

# SIX-NINETY NEWS

*The newsletter of Sedgford & District Branch – formed in 1926  
Royal British Legion: Branch 0690*

Issue 109 – January 2023



**Branch number 690 includes the villages of Brancaster, Brancaster Staithe, Choseley, Docking, Fring, Great Bircham, North and South Creake, Sedgford, Stanhoe, Thornham and Titchwell. *We also have many members from beyond these boundaries – keep coming!***  
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Having voluntarily made a rod for my own back, here is the first of your monthly newsletters for 2023! I start with the proposed schedule of lunch venues for the beginning of the year.  
Notes: I have avoided Good Friday on 7<sup>th</sup> April, and we can celebrate the King's coronation at our 5<sup>th</sup> May lunch.

3<sup>rd</sup> February – **The Rose & Crown, Snettisham**  
14<sup>th</sup> April – The Ostrich, South Creake  
2<sup>nd</sup> June – The White Horse, Holme next the sea

3<sup>rd</sup> March - The Aviator, Sculthorpe  
**5<sup>th</sup> May –The King William IV, Sedgford**  
**Those in red are still to be confirmed...**



## FAREWELL

On 1<sup>st</sup> December, the day before our 'Christmas' lunch, we received the sad news that Nigel Wickens of Stanhoe had died. He had been a branch member for some 10 years, along with assisting in Poppy Appeal collections for much longer. At his 85<sup>th</sup> birthday party in July, he had been on very good form as usual, but his health began noticeably to deteriorate, and a number of visits to King's Lynn hospital culminated in a week as an in-patient, ending with his death. Well known for a wicked sense of humour, and for relating fascinating experiences and interests, he will be much missed.

Having graduated from Pembroke College, Oxford, Nigel worked for many years at Cambridge University, teaching music and singing in five different colleges, as well as having many private students both there and in Norfolk, and eulogies at his cremation remembered this; his emphasis on pronunciation and enunciation, and the exercises with which, among others, he certainly used to torment the members of Heacham based West Norfolk Singers - singing scales both up and down, using the words "fluffy floppy puppy" or "cricket critic". You try repeating those quickly eight times, never mind up and down the scales, and keeping in tune, too!

Well known in the village, he took responsibility for opening and locking All Saints church, building in some practice on the organ ready for the next service to be held, as organ playing was not originally his priority. Residents were used to him singing a solo at the annual carol service, and for several years he also led carol singing house to house around the village. The service was conducted by branch Chaplain Peter Cook, who recalled, among other things, Nigel's customary (and appropriate for this occasion) comment on departure from any gathering: "Right, I'll bugger off now!".



## **DUTCH MEMORIALS OF 1944**

About six miles from Maastricht are the graves of 8,301 American soldiers who died in Operation Market Garden, in the battles to liberate the Netherlands during the winter of 1944. Every one of the men buried in the cemetery, as well as those in the British and Canadian military cemeteries, has been 'adopted' by a Dutch family, the members of which mind the grave, decorate it, and keep alive the memory of the soldier they have adopted. It is even customary to keep a portrait of their soldier in a place of honour in their homes.

Annually, on "Liberation Day", memorial services are held for "The men who died to liberate Holland". The day concludes with a concert, the finale of which is "Il Silenzio" – a memorial composition commissioned by the Dutch and first played in 1965 on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Holland's liberation. It has been the concluding item of the memorial service ever since.

It was composed by the Italian, Nino Rossi. If you use the internet, listen to it on <https://www.flixxy.com/trumpet-solo-melissa-venema.htm> The thirteen year old Dutch girl, Melissa, backed by André Rieu and his orchestra, plays the solo.



## **THE GAMBLERS OF THE D-DAY LANDINGS**

At dawn on 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944, the first landing craft of the largest seaborne invasion in history approach the beaches of the Normandy coast: Op Neptune and Op Overlord are under way. Soon after dawn, well over 100,000 Allied forces, mostly British, American and Canadian, are fighting their way along 50 miles of beaches. However, D-Day could have been a total failure but for the skills of an RAF Volunteer Reserve meteorologist, Group Captain John Stagg.

