



## Editorial

The news that broke at the end of last month was welcomed by many Army ex-servicemen. I am referring, of course, to the fact that many of these are to receive a re-imbusement on the tax they have been paying on their pensions.

But this does bring two points to mind: When it was so obvious to everybody that this tax was unjust in that ex-Royal Navy and RAF servicemen were not taxed in this way, why did it take so long for the M.o.D. to admit to their error?

The second point is why was the Royal British Legion so quiet in this affair? On the face of it, it would seem that it was a natural cause for Pall Mall to take up; and yet we find this matter was brought to a head by the persistence of one old soldier. Why?

The Lancaster bomber which crashed at Foxton in 1945 is back in the news. The villagers at Foxton are to unveil a memorial to the six Australian and one English crew members who were killed when their plan crashed in a field at the edge of the village. The ceremony will be held on April 9th, when it is hoped that the Battle of Britain flight will make a pass over the site. We are assured that the RBL will take a part in the event, and as soon as we know more details we will pass them on to members.

Sadly we have to report the death of Ray Tyler whose obituary is opposite. As a final tribute to a kind, considerate and willing-to-help gentleman, I have included a short anecdote that Ray had submitted to In Touch.       Ω



## Ancient History

By Bob England

At Christmas I received a most interesting book on the history of inventions. Naturally there is a section of the history of warfare, and I found the chapters on armaments fascinating.

We tend to believe that most of the great inventions were given birth only in the 19th or 20th centuries. But in fact these were only developments of very much older ideas.

It was as recent as 1985 that a cave temple in Ta-tsu in China was discovered and was found to contain a scene showing a figure (a soldier?) holding a tube from which was emerging flames and a projectile. The temple was dated at around 1128 and it is believed that it depicts the first known "rifle".

Even the idea of "rapid fire" is not new. Around 1000 a cross bow had been produced which had its own magazine of crossbow bolts fitted above the groove in the catapult into which a bolt dropped as the previous one was fired. However this had only limited use as it was heavy and cumbersome to move.

By the 12th century the Chinese had developed the system for hand-held crossbows and test firing of modern replicas proved that a force of 100 men could fire 2000 crossbow bolts in 15 seconds over a range of 80 yards!

The earliest known depiction of a cannon was found in a manuscript of 1327 and shows a soldier in armour applying a red-hot iron to the touch-hole of a vase-shaped cannon. In the muzzle is a large arrow.

Land mines were known to be used by the Chinese

as early as 1277. Then it was called "The Underground Sky-soaring Thunder". When a shallow buried plate was stepped upon, a fuse was ignited and gunpowder was exploded.

By the 14th century a sea mine was produced which floated inside an ox skin. When a fuse, an incense stick, burned down, the mine exploded.

That most horrible of weapons, the flame thrower, can be traced back even further. They were known to be used at sea by the Greeks in 647 and was known as "Greek Fire". It was a mixture of saltpetre, gasoline, pine resin and gum resin. This was squirted over the enemy through a pump, sometime mounted on the prow of a vessel, which had to be re-charged after each burst or put into shells and fired by catapult. This mixture, being oil-based would float and burn on the water and so destroy the wooden hulls of vessels. Even earlier than this it was recorded that in the Peloponnsia War of 424, the long seige of Darlion was ended when the walls of the town were burned down. It was written that the attackers used long tubes on wheels containing burning charcoal, sulphur and pitch, behind which were bellows to blow the flames forward.

Another scourge of warfare, poison gas, was known to be used on the battlefield by the beginning of the 16th century.

Among famous last words must be those of a General in the 17th century who declared that warfare must soon come to an end because he believed that weaponry had been developed as far as it could possible go. Would anyone today like to make the same statement?       Ω



## Branch “At Home”

As an experiment, the branch is to hold three Sunday afternoon “At Homes”. Subject to confirmation from the Conservative Club they will be in the Function Room from 2.30 to 4 pm on 24th March, 28th April and 26th May. They will be informal gatherings for those branch members who find it difficult to get to normal meetings and also for non-members who could be interested in finding out who we are and what we do.

It is hoped that by chatting over a cup of tea or a glass of beer some members will get to know others they normally do not have a chance to meet. Similarly people from outside the branch would learn something about the branch and its members. There will be a need for some members who are familiar with branch affairs to act as hosts (see page 10).

These “At Homes” will be advertised in the press and possibly by leaflet drop on the new estates and of course, in In Touch.



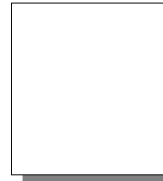
## Some Statistics

From CFO’s Annual Report

£43,246 spent in Leics. & Northants. on 349 Welfare cases, of which 167 arose from SSAFA, but £30,032 recovered from other sources. There were also many cases of non-financial help given by branch welfare people of whom more are needed.

