

In Touch

The monthly newsletter founded in 1996

WITH D-DAY 70TH ANNIVERSARY SUPPLEMENT

The Royal British Legion

Registered Charity No. 219279

Shoulder to Shoulder with all who Serve



Market Harborough Branch

Founded in 1923

91
Years of Caring



**2014: WWI
Centenary Year**



His assassination in Sarajevo 100 years ago led to the outbreak of WWI but his great granddaughters' story is about WW2 (p3)

With thanks to Prime Life Ltd, parent company of Peaker Park Care Village Market Harborough, for printing this issue.

Issue 189
June 2014

Next Monthly Branch Meeting
7.30 pm **Wednesday 9 July**
Committee 3 July

Function Room, Conservative Club,
Fairfield Rd. Market Harborough

Branch News

May Branch Meeting

The planned local commemoration events (see p8), Legion Branch Trusts and the D-Day 70th Anniversary were mentioned.

After Meeting Talk

Jeremy Prescott's excellent presentation 'Sacrifice and Remembrance - WWI and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission' showed how the appalling scale of casualties prompted Sir Fabian Ware to see that the individuals and where they fell were not forgotten and how this led to the creation of the CWGC. Firm principals were established covering the uniformity and high standards of design and maintenance of memorials and cemeteries wherever they are (now located in 156 countries).

From the beginning, records were made of what was known of each individual and now form an accessible database on the website www.cwgc.org.

Some fascinating stories can arise from some of the headstones like that of the WWI double VC medical officer who, when injured, was attended to by an MO who had been awarded the VC in the Boer War and WWI!

Obituary

Frank Thurgood 1931 - 2014

Born in Essex, where after leaving school, Frank became an apprentice with an Electrical Engineering Company. His long career with the firm spanned over 40 years, ending with his final years in Oadby.

The two years of National Service were spent at the RAF.

Busy retirement years were characterised by his unstinting work of helping people. As a volunteer driver with SLCVS, Frank took scores of people to hospital and other appointments. Befriending activities included regular outings, especially appreciated by three of his Branch friends. A different but valued example of service was in delivering ***In Touch*** until medical problems made driving difficult.

Five Branch members and the RAFA chairman attended the funeral at Kettering crematorium on 28th May. Condolences are extended to his family.

Our friends in Desborough invite you to their annual Armed Forces Day Lunch at the Bowls Club, High St., Desborough. There is a choice of four main courses and three desserts. The cost is £12-50. If you wish to attend please contact Betty Ramsay on MH 434923

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Cover Photo

Arch Duke Franz Ferdinand, heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne.

Remember This?

Twists of Fate

"Two shots from a Browning automatic pistol fired by a 19 year old Serbian student today killed the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand and his wife, Duchess of Hohenberg, as they drove through the streets of Sarajevo, capital of Bosnia. Earlier, on their way to the Town Hall, a bomb was hurled at their car ...the Archduke picked it up and threw it into the road..."

Thus ran the press reports on 28th June, 1914.

85 years later, in July 1999, the newspaper, Navy News, carried an interview with the great granddaughter of the Archduke, Her Serene Highness Princess Eva von Hohenberg, a 24 year old student in London and an honorary member of the Royal Naval Association.

Intriguing! Such were the

complications of the politics and royal family relationships of 19th & early 20th century Europe, that though her great great grandfather was an ally of the Kaiser, her grandmother served in WW2 as a Naval Nursing Sister and her grandfather, Arthur Caesar as a Lieutenant in the Canadian Princess Patricia Light Infantry.

"Off Dieppe his ship was attacked and suffered heavy casualties. He was badly wounded and left for dead but he was carried to safety by an unknown Naval seaman." He recovered, rose to the rank of colonel and at the end of the war married the Nursing Sister. Their daughter was Princess Eva's mother. "I would not be here today but for the sailor who saved my grandfather." Her regret is not knowing who that sailor was.

