

For your Diary

25th May H.M.S. Stevenstone Memorial Service, Foxton Church, 11am.

31st May RAFA Coffee Morning -
Harborough Theatre 9.30am to 12 noon

8th June **Dedication of new Branch Standard.** See back page & enclosed letter.

14th June Market Harborough Carnival.
Please support the Float and the stalls.

22nd June Coach Trip to Canterbury &
Broadstairs. Organised by David Hawke with
proceeds to our Branch Funds. Tickets £8 from
David on 01858 431426

18th July. Royal Tournament, Royal British
Legion night. Tickets £5 to £25.

20th July. A concert by the Central Band of
the Royal British Legion, presented by Quorn
Branch.

12th Sept. Dance at the Market Harborough
Conservative Club from 8pm to midnight. Kindly
organised by David Hawke in aid of Branch
Funds. Tickets £2.50 from David on MH 431426

21st Sept. Battle of Britain Sunday.
RAFA need help with collection on previous days.

25th Oct. County Festival of Remembrance
at the De Montfort Hall.

8th Nov. Festival of Remembrance at the
Royal Albert Hall at 2.30pm and 7pm.

Afternoon tickets (£4 to £14) - 6 are available
Evening tickets (£3) - 4 only are available to the
branch, with priority for those who have not
attended before.

Ring the Secretary on M H 431515 for details
of how to book for the Festival (apply before
1st July) or about any of the above items.

Help!!

Prizes are needed for a Raffle
to be held after the Dedication Ceremony
to help defray the cost of refreshments.
Please phone John Cox on MH 434983 if
you can provide something.

Carnival

**Prizes and Helpers are needed for the
Tombola Stall.**

Please phone Tom Ashmore on
MH 433108, after 23rd May.

Meetings

Regular meetings are
held on the **Second
Thursday** of each
month at 8 pm in the
downstairs Function
Room in the Con-
servative Club Build-
ing, Fairfield Road,
Market Harborough.

The next meeting will
be on **12th June**. We
hope that you will be
able to attend and
stay to give your
ideas on what social
activities you want.

Mr & Mrs F T Ashmore
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In Touch

The Newsletter

for
Members
of

**Market Harborough Branch
The Royal British Legion**

Issue No 7

May, 1997

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Editorial

You will recall that when *In Touch* was launched it was for a trial of six issues. That this is issue No. 7 is due to the Branch Committee's agreement that the trial was a success. Your Editors have been encouraged by the favourable comments received (and lack of unfavourable ones!) and will endeavour to maintain the high standards of interest, usefulness and presentation so far achieved.

We are particularly grateful to two younger generation contributors, an ex-member of the WRAF Band and a serving officer who was in the Falklands, who write about very different aspects of peace-time service in the Royal Air Force. Hotspur has come up with another of his "Memories" (or was this one a dream?) and there is another fishy saga, this a poem from John Dilks. Thanks also to Bill Cotton for yet another story about the World War II Royal Navy. (There is a video available on loan to anyone who may be interested in the hazards of the Arctic Convoys).

Betty Jeacock was badly injured in a car accident not long after she and Tom returned from their trip "down under". Betty is now recovering well and we wish them both a speedy return to normal living. When they feel up to it, we hope they will tell us some of their experiences whilst on the other side of the world.

Please let us have material for our next Issue. War time experiences are always of interest but much has happened since in the Services and we would welcome any story from serving and post-war ex-service people.



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World War II Convoys

by Bill Cotton - our Naval Correspondent

There were four types of Wartime Convoy

1. The Atlantic

Merchant Ships carrying goods & troops from the USA were in convoys made up of ships of all sizes and were restricted to the speed of the slowest ship. They were escorted by Destroyers, Corvettes and sometimes armed Merchant Ships. There were times when maybe 40 ships had an escort of only 3 warships. In mid Atlantic they were left unguarded because the escorts never had the range to cross the entire Atlantic. They were met at the eastern end of the "gap" by home based escorts and delivered to the UK.

2. Those which supplied the Desert Armies

had to go via the Cape. These were escorted by home based ships as far as the African coast and then taken over by a cruiser or two. Half would call at Cape Town to refuel and half at Durban. They would then proceed to the Red Sea from where they were joined by units of the Eastern Mediterranean Fleet and escorted to Alexandria.