County Poppy Appeal 2000.

Over £254,182 from Leics. & Rutland. More



## Burma Railway Memorial

For some time now the social team have been considering arranging a visit to the National Memorial Arboretum, at Alrewas, Staffordshire. A recent addition to an already fascinating project which is “the nation’s living tribute to the people of the twentieth century...” makes a trip even more worthwhile.

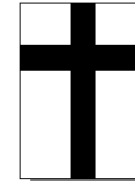
Last month a 100ft. section of the track of the infamous Burma Railway arrived in this country. It was transported to the Arboretum, and is the outcome of years of negotiation with the Thai authorities.

An estimated 68,000 Allied PoWs and some 200,000 Asians worked on the project, and the combined death toll during the construction of the 260-miles of “The Railway of Death” was over 96,000. About 18,000 of the Allied prisoners are thought to have died, some killed by their Japanese captors, and others dying of diseases such as malnutrition, cholera and dysentery.

The Director of the National Memorial Arboretum said “It will remind people of the horrors of that time, of the war in the Far East, that many people have already forgotten.”

A collection of watercolour paintings depicting the forced labourers at work and the atrocious conditions under which they worked was already on show at the arboretum.

If a visit is arranged it would probably be in July and possibly combined with a few hours in Lichfield. It will only be possible if there are sufficient numbers to fill a coach. Look out for a clip-board at meetings and a notice in a future issue of In Touch or ring Tom Ashmore on MH 433108. Ω



## Obituary

RAY TYLER

It was with great regret that we received the news of the passing of Mr Ray Tyler, on Saturday, 2nd February. He had suffered ill-health for the past few months and so did not attend branch meetings regularly, but to those who knew him, I think you would agree that the words best to sum up Ray would be “One of life’s natural gentlemen”. Always ready to help in the branch wherever he could, he was for a time, editor of this newsletter.

He never spoke much about his service with the Royal Navy, and in the story he wrote for In Touch in July 2000 he typically played down his role but I know that he was responsible for saving the life of a shipmate on one occasion.

To his wife, Peggy, two sons and daughters-in-law and four grandchildren, we convey our deepest sympathies and condolences.

## Its Easy When You Know

by Ray Tyler

One of my very bright overseas students asked me the meaning of the English words “MUP” and “YUP”. She said that she could not find them in the English Dictionary but that they were every-day English words. As I had never heard of them, I said so, and asked where she had heard them. “Every morning my landlady goes to the bottom of the stairs and calls out YUP. And her daughter calls back MUP!”

My latest dictionary has not included MUP, but includes YUP as an informal word for YES. Ω



## “The Best laid plans.....”

The February Branch Meeting was to be special. Apart from the scheduled buffet, ‘secret’ plans were in hand for the Chairman at 8.15 pm, the usual time for the end of business, to introduce Andrew Marriott as the new Poppy Appeal Organiser, and present specially produced Certificates of Appreciation to his predecessors, Tom & Betty Jeacock, to Peter Wilson, Ken Stimpson and to Dick and Renie Fulford, the event being given maximum publicity by Press Photographer, Andrew Carpenter.

And what actually happened? Apologies for absence from three of the four recipients, business over before 8 pm, and a photographer arriving 15 minutes late and after the new PAO had had to leave!! The picture that appears in the paper is not quite what was intended.

However, the buffet was good—thanks again to Irene Blissett. Ω



## Coffee Morning

The weather early on Saturday morning, 2nd February was horrible. “People just won’t come”, we said. But they did and in such numbers that some could not get a seat! The result was one of the most successful we have held, producing a profit of £273.

This achievement was due to the generous donations of items for the stalls, of cash and of the time and enthusiasm of many helpers. We were especially pleased to have two cadets from the ACF and two from the ATC working with us.



## Annual County Conference

By Tom Ashmore

Five members of our Branch met with other delegates and observers from 32 other branches from Leicestershire and Rutland on Saturday, 26th January at the RBL Club at Melton Mowbray. Proceedings opened with the entry of Standards (Queens Colour, County Standard - carried by our George Fleming - and the host branch Standard), the Act of Homage, a short prayer and a few words of welcome from the Melton Chairman.

