

Branch Member Drives to the Top

A prestigious competition has been won by Market Harborough Travel director and Legion Branch Member, Nigel Powner. After beating 80 other competitors, Nigel has won the National Coach Driver of the Year award. Our heartiest congratulations go to Nigel, who succeeded to the title following two grueling days of very severe competition from the country's top drivers.

Membership Directory Please note the following corrected telephone numbers. Change John Cox to 01858 434983, and Reg Tarry to 01858 492992. We welcome another new member:

01858 464615 Amos Mr S (Sydney) 12 Rectory Lane Little Bowden LE16 8AS.

Festival of Remembrance A leaflet should be enclosed with this issue giving details of the 2004 event at the de Montfort Hall. You are urged to make every effort to attend this entertaining - as well as moving - presentation. Not only will you have a wonderful night out, you'll be supporting the Poppy Appeal as well.

Visit to Arnhem John Cox asks if anyone would like to share the hotel room he has booked for the trip in September. The vacancy has occurred as John's companion is unable to go. For details ring John on MH 434983 before June 6.

Harborough Carnival The Branch will have an information stall at the Symington's Recreation Ground on June 12.

Cruising Down the Canal It is hoped to arrange a day trip on the canal from Market Harborough and further details will follow.

Welcome Visitors It was a great pleasure to see Gary Farnsworth at the May meeting and Glenys Hocking-Davies at the Lunch. Both are looking remarkably well, despite their respective health problems.



The Diary

Details of all Social Events are available from Joan McMillin on MH 462143. Joan welcomes your ideas for events, outings, etc.

SOME DATES TO KEEP FREE

- 27 May RBL Wigston Charity Night for Tigers Museum
- 29/31 May Annual Conference at Scarborough
- 6 June D-Day Anniversary at Leicester Cathedral
D-Day Commemoration at National Arboretum
- 10 July Beaumanor Hall Open-air concert (Tickets £17)
- 31 July Poppy Race Day at Doncaster (Tickets £20)
- 14 Aug Lutterworth RBL Band Concert St Mary's Church 19.30
- 6 Nov Branch Coffee Morning Harborough Theatre
- 8 Nov Gala Evening Harborough Theatre for Poppy Appeal
- 13 Nov Harboro' Band Remembrance Concert Baptist Church

The date of the next meeting is June 9

Branch meetings are held on the Second Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm in the downstairs Function Room, Conservative Club, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough.

The Branch Committee meets on the Thursday preceding the Branch Meeting at 7.30 pm in the upstairs Committee Room at the Conservative Club.

Current File



The Royal British Legion

Reg. Charity 219279

Market Harborough Branch

Founded in 1923



Branch Website
www.mktharborrbl.ukvet.net

In Touch

Issue 68 May 2004

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The Editor Writes

I think it can be safely claimed that the Market Harborough Branch of the Royal British Legion is riding high - and we can be excused if we give ourselves a few pats on the back. In this issue alone we report on record results from the Poppy Appeal and the Coffee Morning, a second Affiliation, with the Army Cadet Force, and a very successful dinner and dance. Add to this the recent achievements by Branch Members in various fields and, not least, the excellent attendances at Branch meetings. It's not "didn't we do well", but "aren't we *doing* well!"

Those present at the April gathering were privileged to hear an excellent talk by Edward Garnier, Harborough's Member of Parliament. He told of his family's long association with the Legion in Norfolk, beginning with his Grandfather, who became closely involved after the First World War. His Mother, who had served in the SOE, belonged to the Men's Section for many years until forced, much against her will, to join the ladies!

For some years, under the Armed Forces Parliamentary Scheme, MPs have had the chance to gain a valuable insight into military life. In the past decade, Mr Garnier has twice taken advantage of this opportunity. On each occasion he spent 28 days, over a period of a year, with the Army, the one branch of the armed forces in which he felt he would be least likely to suffer air or sea sickness. A forlorn hope, as it transpired, on a particularly hairy helicopter flight!

A lasting impression of his experiences for Mr Garnier is the superb quality of the young men and women serving in many, often dangerous, parts of the world. He spoke of the calm authority displayed by young NCOs he met in Yugoslavia, having learned their craft in Northern Ireland.

Mr Garnier paid a special tribute to the continuing importance of the role played by senior NCOs as the backbone of all three services. They guided young officers fresh from OTU and "sewed on buttons for the raw recruits"!

