The Hampshire Link

The Newsletter of RBL Hampshire County
Hampshire & IOW

Edition Date: November 2026

Registered Charity Number 219279



We will remember them

To all whom we have lost this month. Our sincere condolences to family and friends.



Our mission is to safeguard the welfare, interests,and memory of those who are serving or who have served in the Armed Forces

A Time of Remembrance

This time of year is a time to reflect and to remember the service and sacrifice of all those who served in the armed forces of Great Britain, the Commonwealth and Allies. The poppy serves as a reminder of the sacrifice made by the armed forces in time of war and peace. This does not mean that we do not remember at other times of the year, but rather, it is a time to increase our focus on the remembrance of the sacrifice made.

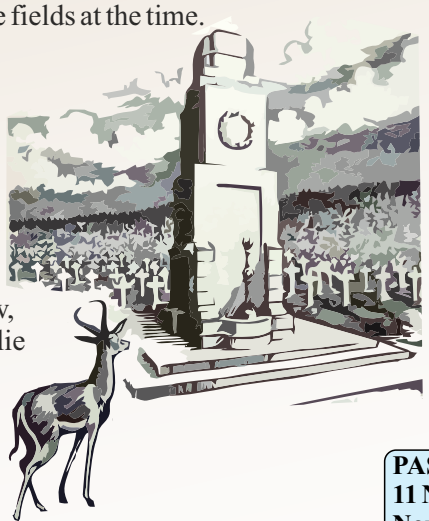
It is a time to reflect on service, sacrifice and peace, despite the turmoil that the world is in today. It is also a time to reflect on current conflicts in the world and to take measures so that the world does not degenerate into open conflict again. If we do not do this, then all those soldiers, sailors and air force personnel will have sacrificed their lives in vain. There is no point in that.

The world is constantly changing and regional conflict dominates the news headlines. We need to remember that it is not the armed forces that choose to go to war. It is the politicians and community leaders who do so. They need to exercise their wisdom and common sense. If they do not, there will be even more fighting amongst nations and opposing groups; even more death and destruction and even more hatred.

Si vis pacem para bellum. DW

In Flanders Fields

A Canadian doctor, Major John McCrae, on the Western Front attached to an artillery brigade on the Ypres-Yser canal in 1915 composed a poem following the death of a friend at that time based on the many poppies blooming in the fields at the time.



In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.
John McCrae, May 1915

Animals in War

It is estimated that 484,143 British horses, mules, camels and bullocks died between 1914 and 1918. And many hundreds of dogs, carrier pigeons and other animals also died on various fronts. Of the 2.5 million injured animals admitted to the Army Veterinary Corps during the First World War, over 85 per cent were treated and returned to duty. Between August 1914 and December 1917 more than 1,850,000 horses and mules were treated in veterinary hospitals and 80 per cent treated were returned fit for duty. This was critical as most of the British Army used horses, especially along the Western Front. Horses were used by Cavalry regiments, to pull the guns, to bring up supplies and to pull the ambulances for injured soldiers.

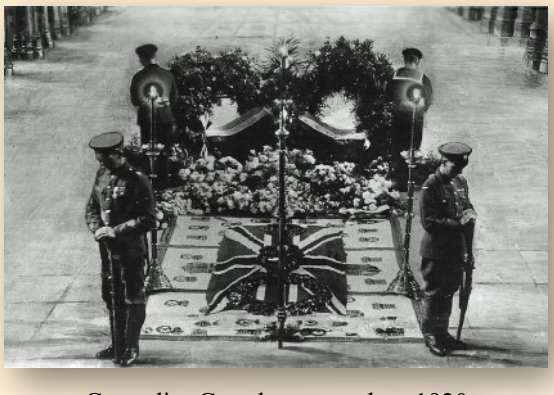
Source RSPCA

PAST EVENTS OF THE MONTH
11 November. Armistice Day.
November 1947. UN Partition Resolution. The country known as Palestine to be divided into separate Jewish and Arab states. Jerusalem to be internationalised. Arab countries and Arab League refuse to recognise this resolution.



