

# SIX-NINETY NEWS

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

Issue 122 – February/March 2024



**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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## **LUNCH INFORMATION UPDATE**

1<sup>st</sup> March – Black Horse, Castle Rising

5<sup>th</sup> April - Queen Victoria, Snettisham

3<sup>rd</sup> May - *The Chequers, Binham*

7<sup>th</sup> June – *The King William IV, Sedgford*

5<sup>th</sup> July – *The Anvil, Congham*

2<sup>nd</sup> August – *The Aviator, Sculthorpe*

6<sup>th</sup> September – *Three Horseshoes, Warham* 4<sup>th</sup> October - *Three Horseshoes Roydon*

*Those in italics are still to be confirmed. Recommendations are always welcomed!*



If you have not attended a lunch before, but would like to try one, please contact me by email or phone (details on page 2), and I will take it from there.

We arrive at the venue between 12 noon and 12.30, to eat at around 12.30. Generally we have between 20 and 25 in attendance; our lunches are very informal, with no specified seating plan or dress code. Lunch pre-orders need to be placed by the preceding Friday, and I usually start the ball rolling by passing round a menu, if available, at the previous month's lunch, so that attendees can choose and sign up: that is followed by emails, and texted or posted copies of the menu.

Usually I distribute name badges, so that anyone joining us for the first time isn't overwhelmed by strangers whose names they don't know – equally, regulars can quickly and easily learn the names of any new members or visitors.

At present, I have over half the branch membership - 42 people out of 63 - on my list, who will receive details in order that they can see the forthcoming menu, and sign up to join the next lunch. We are always pleased to see new people among us!

As yet, all 42 haven't booked for the same lunch... but I'm always up for a challenge!

## **FAREWELL**

I am sad to report that on the day that I started distribution of the last edition of 690 News, in which I mentioned some members known to be unwell, Pen Roche of Stanhoe died, aged 82, with family members present. She used to be a regular attender at our lunches but has been unable to join us for some time; like her late husband, she did a great deal for the village, including opening All Saints church daily, organising distribution of the village newsletter "Saints Alive", hosting coffee mornings, and doing a huge amount for our annual open gardens day each June; she was also a Parish Councillor for some years (and the one who proposed me as chairman – before I had even commenced my basic training as a councillor!) She will be greatly missed. Her husband Mark, also a staunch supporter of the Legion and the branch, and a former member of the Honourable Artillery Company, died in August 2020.

Pen's funeral took place on Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> February at All Saints, Stanhoe and was very well attended.

We subsequently heard that on 24<sup>th</sup> January, John Seedhouse, previously of Stanhoe and more recently Thornham, died aged 85. He also had been a Stanhoe Parish Councillor and litter warden, active in the village as well as having long been a very supportive member of our monthly Legion lunches and outings, but we were aware that his health had been deteriorating. Steve Greef, our branch standard bearer, heard the news locally and informed us. John, an accountant by profession, had also served in the Merchant Navy and worked as assistant purser with Canadian Pacific, before being called up for National Service in 1960, followed by two years on reserve in the Royal Army Service Corps. He returned to civilian work as company secretary and later associate director. He retired aged 55, to enjoy golf, rambling and gardening.

His funeral service and burial took place in All Saints, Thornham, on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February, attended by branch members and Thornham residents. The service was conducted by the Reverend Peter Cook, branch Honorary Chaplain, and Steve paraded the branch standard.

John's death means that we have also lost a branch committee member, so if anyone feels like volunteering for a very straightforward job with no commitments apart from attendance at each AGM, please just let me know; please note two vacancies above.



## **MORE BRANCH NEWS**

As I mentioned some time ago, our Poppy Appeal Organiser Steve, and his wife Megan who have done sterling work on keeping things going since the Covid interruption – not to mention the total of six years' work since taking over from me from 2018 – have decided that enough is enough, and it's time to hand over the task. We did have some significant interest from a Great Bircham resident who had been a PAO before

in a different area, but unfortunately he has now decided that it is not for him after all, and hence that position is now vacant.

