

What's Going On?

The Social & Fund-Raising Team Reports

DIARY OF EVENTS

The date of the next Branch meeting is
April 12

29 Apr	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
20 May	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
24 May	Branch Poppy Appeal Awards
1 Jun	Rededication of County Standards in Mkt Harboro'
27 Jun	Veterans' Lunch, Angel Hotel
1 Jul	RNA Trip to National Arboretum
29 Jul	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
19 Aug	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
30 Sep	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
9 Oct	Branch Informal Autumn Dinner, MH Golf Club
18 Oct	Branch Coffee Morning Harboro Theatre 9am-Noon
28 Oct	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30
1 Nov	Festival of Remembrance, de Montfort Hall, Leic.
15 Nov	Remembrance Concert, Baptist Church MH
25 Nov	Branch Lunch at the Angel, noon for 12.30

If you would like to attend a Branch event but have no transport, please contact the Social Team and every effort will be made to help you.

The RNA National Arboretum Visit

Royal Naval Association visit to the National Arboretum on Tuesday 1st July. The bus will leave the Conservative Club at 9.30 and arrive back in Harborough around 4 p.m. Please phone Mike Middleton on 01858 445827 or Mike Petch on 01536 399419. The bus will commence at Roth if this is a more convenient pick up for anyone. Entrance to the Arboretum is free, the cost of the bus will be £10 per person. There is a cafe at the Arboretum which sells reasonably priced meals and sandwiches etc.

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:

Caroline Windsor 01858 463660

Social & Fund Raising Team:

Glenys Hocking-Davies 01858 467835

Wendy Osborne 01858 467636

Les Moore 01858 463112

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

THE MONTHLY
NEWSLETTER OF THE
MARKET
HARBOROUGH
BRANCH OF THE
ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

Founded 1996

Editor:

George Seward

01858 433873

18 Charles Street,
Market Harborough,
LE16 9AB

g.seward@uwclub.net

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The Royal British Legion

Market Harborough Branch

In Touch

Issue 114

March 2008



Flight Sergeant
Geoffrey Appleyard
DFM.

(See story on page 6)

THE ROYAL BRITISH
LEGION



A cheque for £688.52 was handed to me by Glenys Hocking-Davies at the March meeting. This was the proceeds from the November Coffee Morning and the Remembrance Concert. It rather neatly brought the grand total to date to a fabulous £23,000, an all-time record.

My grateful thanks go to the many volunteers in the town and the villages who gave their services to assist in raising such an amazing sum. The Poppy Appeal Awards on May 24 will be an opportunity for me to meet and recognise their contribution in this and past years. I will give details of the event next month.

**Branch
News
Round-up**

Coffee Morning A total of £210 was raised and the Chairman thanked Wendy Osborne and Les Moore for taking over the running of the event in the unavoidable absence of Glenys and Pat. Gratitude was also expressed for

the willing help given by the Army and Air Training Corps Cadets who gave their usual valuable assistance. The Chairman expressed the hope that more Members will come forward to offer help on future occasions.



Coffee served with a smile by the boys in khaki.

April Meeting The County Crime Prevention Officer, Henry Whatley, will speak about his job and offer some advice.

Branch Lunch in April Make a date now for Tuesday 29 April and enjoy good food and great company in the Angel Hotel. If you haven't been for some time, why not renew your acquaintance with this pleasant occasion. Wendy Osborne is in charge and she will gladly supply details on 01858 467636.

of their 'stand down' hours at her home where the family had made them very welcome. Of course being young and aircrew, high jinks were often the order of the day and they would occasionally 'pinch' some small items as souvenirs or mascots. In Geoffrey's case it was a pink pinafore belonging to Kathleen, which he apparently took on 'ops' and then later she would embroider the target names on it. Kathleen was able to put me in touch with her Goddaughter Judith, who just happened to be Geoffrey Appleyard's niece. Both ladies said they would be

very pleased to be at Coningsby for the dedication service, much to the RAF organisers' delight. Alas. I was unable to find any relatives of F/Sgt Darvill. The next request I received was, could I perhaps find someone in our No 106 Squadron Association who might remember the Appleyard crew or who might have flown from Coningsby during those days. A look through our membership list brought me to former W/O Norman Powell, who flew from there as F/Sgt Wop/Ag in Hampdens before becoming a POW after his aircraft was shot down in August 1941.