The theme which dominated the afternoon was finance. Although the Legion Benevolent Fund was healthy, the General Fund was in a critical state. Over the years, delegates at Legion Conference had refused to allow adequate increases in affiliation fees to even keep pace with inflation. There had been cost savings through improved efficiency and some services had been cut (Leics. & Rutland grant from HQ was nearly £6000 less than needed, so reducing County reserves). Unless there was an urgent and significant increase in subs. the whole membership side of the Legion would collapse. A resolution from Croft branch that the annual affiliation fee be increased to £10 as from next October was carried by 28 votes to 5 and goes forward to Legion Conference. As your delegate, I assumed that most of Market Harborough branch would think an extra 5p a week a very small price to pay to keep the Branch in existence or to be able to wear the Legion badge and I voted for the resolution.

A frequently asked question is why is the HQ building at 48 Pall Mall not sold. Our guest speaker, Mr Bill Parkin, a member of the National Executive Council, explained that because membership administration occupies only a small part of the building, a relatively

small proportion of the proceeds of the sale could be allocated to the General Fund. The cost of relocation would also be considerable. Services had been cut to save costs but some National training courses still would be run this year.

A County initiative was the provision of short training sessions for Branch Treasurers and possibly for Branch Secretaries. A course for Welfare Caseworkers is being held on 2nd & 3rd March (two branch members have already booked).

It was not all gloom and doom that Saturday! The new style Festival of Remembrance at the De Montfort Hall was a success despite adverse media coverage. The meetings of Branch Officers instituted by the County Chairman during his first year of office had gone well and would be continued. The County President’s familiar call for the early integration of the Women’s Section with the main body of the Legion was echoed by Lady Martin, President of the County Women’s Section. Written reports from the County Field Officer and the Poppy Appeal Co-ordinator struck up-beat notes. (see p6 for some statistics)

It was also interesting to note that the guest speaker who was billed to appear, Mr Terry English, RBL Head of Welfare, was unable to be with us because he had been invited to address the US House of Representatives on behalf of Gulf War veterans. Such is the esteem with which some of the RBL staff are held.

When the Agenda eventually reached “Awards”, we warmly applauded George Fleming for winning the Runner-up Cup in the Standard Bearers’ Competition. And I admit I had a small twinge of disappointment in not being able to bring the Jack Quain Trophy home again! Ω



### NATIONAL SPACE CENTRE

A last minute reminder (if the newsletter is out in time) for Saturday 23rd February.

We go by car (say if you need or can offer a lift), buy our own tickets (£5.50 for OAP/disabled, £7.50 otherwise) & meet for coffee in the **Satellite Bar** at about 10.45 Location—off Corporation Road, off A6 about 2 miles north of city centre. N.B. The lifts are not working so lots of stairs!

### BIRTHDAY DINNER

An excellent, order at the table, 3-course à la carte menu, for £10 of which the landlord will donate £1 to the Poppy Appeal. Those who went last year can vouch for food quality, friendly service and attractive setting. Names please by 13th March on clip board or ring Tom Ashmore MH 433108. A minibus may be available for a nominal charge. (£2 max)

### BRANCH SUNDAY "AT HOME"

This experimental scheme described on page 6 requires a few volunteers to act as hosts. Please sign the clip board or phone Betty Ramsay on MH 434923 if you would help on the afternoons of 24/3, 28/4 or 26/5. (to be confirmed)

### POPPY FACTORY

Provisional arrangements have been made for Wednesday 29th May. Poppy Appeal helpers and collectors outside the branch are being invited to join us. We visit the beautiful and moving Air Forces Memorial at Runnymede have lunch in the Poppy Factory Restaurant & a guided tour. Cost including lunch is £14. To book, sign the clipboard or ring Tom Ashmore. £5 deposit required. More details later.



### Diary

Reminders for March with some other dates to keep free (see also page 10)

23 Feb Visit to National Space

- Centre
- 22 Mar Birthday Dinner—Bull's Head, Clipston
- 24 Mar?? Branch Sunday afternoon "At Home"
- 27 Mar Jaguar visit (with Photo Soc.)—fully booked
- 9 Apr Foxton Crash Memorial—see Editorial p1
- 16 Apr Pub Lunch—venue to be announced
- 29 May Poppy Factory & Air Forces Memorial
- 3,4,8 Jun Jubilee Celebration—Under wraps!!
- 15 Jun Coffee Morning—Harborough Theatre
- 16 Jun** County Standard Bearers' Service
- 18 Jun Pub Lunch—venue to be announced
- 30 Jun Poppy Race Day—Doncaster
- 13 Jul Royal Jubilee Concert—Beaumanor Hall
- 18 Oct Annual Dinner—venue to be announced

### Meetings

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.

George Gamble introduces a video film about the Commonwealth War Graves Commission after the next meeting on 13th March.

The Branch Committee meets on the **Thursday** prior to the Branch meeting, in the Upstairs bar, Conservative Club Building.



## The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity 219279

### Market Harborough Branch



Founded in 1923

# In Touch

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