I appreciate that a number of members have been of great assistance with the Appeal in previous years, and I also appreciate that I'm not the only one who is now 'elderly'!

However, if there is anyone reading this may be interested – or indeed if you know anyone who you think might take on the rôle, please let me know, and / or put them in touch with me. It does NOT need to be a branch, or indeed a Legion, member. A full briefing will be given to the new PAO, and assistance is always available from the county Appeal administrator.

It is a 'job' which requires quite a lot of time – not just in November - storage space, and administration, not to mention physical strength and a vehicle, but it is definitely a worthwhile task. Please give this matter some thought.

### **NORTH CREAKE MEMORIAL COMMEMORATION**

Back in 2004, before I was on the branch committee and had started to produce 690 News, a memorial was unveiled in North Creake by Sir Michael Beetham to commemorate the crew of a Mosquito which crashed there, killing both crew members, in 1944. 27<sup>th</sup> April will be the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the incident, and a short wreath laying ceremony will take place there with standard bearers present, followed by light refreshments in the village hall and a viewing of the 6' wingspan model Mosquito made by local craftsman Tony Nelson. All are welcome. The memorial is in Wells Road, where the Stanhoe to Wells road crosses the Fakenham to Burnham Market road.



### **BRANCH OUTING ON 17<sup>th</sup> MAY 2024**

Last year on 8<sup>th</sup> September, we had an outing to Wild Ken Hill at Heacham, when 24 members and guests enjoyed informative guided tours, along with light refreshments, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. It was suggested that that another visit, earlier in the year, would provide a different perspective, as apart from anything else, there would be a lot more bird life to observe.

Two tours are now booked as before, with one at 10 am and one at 2pm. The trailers each seat 14 visitors, and I currently have 18 bookings – so please let me know as soon as possible if you would be interested. The cost per person will be £28.28 (more than last year due to the increase in VAT!) if we can fill both trailers; slightly more if not: payment will be collected and full directions provided closer to the time.

Each tour lasts for two hours. Please note that the trailers are open sided - and we have no control over the weather!!



## **MORE 2024 OUTINGS?**

Another outing, suggested by the late John Seedhouse (see above) was to the National Memorial Arboretum, and I understand that a number of members would be interested. Unfortunately, transport proved to be a major difficulty, primarily due to the costs quoted. I can't really believe that there is no solution to this, so if anyone knows of an organisation with a minibus which it may be prepared to lend to us, please either make enquiries and let me know, or give me the details so that I can enquire.

Please note that a minibus MUST be available with driver. The legislation regarding driving minibuses has tightened in recent years, for good reasons, so a suitably qualified driver will be required. I think that I would qualify (although I have seen that there is possibly an age limit with which I do not comply!), but I must confess that I would not relish the journey! Of course, if anyone else wishes to volunteer.... ?

## **A THANK YOU**

Our branch webmaster, Stephen, does an excellent job of maintaining our website, keeping it up to date, and adding items as appropriate, so a big thank you is due to him for taking the trouble to do that.

If you haven't looked at it, you may be interested to see what's there: obviously we hope that potential members, perhaps people moving into the area, may also read it and become more interested in both the Legion (if they aren't already members or supporters) and Sedgeford & District branch.

If you search on your device for 'Royal British Legion Sedgeford branch', you will see a "welcome" headline; just click on that, and have a look around! I'm sure that if you would like to contribute anything to it, Stephen would be pleased to hear from you: equally, please do encourage others to take a look, and perhaps publicise it if you are able.



## **ANNA GUÉRIN**

The name above was well known during and after the 1914-18 war, as she had originated the idea of a "Poppy Day", where residents of all Allied countries would wear artificial poppies, made by French widows and orphans in remembrance of those relatives lost during the war. It gave work to both the bereaved and children in the areas of France ruined by the war, and created a method of raising funds to support the families of wounded and fallen veterans.

