

# What's Going On?

The Social & Fund-Raising Team Reports

## DIARY OF EVENTS

The date of the next Branch meeting is

**October 16**

**Note Revised Date**

18/19 Sep Wings Collections Mornings

19 Sep RAFA 'Brew for the Few'

20 Sep RAFA Battle of Britain Service

**16 Oct** October Branch Meeting - **REVISED DATE**

17 Oct Poppy Appeal Coffee Morning Harborough Theatre

21 Nov Remembrance Concert Baptist Church

**8 Dec** December Branch Meeting - **REVISED DATE**

2010

5 Jan Christmas Lunch, with RNA and RAFA

**19 Mar** Branch Anniversary Dinner - **REVISED DATE**

## SUPPORT YOUR BRANCH - GET INVOLVED



### Lunch at The Angel

**Tuesday  
October 6**

We meet in the  
bar at Noon

Reserve your  
place now with  
Wendy Osborne  
on 01858 467636

### MENU

#### Roast Leg of Lamb

*With roast potatoes & gravy*

#### Braised Chicken Legs

*In rich vegetable gravy on mash*

*Both served with selection of vegetables*

#### Battered Haddock

*With chips, garden peas & tartar sauce*



#### Raspberry & White Chocolate

**Bavarios & cream**

**Fresh Fruit Salad**

*With strawberry ice cream*

**Chocolate Fudge Cake**

*with chocolate ice cream*

**Only £7**

Join us and enjoy good food in congenial company.

## The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch

Reg. Charity 219279

Hon. Secretary:

Sara Whitley-Kinzett 01858 434476

**Welfare:**

Vida Edwards 0116 279 3729

Betty Ramsay 01858 434923

**Poppy Appeal Organiser:**

Dave Pryor 01858 545612

**Standard Bearer**

George Fleming 01858 462711

**Social & Fund Raising Team:**

Glenys Hocking-Davies 01858 467835

Wendy Osborne 01858 467636

Les Moore 01858 463112

Freda Carnell 077 422 987 68

Meetings are held on the Second Wednesday of each month  
at 7.30 pm in the Function Room at the

Conservative Club, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough.

The Committee meets in the same room on the  
Thursday preceding the Branch Meeting at 7.00 pm.

## In Touch

[www.in-touch.ukvet.net](http://www.in-touch.ukvet.net)

THE MONTHLY

NEWSLETTER OF THE

MARKET

HARBOROUGH

BRANCH OF THE

ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Founded 1996

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# The Royal British Legion

**Market Harborough Branch**

## In Touch

Issue 132

September 2009

### The General

*Siegfried Sassoon.*

'Good-morning, good-morning!'  
the General said  
When we met him last week on  
our way to the line.  
Now the soldiers he smiled at are  
most of 'em dead,  
And we're cursing his staff for  
incompetent swine.  
'He's a cheery old card',  
grunted Harry to Jack  
As they slogged up to Arras  
with rifle and pack  
But he did for them both by  
his plan of attack.

Now read Mike Morgan on  
centre pages.



Pat and Mike Middleton very much enjoyed the occasion of The Second Sea Lord's Garden Party, which they were invited to attend recently at Admiralty House in the Dockyard at Portsmouth.

It is a wonderful old building – it is said that Nelson was a guest there (not in our day!) with a lovely garden. There was a big marquee serving all sorts of delicious sandwiches and cakes and drinks of various descriptions.

We were greeted as we arrived by the Vice Admiral in person and we had a little chat about the Conference in Londonderry which we had attended a couple of weeks previously and he had been the main speaker.

The lawns were dotted with tables and umbrellas – which for once were to supply some shade as the day was hot and sunny, exactly what one would hope for, although



*The Band of the Royal Marines School of Music*

there was plenty of shade from the big old trees. The entertainment was provided by a The Folkstone Sea Cadet Band and the Poole and Parkstone Sea Cadets gave an excellent drill display. The Royal Marine Commandos gave a display of unarmed combat, a class of physical training instructors gave a great display of club swinging and danced the hornpipe, a Jazz Band from HMS Collingwood played gently in the background between acts and it was all rounded off with the Royal Marines School of Music who played and marched for about forty minutes before performing the Ceremonial Sunset – not a dry eye in the house!

Certainly an occasion to be remembered.

## A Spell in Colditz Castle

*Even recourse to the Freedom of Information Act has failed to reveal the nature of the misdemeanour which led to our Chairman's presence in the notorious wartime prison.*

*Fortunately the guards failed to confiscate his camera and he was able to bring back some snapshots.*



## SCHLOß COLDITZ COLDITZ CASTLE 1939-1945

Das Schloß wurde das OFLAG IV C (Sonderlager IV C) zur Unterbringung von Offizieren der Alliierten, die entweder bereits Fluchtversuche unternommen hatten oder aus anderen Gründen für wert befunden wurden, streng überwacht zu werden. Von hier aus wurden weitere Fluchtversuche unternommen, um die das ganze Leben kreiste.