In conclusion, Mr Garnier said there was always much to celebrate in regard to both the Services and the RBL.

Mark Hudson thanked our guest, pointing out with regret that he had not mentioned the Submarine Service, and presented him with a copy of 'Memories Are Made of This' and an application form for Branch membership.

to Lazerett Hohemark, Oberusel, Germany, and subsequently to prisoners of war camps."

Postscript. Lieutenant Nikias shot down another Wellington aircraft that night after he had dealt with Jack's aircraft; but was himself severely wounded in the second encounter when his machine was repeatedly hit, so much so that he belly flopped it just off his own runway. In 1943 he was killed in action while in defence of the Fatherland against attack by the 8th USAAF. Jack served with the Warwickshire Fire Service after his demob. Now eighty-two, he and Joyce reside at Coventry.

Calling All Sportsmen and Women

There is County-wide interest in the introduction of group competitions in sports such as table skittles, darts, cribbage, dominoes, whist, pool, and long alley skittles. Tournaments would culminate in a County sports day. If you are interested in the possibility of taking part in Branch teams and would like more details, please contact Betty Ramsay on 01858 434923 as soon as possible.

Youth Affiliation - The Next Stage

The Youth Officer, Brian Marshall, announces that the presentation of the Affiliation Certificate to the Market Harborough Army Cadet Force Detachment will take place at 7.15pm on Thursday, 29th April, at the Headquarters in Coventry Road, opposite the Catholic Church. There will be a good turn-out from the Cadet Force and, as with the recent ATC ceremony, RBL County Officials have been invited. An invitation is also extended to all Members of the Branch, and Brian looks forward to your support on this important occasion.

The Membership Directory

Please make the following amendments to your copy.

New entries:

Bell Dr J M (John) (NB No telephone number)

235 Albany Road, Rooth, Cardiff, CF24 3NW

Cooper Mr T G (Terry) (NB No telephone number)

223 Bedford Road, Rushden, NN10 0SQ

Amend:

Ballard, Mr J W Telephone number: 01858 440214

Farnsworth, Mr G J Telephone number: 07732 762968

Swannack, Mr & Mrs Telephone number: 01858 464323

Post Code: LE16 9LW

The Anniversary Dinner

The Branch celebrated the eighty-first anniversary of its formation on Friday, 26th March, with an evening of dining and dancing at the Market Harborough Golf Club. The guests of honour, Councillor Ian Tooley, with husband John, and the Patron of Leicestershire and Rutland Royal British Legion, Lady Ann and Sir Timothy Brooks, were toasted by the Branch President, Peter Wilson.

Mr Wilson thanked the Guests for their unfailing support for the Branch and the aims of the Legion, especially at Remembrance time. "The trophies won by the branch are always on display at the Council Offices," he said.

Among those present were members of the Harborough Band and Mr Wilson had a special word of thanks for them. "They give their services willingly at the annual concert in aid of the Poppy Appeal and a bugler will always attend Remembrance ceremonies."

In response, Sir Timothy Brooks proposed a toast to the Royal British Legion.

Some eighty guests, including welcome visitors from Desborough and Ashley, sat down to a first class meal and danced to music by Dave Hawke. The congratulations and thanks of the Branch go to Joan McMillin, Mary Symond and Tom Ashmore, whose organisation and hard work resulted in a hugely successful evening.

Table Round-up

How many did you recognise?

1. Keith Bowley, Claire Walling, Stephen and Julie Simpson, Peter Walling, Josie Bowley.
2. Mary Symon, George Fleming, Francis and John Swannack.
3. Sir Michael Carleton-Smith, Lady Penny Francis.
4. Peggy Kinsey, Ken Stimpson.
5. Joyce and Stan Snow.
6. Janet and Les Sewell.
7. Tom and Joan Ashmore.
8. Bernard and Con Halsall.
9. Valerie Smith and John Standish.
10. Bob and Pam England, Joan McMillin.
11. John Wells, Betty Ramsay, Tony Johnson, Vida Edwards, David and Margaret Whitehead, John Cox, Helen West.