Born in 1878 to a farm owner, Madame Guérin married at the age of 19, and travelled with her husband to Madagascar; she was an early feminist, becoming financially independent there as a lecturer. Following a divorce, she remarried, had two daughters, and lectured in England for the 'Alliance Française', finally becoming a lecturer, fundraiser and humanitarian in the USA during the war. She was awarded three medals for her work, and was also a fundraiser for both French and American

charities, inspiring many people to make generous donations by her speeches, being described by many as the greatest of all war speakers.

Her work in promoting the poppy appeal continued: she travelled widely in the USA, Canada, Newfoundland, Britain, and also influenced Australia and New Zealand: now, of course, the Remembrance Poppy encompasses all the conflicts which have occurred since the 1914-18 War. *RAF Association magazine "Air Mail"; en.wikipedia.org*



## **JEANNETTE GUYOT**

Born in 1919, she joined the French Resistance in 1940 along with the rest of her family, becoming a guide, smuggling people from occupied France into Vichy France, and later becoming a liaison officer to the chief of a French network, carrying mail into Vichy France, while still guiding others.



In February 1942, she was arrested and imprisoned for three months, but resisted interrogation, and nothing could be proved against her: the Germans withdrew her identity papers, but she nevertheless continued to help a dozen people each month across the border. In February of the same year, the network was betrayed, and Jeannette escaped to Lyon, joining another Free French network, the activities of which included intelligence gathering, sabotage, and assisting downed Allied airmen and French civilians to escape France.

When the Germans occupied Vichy France, the Gestapo went after her, but she escaped and was picked up in a rescue mission by the RAF, and once in London she formally enlisted in the Free French forces, and insisted on being sent back to France. She was a volunteer trained in St Albans by both the Secret Intelligence Service and the Office of Strategic Services officers in preparation for Plan Sussex, which was to parachute observation teams into France during and following the Allied landings in Normandy, to report on the movements of German troops and their order of battle.

In 1944, she was awarded her parachute wings, and although the deployment was delayed due to bad weather, she was parachuted into Europe with three other French officers as part of Operation Calanque: their first mission was "Pathfinder", and they arranged twenty drop zones, and about a hundred safe houses for the use of agents in Operation Sussex....

In Paris, she asked a cousin to hide her team's radio operator at a café in Montmartre, which happened to be alongside an office of the Gestapo! Her cousin didn't hesitate, and after the war, the café was re-named Café des Sussex. Guyot continued to travel

throughout France carrying luggage which, had she been caught, would have caused her to be tortured and executed.

When France was liberated, she was assigned clerical duties in the French intelligence service, and she retired in 1945. Jeannette Guyot was one of only two women ever to be awarded the American Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest American award, after the Medal of Congress); she was also awarded the Légion d'Honneur and the George Medal for her service and became one of the most decorated females of the 1939-45 war. She died in 2016 aged 97. *warhistoryonline.com*



## **THE BATTLE OF KOHIMA**

The town of Kohima is in North East India, and in 1944 was under siege by the Japanese, becoming known as 'The Stalingrad of the East'. The Japanese plan to invade India was originally intended to disrupt the Allied offensive plans for that year, and the plan was later enlarged to invade India and even to overthrow the British Raj, demonstrating the weakness of the British Empire and providing encouragement to Indian nationalists in their decolonisation efforts. The occupation of the area would also impact American efforts to supply Chiang Kai-shek's army in China.

Part of the plan was to capture Kohima, cut off Imphal, and cut off the railhead and logistic base. Kohima's strategic importance lay in it being the summit of a pass offering Japanese the best route from Burma to India, and through it ran the supply route to British and Indian troops facing the main Japanese offensive, however initially it was regarded simply as a roadblock.

Some of the heaviest fighting took place at the northern end of the Kohima Ridge, with the two sides separated by a tennis court, and the trenches so close together that grenades were being thrown by hand between them, and one quote said that "Nowhere in World War II – even on the Eastern front – did the combatants fight with more mindless savagery."

The siege began on 6<sup>th</sup> April; by 18<sup>th</sup> April Kohima resembled a battlefield from the First World War, with smashed trees, ruined buildings and the ground covered in craters, however under cover of darkness, 300 wounded personnel were brought out under fire. On 20<sup>th</sup> April a British 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade officer commented on those relieved "They looked like aged, bloodstained scarecrows, dropping with fatigue; the only clean thing about them was their weapons, and they smelt of blood, sweat and death."