The castle became OFLAG IV C (Sonderlager IV C) housing Allied Officers who had made previous escapes or were otherwise deemed worthy of being closely confined. From here attempts to escape continued and became a way of life.

	Erfolgreiche Fluchten Home Runs	Mißglückte Fluchten Unsuccessful Escapes
Franzosen French	12	12
Briten British	11	109
Holländer Dutch	7	17
Polen Polish	1	17

Den Männern von Colditz gewidmet, deren Fluchtversuche mißglückt sind, die aber den wenigen geholfen haben, denen die Flucht gelungen ist, sowie den jungen Menschen dieser Welt, so daß sie wachsam im Streben nach Freiheit bleiben und diese mit Ausdauer und Mut schützen.

Dedicated to the men of Colditz who tried but did not succeed, yet generously helped those few who did, and to the young people of the world that they may be vigilant in the pursuit of freedom and guard it with Tenacity and Courage.

# POPPY CALLS



safety • repairs • maintenance

Poppy Calls Home Support  
The Royal British Legion  
Suite 2, Nelson House  
Allington Rd, Little Barford PE19 6YH

Poppy Calls is one of the numerous welfare undertakings offered by The Royal British Legion. It is a free service to those in the ex-Service community who, by financial or other personal circumstances, are unable to arrange to have work done themselves, or would be exposed to the risk of exploitation, subject to satisfying the eligibility criteria of The Royal British Legion. This includes the cost of materials.

It is a popular misconception that it is necessary to be a member of the RBL to benefit from these undertakings. This is a fallacy. Assistance is available to those who have served in the Forces for at least seven days, or to the dependant of someone who has served. This includes widows, widowers, cohabiting partners or civil partners of ex-Service people.

Poppy Calls provides trusted handy persons who undertake small repairs, minor adaptations, limited maintenance and general assistance, and with whom a client is confident and safe in their own home. The work undertaken enhances the quality of life, enabling the beneficiary to remain independent and have the confidence to remain in their own home, which is comfortable, safe and secure.

Poppy Calls currently employ 9 fitters around the country, with an additional 3 being in the process of joining, and administrative support from a team based in St. Neots. It is planned that the number of fitters will increase to 28 by the end of 2112.

Poppy Calls appointed a Fitter, John Fulks, to cover Leicestershire and Rutland and in the first six months he has provided assistance to 92 individuals, undertaking over 400 jobs.

Poppy Calls provides a free dedicated handy-person service to those who are unable to carry out small repairs and minor alterations to their homes.

We carry out a range of small household repairs and minor adaptations such as:

- Putting up shelves, curtain rails and grab rails
- Changing light bulbs and tap washers
- Fitting door and window locks and other security items
- Fitting and testing home smoke detectors
- Advice on energy saving measures
- Installing a care phone
- Small repairs
- Moving furniture
- Hanging / repairing doors
- Maintenance of garden structure and sheds
- Hardstanding and ramps for electric powered vehicles

Your security is important to us, and so we only use our own qualified fitters, who drive a branded Poppy Calls van. Our fitters carry an identity card, which they will show to you at the time of the visit.

To be eligible for our help, you must have served in the Forces for at least 7 days, or be the dependant of someone who has served; this includes widows and widowers.

All calls will be treated in the strictest confidence, and applications are considered carefully and with sympathy.

If you would like more information about the Poppy Calls scheme, please contact us on:

**01480 478031**

## BRANCH MEMBERSHIP DIRECTORY

We welcome a new member:

Mrs Kathie **Morley**, 31 Walcot Road, Market  
Harborough LE16 9DL. 01858 319714

“ “ *The secret of a good sermon is to have a good beginning and a good ending; and to have the two as close together as possible.* ” ”  
George Burns

## Clifford Holt

1915 - 2009



“My grandfather took me to a polo match and I needed the toilet. In a tent, specially provided, I found myself in the company of three present and future kings: George V, Edward VIII (who later abdicated) and George VI. I was able to tell everyone I was destined for greatness, as at that moment in time, I was fourth in line for the throne!”

Just one of the vast repertory of stories told by one of the most remarkable and extremely likeable men it has been my privilege to meet. My only regret is that I did not get to know Cliff Holt earlier.

Sadly Cliff died recently aged 93 and probably most members will have read a tribute to him in the Harborough Mail a couple of weeks ago. He had been a member of the Branch for only a year or so and, living in Saddington, it was difficult for him to attend evening meetings. Frank Thurgood, another Branch member, introduced me to Cliff, whom he had befriended through the auspices of the Volunteer Bureau.

I met Cliff when I accompanied Frank who was driving him to the Royal Air Forces Association Hotel at Weston-Super-Mare. The journey took about three and a half hours and, apart from a brief comfort stop, I don't think Cliff stopped talking. (Frank was grateful for my presence so that he could concentrate on his girlfriend who was directing him via his sat. nav.!)

I was captivated by this man who could chat about almost anything, displaying an amazing memory. I got to know about his life running his business serving the Leicester shoe trade, his time in the RAF as a Mosquito and Dakota pilot, his worldwide travels studying ornithology, and his interest in antiques.

