



The Editor Writes

There are forty-two Royal British Legion branches in Leicestershire and Rutland, and Market Harborough is one of the smallest. Nevertheless, we are a force to be reckoned with and our recent achievements are ample proof that size isn't everything.

At the Annual County Conference, no less than three of our number were elected to positions of importance and influence in the County Executive Committee Branch. We offer them our congratulations and wish them well in their exalted roles.

The Jack Quain Trophy seems to enjoy residing in our area and is back in town for a fourth appearance. Once again, we thank Tom Ashmore who was responsible for an immaculately composed presentation to the judges.

An historic milestone in the Harborough Branch success story approaches and it is hoped there will be a good turn out on 25 February for the ceremony of affiliation with our friends in 1084 Squadron of the Air Training Corps.

Well, that's the news so far as Harborough is concerned, but what about the country as a whole? By the time you read this, 'Get me out of here, I'm sad and will do anything for money' (or something like that), will be forgotten and the nation will be breathlessly waiting for the next dose of cheap and nasty reality television. May I suggest we launch another campaign alongside the council tax protest? How about BBQT, which stands for Bring Back Quality Television!

Last month I appealed for material for use in *In Touch* and, I am relieved to report that I have proof that at least six people read this modest publication, for that is the number of responses I received. Thank you, dear prospective contributors, watch this space, as they say.



The Hazards of Aircrew Training

By Tony Johnson

From time to time, when passing Gartree Prison, that blot on the rural landscape, I am reminded that it stands on the site of a World War II Royal Air Force aircrew training establishment, No.14 Operational Training Unit (OTU), Bomber Command. It was one of seventeen such units located about the Midlands, with two more in Morayshire, Scotland.

With few exceptions, all air crew trainees took a three months course of training with one of these OTUs before joining an operational squadron. A rookie pilot and crew invariably flew a clapped out Wellington, Whitley or Hampden twin-engined bomber, which was prone to all sorts of malfunctions after being discarded by operational squadrons. Flying during the winter months did tend to get the adrenaline flowing in full spate following a flying incident which we referred to as a 'shaky do'. Who needed laxatives?

Statistics show that during the period of World War II, OTUs suffered the loss of 1,619 aircraft, the majority of which were Wellingtons. A mental calculation, assuming in most cases a five-man crew, would give some idea of the terrible loss of life sustained in aircraft were well past their best before date. In addition, a total of 212 aircraft and crews were lost as a result of operational duties carried out from these units. The year 1943 was a particularly bad one, as a total of 558 aircraft were lost to OTUs.

In December 1942, after completing my wireless and gunnery courses, which took a total of two years, the theory of wireless telegraphy and morse code training being the most time-consuming of aircrew trades, I reported to 22 OTU at Wellesbourne Mountford, Warwickshire,. No sooner had I managed to get 'crewed up'

with four other likely lads, than the Signals Officer talked me into collecting my kit and to report forthwith to the Unit's satellite airfield at Gaydon, a few miles away. A crew, well advanced in training, had suddenly found themselves without a Wop/AG (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner). From what I was able to gather, the lad had formed the conclusion that flying was not really for him after all. Most likely stressed out of his mind, he had been quickly hustled off the station overnight 'to prevent him from contaminating other pupils', and to carry the grossly unfair stigma of LMF - lack of morale fibre.

Thus, after no more than three weeks of test flights and exercises 'bombing' London, Manchester and other cities - and much nervousness from time to time - I joined 427 RCAF Squadron at Croft, North Yorkshire, following a week's leave. During my comparatively short stay at 22 OTU, the veteran instructors in the various aircrew trades were, to use a present day expression, my 'role models'. Having completed at least one tour of thirty operations over enemy territory, and wearing their well-worn battledresses, many with distinguished flying medals, they had been 'screened', or rested. They now had to virtually place their lives on the line once again to train one 'sprog' crew after another for a period of about six months before resuming their operational flying duties. Some showed the strain and were unkindly labelled as 'flak happy' or 'round the bend'.

Nevertheless, despite these uncalled for names, none were more experienced and professional in the air and over enemy territory. I am privileged to count two of such veteran instructors as my long-time friends, having first met them in 1943 in German prisoner-of-war camps. These were Stalag Luft 1, at Barth Vogelsang, on the Baltic Coast east of Lubeck, and Stalag-Luft VI at Gross Heydekrug, situated in what was then East Prussia and close to the border with Lithuania.