After a prolonged counter-offensive, various Japanese positions along the Kohima Ridge were gradually taken by the British during early May, and on 13<sup>th</sup> the area was finally cleared: "the terrain had been reduced to a fly and rat-infested wilderness, with



half-buried human remains everywhere”, and the conditions under which Japanese troops had lived and fought were described as “unspeakable”.

However, the Japanese continued to defend the area, and eventually the decisive factor was the lack of Japanese supplies, and on 31<sup>st</sup> May their withdrawal began.



## **FORCES' EYESIGHT STANDARDS**

From the letters page of 'Air Mail', the RAF Association magazine, where a correspondent wrote that in 1939 his father went to enlist in the Army. Having been turned down for failing the eyesight test, he turned to the Royal Navy, but was again turned down, for the same reason.



He finally approached the RAF and passed with flying colours! Once enrolled, he went through basic training and then served with distinction in the Middle East for the duration of the war.

When hostilities ended, he was anxious to return home to his fiancée, and applied for demobilisation on medical grounds, citing poor eyesight.

The squadron's Commanding Officer asked him how long he had suffered with the condition, and he replied "I was born with it." "Then how did you pass the enlistment medical?" asked the CO. "I memorised the eye chart" was the response. The CO burst into laughter, but was evidently impressed that a man could memorise the chart, achieve the rank of Flight Sergeant, and be Mentioned in Despatches despite such poor eyesight, so he awarded the man in question, Hugh McCrea, an honourable discharge on medical grounds! *Even with my glasses, I couldn't read the copy reproduced in the magazine, but it was only 4" long – Ed.*



## **HITLER'S BUNKER**

In September 1946, a lady called Pat Troup was serving in the RAF as a Flight Mechanic, stationed at RAF Gatow in Berlin, and she and a German colleague, Ruth, decided to try to visit Hitler's bunker. In order to do this, they passed through the ruins of the Reich Chancellery and arrived at what appeared to be an air raid shelter. Two Russian soldiers were on guard, as they were now in the Russian sector, and the two ladies wanted to take a photograph of themselves with the guards; the message was eventually understood, and photos duly taken. The ladies thought that this may

simplify their entry, but they were barred, however fortunately a German policeman arrived and explained that a signed pass was required. Pat had a brainwave, and produced a hairdressing chit, the guard examined the signature, and entry was permitted! Going down the concrete staircase, Pat added her signature to the hundreds already on the walls.

The bunker was extensive with living room, dining room, drinking room, telephone exchange, bathroom, three or four bedrooms and a corridor containing two beds for guards. The drinking room was where Hitler and his friends probably made merry during air raids; his bedroom contained a blown safe and a carpet decimated by souvenir hunters. Off the bedroom was a small room for Hitler's dog, Blondie, containing the burned bones of the dog. There was also a surgery containing plenty of what was then modern equipment.

Back outside was a cordoned off area where Hitler, Eva Braun and others had been burned to death; petrol cans and other debris remained nearby. As they left the site, Pat was approached by a man offering a medal in exchange for cigarettes: she accepted, and the medal was later found to be a 'Gold Cross in Honour of the German Mother' – an award for producing eight or more children for the German Reich.

*Air Mail – RAF Association magazine*



## **THE LONG RANGE DESERT GROUP**

A collision in a British convoy in the Mediterranean forced a troop ship to dock in Egypt for repairs, and among those on board was a Major from the Royal Engineers. Between 1925 and 1935, with an international group he had explored the Great Libyan Desert – 1,100 miles east to west, and 1,000 miles north to south. It involved the use of equipment and techniques which they had evolved for such long distance travel and navigation, and they never imagined that war could reach the emptiness of the inner desert.

However, he was later sent for by the British Commander in Chief of the Middle East who had heard of his exploration, and told the C-in-C that he felt we should have a mobile ground scouting force because there was a lack of information on the Italians' movements prior to the Germans intervening in North Africa: he was asked "Can you be ready in six weeks?" He was ready in five weeks, with Chevrolet trucks, a sun compass which he had designed, and long-range army radios, along with 150 New Zealand farmers recruited by him.

