

Editorial

November, and another busy Remembrance time has passed. With the care which went into the planning of the events, everything seemed to take off successfully. For much of this, special thanks must be given to Mr. Douggie McMeeken, our Poppy Appeal Organiser, who stepped into this very demanding role at a very late stage.

So many people deserve the thanks of the branch, that it is impossible to name them all individually, but starting at the beginning our thanks go out to all those volunteers who started house-to-house collections, in the town and villages, at the end of October.

Then there was the team that set out the Garden of Remembrance (see p 6) and who turned out again on a really wet and miserable Tuesday morning to clear it away.

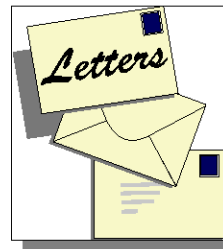
Mark Hudson and Tom Ashmore were down in the Market Hall soon after 8 am to set up the Poppy Appeal display on whichever stall was available (a different one on each of the three days). And, of course, we must also thank the branch members who manned the stall.

This year especially, our biggest thanks must go out to the large band of collectors who took to the streets of the town, sometimes in appalling weather. The very fact that they reported in to collect their trays and boxes in such downpours says it all. I hope no-one suffered any ill effects as a result of their soakings. Early indications are that your efforts will have helped achieve a very good final total for this year's Poppy Appeal.

We finally came to a halt at a place called Thorn (now Torun) in Poland. After some banging and clamouring of metal, the door slid open. Thankfully there was a station platform so we did not have to drop down onto the rail tracks. About eight or ten of us stumbled out. After several gulps of fresh air, we struggled to assist and drag the others on to the platform.

The above true account of the first few days as a prisoner of war was submitted by a member of our branch who wishes to remain anonymous.

Any other first-hand accounts of this nature – stories that do not get into the official archives, would be welcome – Ed.



The following letter was handed to me by Mr. John Liddell. It is interesting in that it gives an insight into the way some civilians were living at the beginning of the last war. It is from Hertfordshire County Council Air Raid Precaution Headquarters, and dated 9th September, 1939.

Dear Sir,

During the past ten days, Civil Defence Personnel have been on duty, or standing by, for long periods, days and nights, and for several days consecutively. It is imperative that they should immediately be given proper periods of rest in case actual air raids should develop.

In the case of part-time workers, many of whom have their ordinary day's work to do, their long spells of duty are affecting their capacity for their work and difficulties are arising with their employers. Immediate arrangements should be made to ensure that:-

1. All personnel who have been on duty for long hours should be given an immediate rest spell away from their posts or depots.

2. So far as possible, the duty spell arrangements for part-time workers who have their ordinary paid jobs should not entail spells of duty on consecutive nights which prevents them getting proper sleep.
3. These arrangements should be carried out even if it involves temporarily reducing the number of persons on duty in squads, parties or wardens' sectors below the number stipulated, provided the local authority concerned is in a position to mobilise the proper numbers at short notice.

Yours faithfully, etc

The curious thing is that the war was not declared until September 3rd, 1939, yet this letter dated the 9th stated that Civil Defence Personnel had been on duty for the past ten days.

Can anyone tell me why they had evidently started their duties on August 27th?--Ed

Congratulations

We are delighted to hear from proud parents, Con and Bernard Halsall that their son Martin has been promoted to the rank of Air Commodore. Members may remember that Martin wrote an article in the early days of In Touch (May 1997) about his two spells of duty in the Falkland Islands.

Somewhat belatedly, we are pleased to report academic success of two members: Helen West received a Doctorate in Biology and Caroline Windsor a MA in Education. Let us see the photos of you in your degree ceremony robes!

And Thanks

to Marion Vine for publicity for the Branch on a National Brass Band website. Blowing our trumpet!!



P.o.W.—France 1940

By Tiger

A group of us British soldiers, part of the B.E.F., were sitting or lying on the grass verge of a country road. We had been taken prisoners of war on the outskirts of Dunkirk. The wounded were being treated and the sounds of machine gun fire and shelling were moving further away.

A German officer, one hand inside the breast of his tunic, strolled among us. He stopped, looked down at me and smiled: “So, hang out the washing on the Siegfried Line, eh!” That was the beginning of my five years as a prisoner of war.

May and June 1940 were very hot months in France. For many days we were marched along hot, dusty roads. People lined the streets as we marched through. Buckets of water were placed on the pavements for us, but these were often kicked over by the guards. (Looking back, I suppose it interrupted the steady flow of the marchers when a dozen desperately thirsty men swooped to get a drink from the bucket).

