succour so many times in my hour of need. He'd clung to the buckle of my battle-dress blouse, or the straps of my small-pack, through shot & shell, hail and snow, perhaps it was fitting that it had taken a panzerfaust to end his days.

In the morning he was laid to rest near to the blasted chestnut tree and his grave marked with a small cross 'TOBY' — R.I.P. With due ceremony we saluted and toot-tooted The Last Post. As we returned indoors the Sgt remarked that he thought that it was only the Canadians who did crazy things like that. The CQMS was informed 'Toby - D.O.W. (died of wounds) and a replacement received. It was but a pale shadow of it's predecessor, shortly after the war finished, it's handle fell off....

They don't make 'em like Toby any more.

In the letter that Ken West sent with this story he says,

" During an early visit to stay with Bob (*his friend in Holland*) we revisited some of the places I knew from 1944-45. The farmhouse in question is within the gemeente (parish) of Dueiven where he lives. The blasted "Cheggy" tree to the left of the front door has gone but the one on the right is in luxurious growth. The farmhouse is now in the hand of the grandson who was amused by the story and didn't know of the fate of the other tree!

Bob often used this tale to show the typical humour of the "British Tommy". Bob sends his good wishes to all at Harborough RBL, especially Bernard Halsall, the glider pilot....." Ω

Quote from an Army Officer:

They couldn't hit an elephant at this dist

be approaching likely replacements in order to nominate them for these posts.

Once again, I am requesting your help! Your editor will not be going to Newmarket with you, so I want you stories (or even impressions) of the day. Imagine you are a gossip columnist, and "give us the dirt"!!! Who lost their shirt on the horses? Did your favourite lose his way during the race and may still be looking for he winning post; or perhaps something more juicy -- like did any of our members get kicked out of the posh side of the course, and more importantly, why? Let us all know.

Our branch secretary, Mrs. Betty West, reported that she had attended a Branch Management course and informed us that she had learned much, and in future she "would be more strict"! Meetings could get interesting in the future!!! Ω



Top Secret

EVEN THOSE WHO were stationed there did not know what it was all about, but the 17 members and friends who went to Harrington Covert War Museum could sense the drama of wartime secret agents, resistance fighters and the organisation and logistics which supported them. And later, when the world was on the brink of nuclear war, there in the quiet Northants countryside Thor missiles stood ready for blast-off. All this is brought to life at what was the Control Centre of the US Air force 801/492 Bombardment Group (Carpetbaggers) airfield. The museum, which holds one of the world's most comprehensive collection of artefacts concerned with Covert Warfare, is normally open at weekends and Bank Holidays. Highly recommended!! Ω



An Invitation

A CIVIC SERVICE was held on Sunday, 8th July at St. Dionysius Church to mark the (near) beginning of the term of office of the new Chairman of the District Council, Cllr. Peter Callis. As one of the local voluntary organisations the Branch had been invited and was represented by our Chairman and four other members. Standard Bearer George Fleming headed the Guard of Honour for the visiting dignitaries.

Following the service there was a reception and buffet in the Council Chamber where members of the Branch had the pleasure of the company of Captain Ungaretti, the Military and Naval Attaché at the Embassy of Ecuador and his wife. Although he works in London, they have chosen to live for his 18 months appointment, here in “this pleasant, friendly town.” Ω



Hospital War Memorial

YOU WILL RECALL that the Branch has been actively seeking to ensure the satisfactory preservation of this unique tribute to the men from this district who fought in the Great War. We have now had the assurances we sought from the Melton, Rutland and Harborough NHS Primary Health Care Trust, the organisation now responsible for the “Cottage Hospital”. In a letter dated 11th July, the Acting Chief Executive writes,

“...I can agree that the War memorial includes all of the portico that encloses the memorial panels. It is also the Trust’s intention to fully fund the reposition of the War

Memorial. At an early stage of the resiting process, organisations such as the Royal British Legion, will be approached for advice on the moving of the Memorial, and its location.”

This is a very satisfactory outcome to our campaign. Letters of thanks are being sent to all those individuals and organisations who pledged their support.

It is understood that it may be some years before anything happens to the hospital so the Branch Subcommittee is being stood down. However is important that the Branch remains alert to new developments.

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What was F & H?

Sir,
May I ask your readers to help in solving a mystery?