3. The Arctic convoys

were a different kettle of fish. They were faced with the extra hazards of bitter cold, giant seas with waves 60 feet high and biting winds of 60-80 mph, making the chill factor up to - 50c. And of course there were the devilish hazards of war for good measure.

4. Malta convoys,

weather wise, had a far better time. However,

the weather made it much easier for the Bomber-Torpedo planes. There was also the threat of the Italian Fleet. One consolation, if you did land in the "drink" it was nice and warm. In the Arctic it was certain death.

Most convoys faced the same dangers - the main ones being U Boats, and Condor aircraft, but there was always the danger from an enemy surface raider.

These trips for the merchant seamen were dangerous to say the least. If they were sunk and managed to survive their pay was stopped from the day they were sunk. For RN crews for much of the time there was either boredom by being on constant alert or by enduring watches of 4 hours on & 4 hours off.

For all the dangers and discomfort it was an experience you could never buy on any package holiday! ●

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Money Matters

A letter from the County Field Officer implying that money in the Branch Trust/Welfare Fund should be released to supplement (HQ) funding for his Benevolent case load, had met with a most unsympathetic response at the March meeting. The chairman was instructed to reply that the Branch would be unwilling for our Fund to be used for Welfare work outside our own area. As a result, this has now been accepted by the CFO.

At our request, the Regional Organiser gave a talk to Committee members from our Branch and from Husbands Bosworth about their responsibilities as Trustees of Branch funds. He emphasised that under Charity Law and the RBL Royal Charter, our "charitable funds" can only be used for the needs of Ex-Service personnel and dependants.

An appeal had been received from HQ to support the BEWSA team entered for the World Ex-service Wheelchair Games in South Africa. A donation of £50 was agreed. A proposal by a member that the Branch should make a donation to St Dunstons was defeated on the grounds that the recent mail-drop appeal was a matter for individuals and that the charity has been supported by RBL HQ funds.

Several years ago some Branch money was invested in the RBL Housing Bonds. As these are now obsolete they are being redeemed.

The daughter of the late Mr. Bert Ward has generously donated £50 to Branch funds in gratitude for our standard bearer's attendance at his funeral. ●

Getting it Right

At the Branch Meeting on 8th May we were joined by the County Standard Marshall and his deputy, who ran through the details of the Ceremonial associated with the Dedication of the New Standard on 8th June. This contribution was most helpful and will help to ensure that the whole ceremony is a credit to the Branch. The Chairman made a special appeal for as many members as possible to attend and support the event. (A personal letter from the Chairman repeating this appeal is enclosed with this Newsletter).

Poppy Appeal

The National total for the 1996 appeal up to 14th April was £m 14.8. Our branch total was £9440.97, over £400 more than the 1995 record which the VE/VJ events had helped to create. This magnificent result reflects great credit on all those who worked so hard last Remembrancetide throughout our area.

Gulf War Illness

Ten thousand Service and ex-service people will shortly be receiving a questionnaire as part of a major scientific study of the so called "Gulf Syndrome". It is important for the study that every form is completed, whether or not the recipient served in the Gulf.

If you know of any Gulf War veteran who may have a war related illness, tell him or her that *Legionline*, the RBL helpline on 0345 725 725, may be able to give advice.

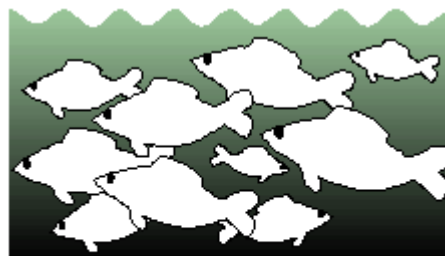
War Grave Pilgrimages

The Secretary has just received the revised 1997 programme. Call MH 431515 for details.

Poetry has been avoided in previous issues of *In Touch*, as the "Eskimo Nell" type of poem is apt to creep in. But the following is only a shade risqué. It is from our man in Thorpe Langton (John Dilks) who *says* he was given a copy on a train midway across Canada.