Kriegie Muckers: Tales of My POW Companions *Tony Johnson*

Flight Sergeant John AKEHURST DFM, aka Jake, an air gunner, was resting from 138 Squadron and an instructor at 11 OTU when, on the night of the 12/13th September 1942, his Wellington was shot down targeting Bremen. Ever ready to escape from his captors his first attempt was to take a flying kick at his Luftwaffe escort's behind and jump off a moving train. He was soon recaptured and severely dealt with, being one of the first Air Force prisoners of war to be court martialled by the Luftwaffe. He had been confined in Stalag 8B and Stalag-Luft 3 (from which the Great Escape was made in 1944) before he walked into our barrack block at Stalag-Luft VI. In February 1945, John, escaped along with me and Sergeant Leslie Mitchell, but we became parted while evading the guards. He and Sergeant Leslie Mitchell were at large for three days, before being recaptured, and they finished their captivity at Stalag-Luft I before being 'liberated' by the Red Army in May. John became a publican after his demob from the RAF and, at the age of eighty-five years, he is alive and well residing at Peacehaven, Sussex.

Flight Sergeant Dennis John PAUL, DFM, who prefers to be called Jack, was resting from 37 Squadron, and an instructor at 15 OTU at Harwell, Berkshire. He was shot down on the thousand bomber raid to Cologne on the 30th May 1942, and I joined him at Stalag-Luft I in April 1943. We became kriegie muckers (kriegie being the abbreviation from kriegsgefangen, or prisoner of war. Jack takes up the story:

"Returning and having bombed and devastated Kohn during the early hours of Saturday, 31 May 1942, we were suddenly attacked by a Me 110 flown by Lieutenant Nikias, with Unteroffizier Wenning as radar operator. I caused the Me 110 to overshoot allowing my front gunner to open fire - with negative result. My aircraft was badly damaged by cannon/machine gun fire; rear turret apparently u/s, together with the wireless set and intercom. Second and third attacks set the port engine and wing on fire and the inside of the aircraft became a shambles. I banged on the dividing bulkhead door to attract the navigator, and told him to release the front gunner and bail out. Disconnected my

intercom and oxygen plugs and promptly lost consciousness. The Me 110 must have attacked again, and only the rear gunner managed to bail out. Unteroffizier Wenning stated in his debriefing report that my aircraft blew up just above a house in the Belgium village of Montigny-le-Tilleul. I regained consciousness trapped in burning roof debris struck by part of my aircraft, the major part of which burned out on the opposite side of the road - and in it were the three other members of my crew.

"A door near me was suddenly opened and an old man, white haired, moustache and clad in a white nightshirt, stood illuminated by the flickering flames. In my confused state I thought he was St Peter at the back door of heaven. I called out 'help' but the old man, the owner of the house, turned and disappeared - scared stiff I guess! Pulling free, I crawled after him into a small front garden. I then passed out again. I came to being cradled in the arms of a woman speaking perfect English (she came from Wiltshire and was married to a Belgian engineer). 'I'm home' I said, only to hear her say 'Be careful, the Germans will be here soon'. I lost consciousness again.

"I regained consciousness lying on a stretcher and being carried to an ambulance. Oblivion again: to come to lying in the corridor of the Hospital de Charleroi in the city of Charleroi. In the operating theatre all Germans were excluded by a diminutive authoritarian consultant, Doctor Louise Biernaux who, in front of all the theatre staff, gave me her prescription pad and, in English, said 'Would you like to send a message home?' (That took real courage on her part, and Joyce eventually received a photostat copy of the message). On that Sunday afternoon many Belgian people queued to enter my room, and I collected two chests filled with all kinds of liquor and food. The English speaking woman, Madame Ruby Dondeyne, came to me with a note written on a cigarette paper from my rear gunner that said, 'Baled out - am in good hands. Bunny' He had landed in an apple tree (thereafter called 'The Tommy Tree'), ran up the road to a cemetery and hid among the tombstones, later to be collected by members of the Resistance and, after thirteen weeks evading capture, he reached England via Belgium, France Spain and Gibraltar.

"My most serious injuries comprised four fractures to my right leg, which were set by a Doctor Soeur, and three days later I was transferred to a Luftwaffe Hospital in Brussels, where I remained until the 1st July 1942. I was then moved

The Annual Conference *Betty Ramsay Reports*

Mark Hudson will be the Branch Delegate at the Annual Conference to be held in Scarborough on 29th - 31st May. He will be asked to vote on a variety of Motions put forward by Branches in this country and abroad.

There are nine Charter Motions and the first would request the National Council to consider a new class of Membership - "Member" for Ordinary and Associate Members - the beneficiaries of the Legion would remain the same (i.e. a welfare matters). If this Motion fails, as indeed it did last year, a further Motion calls for the change of name from Ordinary Member to Full Member.