Originally planned for 5<sup>th</sup> June, the D-Day landings had to be postponed because the entire invasion depended on an acceptable weather forecast, the basic requirements being:

\*Quiet weather for 48 hours before D-Day to enable the assault convoys to sail from their base harbours and form up, followed by three subsequent days of weather with the Beaufort scale of wind at less than force 4

\*Less than 30% cloud cover below 8,000 feet, with a minimum cloud base no lower than 2,500 feet, to enable aircraft carrying parachutists and tugging gliders to deploy, and with visibility of more than 3 miles

\*Low tide at dawn on D-Day

\*D-Day should be between one day before and four days following a full moon

The timing was crucial, as the invasion had to coincide with the Soviet summer offensive in the East, ensuring maximum pressure on German resources. Moon and tide conditions were favourable on only three days in June: 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> - tide conditions would be suitable only once more, two weeks later, but crucially the moon conditions would not. The odds of even broadly acceptable weather were at least 13 to 1, and these roughly trebled when the requirement for a full moon was added.

During 4<sup>th</sup> June, it began to emerge that a temporary period of fair weather might ensue, starting on the night of 5<sup>th</sup>, and if this was right, it would bring a brief break in the weather on the morning of 6<sup>th</sup> June: far from the conditions required for a successful invasion, but with luck, just good enough. A

further advantage would be that the German defenders, equally aware of the limited days when the moon and tide would coincide, would be likely to be off-guard.

In the event, some night-time airborne operations were possible, but the cloud severely hampered bombing, and a higher than forecast wind speed meant that many parachutists missed their drop zones, some being blown into waterlogged terrain, and on-shore winds also created challenging conditions for the initial assault on almost all of the beaches. Fortunately conditions did improve; equally fortunate was the fact that the German forecaster had advised of poor conditions on 6<sup>th</sup>, and the German commanders had decided not to activate their warning system!

Stagg later noted that had the operation been delayed until the next suitable tides two weeks later – the only possible option, although the moon phase would not have coincided – the troops would have run into the worst weather in the Channel for 20 years. *Air Mail, the RAF Association magazine Oct 22*



## **THE HOME GUARD**

The crisis facing Britain in nineteen thirty-nine,  
Provoked a war with Germany to bring her into line.  
As France was overwhelmed and chose capitulation  
A serious threat to England became a Hun invasion.  
With Hitler at the channel ports, and Britain unprepared,  
The prospects of survival were assessed with due regard.  
To counteract the danger a grandiose scheme was planned.  
That local groups form units into watchful bands  
And train as novice soldiers, with bayonets, guns, and bombs.  
Establishing defences of beaches, farms and homes.  
Throughout the entire country Premier Churchill's aim  
Requested boys and elders to forge a stalwart chain.  
Response from every quarter by young and old commenced,  
Instilled ecstatic ardour for Britain's self defence.  
Men denied enlistment in specialist occupation,  
And youths awaiting 'call up' keen to see some action,  
Unfit for active service, but with willingness at heart,  
All thronged recruitment centres intent to play their part.  
Throughout the hours of daylight most were working hard,  
With night-time leisure forfeit when they were sent to guard.  
No uniforms were issued, or weapons close to hand,  
But right from the beginning faith throughout the land,  
Prevailed to save the nation if enemies should come  
To trespass in the boundaries of Britain's island home.  
A simple khaki armband with letters L D V,  
Was worn with proud distinction for all about to see.  
'Local' and 'Defence' the logo, 'V' for Volunteers,  
A skittish name 'Dad's Army' encouraged smiles and jeers.  
Veterans of the last war recalled their fighting skill,  
Some appointed 'sergeant' to train squads and to drill.  
Wholehearted dedication strengthened day by day  
Inspired to fight for freedom dispelling all dismay,  
And should invaders venture forth to occupy and ravish?  
A clownish joke was banded around, "Look – Duck – Vanish"  
The project gained momentum and plans for its success  
At last gave way to uniforms, and military dress.  
But only worn on duty or outposts through the night,  
Expecting men like Nelson, 'Do your duty stand and fight'.

