



## The Editor Writes

A perennial problem for societies, clubs and other such organisations, is finding enough members willing and able to get involved in the running of the group. Most of us do not wish to stand out in the crowd and anyway, as a race, we are not exactly a bunch of extroverts! In our Branch, however, we are fortunate in having a higher than average proportion of members making contributions and, as a result, we have been able to celebrate many achievements.

For the Legion as a whole, however, there is a far more pressing state of affairs to be addressed. This is the need to attract members from the younger generations to our ranks. As you will see from the report in this issue, our Branch, through vice-Chairman, Brian Marshall, is leading the way within the County to establish links with youth organisations.

Those Members who were fortunate enough to be present at the affiliation ceremony in the company of our friends in the Air Training Corps, enjoyed a thoroughly pleasant, friendly evening, which served to strengthen the bond between our two organisations. Many cadets will go on to serve in the armed forces and it is hoped they will remember the affiliation and, for all the best reasons, will one day join the Royal British Legion. As Brian announces, this is just the beginning and the Army Cadets will follow soon.

We have reached the end of Sid Reed's story after six episodes - and I shall miss him around my computer! It is good to know that I have a healthy stock of articles, as well as promises of more to come. I sincerely hope you get as much enjoyment from reading *In Touch* as I do in producing the monthly issues.

Finally, I am reliably informed that Spring is just around the corner. How about some ideas for Branch activities in the brighter, warmer days ahead?

going into that cemetery where they were buried, and the headstones, and when I got there I felt the presence of those men all around me.

The Company finished up in Hamburg in Germany, Wilhelmsburg, and we were billeted in Herman Goering's girls' school. I shall never forget it, the war was finished and we were free. We felt so joyful because of what had happened and there was a lad who used to play the piano accordion and the piano, and we were all so happy because we'd survived it all. We knew we were going back home.

We were sectioned into groups for demob. One, two, three, four and five, up to twenty six and beyond. Those that had been in the longest were the first out and I finished up in 33 group but most of the lads that I was with were in 26 group so I can remember having to say goodbye to these lads and officers that I had been through all the misery with, and I can't explain how we felt - because we'd survived. And I can't believe to this day that after all the misery we'd been through we went from this place in Wilhelmsburg after I'd lost all my mates that I knew and we sang and smoked together and helped each other. Then they went.

We were transferred to Wansbeck Kassern, a German infantry barracks and I was on a cadre course then for six weeks to be made up to a full sergeant. During this time I learned unarmed combat amongst other things, but do you know what, those "wonderful dockers in England who had suffered so much" went on strike and because we were a docks company we were brought back to England to work the docks. I remember coming back from Hamburg and finishing up at a place called Purfleet. We were under canvas and were woken at dawn to go to Canary Wharf, West Indian Dock and we worked from dawn until dusk until the dockers decided to return to work.

When all this had finished, still waiting to be demobbed, we were posted to Weston just outside Derby and again I had to leave all the mates that I knew. I was there for a few weeks and I knew there was a place a bit closer

to home called Old Dalby, just outside Melton. I thought that was near to home and it was agreed that I should be posted to Old Dalby in charge of a detachment of men that were waiting for demob. It was at Old Dalby that I was discharged but first I had to go to York to get my demob suit and hand everything in except my battle-dress. I chose a nigger brown, herring bone suit and brown trilby hat. We were also issued with shirt and tie and boots and socks.

I walked out in my new 'kit' and came home and that was the end of my service in the army. It is impossible to explain how I felt coming home after all those years and all that misery - because it surely was.

*Sid finishes his fascinating story with these words addressed to his fellow Branch members.*

There are so many more things that I could talk about, so many things, but doing what I am, talking about it, it brings back so very much to me, things that I've always tried to forget. I was brought up to believe in God and to be religious, and I was, to a point.

I used to talk to my Padre, I can always remember him, Bernard Headley, when we were in Hamburg before we were demobbed, and he used to say to me, "You know Sid, when you get older you will think about all these things that you've been through".

And it's quite true, now, if I sit like I'm doing now, talking about it, it brings so much back, so much. And the things that I saw and the people, civilian people, that suffered so very much because of it.

Most of my army mates and most of my friends, even in the REA, the Welland Valley and Ashley British Legion branches that I was a member of, they're nearly all dead and gone. Only about two left that I know.

But I think, having said what I have, I've said enough. I leave this in your hands and you must make the decision whether it is worth listening to. So I say this to all you members at Market Harborough, thank you for listening and I wish that I could come to the meetings, but on my next birthday I shall be 84.



**Coffee Morning** - Mary and Joan (on MH 462143) urgently need raffle and tombola prizes - and, of course, your bric-a-brac - to help make the Coffee Morning on 3 April another success.

Proceeds on this occasion to the Gurkha Trust Fund.

**A Creditable Performance** - George Fleming is to be congratulated on achieving third place in the East Midlands Regional Standard Bearers' Competition.