On the morning of the 31st October 2007, our small party of Mrs Kathleen Davies, Mrs Judith Brewer, her husband David, Mr Norman Powell, his son Ian and I arrived at RAE Coningsby's main gate, where we were escorted through security to the Sergeants Mess and a very warm welcome from a large group of senior NCOs which included the Mess CMC, W/O Henton and the station padre S/Ldr John Ellis.

Light refreshments were served in the lounge and an opportunity to learn a little about Coningsby's present day role and the Royal Air Force in general. Mess members took a keen interest in Mrs Davies's and Norman Powell's recollections and were excited to glance through F/Sgt



Kathleen and Judith Brewer are joined by their RAF hosts.

Appleyard's log book, a family treasure held in safe keeping by his niece Mrs Brewer, which bears the signature of W/C Guy P Gibson on several pages.

At 1200 hours our group, which included several members of the Mess, made its way to the newly designed and planted garden where a short service of dedication took place naming the garden 'The Darvill Garden of Remembrance' and dedicated to all NCO aircrew who had lost their lives operating from Coningsby. A small brass plaque is mounted at the base of the fountain positioned in the middle of the garden.

From there we moved into the newly refurbished and very spacious lounge/dining room where a large Brass Plaque is wall mounted and inscribed with the words 'Appleby Lounge'. Here again the Padre conducted a short dedication service.

After lunch we were driven over to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight to be very well received with a conducted tour and briefing of each aircraft. The Lancaster was on jacks, tail-wheel removed and interior floor panels removed for inspection and servicing so, sadly, no chance of going inside. However, many of the party were able to climb into the Dakota and go up to the front, to everyone's delight, for if ever there is another classic aircraft it must be the DC3 Dakota.

By 1500 hours, our visit was coming to an end and after coffee in the Sergeants Mess we left RAE Coningsby with some of us going to the nearby cemetery to pay respects at the graves of F/Sgt G Appleyard DFM, Sgt J M Darvill DFM, Sgt R L Beaddie, Sgt J W Grimwade RAAF and P/O R B Smith RCAF. The thanks of us all must go to those at RAF Coningsby who designed, planted and tend this living memorial to so many young men who died on operations from there.

A Memorable Day for Kathleen Davies

Kath's story of her friendship with an RAF bomber pilot appeared in *In Touch* in 2004. This extract introduces a wonderful sequel; it took place recently at RAF Coningsby.

The night of July 26th 1942 will live with me forever. I was awoken by a terrific noise and looked out of my bedroom window to see the sky was a brilliant red glow. My heart sank and somehow I seemed to know what I had so often feared. My parents and I dressed quickly and went to the scene only a mile away on the North Sea coast at Benington, near Boston. I didn't know then, but the crashed Lancaster bomber, loaded with bombs, had a mechanical failure.

The pilot, Flight Sergeant Geoffrey Appleyard, had done several sorties and 1000 bomber raids. He was wearing my pink pinafore, his air gunner carried his girlfriend's bra, and other crew members had their mascots.

The following account of Kath's visit last autumn to RAF Coningsby was written by Derek Thomas, Secretary and Historian of the 106 Squadron Association.

On the night 11 /12 July 1942, nine Avro Lancasters of 106 Squadron took off from RAF Coningsby for what was to be the squadron's biggest daylight raid to date. The target was the submarine works at Danzig, which involved a flight of over 1700 miles. The plan was to fly in three formations of three aircraft and, having made the attack, each aircraft was to return to base individually. The weather on departure was fair, but soon deteriorated rapidly with post flight debriefings reporting cloud base down to sea level near the Danish coast and with Wing Commander (Guy) Gibson reporting it was "exceptionally bad throughout". The formations were compelled to split up and each aircraft proceeded independently to the

target. Two aircraft were forced to return with technical problems and two others were unable to locate the target and so returned without making an attack. One other, W/C Gibson's, was too late arriving in the target area so bombed a ship, but results were not observed.

