

Memories

by Hotspur

It was about 1916. A soldier knocked at the stage door of a famous London theatre. He asked to see the star of the show - I think it was Vesta Tilley. It was a very patriotic time and the soldier was admitted.

He said to Miss Tilley, "I have written a song whilst in the trenches in France, and hoped you might look at it". She took the paper from him and read the words and music. She then called for the Musical Director. "Is it possible for us to play this tune this evening?" she asked. The musical director read through the music, and said he would be able to play it at the Second House.



Unfortunately the soldier was unable to stay for the second house, but promised to do his best to revisit the theatre the next day to see how it all went at the performance. Miss Tilley sang the song as promised. She received five encores. It was a Hit, and she waited eagerly for the soldier to call in the next day. He did not come - neither the next day - or ever again. The song was to become one of the great songs of the First World War. If you buy the music sheet today the author is shown as Anonymous.

The song was called
"There's a long long trail a-winding"

Ed. This is definitely one of Hotspur's true stories, and very moving.

Reminders

25th October. RAFA Coffee Morning, 9.30 to 12 at the Harborough Theatre.

25th October. Centenary Concert by the Harborough Band at St. Dionysius Church, Market Harborough.

27th October. Poppy Appeal
House to House Collections start.

7th & 8th November. Poppy Appeal
Street Collections.

Volunteers needed in the town and villages. If you can help by distributing Poppy boxes, being a Collector or manning the Market stall, please phone Dick Fulford on **MH 431515**.

9th November. Remembrance Sunday Parade & Service at St. Dionysius Church, M.H.

11-11-11. Ceremony at the Town Square to observe the 2 minutes silence.

Meetings

Regular meetings are held on the **Second Thursday** of each month at 8 pm in the downstairs Function Room, Conservative Club Building, Fairfield Road, Mkt. Harboro'.

Next Meeting
9th October.

This is a convenient occasion on which to pay your Subscription for the year starting on 1st October.



Regd. Charity No. 219279

In Touch

The Newsletter

for

Members

of

Market Harborough Branch The Royal British Legion

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Editorial

Can it be 12 months since In Touch reminded us all that Remembrancetide was fast approaching? Six issues later we again feature the Poppy Appeal, this time with general information from HQ and cries for help locally. Please answer the call willingly.

Our main "I was there" story concerns the often forgotten campaign in Malaya just after the War, and in which National Servicemen played such a major role. One of them was John Cox and he tells us something of his activities.

From a different time, a different place and a different culture is the copy of a much creased document typed on Army paper, a treasure from Ken Stimpson's archives. It had no heading but we have called it "A Fond Farewell".

Kenneth West's poem and its foreword were inspired by his return to Normandy in 1984, but what sparked off Bill Cotton's recollections of life as a Boy Sailor we do not know. Hotspur may have been listening to old music hall songs when one of his Memories came to the surface. All make for interesting reading.

Branch & Other News

New Members. We welcome Melvyn Mullin (Ordinary Member) and from Ohio, as our first overseas members, Anne & Barry Bashore & John Marshall (Associates). Barry & John now have the rare, probably unique distinction of being members of both the American Legion and The Royal British Legion.



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HMS Ganges

by Bill Cotton

January 9th 1939, 5am "Come on Bill; time to get up. Uncle Fred will be here soon". Uncle Fred was taking me to the station to catch the 6am train to Derby. It was there that we had to muster en route to Shotley in Suffolk. Train to London, trains to Harwich, ferry to Shotley. *HMS Ganges* was the boys' Training Ship on the Suffolk coast, a harsh place to be when you are only 15, and have never been away from home before.

It seemed to be alive with RPOs (Crushers as Regulating Petty Officers were called). Everyone seemed to be shouting at once "You're in the Navy now and don't forget it, and don't ever let me catch any of you smoking".

We were taken into a mess with about 26 beds; told to stow our gear and fall in outside. We were then taken to the dining mess and given food (I think that's what they called it).

Next day at 6, "Wakey, Wakey up you get, ten minutes to wash and fall in outside". After breakfast we were taken to the main Barracks to be kitted out, and then back to the annexe where we had to sew our name tags on every bit of kit. Five weeks of sewing, squad drill, Dentist, Doctor, swimming tests, mast climbing and at last the training started.