From In Touch May 2000 Issue 25.

Branch News June 2001

THE LUNCHEON held at The Old Red Lion at Welham on Tuesday, June 12th, was yet another success story. 26 members attended this social occasion, and actually overflowed from the room allocated to us in the pub. It is good to see the luncheons well supported as they are an excellent

occasion to meet and chat with fellow members. Here's to the next time!

Buffet. . . a bigger spread than usual had been prepared by the Social Team. "We will never eat all that", was the reaction . . . but in the event little was left over so it must have been OK.

WW2 clandestine operations.

Research by Tom Ashmore and featured in the e-circular 'Click 2B In Touch' of March 2009 Issue 25

The Special Operations Executive

had been created in July 1940 (after a good deal of inter-ministry rivalry and little support from the conventional arms of the Forces) to encourage guerilla activities in occupied countries. Many indigenous groups were harassing the enemy but



very little was known about this aspect of the War until official records became available. Since then, much has been written about its work and the outstanding courage of the agents infiltrated into enemy held territory.

Amongst the web-sites I that gives a good outline of the work of SOE is http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/special_operations_executive.htm whereas those with details of individual agents include

<http://www.64-baker-street.org/main/index.html>

which is devoted to the women of SOE. The on-line encyclopedia [Wikipedia](#) also covers SOE comprehensively with a lot of detail including a long list of operations during the war in Europe.



Maj. Gen. Gubbins
OC SOE from 1943

needed material and organisational support. Coordination and direction was also required. Because of the very secret nature of the organisation,

Not all operations were in Europe and SOE established regional organisations with headquarters in Cairo and Delhi. The former was responsible for Africa and the Middle East and the latter for India and South-East Asia.

An early success was to organise a force in [Abyssinia of Ethiopian irregulars](#) under Orde Charles Wingate (of later Chindit fame) against the Italians and in support of the exiled Emperor Haile Selassie.

To serve countries in and to the east of the Indian Ocean, the SOE group was known as Force 136 (B) and was



Capt. Wingate

based in Ceylon. A full and interesting account of its origin, development and operations is given in *Operations Most Secret - SOE: The Malayan Theatre* by

I a n Trenowden (ISBN 0-947554-43-2). There were active resistance groups especially in Malaya but they were



Initially, only Dutch Submarines from their East Indies Fleet were available

beyond the range of available aircraft until quite late in the War. Submarines were used but were only available as part of normal Naval patrol activity (Ceylon itself was always under threat from the

I party was unable to contact Ceylon for eighteen months!

Despite these logistical difficulties, Force 136(B) by the end of the War had infiltrated over 400 British Officers and other ranks into Japanese held territory.

One less well known aspect of clandestine operations was the creation and training of "stay behind" parties in anticipation of enemy occupation. an unusual web-site by Maurice Christie recording his research into SOE, primarily in Malaya, where his father worked in the training school in Singapore. Taken prisoner, he spent three years in Manchuria. I found the site compelling.

Editor's Foot Note

*The document from which the above is reproduced was a personal venture of Tom Ashmore designed to provide information he had found on the Internet and links to some of the detailed background accessible by a **Click of the 'mouse'** as one read the document on the computer' screen. Hence the title. showed how the stuff Tom thought would of interest could be shared by the recipients The circulation was restricted to Legion members in branches in the UK (including some in Market Harborough) and overseas he had 'met' through their branch websites.*

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Peaker Park Anniversary Party

Several Branch members joined residents and friends at this most enjoyable event on 1st June.

June Branch Lunch

Again, the occasion at the Angel Hotel was well supported with twenty persons present.

A Fishing Tale

by John Black

Whilst serving in the Far East, the Regiment went on exercise to a small island some miles off Singapore. I was assigned to go on board an RAF launch as a radio operator to liaise between the aircraft (Hunters & Javelins) and our guns (L70 40mm Bofors).