'Home Guard' became a name change for military unction,  
 'King's Rules and Regulations' were adopted without option.  
 'Shoulder flash', and 'badges', all worn with obvious pride  
 Distinguishing the counties where defenders did reside.  
 Grenades, and guns, were issued five bullets for each man,  
 Live shooting practice woeful "...just do the best you can."  
 "Aircraft recognition and the art of camouflage".  
 "Silent sentry duty laced with subterfuge".  
 "Cocktails made with petrol sealed in bottles with a wick".  
 "Hand to hand close combat" was yet another trick.  
 All practised to perfection at evening and weekend,  
 Enthusiasm flourished with Britain to defend.  
 Churches', and cathedrals' bells, forbidden they should peal,  
 But if assault troops landed to ring out with great zeal.  
 A link-line by the telephone between each guarded post  
 Sited where an enemy attack would suffer most.  
 And several groups of sentries dispersed around the towns,  
 Offered some protection when the sun went down.  
 Signals spelling danger were expressed in colour codes,  
 Relayed throughout all units to keep them on their toes.  
 'Purple' was the first alert, and then the next code 'red',  
 Warning all defenders "expect the enemy overhead".  
 Soon the droning bombers shed incendiaries and H.E.  
 Causing mass destruction in the hope that we would plea  
 For peace, and give Herr Hitler power throughout the land  
 To rule the entire country with his infamous hand.  
 When the raid was over, the relief was quite profound  
 If the signal 'white' prevailed until the dawn came round.  
 Each twelve-hour guard was tedious, for sentries stood in pairs,  
 And on the darkest nights were uttered many silent prayers.  
 Two hours on, and four hours off, the leisure time was spent  
 Playing cards and gambling till everyone was skint  
 Except for one, the winner, with a gambler's lucky streak  
 Trudging home to breakfast without a good night's sleep.  
 Trepidation for the Home Guard was the threat that air invasion  
 Might overpower defenders to accomplish full submission.  
 But, never in full glory was it called upon to act  
 To do what it was trained for in wartime to react  
 And resist a foreign enemy; or ever sought to brag,  
 That it helped to save the nation, and the union flag.  
 As allies conquered Europe with the enemy in retreat,  
 The Home Guard's role in Britain was rendered obsolete.

*Extract from "The forgotten army – a Burma soldier's letters, by James Fenton*



## **SPACE WEATHER FORECASTING**

*We are all familiar with the Aurora Borealis, I'm sure – I often used to be able to watch it from our back garden when we lived in a Berkshire village during my late childhood and early teenage years - Ed.*

However, 'space weather' was added in 2011 to the UK government's National Risk Register as a high risk: with humans now being so dependent on technology, which is affected by events in our solar system, this has become a major problem.

The auroras are the most visible space weather effect, but apart from the visual display, they have very little impact on earth. However, extreme space weather can and does impact on our technology,

national infrastructure, and communications systems, so space weather prediction is of huge importance to our national infrastructure operators, satellite operators, and civilian and military aviation.

In March 2002, a US Quick Reaction Force boarded a Chinook helicopter to provide support to a team of Navy SEALs operating in the Afghanistan mountains, but repeated attempts by Bagram Air Base to inform the crew that the landing zone was under enemy fire were hindered by the failure of satellite communications. The QRF never received the message, and the Chinook crashed under heavy fire with the loss of three crew members. Initially the helicopter's radio communication systems were blamed, but space scientists had another look and suggested strong evidence that ionospheric plasma bubbles observed over Afghanistan may have been to blame.

These bubbles of super-heated ionised gas comprised of charged particles rise into high density plasma in the earth's upper atmosphere, and once in the ionosphere (40 to 600 miles up), electric and magnetic fields govern their drift and are also affected by the sun. The 'bubbles' can reach up to 100 km across, and reflect, refract and disperse radio waves. *RAF Association magazine - Air Mail autumn 2022*



### **BOOK REVIEW – "ABOVE THE LAW" by Adrian Bleese**

The author of this book is ex-RAF, but is writing about his years of work, primarily in Suffolk, as a police helicopter crew member – hence the title. The first recorded use of a helicopter by a UK police force was on 15<sup>th</sup> June 1947, and this extremely informative and well written book about the work of the service is, despite the subject matter, very amusing as well. It also contains many interesting facts about the forces: here are some random extracts for your entertainment.