The Unknown Warrior

The idea arose when the Reverend David Railton (1884-1955) was deployed in France in 1916 and saw a grave with a rough wooden cross in a back garden at Armentières that had a pencilled sign saying "An Unknown British Soldier". After the end of World War One in August 1920 he wrote to the Dean of Westminster, Herbert Ryle and suggested that an unknown soldier be brought home and buried in Westminster Abbey. A body was chosen from four unknown British servicemen exhumed from four battle areas, the Aisne, the Somme, Arras and Ypres and were placed in the chapel at St. Pol on the night of 7th November 1920. The GOC i/c Troops in France and Flanders, Brigadier General L.J. Wyatt accompanied by Colonel Gell, chose one of the Union flag covered bodies. A service was held the next morning and the body placed in a coffin lined with zinc inside a bigger coffin, that was covered with the flag that David Railton had used as an altar cloth during the War (known as the Ypres or Padre's Flag and shipped to England. (The flag now hangs in St George's Chapel).



Grenadier Guardsmen on duty 1920
Photo taken from the Internet



The grave of the Unknown Warrior.
Photo taken from the Internet

On 11th November 1920 the coffin was placed on a gun carriage drawn by six black horses of the Royal Horse Artillery and was taken via Whitehall and the Cenotaph where King George V placed a wreath of red roses and bay leaves on the coffin with a card "In proud memory of those Warriors who died unknown in the Great War. Unknown, and yet well-known; as dying, and behold they live. George R.I. November 11th 1920". The Last Post was played here.

The carriage, accompanied by (Admirals) Lord Beatty, Sir Hedworth Meux, Sir Henry Jackson, Sir C.E. Madden, (Field Marshals) Lord French, Lord Haig, Lord Methuen, Sir Henry Wilson, (Generals) Lord Horne, Lord Byng, Albert Farrar-Gatliff and Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Trenchard followed by the King, members of the Royal Family and ministers of State, proceeded to Westminster Abbey. The coffin was carried into the west end of the nave of the Cathedral. Approximately 1,000 mourners and a guard of honour consisting of 100 holders of the Victoria Cross (from all three services) were present. Once the coffin was put in pace the King stepped forward and dropped a handful of French earth onto the coffin from a silver shell as it was lowered into the grave. The service ended when Reveille was sounded. A guard of honour remained, standing to attention, arms (rifles) reversed, heads bowed. On 18th November the grave was filled in, using 100 sandbags of earth from the battlefields and covered by a temporary stone inscribed A British warrior who fell in the great war 1914-1918 for king and country. Greater love hath no man than this.

On 11th November 1921 the present black marble stone was placed on the grave at a special service. US General Pershing conferred the Congressional Medal of Honour on the Unknown Warrior on 17th October 1921. (It is in a frame on a pillar nearby in the Abbey).

It is possible that the Unknown Warrior is from any one of the three services or from any part of the British Isles, Dominions or Colonies and represents all those who died who have no other memorial or known grave.

When the Duke of York (later King George VI) married Lady Elizabeth Bowes Lyon in the Abbey in 1923 as she left, laid her wedding bouquet on the grave as a mark of respect (she had lost a brother during the war). All royal brides married in the Abbey since then have sent back their bouquets to be laid on the grave (as also have some royal brides who were married elsewhere).



The grave of the Unknown Warrior surrounded by poppies.
Photo taken from the Internet

DW



I remember once in a while. A personal story.

Once in a while I find myself thinking back on my days in the armed forces. Memories flood back of contacts with the enemy, ambushes, land mines and coming under mortar fire in Rhodesia. I remember walking in the bush on foot patrols for miles and anticipating that the enemy will be just around the corner, ready to do his best to destroy us. I remember the look on a mother's face as she carried her baby on her back in an old blanket as we passed her on a dusty path joining small villages and an old greybeard man hobbling along with a crooked stick, off to the cattle dip, with his small grandsons, herding cattle.



I remember the first time I took an enemy's life. After the contact was over I removed the sling from his AK 47 and kept it as a souvenir. I stared at his blank face and wondered if he thought it was worth it. I remember being wounded in an ambush and my co driver / machine gunner was killed instantly, several rounds in his head and chest. Life snuffed out in an instant. I remember Quentin, who came back to help us and chasing the enemy off; his aggression and first aid, saving the day and my life.

I remember big battles, coming under close artillery fire, and being chased by enemy tanks in Angola. I can still hear the shrapnel clanging against the side of the Ratel Infantry Fighting Vehicle, looking out of the turret and seeing fellow soldiers under fire, vehicles being hit and it seemed like temporary chaos. Of course it was not. Everybody was well trained and knew exactly what was expected from them. They just got on with the job. I remember standing on top of my Ratel Infantry Fighting Vehicle north of the town of Cuvelai, hearing an oncoming enemy mechanised convoy, and in awe, watched as Mirage aircraft came over, pitched up and attacked them. I was grateful I was not on the receiving end. Those were the aircraft of my brothers' squadron and their great skill was something to behold.