**Legion in the Community** - Messrs Hudson and Fleming attended a meeting to discuss a programme for the County, which is one of ten participating in a pilot scheme to raise the Legion's profile in the community. The RBL is mostly known only for the Poppy Appeal and there will be publicity emphasising other aspects. George Fleming, as County Recruitment Officer, will be manning the publicity marquee at County locations.

**Beware Mobile Phone Scam** - A missed call may show on your mobile phone with the number 07090 203840, although the last four digits may vary. Do not call this number back - you will be charged at a rate of £50 per minute, and believe it or not, it is completely legal!

**New Laser Treatment for In Touch** - This issue is the first to use the new laser printer purchased to replace the old, worn-out machine, which has given excellent service. Fortuitously, the cost was virtually covered by a timely charitable donation of £100 by St Peter's Lodge.

**Let's Copy John's Great Idea** - It is often difficult for us Oldies to come up with gift suggestions when asked what we would like for anniversaries and birthdays. Well, how about taking a lead from John Cox, who requested that his recent milestone birthday be commemorated by donations to the Gurkha Fund? He must be a popular bloke - he raised a superb £220!

**RBL and Youth Sport** - Disappoint at the lack of sporting activity for youth was expressed by Tom Jeacock. George Fleming explained that there were no youth members in the County and no-one was willing to take on organisation of activities.



## The Diary

*Details of all Social Events are available from Joan McMillin on MH 462143. Joan welcomes your ideas for events, outings, etc.*

### SOME DATES TO KEEP FREE

- 26 Mar Branch Anniversary Dinner
- 3 Apl Branch Coffee Morning at the Harboro' Theatre
- 29 Apl Harboro' Army Cadet Force Affiliation (see page 4)
- 27 May RBL Wigston Charity Night for Tigers Museum
- 6 Jun D-Day Anniversary (hopefully details to come)

*Would you like to attend Branch Meetings or other events but cannot because you have no transport? Well, don't despair - help could be at hand! Please telephone Vida or Barry (see front page) and every effort will be made to help you.*

**The date of the next meeting is April 14**

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.mktharborrbl.ukvet.net](http://www.mktharborrbl.ukvet.net)

# In Touch

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*Flt Lt John Standish, Cpl Nick Harrison, George Fleming and Brian Marshall stand by Flt Lt Valerie Smith and Mark Hudson at the signing ceremony.*

## The ATC and the RBL

## WE'RE FLYING IN FORMATION



*Flt Lt Valerie Smith, Commanding Officer 1084 Squadron, accepts the print of 633 Squadron aircraft from Branch President Peter Wilson.*

My thanks to all members who were able to attend the parade to commemorate the exchange of Affiliation Certificates between our Branch and 1084 Squadron, Air Training Corps. The event came at the end of a period of negotiation and the making of arrangements to achieve an important first for the County. I have learned a lot which will be helpful to me in setting up future affiliations.

The evening, for which we thank our ATC hosts, was a happy occasion and, following the signing by Flt Lt

Valerie Smith and Mark Hudson, a presentation was made to the Squadron

### *A Report by Brian Marshall County Youth Officer*

on behalf of the Branch by our President Peter Wilson. Mr Wilson donated a superb limited edition print showing aircraft, past and present, which served with the RAF's famous 633 Squadron.

The Affiliation agreement reads: "We, the under-signed having a clear understanding and respect for the aims and objectives of each other's respec-

tive organisations, do hereby agree to provide mutual support and encouragement within our community and, when requested and practicable, do hereby agree to provide help and support in achieving those aims and objectives."

Having got off to such a fine start, I am pleased, on behalf of the Detachment Commander, to invite you to the next ceremony with the Market Harborough Army Cadet Force Detachment at the Headquarters, Coventry Road, on Thursday 29 April at 7.15 pm. Your full support will be much appreciated.

**Let Gary Know We Care** - Once again Gary Farnsworth is undergoing hospital treatment, but this time he is a long way from family and friends. With very few visitors to relieve his loneliness, let us assure him that he is not forgotten by sending him lots of cheery cards and letters. Gary's address is: Osborn 2, Spinal Injuries Unit, Northern General Hospital, Sheffield, S5 7AU.

**Welfare Continuity** - Vida Edwards and Barry Peck will continue as your contacts until June.

### **Welfare Matters**



**Are You Interested?** - The next Welfare Caseworking Course is due to take place on the weekend of 27 and 28 November in Northamptonshire.

**Gulf War Syndrome** - Concern was expressed by Members when John Liddell quoted from a press release on the threatened collapse of the Syndrome case.

**Pension Problems** - Duggie McMeeken has been appointed to deal with such matters on behalf of the Veterans Agency in the East Midlands.

## **A Night Out with the Marines**

*Pat Middleton*

On a cold Saturday in February a group of RBL and ORNA members and their friends met up at the Conservative Club for a trip to the Royal Albert Hall, to attend the Mountbatten Festival of Music by the massed bands of Her Majesty's Royal Marines. We had an easy journey to London with a stop en route for a cup of coffee.