The remaining four aircraft, one of which was captained by F/Sgt Appleyard, who was on his 17th operation, (the first thirteen of which had been on twin-engine Avro Manchester aircraft) located their target and pressed home their attacks, bombing from between 3500 and 5000 feet. All four pilots reported seeing their bombs burst in the target area.

On the 17 July, the squadron operations Monthly Summary shows that "it was announced today that the DFM had been awarded to both F/Sgt G Appleyard and F/Sgt M J Darvill (his navigator) for their part in the recent Danzig raid".

Early on the morning of the 26 July, F/Sgt Appleyard took off in Lancaster R5683, in company with two other aircraft on what was to be his 18th and final operation. The target was Duisburg, but shortly after take off, the aircraft exploded in mid-air and crashed in Benington Marshes near Boston with the loss of all on board. The cause was never established. F/Sgt Geoffrey Appleyard DFM, F/Sgt Montague Joe Darvill DFM and three other crew members are buried in Coningsby cemetery, the two remaining were taken to their home towns for burial.

A short while ago I received a telephone call from a member of the Sergeants Mess at RAF Coningsby, telling me about a new 'Garden of Remembrance' in front of the Mess. It was soon to be dedicated by the station padre and did I know of any living relatives of a F/Sgt Appleyard or F/Sgt Darvill who perhaps might like to attend the service. After telephone calls to the many Appleyards listed in Geoffrey's home town which revealed nothing, I was given a tip-off which eventually led me to make contact with a very lively 85 years old lady now living in Market Harborough, named Kathleen Davies. It turned out that in 1942 Kathleen lived with her parents quite near Coningsby and had known Geoffrey Appleyard and his crew very well. Apparently they used to spend some



Formal Dinner and Dance Celebrating the 85th Anniversary of the formation of the Market Harborough Branch of the British Legion in 1923

The Guest of Honour on this special occasion was the President of the Leicestershire and Rutland Royal British Legion, Lt. Col. P. A. Roffey DL. We were delighted that guests from the Royal Naval Association, the Royal Air Forces Association and neighbouring RBL Branches were able to join us in our celebration.

Sixty-five guests enjoyed a first class dinner at the Market Harborough Golf Club and danced off the calories to an excellent musical selection provided by David Hawke.

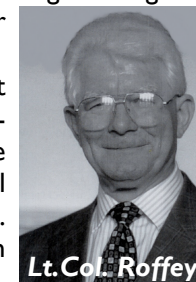
In his response to a warm welcome by the Chairman, Lt. Col. Roffey spoke of the continuing relevance of the Legion in its work with members of the armed forces and their families. He emphasised the importance of the Covenant and the need to remind the Government of its duty of care to those serving our country. Lt. Col. Roffey went on to praise the work and initiatives of our Branch.

The President, Brian Marshall, read the following message received from Buckingham Palace.

Please convey my warm thanks to the Members of the Market Harborough Branch of the Royal British Legion, together with their guests, for their kind message of loyal greetings, sent on the occasion of their eighty-fifth Anniversary Dinner which is being held tonight.

As your Patron, I much appreciate your thoughtfulness in writing as you did and, in return, send my best wishes to you all for a most memorable and enjoyable evening.

Elizabeth R.



Lt. Col. Roffey

Whenever I think of Tommy Grove, I think of Wilfred Owen's poem, and never a day goes by that I do not think of Tommy, and how much sweeter and fitting life would have been if only Tommy and me had died for our country.

I first met Tommy in April 1942 in Catterick Garrison. Although neither of us were Yorkshire men, in the way that only the Army can manage things, we were both posted as infantry recruits to the 2nd East Yorks, we were both 18 years old. The battalion was full of old sweats, Dunkirk evacuees, and full of war stories.

