

### For Your Diary

- 24th May** Service of Thanksgiving at Market Harborough Parish Church at 2.30pm. See panel on page 17.
- 27th May** Committee Meeting - 7.30pm.
- 7th June** Concert by the Gurkha Band at the Derngate Theatre, Northampton.
- 10th June** Branch Meeting - 7.30pm. See panel on Page 17.
- 13th June** Market Harborough Carnival. Volunteers needed to man the stall and items or donations required for Tombola Prizes. Please contact Renie & Dick Fulford (MH 431515) or Tony Johnson (MH 440501)
- 21st June** Music for a Summer Evening See panel on Page 13
- 25th June** Narrow Boat Outing - 8.45am Foxton Bottom Lock. Currently fully booked but ring Tony Johnson nearer the date in case there have been cancellations.
- 8th July** Branch Meeting & Games evening -
- 18th July** Branch Coffee Morning at the Harborough Theatre - join us for a cuppa!
- 16-18th Aug.** Edinburgh Tattoo Visit A few places may still be available. Ring Tom Jeacock (MH 466829) for details.
- 29th August** Branch Coffee Morning at the Harborough Theatre - join us for a cuppa!
- 2nd October** Anniversary Dinner (postponed from 3rd April.)

Watch this space and ***In Touch, Too*** as other events become known.

### WANTED

Your attendance at Our Anniversary Service of Thanksgiving at Market Harborough Parish Church on Sunday, **24th May** at 2.15 for 2.30pm. Medals should be worn.

### REWARD

Refreshments at the Catholic Community Hall after the Service.

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**APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE**

#### Meetings

Regular 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.

At the next meeting, on **10th June**, after the usual short business session, David Greenway will give a talk on his job as our RBL Regional Organiser and answer general, even awkward, questions on the Legion.



Reg. Charity No. 249279

## The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch

1923 - 1998



# In Touch

Issue 13

May, 1998.

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### Editorial

If we followed the tradition of some publications this Issue would be designated "Vol. 3 No.1", but we are not superstitious and so we embark on our third year with "Issue 13". Perhaps we should start a new Volume after Issue 22 as we enter the new Millennium!! Of course that assumes that you will still want *In Touch*.

We are grateful for the compliments which we have received on the style, quality and content of this newsletter from within and outside the Branch. Many of you who cannot attend meetings welcome *In Touch* being delivered by hand and the occasional call at the door of a fellow member. Our thanks to all who share the task of distribution.

In this issue we report on the latest examples of the success of the initiatives to improve camaraderie through social activities at and between meetings. The full Diary page shows that these are to continue. Although the Branch may be 75 years old, and we are proud of our history, we clearly have up-to-date ideas as witness the report of the launch of a Branch Web Site on the Internet.

Two light-hearted tales from "Hotspur" and another of Ken West's amusing pieces, are complimented by a remarkable mystery which Charles Freer brought to light at the collector's Evening, and some background information about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.



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## My Victoria Cross

It was March 1945, and a long way from Caen in Northern France. We had fought our way through France, Belgium and through part of Holland. We had tried desperately to relieve the stricken Airborne Troops at Arnhem. We had stood firm as the Germans pushed through the Ardennes in their savage counter-attack. We had crossed the Maas River and now stood not 3 miles from the Rhine - our next objective.

We were part of Montgomery's Army and as Bdr. C Freer my job was Driver i/c of a Sherman Tank carrying the Officer Commanding. Armed with a 75mm 25 Pounder gun we were firing across the river both H/E and Smoke shells, and a considerable smoke-screen was being formed to confuse the enemy as we prepared to storm across the river. The ground we occupied had, of course, been the scene of previous heavy fighting and damaged tanks and lorries of both Armies littered the area.

In a "stand down" one day I did a "walk-about" among these wrecks, and came across a German Tiger Tank that had been hit in the turret by a "P.I.A.T." shell. The crew appeared to have escaped without mishap and I climbed into the driver's cockpit without hesitating, eager to compare the conditions experienced by the enemy. The dashboard with various dials and gauges was at a slope and I put my hand behind it more or less out of habit.