When we arrived at the Albert Hall the security checks were stringent with the whole area around the hall coned off and police keeping traffic from stopping too close. We were searched by cheerful, young Marines as we entered - there were no complaints from the ladies! We took the opportunity to explore the newly refurbished Albert Hall before taking our seats .

The music reflected a number of historic events including the 60th anniversary of the D-day landings and the 300th anniversary of Gibraltar, the battle that gave the Royal Marines their famous sole battle honour in 1704. It also demonstrated the versatility of the band as they went on to play classical overtures, solo features and music from stage and screen. The skill and precision of the Corps of Drums was one of the highlights of the evening.

The Finale featured a solo bugler in a setting of ceremonial sunset, audience participation in the singing of Jerusalem, and, of course, A life on the Ocean Wave, the regimental march of the Royal Marines, leaving not a dry eye in the house! We heard that many of those performing on stage had spent much of the last twelve months away from their instruments in the Gulf providing medical support to 3 Commando Brigade.

The stunning venue of the Royal Albert Hall combined with the spine-tingling music created a spectacle that we will remember until well - how about next year? Proceeds from the concerts provide income for the Sargent Cancer Care for Children and over thirty Service charities.



## Sid's Story

*So we reach the end of this moving account of one man's war experiences. Sid Reed recorded these words in October 2002 as he sat in his beloved summerhouse in his cottage garden at Hallaton.*

We moved from this place into an orchard because the Germans had fallen back and I don't think they were very far away from us, but we didn't know this. We dug in again and stayed in there for perhaps a month, I'm not sure how long. It started to rain and we were getting wet through and it was very miserable, but we managed to get away from there and moved into a French infantry barracks on the outskirts of Caen after it had fallen.

But, what I had forgotten to tell you was that whilst we were in these trenches under the wall, we all watched 500 Lancasters come out of the clouds and bomb Caen. I saw Lancasters getting shot out of the sky, I think there were at least five that I saw hit with the Ack-Ack and the 88 millimetre guns that the Germans were firing at them. I saw some of the lads bale out when they were hit and I don't think there were any of them that would survive it because the Ack-Ack fire was so fierce. When you think about it they were all good lads, they were, they were the best we had. This is what the war did.

Then we moved up into the infantry barracks. Going down into Caen there was a Naafi which they had developed in a bombed-out hotel where we could go and buy cigarettes, and the Naafi things that we could get. I went down there one day with a bloke named Arthur Spencer, he was a mate of mine and came from Nuneaton. We walked out of the Naafi just in time to see a young woman, she must have been about 18, climbing over a heap of bricks and beckoning us to go to her. She was crying, hysterical, sobbing. And we went to her to

see what was the matter, and she got hold of our hands and beckoned us to follow her. When we got over the bricks, we followed her down a pathway and she stopped when she got about a hundred yards up this path and it was all houses down, bricks and everything. She stopped and she looked at this building, it was a heap of bricks and windows and doors all down and everything, and she said in French, "Ma maison, ma maison".

I knew a bit of French, and she meant "my home", or what was left of it. I ask you this question today, how do you think we felt.

We were in the infantry barracks on the outskirts of Caen until after Christmas. They'd boxed the Germans in at Falaise, they'd fallen right back and Paris had fallen so they let us come back home on leave. I had a leave in January, I think, and afterwards we moved up to a place called Dixmude in Belgium and were there for about a fortnight. They then moved us up to Blankenberg in a hotel on the seafront.

What we had to do then was clear the beach and find out where the mines and things were and move them. I remember them finding something, we didn't know what it was. Some of our lads found it and it had a hand grenade attached to it and the officer said, "Well we'll take it up on the prom and we'll see what it is".

But the bloody fool didn't know what he was talking about. They took the hand grenade off it and it was a timing device and they had only just put it down on the prom when the bloody thing went up! It killed the RSM, the Officer, four more men — one of my mates, and I can see him as if it was yesterday. His name was Jacky Peckner. Big Wilkie the RSM he was stone dead, his life's blood all over the floor. Jacky Peckner had both his legs blown off and his arm hanging and he was still conscious. The Sergeant had a leg blown off. I don't know...some of these things are so vivid. Jacky Peckner was alive but he didn't live very long after that.

We buried them in the cemetery in Blankenberg. There are six of them there. I've been back once to see them and it's a funny thing about this, I can remember



Photo: Andrew Carpenter

George Fleming, Peter Wilson and Mark Hudson, seen here with trophies on display, as they pose for a press photograph at the Branch meeting last month.

As reported in *In Touch*, Peter had been presented with his much-deserved Gold Badge, George was celebrating his appointment as the County Standard Bearer, and Mark was looking forward to increased responsibilities as Vice Chairman on the County Executive.

Also on show is the Jack Quain trophy, which has returned for yet another year in recognition of endeavour by the Harborough Branch.