The Salmon Saga

I hesitate to be unkind
 But the salmon has a one track mind
 Once every season full of fire
 He swims up stream higher and higher
 From dawn to dusk and dusk to dawn
 From morn to night and night to morn
 Up rocks and rapids, up streams and hills
 Up high cascades, up grassy glades
 Up canyons steep, through waters deep
 Up stones and rocks, up dams and locks
 From day to night from dark to light
 Until at last on one bright dawn
 He gets there just in time to spawn.
 Now having done his salmon duty
 Now having won his salmon cutie
 And weary from his trip up town
 In quiet waters he will drown
 Pondering with his dying bubble
 Just why sex is so damn much trouble!



by Hotspur

Three British POW's had escaped from their camp, but a couple of weeks later had been recaptured in a valley in the Italian Alps. It was a difficult time in the War and, as they were wearing civilian clothes the local commander ordered them to be shot as spies.

About 11.00 hrs, as the first prisoner was led out on to the village square, the mid-April sun was shining down on the heavily laden snow-capped mountains. The firing squad prepared to aim their rifles, and the prisoner looked above them to the glistening peaks. "Avalanche!", he cried. The soldiers turned to look in terror and in the ensuing commotion the prisoner (a naval man) escaped.

Order was restored and about 2pm, the second prisoner was led out on to the square. By this time, with the heat of the sun water was dripping freely from the numerous icicles. As the firing squad took up their positions the Flight Sergeant (RAF) looked down at their feet for a few seconds then shouted, "Floods!". In the melee following, he too, escaped.

It was nearly dusk when the last POW was brought into the village centre. History does not recall to which Service he was attached, but record remains of his name - Paddy O'Reilly. However, in spite of this there should have been no problem. He knew exactly what to do. He had seen it all twice before. And as the soldiers raised their rifles to take aim, he looked straight at them and shouted, "Fire!".

The Editor will not guarantee the authenticity of this story!

WRAF Music

by Marion Vine

27 years ago I was at a small "all girls" grammar school in the depths of Dorset where the only career information was on teaching, nursing, secretarial work or motherhood! I was not at all interested in any of these options - only in my hobby of playing in a brass band & a yearning to do something "different". One day a friend's mother mentioned that she had heard that the WRAF had a brass band & maybe I would be interested. As my father had served in the Royal Navy & my mother in the Army it seemed a sensible option to try the Air Force!

At the age of 17 years 3 months I arrived at RAF Spitalgate in Lincolnshire to do my 6 weeks basic training. I found it a challenge but thoroughly enjoyed it. In October 1971 I was posted to RAF Uxbridge to start my career as a musician with about 30 other girls in the WRAF Central Band. As I had played in a brass band since the age of 11 years (quite unusual for girls in those days), I did not have to do the 12 months musical training & went straight in to the Band. Within days I was taking part in a marching display at the Grosvenor House Hotel in London - this was certainly different! Over the next 12 months I played at many parades, fetes, concerts, tattoos & spent considerable hours in an RAF bus.

The day before my 18th birthday I took part in Kettering Carnival. The drum horse - Hercules - (plus two of his friends), were at the front of the parade & we were trying to march in

straight lines behind them - I'm only sorry I didn't know any rose growers at the time! We then drove back to Uxbridge, & left at 3 am the next day to march on Plymouth Hoe in the afternoon & play in a concert at night. As I was the "baby" of the band I had been bedchecked every night at midnight but now that I was 18 I was looking forward to a proper celebration & not rushing back to the barracks. However, we were staying with the WRNS at Devonport - they hadn't moved with the times, (as usual - sorry Dad!) & insisted bedchecking anyone under 21. Having spent a short time in their NAAFI & watched the behaviour of a few sailors who had just arrived from 6 months at sea, maybe this was just as well!



It was at about this time that our Wing

Commander called us all in to a meeting where he told us that due to defence cuts the WRAF Band would cease to exist from the end of 1973. I was the last civilian to join the band & we were all devastated. The next few months were taken up performing at several farewell concerts, including Battle of Britain Week in Jersey & playing at the Royal Albert Hall Festival of Remembrance - an experience I will never forget. My musical career then came to a close - I was again looking for a job, but there are not many outlets for Tenor Horn players who can march well!

I sensibly decided to re-train as a Telegraphist at RAF Cosford & continued to serve in the WRAF up until my marriage in 1979. I was fortunate to have served during 8 years of peace time & have many good memories of friends I have met & places I have visited. ●

80% War Disablement

Rules have been updated on the entitlement to War Widows Pensions and Funeral expenses. For more information ring Peter Wilson on MH 464585 .

London Marathon

The RBL fielded a team of 80 runners, each of whom had secured more than £500 in sponsorship. HQ held an "Open House" at the Pall Mall Offices for the runners and their supporters.