A dirty oily rag was there but inside the rag I found a dull metal object in the shape of a cross. On the reverse side was an inscription,

*"To commemorate the sixty years of the reign of Queen Victoria",*

and turning it over I saw that the front bore the head of that venerable lady, and the date 1897.

What was this medallion doing inside a German Tank? Had it been captured? By whom from whom? Why would a British soldier have been carrying an over 40 years old souvenir of the royal Diamond Jubilee? Why?...Why?...Truly a mystery from that battlefield so long ago.

But today, that 101 years old bit of dull metal is still one of my most prized possessions - my Victoria Cross.

We are told that Members can obtain a discount (on production of Current membership cards) on Good Quality BLAZERS in single or double breasted styles, in navy blue or black, from Mr D Holden at SRS Menswear at Stalls 7, 8 and 9 in the Market Hall on Tuesday, Friday & Saturday

### Music for a Summer Evening

The fourth open air concert will be held on the lawns of Beaumanor Hall, Woodhouse, near Loughborough on Sunday evening, 21st June 1998 commencing at 7.45pm and will be given by **THE LEICESTER SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA**

under the direction of Roland Melia

As in previous years the proceeds will be divided between the 1998 Poppy Appeal, The Royal Naval Benevolent Trust, The Army Benevolent Fund and The Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.

Tickets are priced at £12 discounted to £10 for those who apply early. Juniors under 16 half price.

## News

**Branch Meetings** - Continuing the new format, the May "after business" session was a very successful "Collectors' Evening" and Buffet. There was a great variety of interest and originality in the 14 exhibits and prizes were awarded to Charles Freer for his W.W.II "Victoria Cross" (story on Pages 12 & 13) and other memorabilia, to Marion Vine for an album of early embroidered greetings cards, and to Mark Hudson for a remarkable collection of Belt Buckles. Tony Johnson's beautifully presented dish of salmon & cucumber sandwiches might have won a prize but they were eaten before the judging took place!

For the June meeting we have invited our Regional Organiser, David Greenway to give a talk on his role and the broader RBL scheme of things, now and possibly in the future. He welcomes questions and comments, so now is your chance to air those sometimes less than complimentary views on the upper echelons.

**High-tech Harborough.** Another exhibit at the May meeting was a demonstration of the Web Site (<http://members.xoom.com/MktHarbroRBL>) which Mark Hudson has produced for the Branch. This provides users of the Internet information about the Branch, the Legion and Market Harborough. Through reciprocal links with other Sites, the Branch will become more widely known, thereby encouraging recruitment especially of younger people. H Q and a few Branches have Web Sites but ours is the first in Leicestershire. Mark has been congratulated already on the high standard of his design and on the speed of its launch, but he will continue to make it even more accessible and useful.

"Those who say it can't be done shouldn't stand in the way of those who are doing it"

**The April Lunch.** Seventeen people enjoying good food, a relaxed atmosphere and one another's company, marked another successful get-together at *The Countryman*, Great Bowden. Tony Johnson is happy to continue arranging informal "Getting to know you" events so let him have your suggestions. Next on his agenda is a day on a Narrow Boat (see **For your Diary** on Page 16).

### From HQ

**Legion Travel Service.** PARMA LINE is a new service giving details of last-minute travel and holiday offers. Call 8091 446041 (50p/min call charge).

**Gas and Electricity Supplies.** A comment from RBL Marketing, who are negotiating with suppliers for deals to benefit the Legion, "When the market settles down prices will flatten across the board with no more fluctuations than at the petrol pump. Better the devil you know, especially if you are getting on."

**Income Support.** A minor change in the rules may adversely affect benefit entitlement of certain Borderline Recipients. For more information ring Ken Purdy (MH 440623).

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## Serious Business

by Hotspur

The Branch is looking for members to take part in a The Royal British Legion Golf Competition. No other sport can focus the mind of both player and spectator for so long a period as competitive golf - or even Club golf for that matter. Dedication is never at a premium in Golf as illustrated by these two stories.