I remember going through the defences of captured enemy brigade deployments, underground bunkers with a myriad of documents in Cyrillic, Spanish and Portuguese. I remember going through the pockets of dead Cuban soldiers on Christmas morning, looking for information that would help us close with their comrades and destroy them. That was our intention.

I remember patrolling in Natal (South Africa) trying to stop the African National Congress killing Inkhatha Freedom Party members and vice versa. I remember deploying to various areas in Natal and coming across small school children lying dead, their blood covered little bodies; their lifeblood seeping away in the dusty road when all they wanted to do was go to school and learn; killed by Mandela's thugs. They just happened to be members of a family who belonged to a different political party and were slaughtered just because of it.

I remember my fellow comrades in arms. My brother Tom and cousin Mark served. I cannot be more proud of them. I served alongside brave men and women who did not take sides, who served loyally and impartially, not like the spineless cowards who hid behind their so called conscience or political ideology. I yearn for that comradeship in a slit trench in the middle of the night in Angola. I yearn for the days when I visited with my brother at his base, or in the operational area when he was also deployed and we shared the same circumstances.

I yearn for the comradeship of my fellow soldiers. The reality is that they are now much older, like I am, and scattered all over the world. Many are no longer alive, killed in their prime. The reality is that my era of soldiering has effectively been forgotten or turned about to make us look like we were the evil ones in the conflict. Our battlefields are no longer.

I live far away from those places now, but I remember them. When I walk down the street and when I see the faces of the people, I am cynical. I ask myself; what values do they place on everyday life? They take life for granted. They do not know the comradeship of combat; the brotherhood of soldiers, airmen and sailors, but I do, and once again I remember and long for those days. Too often I remember.

DW (A personal account of remembrance)

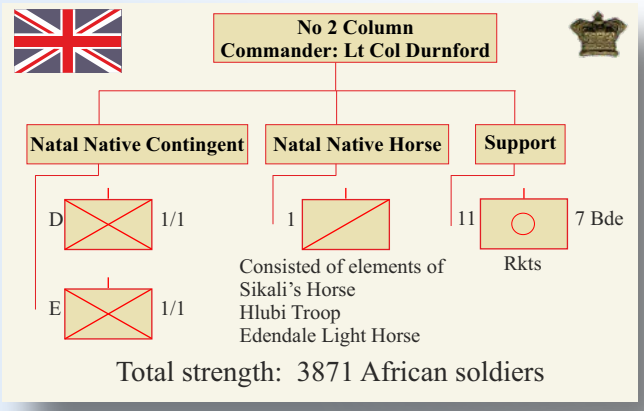


Victoria Cross Recipients: Remembering the Bravest



Christian Ferdinand Schiess was born in Burgdorf, Switzerland on 7 April 1856 and died on 14 December 1884. His parents died young and he spent time in an orphanage. In 1870 he joined the French Army and fought in the Franco-Prussian War. Schiess later served in the Armée de l'Est and was interned in his home country when it surrendered there. He went to South Africa in 1877 and was a volunteer in the last Frontier / Xhosa War. When the Anglo-Zulu War began in 1979 Scheiss was 22 years old and was promoted to corporal in the Natal Native Contingent under command of the British Army in South Africa.

The Battle at Isandlwana took place on the 21st January when a column entered Zululand looking for the Zulu force who attacked the undefended position. This resulted in a defeat for the British force there. The few survivors retreated to Rorkes Drift a few miles a way and the Zulu reserve at Isandlwana disobeyed orders and advanced on Rorkes Drift to attack the small hospital and supply base there. On 22 January 1879, at Rorke's Drift, Natal, Corporal Schiess, in spite of suffering from an injury to his foot, displayed great gallantry when the garrison had retired to the inner line of defence and the Zulus had occupied the wall of mealie bags which had been abandoned. He crept along the wall in order to dislodge one of the enemy and succeeded in killing him and two others before returning to the inner defences. The British losses amounted to 17 killed and 8 wounded out of 35 all ranks. The Zulus lost between 300 to 500 killed. Approximately 300 Zulu bodies were left at the site of the battle. In total 11 Victoria Crosses were awarded for the battle at Rorkes Drift. Seven to the 2nd Battalion, 24th (2nd Warwickshire) Regiment of Foot, one to the Army Medical Department, one to the Royal Engineers, one to the Commissariat and Transport Department and one to the Natal Native Contingent. In 1880 Schiess was awarded the Victoria Cross by General Sir Garnet Wolseley for his gallantry at Rorke's Drift. Schiess was the first man serving with a locally raised native unit to receive the Victoria Cross, the "British-only" rule being broken under political pressure, also being the first Swiss national to do so.