We had nothing but our uniforms; many of us were bareheaded. We had been searched and some of us had our personal possessions (watches, photographs, etc.) taken or just thrown away on the grass.

The first items we had to acquire were a bottle or a tin can. The bottle for use if we got near a water-filled ditch; the can if we managed to get near a bucket.

In early evening whistles blew all the way down the column. We were halted and shepherded into

fields alongside the road. Guards patrolled the outer hedges of the field all night. Often during the night rifle shots rang out as some brave soul made a break for it in the dark.

In the early morning as we stumbled back onto the road, every fifth man had a loaf of bread thrust upon him – somehow the loaf had to be divided among five men. Many hands grabbed at the loaf given to me. The guards shouted to keep moving and the scuffles broke up, and I was left standing on the roadside. A German soldier picked up a steel helmet lying nearby and hurled it into my groin. Some comrades came to my aid and I was half carried, half dragged for the next hundred yards. (I still cannot remember what happened to that loaf!).

It was difficult to estimate how many of us were on that march; as far as one could see to the front and rear, hundreds.

Hunger, thirst and fatigue made us rest on the grass at the side of the road at times. The guards tolerated this as long as it did not interfere with passing military vehicles. It was only a brief rest, but it meant losing touch with your mates.

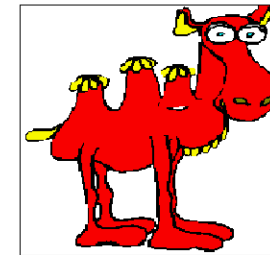
After several days we arrived at a town with railway sidings. A long row of cattle trucks, with doors open, awaited us. Once again we were given a loaf of bread to share among five and ordered to get into the wagons. We were counted in – forty men to each wagon. The big wide door slid shut and we were bolted in for what proved to be three days and nights.

It was impossible to lie down, so we sat or sprawled as best we could. The only ventilation and glimmer of light came from two small metal grills in opposite top corners of the truck.

I find it difficult to describe the disgusting, filthy and horrible acts we had to perform, witness and endure during our confinement, therefore I will pass over them in this account. Many of us had diarrhoea, so it was perhaps as well that we had no food or water.

The Cadets of the Air Training Corps who took out trays and collecting tins on the Saturday (the only day they were not at work or school) also deserve our thanks.

If I have missed anyone from this thank-you list, please accept my apologies for the oversight and WELL DONE EVERYBODY.



The Truth Will Out

Following up the story from Jim O'Brien in last month's In Touch, concerning the Royal Navy's Long Range

Desert Camel attachment, I have been trying to verify the facts. Unfortunately I have learned that Mr Geoff Chester is at present working in Kosovo, so I have been unable to confirm anything from that source.

However, from a person who sounds as if he should know, I gleaned the following: When Her Majesty enquired of Geoff that if he was from Market Harborough was it possible that he knew of one Jim O'Brien, he replied: "Yes, Ma'am, I have known him for many, many years."

Her Majesty replied that "In that case you have well earned your award!"

The true facts are very hard to come by, but Jim had explained that it was a Top Secret operation.

I still find it hard to believe that just four camels could have supplied a whole tank division. Now had it been four cows with three udders apiece . . .!!!

Editor



Annual General Meeting

The AGM was very well attended.

In a short address, President Mr. Peter Wilson, said the branch had enjoyed a successful year, and, pointing to the Haig Cup, he remarked that “You don’t get that for nothing”. He emphasised that this success was due to all the membership but special thanks were due to the officers, and to the In Touch team who kept all members informed and made them feel part of the branch even though some were unable to attend meetings.

In his report, the Chairman, Mark Hudson, said that during the past year we had gained 17 new members but sadly four had died.

Successes during the year included winning the Haig Cup, our Standard Bearer, George Fleming.

REMEMBRANCE CONCERT

The concert given by the Harborough Band was another first class evening. They presented a wide range of music, including pieces by Gershwin, a fine rendering of Mack the Knife and music from the James Bond films. As an Act of Remembrance, the Band played *Nightfall in Camp* with two cornet players and Standard Bearer high up at the front of the Church. This made a very moving finale.

The audience of about 120 was smaller than last year’s, due in part to the absence of press publicity, but all present voted it a great success and many are already looking forward to next year’s concert. Thanks to a generous donation from the Baptist Church supplementing the ticket sales, over £300 was raised for the Poppy Appeal.

also won a cup for the branch. The branch had hosted the Standard Bearers’ Rededication Service. Some members had attended various courses including welfare and finance.