Into the main Barracks, into No 40 mess, then Seamanship, Gunnery and School every day. Early morning laundry (5am) once a week, early morning bath once a week, and endless marching.

Pay day every Thursday meant one shilling (5 pence) a week pocket money to spend on stamps and sweets. The Tobacco Barons did a good trade, as 20 Players bought for 11½d sold for 2d each. When caught smoking once you were given 6 of the best with the cane. In the toilets the cry "Lobs a jock" went up when the Marine sentry was seen getting near.

Easter leave came and went and summer leave was due giving 3 weeks at home with plenty to eat and mother doing the washing. It was heaven.

On September 3rd 1939 whilst still on leave, war started. "I'll get called back now, I suppose". My mate Len Tebbut, who was in the Fleet Air Arm, was recalled and I went to the station to see him off. That was the last time we saw each other as he was killed when the *Glorious* was sunk off Norway in 1940.

Back from leave we had our exams and were then classed as trained seamen. October 5th was my 16th birthday; October 6th I was off to Pompey for my first real ship, but that's another story!

The **Ex-service World Games** due to be held in South Africa have had to be cancelled because of security problems in Pretoria. Naturally, the Legion's BEWSA team, which the Branch had supported, are terribly disappointed. We wish them well for the 1999 Games in Sheffield.

News continued

Thanks are due to David Hawke for organising the Dance on 12th September for the benefit of Branch Funds. Sadly, it was very poorly attended and a disappointing result after all David's time and hard work.

Welland Park Memorial. Tom Jeacock has arranged for Harborough District Council to enhance the setting of the memorial. The Branch has been asked by HDC for suggestions for improvements to the Memorial Gardens.

Welfare. An elderly widow needed repairs to the roof of her house - could the Legion help with the cost? Service Committee member, Ken Purdy found that cover was provided by her House Insurance and helped her with the Claim. Such help and sound advice can be more valuable than direct RBL financial assistance.

Battle of Britain Sunday. The Branch was represented at the RAFA annual Service of Commemoration held in the Parish Church. John Cox (deputising for George Fleming, who was still recovering from a knee operation), carried our Standard in the Parade and in Church. Thanks are due to John and to the Branch members in the congregation but it is a pity that not more members came to support our RAFA colleagues on their day of remembrance for "The Few".

To quote Churchill, "At the summit the stamina and valour of our fighter pilots remained unconquerable and supreme. Thus Britain was saved.....Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few". (*Their Finest Hour* p279).

Poppy Appeal Collections 1997

House to House and Static Point Collections should commence on, and no earlier than, 27th October 1997. Such collections taken on private property may take place throughout the period 27th October to 9th November inclusive. These may be pub to pub, office to office, shop to shop, business to business etc., but NOT collections in public places.

Remembrancetide **static point collections** comprise a tray of poppies and sealed collection box placed in business establishments, schools, hospitals or any other premises not having free public access. Sealed static collection boxes placed in the absence of poppies may be sited any time during the year. Special all year round collecting boxes are available from the Poppy Appeal for this purpose.

Collections in the street and public places should only take place during the day(s) for which Local Authorities have granted a licence. It is against the law to collect in public places outside the prescribed dates which for the Harborough District Council is the period 2nd-9th November.

The "Charity" stall in the Market Hall is available to us on Friday and Saturday 7th & 8th November. Once again, the hire cost will be paid by the Market Traders. Renee Fulford had said that she would like someone else to be responsible for the design and preparation of the stall. Volunteers please call her on MH 431515.

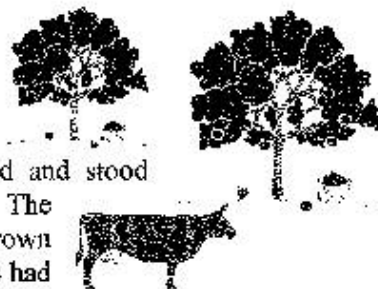
Gently Graze the Cattle

By K.J. West, Fus (Ret'd),
11th Bn Royal Scots Fusiliers

In 1984, to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the landings, I returned to Normandy with my trusty old bike and spent two weeks cycling around the battle areas. Starting at Cherbourg, I visited the American beaches and went on to the British sector, eventually reaching the village of Fontenay-le-Pesnil, where, in a matter of a few days, more than a quarter of the 49th Infantry Division (The Polar Bears) were killed or wounded in the bloody battle.