In the afternoon the aircraft scheduled to overfly went u/s so we on the launch were left with nothing to do. Three of us, myself and two airmen decided to go for a swim, off comes the kit, and straight into the South China sea, after the heat of being on the launch it was wonderful.

We swam out to a sampan from which an old Chinese man was fishing, asking what he was fishing for, he replied Sharks, and sure enough in the boat were three or four small sharks, with what seemed to be lots of sharp teeth. There was some Olympic speed swimming by the three of us back to the launch, checking of course that we were all complete!

Miscellany

June Centenary Snippets

1914

Suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst is arrested for the eighth time.

1915

The Derby is run at Newmarket because the Army occupies Epsom.

1916

Lord Kitchener is lost at sea.

1917

Windsor and Mountbatten names replace Royal German titles

1918

General rationing introduced

It Happens in June



Summer Solstice at Stonehenge

Nettle Eating Contest

Held as part of a charity beer festival in the village of Marshwood, Devon with entrants from around the world, attempting to out eat the current champion nettle-eater.

Midsummer Bonfires Cornwall

A chain of bonfires is lit one after another on hilltops from Lands End to Kithill on the border with Devon, on the eve of longest day (the evening

Annual Conference

The 'domestic' arrangements for Registration and lunch time catering were much improved over last year.

I attended the Membership Forum on Saturday morning (0830). There are hopes that there will be a move to a greater all round public awareness and raised profile of TRBL at all levels. One topic that we will continue to hear more of is the changes in Welfare processes and, as one delegate put it 'the summary sacking of the willing welfare volunteers'.

The Charter Motion on the changes to the Royal Charter was once again defeated, it will no doubt appear again at next year's Conference. I think it is holding back some important work of TRBL and hopefully something suitable will be approved next year. The details of all the other motions and the main speeches can be found on TRBL website, www.britishlegion.org.uk

I took the opportunity to speak to the Legion Staff about Property Trusts and its effect on the Portacabin. I have reported the discussion to the Branch Committee who will be following this up over the next few months.

Your Branch Standard was ably carried during the Conference and on the somewhat long Parade held on Saturday afternoon., by Hilary. She was as smart as ever and the Branch can be proud of her.

John Standish - Branch delegate

LUNCH AT THE ANGEL



for good food and good company

1 JULY

**MEET IN THE
BAR AT NOON**

MENU

Shoulder of lamb
with Yorkshire pudding, roast
potatoes & gravy (can be gf)

Baked salmon on mashed potato
with watercress sauce (gf)

Trio of Grasmere sausages on mash
with onion gravy (gf)

Summer salads with warm new
potatoes - Choice of:-
Home cooked ham (gf) or
Mature cheddar cheese (gf) (v)

-/-/-/-/-/-

Strawberries & clotted cream ice
cream (gf) (v)

Vanilla cheesecake with mandarins &
mini jug of cream (v)

Rich chocolate torte with clotted
cream ice cream (v)

(v) = vegetarian (gf) = gluten free

-/-/-/-/-/-

Finished off with either fresh tea or
coffee with chocolate mints
£8.50 - pay on the day

To book, ring Les Moore (01858 463112) before 21 June. To cancel ring The Angel (01858 462702) before 10 am on the day or you will be charged.

What's Going On?

Forthcoming Events

- 14 Jun MH Carnival - Helpers needed
- 15 Jun National Arboretum-unveiling of RN memorial with R M band
- 21 Jun AFD Coffee Morning-Harborough Theatre 9-12
- 23 Jun AFD Week Flag Raising @ Council offices-10.15
- 25 Jun AFD Lunch Desborough - see p2
- 28 Jun Peaker Park Event 3 pm
- 29 Jun AFD event - Welland Park
- 9 July After Meeting event
- 4 & 9 MH WWI commemorations-Aug details later
- 13 Aug Branch meeting @ Peaker Park
- 25 Oct Poppy Appeal launch

Welfare

If you are aware of any one who qualifies for, and may benefit from the Legion welfare services please contact **Betty Ramsay on 01858 434923**

RBL Helpline

is open to everyone, 8am - 8pm, 7 days a week on Freephone 0800 802 8080 for advice and support for serving & ex- service people and dependents.