More of Tony's wartime experiences will follow soon.



Reminder 1 - Urgent

Members are invited to the presentation of the Affiliation Certificate to 1084 Squadron of the Air Training Corps will take place on at 8 pm on Wednesday, 25 February, at the ATC Headquarters in the Leisure Centre grounds (as you approach the Centre, fork left and it's the first building on the right).

Reminder 2 - Anniversary Dinner

Friday, 26 March at Market Harborough Golf Club The cost: just £15. Make your booking as soon as possible, please, with Mary or Joan on MH 462143.

Membership Directory

The Membership Secretary is at present compiling a new membership directory. Will any member who does not wish to be included in the list, please contact Tony Johnson on 01858 466097 as soon as possible.

Coffee Morning

You can help to make the Coffee Morning on 3 April another success! Please bring raffle and tombola prizes and bric-a-brac to the next meeting or, if you have items but cannot attend, ring Mary or Joan on MH 462143.

A Warm Welcome

The President presented his Legion badge to new Member, 93 years-old Mr Reg Tarry.

Do you need a lift?

Want to attend Branch Meetings or other events but can't because you have no transport? Then help could be at hand. Please telephone Vida or Barry (see front page) and every effort will be made to help you.

New Leaflet

Tom Ashmore is currently up-dating the Branch promotional leaflet.

The Diary



*Some dates to keep free.
Details of all Social Events are available from Joan McMillin on MH 462143. Joan welcomes your suggestions for events, outings, etc.*

- .10 Mar Branch Meeting
- 13 Mar RBL Central Band Concert, Fairfield Halls, Croydon
- 16 Feb Branch Lunch, Angel Hotel, Noon for 12.30pm
- 26 Mar Branch Anniversary Dinner
- 3 Apl Branch Coffee Morning

The date of the next meeting is March 10

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 Branch Committee meets on the Thursday preceding the Branch Meeting at 7.30 pm in the upstairs Committee Room at the Conservative Club.



The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch

Founded in 1923



Branch Website
www.mktharborbl.ukvet.net

In Touch

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Leicestershire & Rutland Annual County Conference Report by Betty Ramsay

I attended the Annual Conference as Branch Delegate on 31 January 2004 at the Mountsorrel Working Men's Club.

Of the forty-two County Branches just twenty were represented. Speakers from the County included the President, the Chairman, the Field Officer and the Chairman of the Women's Section

The County Chairman reflected on his three years in office and believed there was better communication between County and the Branches.

Both the Chairman and President referred to the De Montfort Hall Festival of Remembrance being very successful in 2003 with over 200 representatives on stage. Now the event was back on stream it was hoped this would be reflected by support in 2004 when the Band of the Life Guards have been booked to perform.

The County Field Officer believed the RBL Charity made a real difference to people's lives but he recommended that, where possible, Members should try to have some fun in the Legion!

Welfare cases included vulnerable people looking for advice particularly as regarded debt. Cases covered every age group from babies to the elderly; and ex-servicemen from old campaigns to present-day conflicts.

166 cases with dealt with during the year and the total spend was up slightly.

There are 65 active caseworkers throughout the County, but 13 of the 42 Branches had no trained

caseworker. (Market Harborough has three.)

The Guest Speaker was Peter Henderson, Director of Field and Membership Services He spoke on Taking the Legion Forward and Best Practice. He believed that the Legion must change its profile and tell the world what it does and why it does it.

There had been a decrease of 42,000 in the national Membership with some 145,000 members over the age of 75 years.

Loss of Membership was a cause for concern in the County and George Fleming, the County Recruiting Officer, was continuously visiting Branches.

Poppy Appeal increases were reported with current totals being £287,269 for Leicestershire and £23,310 for Rutland.

The National Poppy Appeal total was currently up by 8% on last year. £315,000 was returned from the Inland Revenue in respect of Gift Aid and it was believed this could rise to £1 million.

The 16 Branches of the Women's Section had raised £900 on an All Gold Day and the Purse Presentation in August amounted to £17,000.

News of particular interest to our Branch is covered in the next column.

I have available for inspection copies of the County Accounts, the Meeting Agenda and Reports, together with a paper circulated by the Speaker on some of the topics raised.



Branch News

A Prestigious Award

Fifty years of dedication to the Legion were recognised at the February Branch meeting when the prestigious Royal British Legion Gold Badge, was presented to **Peter Wilson**, the President.. Mr Wilson has held virtually every office in the Branch, including secretary, welfare officer, chairman and Poppy Appeal Organiser.