In its first operation in August 1940, the Group crossed 4,000 miles undetected, attacking Italian outposts, although progress could be as little as 4 miles per day. An average patrol of 40 men in 10 vehicles, each with fuel, water, ammunition, spare tyres and food, lasted for three weeks, and covered 2,000 miles, surviving 120 degree heat in the shade during the day and having only six pints of water per day.



They were reported as being utterly reliable: if they said that they would arrive at an exact spot in the desert 1,000 miles away at a certain time, they almost invariably did. General Montgomery of El Alamein said that but for the LRDG his attack would have been "A leap in the dark". They would undertake nerve-wracking vigils, concealed and not daring to move, along with planting mines, ambushing convoys, attacking enemy bases and runways, blowing up fuel depots and aircraft – sometimes dozens in a single raid. One unit simply drove up the open road past enemy vehicles to their target: as the Germans and Italians used captured British trucks, nobody paid any attention to them!

The LRDG also guided other forces to their objectives, rendezvoused and then brought them back out: Free French troops and the SAS, along with German Jewish refugees from Palestine, wearing Afrika Korps uniforms and a defecting German prisoner, but only one prisoner reached the rendezvous, reporting that the German had betrayed the mission.

Operating mainly as a commando unit, the LRDG went on to see action in Italy, Yugoslavia, Albania and the Dalmatian Islands. The LRDG had killed many Germans without serious losses itself, but losses were significant in late 1943. The LRDG was disbanded in August 1945. [www.warfarehistorynetwork.com](http://www.warfarehistorynetwork.com)



## **INTERESTING ABBREVIATIONS**

In a recent conversation at home, Terry mentioned 'AWACS', and whilst I knew what he was talking about, I couldn't remember exactly what the letters stood for. The answer, of course, is 'Airborne Warning And Control System': he was referring to the 'Sentry' aircraft which preceded the current 'Poseidon', which carries out the same duties.

That led to thoughts of other acronyms – of which most of military language seems to be full, from RADAR – Radio Detection And Ranging, to a familiar 'lady' dating back to our days in the Royal Observer Corps – AWDREY - which stood for Atomic Weapons Detection, Recognition and Estimation of Yield: in other words, it could detect a weapon, identify it, and estimate how big a bang it would produce and how far the nuclear radiation might travel.

A quick look at the internet produced some interesting ones I'd never heard – like AARADCOM: Army Armament Research And Development Command; among the familiar ones were LASER: Light Amplification by Stimulated Emission of Radiation; AWOL: Absent WithOut Leave; SONAR: SOund Navigation And Ranging; SWAT: Special Weapons And Tactics; and the very familiar SNAFU: Situation Normal, All Fouled Up (you may insert your own alternative/s for 'Fouled' as necessary!!)

Another website showed some, probably American, which I hadn't heard before, and which were foul-ups, not properly considered: DISCO: Defence Industrial Security Clearance Office; MAGIC CARPET: Maritime Augmented Guidance with Integrated

Controls for Carrier Approach and Recovery Precision Enabling Technologies(!); BLT: no - not bacon, lettuce and tomato – but Battalion Landing Team!

*rd.com; military.com*

Many people also wonder where the names of military operations come from, as some of them seem very 'unusual' to say the least: in recent times they are apparently intended NOT to enable anyone to work out which operations they could be related to. Some which come to my mind are Op Corporate (the Falklands war), Op Granby, Op Ellamy, Op Kipion, Op Herrick, Op Shader and of course Op Telic (the 2003 Gulf War).

I had heard that they are now random, computer-generated and unrelated words, which a quick look on the internet confirmed. However, the pre-computer ones seemed equally unrelated to their aims: Dynamo, Compass, Crusader, Supercharge, Mincemeat, Chastise, Husky Overlord, Bodyguard, Titanic, Neptune and of course Market Garden are 1939-45 war examples.

*www. alanharding.com*