Four old, retired keen golfers were regular players at Royal Birkdale. Three times a week they teed off at 8.30 am, and could be spotted just after mid-day winding their way up the 18th fairway. Week in, week out, whatever the weather these four chaps fought out the keenest of matches to the last green - until one morning about 12 months ago. The secretary had noticed that they were not to be seen approaching the Club-house, and after checking that they had started out at 8.30 am he watched with increasing anxiety as they failed to appear.

It had gone one o'clock when the Secretary finally spotted them. And what a shock he got. Three of them were struggling along half carrying and half dragging their apparently unconscious friend. The secretary rushed out to assist. "Good gracious", he said, "whatever has happened?" "It's Charlie", said one. "He dropped dead on the 12th green. The Secretary was appalled. "What a tragedy", he cried, "what a terrible thing to happen, and you chaps have carried him all the way back?". "Yes", said the



spokesman. "My goodness", exclaimed the Secretary. "What a gallant thing to do - but you must be exhausted!". "Well, yes", said the spokesman, "but the worst part was putting him down and then picking him up between our shots!"

Golf can get like that. It can take over to the exclusion of all else. Recently, on a Midlands course four chaps had played 9 holes and were ready to drive off on the 10th tee. A road leading to the town ran alongside this hole and as the first player went to address the ball, a cortege passed by on its way to the crematorium. The player about to drive lowered his club, turned towards the funeral procession and lowered his head until it had passed. He then resumed the game and all four hit their drives. As they walked away one of the others said to the man who had interrupted his shot that it was rare to see such respect and decorum in this day and age. "Well", said the man, "after all she has been a good wife".



The British, being brought up on team games, enter their House of Commons in the spirit of those who would rather be doing something else. If they cannot be playing golf or tennis, they can at least pretend that politics is a game with very similar rules.

Cyril Northcote Parkinson

## Well Prepared

by Kenneth West

For over a year we had been preparing for the "Second Front". Trained to the Nth degree and superbly fit, the time had now come. Tomorrow we embark and then "Ramps down" - inwe go!!! But first there were items of personal kit to be issued. The army with it's meticulous attention to detail would ensure that we would be well provided for.

New assault type Gas-masks, special wound dressings, foot powder, water sterilization tablets, small 3 legged "Tommy Cooker" & solid fuel tablets, tin of tea/sugar/milk powder, packet army biscuits (hard tack), 1 emergency ration (tin of concentrated chocolate), tin 50 cigs, book matches & 1 pick or shovel were also issued. We were required to fill in the page marked WILL in our AB 64 and paybooks then to be handed in. On their return we found that 1/- had been deducted for "Blankets, soldiers for the use of, 1". When the CQMS was asked why we should pay for an army blanket, he replied - "That is now your personal property, to keep you warm when you're alive and to bury you in if you die - any further questions?" - there were no further questions.

Whilst in Normandy, our daily needs were catered for by the 14 man packs, usually brought to us at night. Carefully shared out, we each received 1 tin M&V, 1/7 of a tinned pudding, 6" rasher bacon, cube of porridge, pkt hard tack, tablsps. Tea/sugar/milk, 7 boiled sweets, 1 bar Bournville chocolate, 7 cigs, 1 book matches and 3 sheets of khaki IZAL toilet

paper. Whilst the edible contents provided a well balanced diet, the 3 sheets of "Army Form Blank" did cause us some concern.

However, as in all cases where "Tomnies" find themselves with their backs to the wall, a solution was at hand. It was quickly found that with great digital dexterity, 3 sheets were sufficient if used in the following manner: 1st to wipe up, 2nd to rub down and 3rd for polishing.

So the dour struggle continued, with many shiring examples of strained rearguard actions, especially in the CAEN area, but thanks to the "Back-room boys" at the War Office and their excellent forward planning down to the minutest detail, within 3 months the Normandy Campaign was finally polished off.

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*Excerpt from Army Training Manual*  
"Blankets woollen will be shaken every Friday". Our Training Corporal then added "In case of wet or inclement weather on that day blankets will be shaken on the day previous" (*This is the sense of humour which won us a war !*)

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## Gulf War Veterans

British Gulf War veterans everywhere are being encouraged to join a strong new alliance of veterans organisations which has been formed to look after their interests as a special branch of The Royal British Legion.