*College Hall at RAF Cranwell is topped by a lighthouse, and I had always wondered about it - Ed.*

"The college was originally a Royal Naval air station, but the coast is twenty miles away and well over the horizon: 'There is always the possibility that the lighthouse is there to remind officers how they should behave during their careers – it being both brilliant and of no practical use!'"

"Most things look better from the air – even Ipswich – but the estates of Haverhill do not!"

"The very first British member of parliament of Asian descent was David Ochterlony Dyce Sombre: when do you think he was elected? July 1841...."

"The Met Office has a super computer based in Exeter, which cost £97 million, and is capable of doing 14,000 trillion calculations per second (Yes, really!!).... It is 80% accurate, apparently, but UK weather patterns tend to go in four-day runs, and sometimes more, meaning that the weather we had yesterday is not only the weather we have today, but is likely to continue to be the same all week: the midday temperature is not likely to vary by more than a couple of degrees, and even the wind speed and direction won't be very different tomorrow from yesterday. So if you say that the weather will be much the same as today, you will be accurate in your forecast for the next seven days – 86% accurate – and you (as a taxpayer) will have saved £97 million!"

"Some drills are designed to simulate a crash at sea where the helicopter turns upside down – which a helicopter will almost always do if you land it on water, partly because all the heavy stuff is at the top, and partly to teach you a lesson for being so stupid! Helicopters do that kind of thing: just when you think 'Gosh, I've been somewhat unlucky and had a double engine failure over the water, forcing me to ditch at sea, but at least things can't get any worse today – it's not as though the helicopter will turn upside down before I can get out'.... It will."

"Helicopters, quite clearly, should not fly: it is patently obvious that they do not belong in the sky. It is said that the only reason they do get airborne is that they are so ugly that the earth repels them. However, as helicopter designer Igor Sikorsky said: 'According to recognised aero-technical tests, the bumblebee cannot fly because of the shape and weight of its body in relation to the total wing area."

The bee does not know this, so he goes ahead and flies anyway'. Helicopters seem to feel much the same."

"When an aeroplane pilot learns to fly, he or she will study the subject 'Principles of flight', defined in the Oxford English dictionary as 'a fundamental truth or law'. However, helicopter pilots study a similar subject called 'The theory of flight' – and what is a theory? 'A supposition': no further questions, your Honour!"

"An aircraft is never allowed to fly unless it leaves behind on earth a pile of paper equivalent to its weight – a kind of Archimedes' first principle of bureaucracy."

"As a fault light came on during flight, the affected engine was shut down... we now had just one engine, often described as just enough power to make it to the scene of the crash..."

"A quote from Gp Capt Douglas Bader: 'Rules are for the guidance of wise men and the obedience of fools.'"



### **FOG INVESTIGATION DISPERSAL**

### **OPERATION**

'FIDO' – the name later changed to "Fog, Intensive, Dispersion Of" - was a system devised in the 1940s, developed at the University of Birmingham chemistry department, and first used in November 1943. At one time, it was installed at only three operational airfields, one being Downham Market and the others Fiskerton near Lincoln, and Graveley, in Huntingdonshire. It was comprised of petrol burners situated along the sides of a runway, with a 500 yard long section on the approach, and a further 500 yards along the sides of the runway, both pierced with holes. Petrol was pumped at the rate of 99,000 gallons per hour, and flowed into two pipes from which the vapour was released, and that was then ignited at the first burner by a man with a hand held flaming torch so that the flames shot up along the pipes, giving off a fierce yellow-white glare, the heat of which evaporated the fog in minutes.



Needless to say, the operator ran away at considerable speed as soon as ignition was achieved – what a lethal idea!

About 30% of emergency landings were caused by bad weather, and in particular, fog. Ultimately there were 15 FIDO stations in the UK, mostly on the East coast.

During the war, it was not uncommon for an individual to be unable to see the hand at the end of

an outstretched arm due to thick fog: the fogs' densities were ultimately significantly reduced, probably due to the post-war Clean Air Act. Often, large areas would be fog-bound, and the recommended procedure was for the pilots to head towards the sea, but while the aircraft were still over land, for the crew to bale out, leaving the aircraft to crash into the sea. With some raids consisting of hundreds of aircraft, this could result in a huge loss of bombers.