Both me and Tommy were very proud and nervous to be amongst such austere company. We knew nothing about soldiering, but we were desperate to prove what we could do, and we threw ourselves into learning to be soldiers.

We soon learned that the Battalion had been selected for a special operation, so we took our training very seriously indeed. Tommy was a big lad, and inevitably became the section Bren gunner. It was only natural that I became his number two, although chasing Tommy all over Salisbury Plain and Thetford carrying those bloody Bren magazine boxes was no joke, even for a fit young lad. We became a very, very good team, our gun always being the first into action, the first to get rounds down the range, and our stoppage drills were slick and efficient and second to none. The special Operation never happened, thank god, as this turned out to be the Dieppe raid in August 1942. The poor bloody Canadians carried the can for that one.

Just a Bit of Fun

A man and his wife are awakened, at 3 o'clock in the morning by a loud pounding on the door. The man gets up and goes to the door where a drunken stranger, standing in the pouring rain, is asking for a push. "Not a chance," says the husband, "it is 3 o'clock in the morning! He slams the door and returns to bed. "Who was that?" asked his wife.

The Finest Army in the World

Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori

How sweet and beautiful it is to die for one's country.

This is the second in the series of articles written exclusively, and anonymously, for In Touch.

So into 1943 we trained, first as individual sections, then platoons, then as a company, and finally as a battalion, with tanks and artillery in support. We started off dry firing, and progressed gradually to full live fire manoeuvres. We got fitter and slicker and Tommy and I were inseparable.

We managed Christmas leave in 1943 and both went to Leicester where I met his Mam and Dad in their little, spotless, terrace house. They were both so very proud of 'Their Tommy', who was by now Lance Corporal Grove. Tommy had two older brothers, both also in the Army, although both had managed to find fairly 'cushy billets' in the RASC, one serving in Burma and the other in Italy. Tommy's parents wanted to make this Christmas special, with at least one of their sons home, and they did.

That was, to this day, the best Christmas I ever

"Just some drunk asking for a push," he answers. "Did you help him?," she asks. "No, I did not, it's 3 o'clock in the morning and it's pouring out there!" "Well, you have a short memory," says his wife. "Can't you remember, about three months ago when we broke down, and those two chaps helped us? I think you should help him, and you should be ashamed of yourself!"

had. Tommy's folks made such a fuss of the pair of us. His parents called each other, 'Mam' and 'Dad', 'Mam' was always fussing about something, and 'Dad' was always in the way of 'Mam's' fussing, and so Dad would escape to his local, the two young 'heroes' in tow at every opportunity. The Leicester girls liked us, and we liked the Leicester girls. Life could not get much better.

After New Year the battalion moved to Scotland. And there we trained and trained some more. I remember sitting in a hole with Tommy, one freezing night. We had been living in the field for a week, practicing attack after attack. We were cold, hungry, bored and very tired. 'Could be worse', I said, 'Could be snowing', and inevitably within a minute the first very large snow flake landed on Tommy's nose. We just howled with laughter and couldn't stop. And, of course, that became our phrase, whenever things became cold, wet and unpleasant, or the Army just became a little too unbearable - 'Could be worse, could be snowing', and you just couldn't help but laugh out loud.

More serious training through the spring of 1944, a lot of loading onto assault craft from the big ships - not at all easy with full kit. And then assault after assault onto the Scottish beaches. We practiced and practiced. We knew each other, our weapons and our capabilities inside out. We were fitter than we had ever been. We knew the battalion would have a key role when the invasion came - and we wanted to make sure that we were as capable as any infantryman could be.

To be concluded

The man does as he is told, gets dressed, and goes out into the pouring rain. He calls out into the pitch darkness, "Hello, are you still there?" "Yes" comes back the answer. "Do you still need a push?," calls out the husband. "Yes, please!" comes the reply from the dark. "Where are you?" asks the husband. "Over here on the swing!" replies the drunk.