After several years of individual endeavour, three associations have combined as a national branch, electing Flight Lieutenant John Nichol as their first president. He is the ex-RAF navigator who was captured and tortured by Saddam Husseins forces.

The Gulf War Veterans Association, Vetnet, and Middle East Forces Veterans Association will operate in future as the Gulf Veterans RBL Branch.

To contact the branch directly, ring 0191 230 1065 (Fax 0191 230 3952), or call Legionline on 0345 725725.

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## A Bit of Philosophy

Why Worry?

There are only two things to worry about.

Either you are sick or well.

If you're well, then there's nothing to worry about

If you are sick, then you only have two things to worry about .....

Either you live or die.

If you live, you have nothing to worry about. If you die, you only have two things to worry about.

Either you go to heaven or you go to hell.

If you go to heaven, you'll have nothing to worry about but

if you go to hell, you'll be so busy shaking hands with old friends, you wo't have time to worry.

## **The Commonwealth War Graves Commission**

The Commission was established by Royal Charter in 1917 and is an official organisation of Governments - Australia, Britain, Canada, India, New Zealand and South Africa. Its duties are to mark and maintain the graves of the members of the forces of the Commonwealth who were killed in the two World Wars, to build memorials to those who have no known grave and to keep records and registers, including, after the Second World War, a record of the Civilian War Dead.

It was the energy of Sir Fabian Ware, the Commission's founder, which established the principles upon which the work of the Commission was built. Those principles, which have remained unaltered, were:

- each of the dead should be commemorated individually by name on headstone or memorial
- headstones and memorials should be permanent
- headstones should be uniform
- there should be no distinction made on account of military or civil rank, race or creed.

1,700,000 men and women of the Commonwealth forces died in the two World Wars. Of these the remains of 925,000 were

found and their graves are marked by a headstone. Where the remains were not found, the casualty's name is commemorated on a memorial.

The Commission maintains graves and memorials throughout the world, mostly in the 2,500 war cemeteries and plots constructed by the Commission. Under arrangements with member and foreign governments, the commission also maintains foreign and non World War graves, either through reciprocal arrangements or on a repayment basis.

These notes are from the Commission's Internet Web Site, [www.open.gov.uk/cwg/](http://www.open.gov.uk/cwg/) which includes statistics on the number of graves in each of 148 countries. It comes as a surprise to read, for example, that there are 136 in neutral Switzerland and 138 in Sweden, 6 in Peru and even one in Venezuela. In France there are 356,821 and in Britain, 170,644.

If you want to locate someone's war grave, ring the Commission on 01628 34221 and ask for Records. You will be asked the person's Service Number, the surname & initials and the date of death. Usually, within a few minutes, you will be given the name and location of the cemetery and where the grave is within the cemetery.

On payment of a fee, the commission will search for any other information it may have about an individual such as next of kin.

### **Did you know?**

The inscription "Known Unto God", found on the headstone of someone killed in action but not identified, and the words "Their name liveth for evermore" featured in War Cemeteries, were both composed by Rudyard Kipling, whose only son was killed at the age of 18 during the Battle of Loos in 1915.

## **War Grave aid to Widows Extended**

The MOD has announced that War Widows will receive help to visit their husbands' graves overseas until after the Millennium. A subsidy, due to end next year, is to be extended until March 2001.

The scheme began in 1985 and is now administered by the Pilgrimage Department of the Royal British Legion. Widows pay one-eighth - £40 to £200 - of the cost of a return journey to graves of husbands buried abroad between 1914 and 1967 and 3,000 have been assisted so far.

## **Programme of War Grave Visits**

For the remainder of 1998, there are Pilgrimages to Israel, Normandy, North & South Italy, Indonesia, St Nazaire, The Somme, Berlin, Colditz, Poland, Cologne, Rheindahlen, Holland, Belgium, Cyprus, Burma, Egypt, Ypres, Thailand, Singapore.

Full details of the visits are given in a brochure, a copy of which is obtainable from The Pilgrimage Department The Royal British Legion Village Aylesford, Kent. ME20 7NX Tel: 01622 716729 / 716182