Both Frank and I mourn the loss of a friend for whom we shared a great affection.

George Seward

## The Finest Army in the World

*An article in the series written exclusively for In Touch.*

By Lt Col Mike Morgan

### Massacre at Funky Villas

1st of July 1916. This date, the opening day of the Battle of the Somme is infamously known as the, 'Black Day' of the British Army. A single day when the British Army suffered over 57,000 casualties.

In recent years there have been attempts by many eminent military historians to show that the old adage of, 'Lions led by Donkeys', was simply not true, and that the Generals and the staff, did a, 'difficult job, in difficult circumstances', and that, 'war, especially attritional war, is a nasty business, and high casualties are to be expected'. 'It was not the Generals fault'.

Other historians have described the vast majority of very senior Army officers in 1916 as a bunch of tired old men, lacking ideas and simply obeying orders. The truth is much worse. Mass murderers is a more fitting epitaph for these men, especially for what they did at Funky Villas.

To be fair no senior officers wanted to fight the battle of the Somme. But political pressure forced the battle upon them. The British had to relieve the pressure on the French who were dying in their thousands at Verdun and the political decision was taken to launch an offensive, to show that, 'the British were carrying their weight' in the war.

By 1916 the tiny professional BEF was gone. Hundreds and thousands of new conscripts now formed the British Army. The Generals knew that this new Army was under trained, inexperienced and very, very young. So their plan of attack took this into account. A massive, prolonged bombardment, to destroy the enemy trenches, followed by a well controlled and orderly march across no mans Land. For this plan, for the entire battle of the Somme, perhaps the Generals can be forgiven, however naïve, however

optimistic, they can be forgiven. For what happened at Funky Villas they can not, and never should be forgiven.

Well to the North of the Somme battlefields lies the small French village of Fonquevillers, inevitably dubbed, 'Funky Villas' by British troops. Just to the South of Funky Villas, was a heavily defended German salient, centred on the village of Gommecourt.

General Haig decided that the Somme offensive needed a 'diversion', and that Gommecourt would make an ideal place for this diversion. The 46<sup>th</sup> (North Midland) division would attack Gommecourt from the North. 56<sup>th</sup> (1<sup>st</sup> London) Division from the West. Funky Villas marked the dividing line of the two divisions.

Both divisions were ordered to make all their preparations for the attack, 'well known to the enemy'. This they did, and the Germans further reinforced what was already one of their strongest defensive positions on the entire Western Front.

The two divisions had absolutely no chance of success. No reserves were available to exploit any advance. If the attack had not gone ahead, then some success could have been claimed for this, 'diversion', as the Germans had indeed moved some men and guns from the Somme up to Gommecourt. That the attack went ahead can only be described as unnecessary murder.

Early in the morning of Saturday 1<sup>st</sup> July 1916, the slaughter on the Somme battlefield commenced. Well to the north the 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions also went over the top at Funky Villas. They were met by well prepared German machine guns and artillery. Despite the inevitable appalling losses men from both divisions actually managed to take the first line of German trenches. But the survivors of 46<sup>th</sup> Division were soon forced to retreat, and the remnants of 56<sup>th</sup> Division finding themselves now isolated in the German lines also had no choice but to retreat. By evening the survivors of both divisions were back at their start lines. Over 2200 men were dead and a further 4000 seriously wounded. Nearly a thousand

more were, 'missing', many of whom would add to the total dead in the days, weeks and months to come.

Unbelievably following the slaughter across the entire Somme battlefield on 1<sup>st</sup> July, only one court of enquiry into the reasons for the losses occurred. This court of enquiry was targeted against 46<sup>th</sup> Division, fighting well away from the Somme, to find out why the Division had showed, 'A lack of Offensive Spirit'.

So, Senior Officers as Incompetent murderers? Yes. Any diversionary attack, if needed, should have been aimed at some quiet sector of the front to draw as much of the enemies reserves as possible into the area. Gommecourt was so strong, it needed very little reinforcement. And why attack at all if the reason for the attack, to draw German reserves away from the Somme into the area had already succeeded? And why launch an attack with no chance of success, and no reserves available to exploit any success which by any miracle had been achieved?

The battle of the Somme continued for three more months. The half a million British casualties meant that the slaughter at Funky Villas became just a foot note to the greater battle. But over two thousand telegrams were sent to the mothers and wives of the dead soldiers from 46<sup>th</sup> and 56<sup>th</sup> Divisions informing them that their loved ones had been killed in action. The telegrams failed to inform them that their loved ones had died for no good reason. In fact, they had been ordered to their deaths for no reason at all. A further 3000 men from both divisions lost arms and legs, their sight or their sanity, again for no reason whatsoever. And then the final insult. A board of enquiry into the reasons for, 'A lack of offensive spirit'. The officers and men of both divisions knew they had no chance of success long before they went over the top. They gave their lives in the belief that what they were doing would make some difference to the chances for survival for their comrades to the south on the Somme. Their pointless sacrifice made no difference whatsoever. The attack was sheer bloody murder – murder with no excuse by Haig and his deputies.