I found the orchard where I'd joined the 11th Battalion Royal Scots Fusiliers on that June evening. Memories came flooding back of the blasted apple trees and the dead cattle, lying with their legs at grotesque angles, their innards heaving with maggots and the stench of cordite and death permeating all.

Now 40 years later, cattle were back in the orchard and stood quietly chewing. The hedges had re-grown and some new trees had been planted, but older ones grew in odd, twisted shapes. Many old stumps remained and here and there, cows rubbed themselves against a broken stump, a scene of quiet solitude and contentment which I found to be a most emotional moment and one



of the most memorable of the whole two weeks trip, one which in some way, made all the former hardships and efforts seem so worthwhile.

As I cycled on, I couldn't shake this scene from my mind and I found myself putting my thoughts into verse, which were as follows:

Return to Fontenay

*Gently graze the cattle now,
Beneath the shady apple bough,
In quiet contentment they scratch their rumps
Against the twisted, gnarled old stumps.
Blasted by shell whilst in their prime,
Part of man's inhuman crime.
They remain a memorial, still today,
To those who fell at Fontenay
And died beneath the apple bough,
Where gently graze the cattle now.*

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A Fond Farewell

(an echo of Empire - from 1945)

"Address represented on the occasion of the repatriation of Capt K. Stimpson R.E. O.C 754 I.M.E. Platoon I.E.

We have this day assembled here to pay our humble respects and homage to our worthy and sympathetic Commanding Officer on the eve of his repatriation to his Home, The United Kingdom. As such our feelings can well be imagined. We are not only very sorry to have to part with him, but we are rather perplexed about it. No doubt, Sir, you must be having any amount of pleasure in looking forward to your happy return to your awaiting kith and kin. Every one should like the same. We also do envy it. But at the same time our feeling at our having to part with you are intense.

You will agree with us that we, under your able and enthusiastic guidance have done our best to keep up the traditions of the Indian Engineers and have done our bit towards precipitating the victorious end of the war. We can never remember single occasion when we let down the cause of Victory. really speaking it is not only all due to your unparalleled qualities of initiative, sympathy and appreciation. But it should be needless to mention that your treatment with every body from a sepoy to a V.C.O was such that it not only inspired our admiration for you, but simply won our hearts.

As such we pray to God to shower upon you and your nearest and dearest ones the choicest of his blessings that he can possibly have in His Stores and let the places where your feet take you flourish in roses and nightingales.

Before you leave us, Sir, we desire to impress upon you that you are leaving your goodwill and happy memories behind, which we always shall cherish for the rest of our lives. That will be our only consolation.

We hope, that your successor, Capt K.O. Perry, will do his best to keep our spirits as nice as have remained hitherto. In him we foresee the same traits of character as we have appreciated in you and we take this opportunity of assuring him that we will leave no stone unturned to maintain the same healthy relationship and efficiency in the unit.

A word here about Lieut B.H.C Robinson, R.E, we think should not be out of place. He has been all along quite understanding and magnificent towards us and we pray for his promotion in the near future.

In the end we request you that in case any one of us has happened to annoy you in his unguarded moment (Though we think that this never have been done - much less meant) you will bury it here and not allow our happy association in any way to be marred thereby. As a humble mark of our gratitude, we are presenting before you a humble token with a view to ever remind you of us and we request that you will very kindly accept it in the same spirit. This reminds us of one of the most passionate poets of your country in the name of Shelley when he composed the historic words that, *"Our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts"*

So be it understood that our sweetest memories will be those that will represent our feelings of this time of having to sadly part with you."

Closed Period

Between 14th October and 14th November 1997 inclusive, no fundraising events may be held except in support of the Poppy Appeal. This is mandatory by authority of a resolution of Annual Conference.