Two Coffee Mornings had raised £525 for branch funds; three luncheons and two dinners had been held, and five outings arranged.

He thanked all the members for the support they had afforded him during the year and said that whenever a crisis loomed

More Branch News

GARDEN OF REMEMBRANCE



The Council’s face-lift of the Memorial Gardens, the large red 11-11-11 characters and “lollypop” poppies on the wall of the Working Men’s Club and greater precision in the alignment of the crosses, as seen in this photo by Dick Fulford, made the Garden this year more impressive than ever. Compliments from the Lord Lieutenant and the MP, who visited the site after the Remembrance Day Service, were among many received.

The Sunset Ceremony in which Harborough Band’s Peter Vine played the Last Post and Reveille every afternoon was well attended with several members of the public present.

within the branch, there always seemed to be someone willing to step into the breach. In this regard he gave special thanks to Mr Douggie McKeenan who took over as Poppy Appeal Organiser at very late notice.

Mark then thanked all the officers, committee, and “teams” who had supported him during the year.

In the Elections all the officers agreed to stand for a further year and were elected en-bloc.

The committee lost the services of Mr John Cox (resigned) and Mrs Irene Blissett (ill health) and they were replaced by Mr George Fleming (who had been co-opted during the year) and Mr Brian Marshall.

Delegates to County and National Annual Conferences were confirmed as Tom Ashmore and Mark Hudson respectively.

An excellent buffet followed, provided, as in previous years, by Jan and Les Sewell. Thank you both!

REMEMBRANCE AND ARMISTICE DAYS

Despite the rain on the Sunday, there was a good turn-out for the Parade (though there should have been more branch members!), the High Street was well lined with spectators, the Church was full and Rev. Chris Moody’s sermon was timely and thought provoking.

The short wreath-laying ceremony on The Square on the 11th was very well attended and the Two Minutes Silence respectfully and widely observed in the town.

At the request of the Head Teacher of Great Bowden School, Con Halsall and Tom Ashmore spoke to the children about the significance of the poppy.



RNA XMAS DANCE
Details from Mike Middleton,
MH 445827

BRANCH XMAS DINNER
7.30 pm Countryman Gt. Bowden
MENU

Starters

- Stilton Mushrooms
- Chef's Warming Soup
- Fan of Melon
- Brie Wedges

Main Course

- Pan Fried Supreme of Chicken
- Traditional Roast Turkey
- Scottish Salmon Fillet
- Mediterranean Pork
- Macaroni Bake

Dessert

- Christmas Pudding or Choice of sweet
- Coffee and Fudge sweets

Price £13.25. Indicate choice on clip-board
and pay at 13th December meeting or
Ring Tom Ashmore on MH 433108.

ANNUAL and BIRTHDAY DINNERS

As 2003 is our 80th Anniversary Year, the March Dinner will be a special event with invited guests and in the style of our previous Annual Dinners. In the Autumn, provisionally on 3rd October, there will be a less formal Dinner, possibly used to launch the Poppy Appeal. This will be the pattern in subsequent years. What should these dinners be called? Send your suggestions to the Editor and they will be put to the Branch Committee.



Diary

A November date,
reminders for December
& some other dates to keep free

- 30 Nov** RNA Bric-a-brac Methodist Church— morning
- 5 Dec** Branch Committee Meeting
- 11 Dec** Branch Meeting + Punch & Mince Pies
- 13 Dec** RNA Xmas Dance—Conservative Club
- 20 Dec** Xmas Dinner 7.30 pm Countryman Inn
- 2 Jan** Branch Committee
- 8 Jan** Branch Meeting
- 14 Jan** Pub Lunch—details later
- 20 Mar** 80th Anniversary of Branch formation
- 21 Mar** Branch 80th Anniversary Dinner
- 29 Mar** Coffee Morning—Harborough Theatre
- 3 Oct** Autumn Dinner (to be confirmed)
- 17 Oct** RNA Trafalgar Day Dinner
- 25 Oct** Coffee Morning—Harborough Theatre
- 8 Nov** Remembrance Concert—Baptist Church

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.

The next meeting is on 11th December and will be followed by our traditional pre-Christmas hot punch and mince pies.

The Branch Committee meets on the **Thursday before the Branch meeting, at 7.30pm upstairs in the Conservative Club Building**



The Royal British Legion



Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch



Founded in 1923

In Touch

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