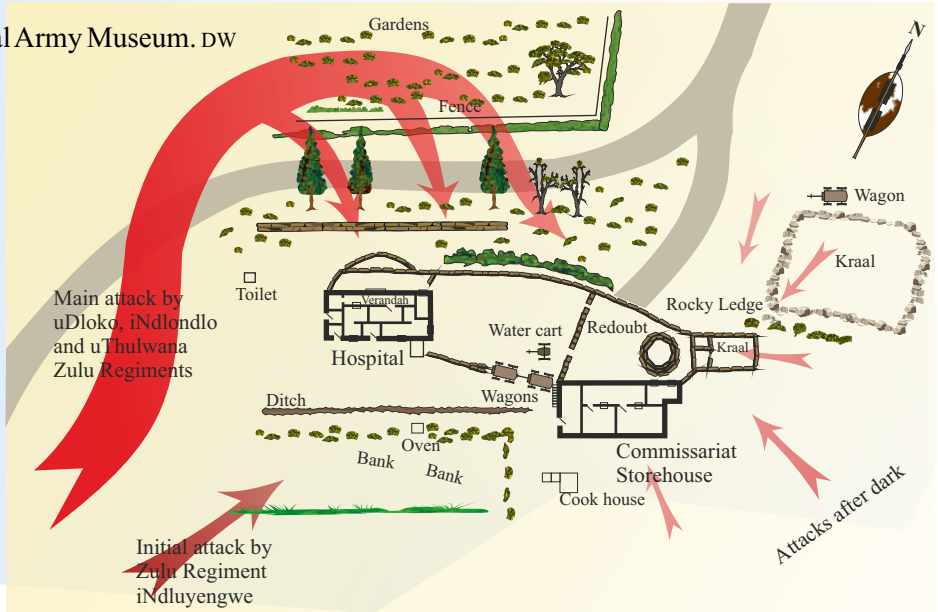
After the volunteer forces were disbanded Scheiss could not find employment and briefly went to India before returning to South Africa. In 1884, he was found on the streets of Cape Town suffering from exposure and malnutrition by the Royal Navy who gave him food, and offered him a passage to England on board the Serapis. He accepted, but became ill during the voyage and died. His remains were buried at sea at approximately 13°00′S 07°24′W.

Citation. For conspicuous gallantry in the defence of Rorke's Drift Post on the night of the 22nd January, 1879, when, in spite of his having been wounded in the foot a few days previously, he greatly distinguished himself when the Garrison were repulsing, with the bayonet, a series of desperate assaults made by the Zulus, and displayed great activity and devoted gallantry throughout the defence. On one occasion when the Garrison had retired to the inner line of defence, and the Zulus occupied the wall of mealie bags which had been abandoned, he crept along the wall, without any order, to dislodge a Zulu who was shooting better than usual and succeeded in killing him, and two others, before he, the Corporal, returned to the inner defence.

His Victoria Cross is displayed at the National Army Museum. DW



Detail from Alphonse de Neuville's 1880 "The Defence of Rorke's Drift" reputedly depicting Ferdinand Schiess.



Basingstoke, Overton and District Branch News

Basingstoke, Overton and District Branch received their new Branch Standard which was dedicated and blessed at All Saints Church, Basingstoke on Sunday 11th October 2026 at 10 am by Revd Jane Leese at All Saints Church. In keeping with the RBL's vision of "Bringing society together to recognise, remember, and support the Armed Forces community" the dedication service will be incorporated into an existing Eucharist church service rather than having a stand-alone RBL service. Photo at right is from the RBL branch website. DW



Basingstoke, Overton and District branch is currently a County Supported Branch and rarely hold meetings; the great news is that following our AGM, we will start the process to return to full Branch status. In the short term, please continue to contact our PoCs. However, the new Branch Committee is as follows -

Chairman. Laura Wares.
Branch Secretary. Lisa Aven.
Treasurer. Malcolm Brunsdon.
Branch Standard Bearer. Laura Wares.
Committee Members. Steve Day and Stuart Humphries.
Event Coordinator. Steve Day.
Poppy Appeal Co-ordinator. Wayne Stent.