In Touch Next Month

Just Nuisance Part2, centenary Snippets, 'Remember this?', News, etc

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Branch Website

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www.britishlegion.org.uk/branches/market-harborough/newsletter

Supplement to June 2014 Issue # 189

D-Day 70th Anniversary Special

My D- Day Memories (before, during and after) by **Douglas Owen**

I joined the RAF on 18th September 1942 after two or three years in the ATC where I had trained as a Navigator, reaching the rank of Sergeant. Initial training was in Redcar but my eyesight prevented me being aircrew and, eventually, I was sent on a Radar Operators course. I was posted to static Radar stations on Spurn Point where the work was plotting all the naval traffic (and German E boats) approaching Hull.

The next change in my RAF life was being transferred to and trained in the very different mobile role in which the Radar equipment was built onto the backs of lorries in G C I (Ground Control Intercept) units. The training now included learning to drive, cooking and gun firing. It was mainly in rather primitive conditions in South Wales but in early 1944 we moved to near Brighton. Later, with Army and other units, our GCI assembled at Gosport ready for D- Day.

The unit was commanded by a Fl Lt supported by a Fl Sgt and other NCOs including Cpl Piggot who travelled in the lorry which I drove. The unit was self sufficient with a variety of trades

amongst the about 30 men and with lorries carrying equipment and stores. On the move we travelled in convoy. Having embarked on a tank



Port en Bessin today. It was captured on D-Day by 47 RM Commando after heavy fighting and serious losses

landing craft, less two vehicles for which there was not space, we crossed to Normandy on 7th June, escorted by the Canadian navy, landing at Port en Bessin. Our sister unit went in with the American Navy but suffered quite a loss and never operated. The landing craft was able to sail into the port to the quay where we disembarked and the lorries were off loaded.

We set up our unit in a recently evacuated German site where there was still unfinished food on their plates! The front line was very close and just down the road there was

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heavy fighting at a junction known as 'suicide point'.

When the Army broke through, we rushed through France, finishing up in a small town near Brussels. There we were feted as liberators. Later we transferred to Le Treport in France where we searched the Channel for planes that had been shot down to try to rescue the crews.

After a while we were kitted out with full winter flying kit and finished up in Holland on a dyke on Walcheren Island which had been flooded when RAF bombers beached one of its surrounding dykes. The only way to reach our location was by 'Duck'



(DUWK) landing craft which travelled at house roof top level. There we controlled two Beaufighters and a two-man submarine based on the neighbouring island. We were guarded by Norwegian troops.

After Germany surrendered we returned to England and on 10th February 1946 we were posted to the Far East where I served the rest of my RAF time in Hong Kong.

Treating the Casualties

from Marjorie Adcock's article in Harborough Parish Church magazine

My D-Day memories are very clear and unforgettable. I had recently joined Princess Mary's Royal Air Force Nursing Service and was posted to RAF Hospital Wroughton.



Prior to D-Day this rather plain brick building had been transformed with a hive of pre-fabricated buildings which housed

reception areas, emergency wards, mobile X-ray units, theatres and numerous staff.

Wroughton was surrounded by airfields and when D-Day began was established as a casualty clearing hospital. Air ambulances flew in convoys of wounded from all services, but mainly army personnel. It was an incredible undertaking. Many hundreds came through Wroughton. The cases treated were not to be found in any text-book.

When the European war was drawing to a close I was posted to Singapore - but that's another story.

Which we hope Marjorie will relate for a future issue of In Touch.