Harry Bolton, like many other young Harborough men joined the 1/5th Bn

Leicestershire Regt. and in August 1914 marched off to war. (Have you seen the big picture in the Museum of the ‘Terriers’ assembled on The Square prior to setting off?). He wrote to his pal Jack Dimpleby saying, “...what a send-off they gave us when we left home, there couldn’t have been many early at the Factory that afternoon, and some came right up Leicester road with us.” This is the first of nearly 40 letters from Bolton to his friend, transcripts of which have recently been presented to the Museum by a member of Dimpleby’s family not now living in MH. It seems likely that the two men were workmates and in a letter from France in June 1915, Bolton asks, “Is the trade very brisk at F & H’s this year?”. Now you Harborians, what was F & H? Was it “the Factory”, was it a department of a works—Symington’s perhaps and is there someone local who might be related to Harry Bolton?

I would be most grateful for any help.

Yours, etc. Tom Ashmore (MH433108)

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County Half-year Conference

Reflections by Tom Ashmore

THE BRANCH CHAIRMAN and three other Committee members represented Market Harborough on 30th June at a poorly attended event at Blaby RBL Club. A common theme during the afternoon was “Change”. In his introductory address, County Vice Chairman, Peter Baker spoke of the need for change and saw some evidence of its acceptance. On the other hand, reporting on the Legion Annual Conference, Mr W Briggs was appalled at the unwillingness of many delegates to support proposed changes to the Royal Charter and to the format of Annual Conference. Changes have had to be made to the de Montfort Festival of Remembrance but as Julia Walker explained, some of the traditional features will be retained.

The message from the Guest speaker, Terry English, RBL Controller, Welfare, was much more positive. New casework procedures including closer ties with SSAFA were being introduced and a programme of upgrading Legion homes was in place. Mr English also emphasised the achievements of the Welfare activity throughout the Legion and how this was so dependant on work at Branch level.

Overall impressions? The feeling that although there is a genuine and in some cases urgent need for changes at all levels, this is not sufficiently understood or accepted within Branches or the rest of the organisation. What can we do in our bit of the Legion to get the message across? Ω

Those who say it can’t be done shouldn’t stand



Notices

NEWMARKET— The coach will now start from the Conservative Club at 8am but will also pick up at MH Bus Station outside the Market Hall.

SEPTEMBER OUTING—A day of contrasts: The RAF MUSEUM at Cosford near Telford has an extensive collection of civil as well as military aircraft from the earliest days of flying to present day space travel. BLISTS HILL is one of the famous Ironbridge Gorge museums but is really a living small industrial town over 100 years ago. It is fascinating! Tom Ashmore MH 433108 has leaflets. The cost for the day will be between £18 & £20 depending on numbers. To book, if you are not already on the list, please ring John Cox MH 434983.

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE Festival Concert at the Derngate Theatre on Saturday, 27th October again features The Black Dyke Band to provide “an evening to remember”. Apply for tickets (£8) via Tom Ashmore MH433108 by 31st July.

LEICESTERSHIRE Festival of Remembrance at the de Montfort Hall, on Saturday, 3rd November. Entertainment by the Sid Lawrence Orchestra. Tickets @ £14.50, £12.50 or £10.50, less £4 on production of RBL membership card, from MH Council Offices from 1st August .

OUR OWN Remembrance Concert by the Harborough Band at the Baptist Church, MH on Saturday, 10th November. Details later.

THE ROYAL ALBERT HALL Festival. Contact Betty West MH 434923 for details or to apply for tickets.



Diary

Reminders for August with some other dates to keep free. (see also page 10)

- 4 Aug **Newmarket—fully booked**
- 8 Aug Branch meeting
- 28 Aug Branch Committee meeting
- 8 Sep Cosford & Blists Hill Museums
- 12 Sep Branch meeting
- 25 Sep Lunch at Countryman, Gt. Bowden
- 12 Oct Annual Dinner - M H Golf Club
- 27 Oct Poppy Appeal Collections start
- 27 Oct Northants. Festival Concert—Derngate
- 3 Nov Remembrance 2001— de Montfort Hall
- 10 Nov Remembrance Band Concert
- 10 Nov Royal Albert Hall Festival of Rem'ce
- 11 Nov Remembrance Sunday

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 8th August.

The Branch Committee meets on the **Last Wednesday** of each month (except December).



The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch



Founded in 1923

In Touch

Issue 34

July 2001

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