In early June **School Packs** were distributed to all schools in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Isles to promote awareness amongst young people of the meaning of the Poppy emblem at Remembrance time and the continued needs for funds. The aim of the pack is to inform schools about the Legion's work and to solicit their involvement with the Legion, most specifically by inviting their participation in a Poppy Appeal competition and joining in the Two Minute Silence on 11th November.

Very often schools request a speaker to address the assembled school. In cooperation with their local PAO, branch secretaries are requested to arrange a suitable speaker. A copy of "Suggested Speaker's Notes for Schools" is available, on request, as an aid to those making presentations. The video "The RBL at Work" is available on loan, (or for purchase at £10.00) by application to the Poppy Appeal.

Poppy Appeal Posters

Use of posters is an excellent way of promoting public awareness of the forthcoming Poppy Appeal. Some new designs are available for 1997 and all members are asked to help by displaying, and encouraging others to display as many Poppy Appeal posters as possible. In order to achieve maximum impact on the general public, posters should only be

The Two Years of a National Serviceman

by John Cox

Life for me as a national serviceman began on 20th February 1952 (my 18th birthday) at the old Labour Exchange office (now Park House) in Leicester Road, Market Harborough when I signed on for 2 years in the army.

After medicals and interviews my final decision was to join the Royal Army Service Corps as a driver. My call up papers arrived on the 1st May 1952 together with a one way train ticket to report to Blenheim Barracks, Aldershot.

On arrival I was kitted out and given an army number and I became 22672959 Driver Cox J, with a pay book and a wage of £1.22½p a week. For the next 7 days I endured spit and polish before going on to Blandford, Dorset for 8 weeks training - 4 weeks drill and weapons and 4 weeks driver training.

On completion of this 8 weeks course I finally qualified and was posted to Watchfield, Swindon on a 12 weeks Air Despatch course. Here with the aid of one mock up Dakota, I became a trained Air Supplies Crewman and was posted to Malaya to take part in the Malayan Campaign 1948 -1960. I was given 4 weeks embarkation leave and then sailed from Southampton in the Empire Trooper in November 1952 arriving at Singapore 3 weeks later.

I joined 3 Company RASC as a Scout Car Driver in Johor-Bahru but later my platoon was

sent to establish a new base for the Company about 360 miles to the north near Ipoh.

Shortly after I was transferred to 55 Air Despatch Company RASC near the capital Kuala Lumpur. We lived in tents in a clearing in the jungle but close to the airfield. We worked in 4 man teams delivering supply packs to our Infantrymen fighting the Communist guerrillas in the jungle where vehicle access was impossible.

We flew with RAF crews in their twin engined Vickers Valetta, dropping all kinds of supplies, from ammunition and medical supplies to leaflets and food - including eggs! We even dropped live chickens for the Gurkhas!

It was hard going and not without danger as the packs had to leave the aircraft at the right moment to hit the Drop Zones - small clearings in the jungle. Often we were flying four sorties a day at very low altitudes without parachutes over this thick jungle, and this type of flying caused crashes; there were eight during the 1950s and our Company lost 19 men. In all 15,000 sorties were carried out and 30,000 tons of supplies were dropped. During the Monsoon period we still had to fly every day in appalling weather.

All supplies were packed in wooden crates and

to soften the blow Coconut Fibre Bales were used for packing. I well remember scorpions emerging from this fibre and tales of the presence of snakes in this land could fill another article for In Touch!

We had regular leave and went to Singapore where the Union Jack Club and the Nuffield Centre gave us rest and entertainment. But with only £1/2/6d a week to spend, life wasn't too pleasurable. I

Malaya was a most interesting country. Apart from the jungle, there were numerous rubber plantations and Ipoh was mining country. A mountainous area known as the Cameron Highlands was beautiful country and at such heights the temperature was perfect and because of this the main hospital was there.

The Campaign in Malaya up to 1960 was not well known at home and soldiers, especially the Infantrymen, felt that they were the Forgotten Army, like their predecessors in Burma, Siam &

Malaya had done during the war.

With mixed feelings I joined a troop train back to Singapore on May 6th 1954 where I boarded the Empire Fowey arriving back in Southampton 3 weeks later and was demobbed on May 30th. My Army career as a National Serviceman had ended!