Editor

Ode to Normandy

(with apologies to **Stanley Holloway** and **Sam Small**)
by **Kenneth West**,

We woke in our bivvy, just about dawn
as the sun burned the mist, for a beautiful morn
On a quiet, peaceful Sunday, in the middle of June
and even the birds were singing in tune.

A Jeep then pulled up and out jumped a chap,
He weren't very tall — and he carried a map
With his cap with two badges, medals and braid,
Twas quite an impression the little chap made.

He said "gather round, I've got something to say
there's a fair bit of bother that we're in today
We've launched an attack, that's not quite going our way,
In a village, down the road, called Fontenay"

"It's a hell of a scrap and our lads need some backing
so pack up your kit chaps, we'd better ge cracking.
George and Ken, we'll need you, so you'd better come
And I think it best, if you'd both bring your gun".

We scrambled aboard the TCV trucks
Signallers, Gunners, Drivers and Cooks.
Each one a specialist, grade one, two or three,
And all from Welsh Regiments, except George and me.

By late afternoon, as sounds of battle drew near,
We were ordered to stop by a Scots Fusilier.
He watched as we de-bussed, a right motley crew.
But wily old QM, he knew what to do.

Kit checked and replaced, with the usual banter,
ammo issued, wound dressings and Caps Tam-O-Shanter
"I dinna care where ye've come from, but I'll make it quite clear,
as from today - you're a Scots Fusilier".

We moved forward quietly, following Polar Bear sign
to 17 Platoon, on the right of the line.
Houses still burned, smell of death lingered still,
"Am I glad to see you" said a relieved Sgt Hill.

“Dig yourselves in lads, by the side of that cow”,
I’ll see you both later, I’ve got to bury lads now”.
As we dug, maggots oozed from the rotting cow’s inner,
Then the Cook dashed across, to bring us our dinner.

Compo tea, ‘Hard Tack’ and a tin of Oxtail
But the stench from the cow, made both of us quail.
The Sgt came back saying, “keep your eyes peeled
There’s a sniper about, over there, in that field”.

As one of us dug, the other shielded his back,
Just in case Jerry decided to counter-attack.
But the night slowly passed, just the odd desperate yell,
“Stretcher Bearer” as another Jock was hit by a shell.

We’d squat in our ‘slits’ in the hot summer sun,
Under constant bombardment, from mortar and gun,
No counselling to help, if our spirits should flag
We’d just shrug our shoulders and light up a fag

Week by week our attacks were slowly improving,
“Dig-in - Pack up - Get ready - We-re moving”.
From Bocage to Cornfields, the battles continue
As the Poor Bloody Infantry strain every sinew.

Pushing forward by day, at night digging in,
and with lads being lost, our numbers grew thin,
But we had to keep going, ignoring the gore,
remembering the old adage of soldiers of yore.

“Don’t worry — you won’t hear the one that will hit you
I was stretchered to a tent, with Medics in situ.
As the Quack wrote a label, he said to me brightly
“You’re a lucky young fellow — you’ve got a ‘Blighty’.

Next day we were loaded into a Dakota,
Eighteen stretchers — on racks — that was the quota.
Where we landed — I know not. Some RAF Drome,
I couldn’t care – I’d made it back home.

Ken West, has been a very generous and valuable contributor to In Touch over the years including this short piece about Fontenay, which evolved in his mind during his cycling holiday to Fontenay in 1984, when he saw the battered tree stumps that were still there.

Gently graze the cattle now
beneath the shady apple bough,
in quiet contentment, scratch their rumps
against the twisted gnarled old stumps.
Blasted by a result 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.

His Ode to Normandy recalls his part in
the battle for Caen just 70 years ago.



**49th (West Riding) Infantry Division
(Polar Bears) Memorial at Fontenay**

Ken West as vice-chairman of the Leicestershire branch of the Normandy Veterans Association organised the recent 70th Anniversary visit. His work has earned him Le Légion d' Honneur.