B T Global Challenge Yacht Race

Pause to Remember, the sponsored RBL entry was running 7th in the field of 14 when she reached New Zealand and two of our Branch members were there to greet her! Betty and Tom Jeacock were visiting their daughter and were able to get to Wellington to see the yacht. She had improved her position to 5th place when she reached Sydney. Near disaster struck on the next leg when the boom broke, but she reached Cape Town safely though in 13th position. By 8th May, on the 6000 mile leg to Boston, she was lying 9th. A message of congratulation and best wishes has been sent from the Branch, via HQ, to the skipper & crew. ●

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The Falkland Islands A Personal perspective

by Wing Commander M W Halsall

I first set foot in the Falkland Islands in August 1986, some 4 years after the end of a short but bloody war over sovereignty between the British and the Argentines. I was based in the British Forces Headquarters in Stanley and my arrival there was like stepping back in time to my childhood in the 1950s in deepest Leicestershire. There was very much a village feel about the place and I actually felt quite at home. People were friendly and undoubtedly pleased to have British troops there in significant numbers, but there was also a hint of resentment; there were definitely those who were beginning to object (in private) to the intrusion and the inevitable effects the presence on the Islands of more military personnel than Falklanders was having on the way of life.

The Islands are absolutely fascinating. For those who are familiar with the northern islands of Scotland, the similarities are numerous. However, nothing quite prepares the newcomer for the treeless moonscape that covers much of the land mass. The Falklands are roughly the size of Wales and yet the entire local population numbers only 2000. Many of today's youngsters have been attracted to Stanley, the capital, and the "Camp" lifestyle is gradually but inextricably withering on the vine. The total population is doubled if the military establishment is included, but more than 80% of this is stationed at Mount Pleasant. This is a modern, purpose-built airbase which is most impressive as it looms out of the darkness as one returns late from a

trip to Stanley. Darkness is not strictly correct; blackness would be more accurate and the sky is often filled with a million stars stretching from horizon to horizon.

I returned to the Islands 9 years later to command the newly-formed Air Wing which was responsible for providing 24 hours a day air defence cover. The system is a microcosm of a modern air defence system consisting of Tornado fighters supported by an air-to-air refuelling VC 10 tanker, air defence radars, Rapier short range surface to air missiles and other support aircraft including Hercules transport, Sea King Search and Rescue Helicopters, Chinook Mark 2 heavy-lift helicopters and civilian Contract Sikorsky S61 support helicopters. The base is home to nearly 2000 personnel and boasts its own power station, sewage works, bakery, dry cleaners church and coffee shop! Most people are there for 4 or 6 month tours and the majority enjoy their time far more than they had dared hope. The weather can be appalling, wind speeds regularly and persistently exceed 40 knots and that can wear you down. However, the air is pure, there's lots of space and the wildlife is breathtaking: whales, penguins, elephant seals, sealions, birds of prey. . . , the list is endless. Fortunately even with the military in close attendance, man has generally left the wildlife alone and they exhibit little fear of humans: to stand within a few feet of a 5 tonne elephant seal is a sobering experience!

What of the future? This is certainly unclear. Diplomatic relations with Argentina are still improving steadily, although the sovereignty dispute remains insoluble. Argentinean relatives have begun to visit the graves of their

loved ones lost during the war and have been surprised by the courteous and helpful assistance they have received. The threat of another invasion seems slim, but then it did in 1982. I don't believe that we shall ever return to the token 40 Marines of pre-war days but I for one will have very mixed feelings if I am denied the opportunity to return, as the Islands and Islanders have a unique character. We were right to go to war to defend their right to remain British.

Wing Commander Halsall was the Officer Commanding the Falklands Air Wing from September 1995 to November 1996. He is the son of Bernard Halsall, our Assistant Editor.

The Falklands War

between Argentina and Britain over disputed sovereignty of the Falkland Islands was initiated when Argentina invaded and occupied the islands on 2nd April 1982. On the following day, the United Nations Security Council passed a resolution calling for Argentina to withdraw. A British task force was immediately dispatched and, after a fierce conflict in which more than 1,000 Argentine and British lives were lost, 12,000 Argentine troops surrendered and the islands were returned to British rule on the 14th-15th June 1982.

In April 1990 Argentina's congress declared the Falkland Islands and other British-held South Atlantic islands part of the new Argentine province of Tierra del Fuego.