We meet in the Basingstoke Labour Club, Sandys Road, RG22 6AS at 19.30 on an ad hoc basis. Forthcoming meeting dates are published on our news page on the branch website. JD

Poppy Appeal Launch. There was a parade and traditional annual Trench Style Lunch as is conducted every year. Veterans were invited to participate in a short parade. Participants formed up outside the Willis Museum at the Top of Town and then marched to Laarsens, for a meal 'Beef Stew' in a mess tin! On behalf of the Royal British Legion, we extend our grateful thanks to Laarsens for their support. Steve Day



One of the Basingstoke, Overton and District Poppy Appeal tables in Festival Place. Steve Day (left) and visitor

Petersfield Poppy Appeal Launch



The Petersfiel branch of the RBL launched its Poppy Appeal on the 22nd October. It was attended by the Town Mayor, Branch Chairman, PAO collectors. Representatives of Petersfield Post and Shine Radio were also present, as was the previous Branch Chairman Chris Paige. Collection will commence on 23rd October till 7th November. DL





At the going down of the Sun, and in the Morning, we will Remember Them.

Memorials; In Remembrance of the Fallen



Ashford Hill



Basingstoke



Eccinswell



Hartley Wintney



Kingsclere



Old Basing



Preston Candover



Sherfield on Lodden



Shilchester



Winchester



Hampshire County Standard Bearers Competition



The annual standard bearer competition for Hampshire County too place at Crossfield Hall, Romsey recently. Congratulations to Amelie (Winchester) in retaining the Hampshire Youth, Chloe (Fawley & District) in a well deserved 2nd place. Karen Graham (Milford on Sea WS) retained the Hampshire County Women Section title. Hampshire County RBL was retained by Pete Pullin (Fawley & District Branch) but only just, with Andy Wells (Brockenhurst branch) coming in a close 2nd and Ben Hitchin (Sutton Scotney branch) coming 3rd. A big thank you is extended to the judges, competitors, adjudicators, Parade Marshals, the Women's Section for the catering (Sandra's Cakes are amazing) and all the family and spectators who attended. Photo and information is from the "Members of the RBL" From the RBL Facebook page by Pete Pullin.

County Contact Details

Postal Address for Hampshire County Committee - Hampshire & IOW MEO (or Name), Royal British Legion, 199 Borough High St, London SE1 1AA

RBL Website: www.BritishLegion.org.uk, County Website: http://counties.britishlegion.org.uk/counties/hampshire

Facebook Page: www.facebook.com/groups/hantscountyrbl/

Facebook Email address - Hampshire.web@rbl.community

Poppy Appeal - www.facebook.com.poppy.HamsphireRBL
ALL LEGION ENQUIRIES (including Welfare requests) should be directed to the national call centre - **0808 802 8080**

2026-27 HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COMMITTEE
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President Col A King Hampshire.president@rbl.community
Vice Presidents. B C N Soffe, R G Knight
Chair. R Moore Hampshire.chair@rbl.community
Vice Chair and Training Officer. J Davies Hampshire.CTO@rbl.community
Treasurer. G S Brown Hampshire.treasurer@rb;.community
County Secretary, Conference Secretary and Webmaster. A Mitchell Hampshire.secretary@rbl.community
Committee and Recruiting Officer. T Russell Hampshire.CRO@rbl.community
Committee and Youth Officer. Vacant
County Community Support Co-ordinator vacant
County Clubs Liaison vacant
Committee and Conference Chairman. B Mansi Ringwood.chairman@rbl.community
Committee, Poppy Appeal Coordinator S Hampshire + Conference. P Prior leeonsolent.secretary@rbl.community
Conference Committee. P Cunningham, P Perkins, M Brunsdon
Parade Marshal. D Graham Hampshire.parademarshall@rbl.community
Deputy Parade Marshal. A Cassidy
County Standard Bearer. P Pullin Hampshire.stdbearer@rbl.community
Deputy County Standard Bearer. A Wells
County Youth Standard Bearer. A Neal
County Padre Reverend. D Roche
County Golf Organiser. R J Bourne
Independent Examiners. G S Brown, J Davies, P Prior, A Mitchell, M Brunsdon
County Management Board Chair, V/Chair, Treasurer, Secretary
Annual Conference Delegate. R Moore
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Errors and Omissions Excepted