"This award", said Mark Hudson, who made the presentation, "is in appreciation of Mr Wilson's hard work for the Royal British Legion as a whole and the Market Harborough Branch in particular." Mr Wilson, who served in the Royal Air Force in World War II, was a career policeman and he recalled being posted to Market Harborough, "My first job was to co-ordinate the Remembrance Day Parade".

New Posts - New Responsibilities

The Harborough Branch featured prominently at the recent Annual County Conference, when three members were elected to important positions of influence.

Mark Hudson accepted the post of Vice Chairman on the County Executive.

Our Standard Bearer, **George Fleming** was formally appointed County Standard Bearer and would represent the County in the Area Competition on 14th February. *Good Luck George!*

Brian Marshall continues to serve on the County Executive and carry out responsibilities for Youth.

We've Done it Again!

The top County award for endeavour, the Jack Quain trophy, has been won for the fourth time in the past five years and will once again be on show in the Council Offices.

What the Papers Said

From the Harborough Mail dated 3 April 1952

Memorial Plans

More Demolitions Anticipated

PLANS for the Market Harborough Garden of Remembrance were discussed by members of the War Memorial sub-committee and the Highways Committee of the Urban Council when they met Mr. J. G. Barlow, council surveyor, at the site behind Welland House on Monday.

Among the many ideas put forward was a suggestion that a memorial column should be placed in the centre of the garden, commemorating those who fell in the last war.

Another proposal was that two plaques inscribed with the Roll of Honour from both World Wars, should be placed on the stone supports to the main, ornamental gates, which have been acquired from the old Gopsall Hall. This would bring the two memorials together, and it was also proposed that the South African War plaque should be placed near the main entrance.

Mr. Barlow is to prepare plans, incorporating the various ideas, and these will be submitted to the full War Memorial committee. Their choice will be passed to the council for final approval.

It is hoped that a start will soon be made on the garden, though it is expected that it will be some time before the scheme is completed, as the final plan involves further house demolitions.

Still in the news

Messrs Ashmore and Hudson recently attended the Primary Care User Consultation Group Meeting to discuss the future of the War Memorial Portico in the Cottage Hospital.

COMBINED OPERATIONS ON LAND AND IN THE AIR



Probably taken some sixty years ago, this evocative photograph was found lurking in the archives at Market Harborough Museum.

Unfortunately, it is not dated and the caption reads; Husbands Bosworth airfield. Airmen and Land Girls.

Branch News Extra

The February Branch Meeting

This was a notable occasion for several reasons in addition to the announcements about our Members' successes and the Gold Badge presentation to the President. No less than forty-seven Members were present to enjoy two special treats.

Firstly, the story of his trip to Belgium last autumn (as reported in our November issue) was told and illustrated by Bernard Halsall. The fascinating tale which took Bernard back to the place where he had crash-landed the glider he was piloting in 1943 captivated his audience. Bernard was thanked by the President to much applause.

Then, the evening was rounded off most agreeably with an excellent buffet laid on by our Social Committee ladies, Joan and Mary.

Where are they now?

Anon

Where are the bombers, the Lancs on the runways
Crouching, menacing, black faced and dour.
Loaded with aircrew and window and ammo
And 'cookies' and incendiaries to drop on the Ruhr.

Where are the pilots, the navs and air gunners,
Wops and bomb aimers and flight engineers,
Lads who were bank clerks and milkmen and teachers,
Carpenters, lawyers and grocers and peers.

Geordies and cockneys and Wiltshire moonrakers,
And little dark men from the valleys of Wales,
Manxmen, Devonians, Midlanders and Scousers.
Jocks from the Highlands and Tykes from the Dales.

Where are the Aussies, the sports and the cobbers
Talking of cricket and sheilas and grog,
Flying their Lancs over Hamburg and Stettin
And back to the Lincolnshire winter-time fog.

Where are the fliers from Canada's prairies
From cities and forests determined to win,
Thumbing their noses at Goering's Luftwaffe
And busily dropping their bombs on Berlin.

Where are the Kiwis who left all their sunshine
For bleak winter airfields and fenland and dyke,
And playing wild mess games like cockalorum
And knocking the hell out of Hitler's Third Reich.

Where are they now those men of all nations
Who flew not knowing what the future would send
And the few who returned their missions completed
That night in 'The Chopper' would toast absent friends.