*en.wikipedia.org; <https://masterbombercraig.wordpress.com>*



### **WHAT FINANCIAL CRISIS?**

I was flicking through a book recently, and found the following:

The Government ordered a dire new economy drive today. It puts Britain back to wartime austerity – or worse. "Export or die" and "Work or Want" are among new official slogans.

Hugh Dalton, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, warned Parliament that food rations may have to be cut again, but denied there will be any greater public hardship. He announced substantial reductions in tobacco and petrol imports, and said that newspapers will revert to wartime size – four pages. Mr Dalton revealed that more than half of last year's huge American loan has already been spent and that the economic crisis is now desperate. "A severe shortage of dollars is making itself felt in almost every part of the world" he said. The Opposition accused the Government of underplaying the gravity of the situation while the nation slides towards a precipice.

The tinned meat ration was cut today to twopence-worth a week. But the sweets ration is up from four to five ounces, and extra sugar is promised for jam-making.

There are again reports of serious divisions within the cabinet as it wrestles with the dollar crisis. But a plot to oust Mr Attlee and make the Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevin, the Prime Minister in his place appears to have fizzled out....

That was on 30<sup>th</sup> June, 1947

*From The Chronicle of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*

### **FEMALES ARE NOW ABLE TO JOIN THE ROYAL MARINE COMMANDOS**

The rôle of the Royal Marine Commandos was opened to female applicants in late 2018, but by the end of 2021, despite 350 female applicants to join as regulars, no female had passed out as a Commando. The Commando Training Centre in Devon has a female recruit instructor, who brings the female applicants through their first four weeks of training, and there is evident passion, potential and progress.

However, before the training can commence, applicants are subjected to two full days of fitness: on the first day, a series of tests, and if a candidate fails, he or she will be removed from the course. The second day includes a fitness session on the assault course, and a chance to experience the endurance course, a series of tunnels on Woodbury Common.

The training is tough – above and beyond the rest of the armed services except for Special Forces and the Parachute Regiment. It is a 32 week long, progressive course, starting with ten weeks in the gymnasium on Initial Military Fitness, based around sprints, pull-ups, sit-ups and rope work; the second ten weeks are spent on the field assault course, gradually building up the weight that recruits can carry, and culminating in a field test in week 20. It includes a 200 metre 'fireman's carry', with a weapon – to be completed in 90 seconds – and climbing a 30 ft rope carrying 32 lbs of kit.

In week 31, the requirement is four Commando tests, the final of which is a 30 mile speed march across Dartmoor, to be completed in eight hours.

Typically, about 50 – 60% of the male recruits who start the training result in the award of the green beret. Before females were admitted, there were a number of understandable reservations about them – would troops react differently if a female was injured during a combat assault? Would females have the physical ability? Would women affect cohesiveness if relationships were formed? (30 years of females serving on Royal Navy warships has proved that this is not the case.)

Meanwhile, a small number of females have earned the green beret of the 29 Commando Regiment of the Royal Artillery since women were admitted in 2018 – but their course is apparently only 11 weeks in duration!

*wrens.org.uk / forces.net / bbc.co.uk*



### **SPECIAL INVESTIGATION BRANCH**

Each part of the military, the British Army (also with a special Territorial Army section), Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, has its own police force, and within each of those is a detective arm: the SIB, operating in plain clothes. There are noticeable similarities with the civilian police's Criminal Investigation Division (CID), although of course the SIB will focus on not only serious criminal and military offences, but also other incidents which although not criminal offences, may impact on the reputation of the UK Armed Forces.

The 'Provost' has been conducting investigations for hundreds of years, and from about 1915 the term 'military detective', employed on both intelligence and police investigative work, came into use, with plain clothes military police used for criminal investigations on the home front, and undercover work behind the lines in France, adopting the dress and insignia of other units while investigating.

The RAF SIB became the only branch-specific investigative unit entrusted with a major war crime when given the assignment of investigating the Stalag Luft III murders immediately after the 1939-45 war.

*[rmpasib.co.uk](http://rmpasib.co.uk) / [military-history.fandom.com](http://military-history.fandom.com)*