There are also Motions which would allow the Bevin Boys and Land Army Girls to become Ordinary Members, and thereby Beneficiaries of the Legion.

Under Charter Motion 4, the Future Structure Group proposes changes to the Royal Charter and Rules to bring the Legion into line with a new code of best practice for UK charities recommended by the Clarity Commission and Financial Reporting Council. This would mean that the National Council would be replaced by a new trustee body (Board of Trustees) and all that this entails.

Many of the Motions, if passed, are requests to the National Council to make representations to the HM Government. For example under the "Pensions and Disability" Section, to disregard all War Pensions and War Widows Pensions in Pension Credit calculations and to retain the current standard of proof applied to War Pensions awards, that of reasonable doubt as opposed to balance of probabilities.

There are a further 20 Motions under Sections such as "Remembrance, Fundraising & Publicity" and "Welfare & Resettlement" for our consideration and Mark to vote on in May.

I have all the paperwork and will give more details at the May Branch Meeting and in the next In Touch. In the meantime, please contact Mark or I if we can be of help.



Oh! What a Night it Was!



Honoured guests line up with their hosts for the formal photographs at the Branch eighty-first anniversary celebration dinner and dance on Friday, 26th March, at the Market Harborough Golf Club.

From the right are Branch President Peter Wilson, Vice-Chairman Brian Marshall, John and Councillor Jan Tooley, Branch Chairman Mark Hudson, Lady Ann and Sir Timothy Brooks, the Patron of Leicestershire and Rutland Royal British Legion, and the Branch and County Standard Bearer, George Fleming.

How many happy diners do you recognise in this selection of photographs? The full story is on page 9, along with a key to the pictures.





Dear Editor

I am very pleased to receive a copy of *In Touch* each month which I read and pass on to other members of my branch. My chairman recently lent me a copy of your book containing excerpts from *In Touch*.

In your book there was an article about the WRNS, their history and achievements. It came to my mind that there was one omission from the story, that is, the work done by the WRNS during the war in support of ULTRA and the breaking of the German codes. Both of the stations operating the "Bombe" code-breaking machines at Stanmore and Eastcote were operated solely by Wrens.

Some time ago my wife and I went on an outing to Bletchley Park with a guided tour which proved very interesting. Our visit was brought to life by having a lady in our party who had been a Wren during the war working on the Bombe code-breaking machines at Eastcote. She actually found a photograph of herself in the displays.

In our Christmas Newsletter to friends and family we men-

tioned our outing. This promptly brought a reply from my cousin, who lives in the New Forest, from which I quote:

"I was also a Wren during the War, operating the bombe code-breaking machine at Eastcote, and could have told you about it if I'd known you'd be interested. The codes concerning air and land manoeuvres in and over Germany were not so difficult, but once we got the enormous machinery dealing with ships and submarining became more complicated.

"Of course, it was all very secret and never mentioned to anyone (in my case, even my fiance, and later husband) until it came out when the ban was lifted after 30 years. Churchill is said to have spoken of us Wrens as 'his chickens who did not cluck'. Quite a compliment."

I hope that this may be of some interest to you. I would only add, as an ex 'erk' myself and to stop the matelots getting too bigheaded, that many technicians for ULTRA were RAF.

Yours sincerely,
Ian D. O. Richardson (Hon Sec Wigston RBL)

A famous soprano named Lottie
Ate a meal of baked beans and
biscotti.

Then, I'm sad to impart,
Her intestines took part
In her duet with poor Pavarotti.

One For the Ladies

"I met my husband at a dance
and he was the best looking man
on the floor - I can see him now,
lying there."

Just for Fun



Tony Husband
"Oh no, Arthur, not the Michael
Flatley impersonation."
Spotted in *The Spectator*.

"Why ever did they build the rail-
way station three miles from the
village?" asked the traveller.
"Ah," says O'Reilly, "they must
have thought it would be a good
thing to have it near the trains."

Prince Edward and Sophie were hav-
ing a night in, and Edward made a pot
of tea. "Where is the tea strainer" he
asked. "You know very well it's his
night off", said Sophie.

"inscribed upon panels of metal which could never fade" and they were of "those who have fallen". Although his grand ideas for the library building did not materialise, at least the idea of recording the names of all those who had served in the War was adopted at the Hospital. True, the panels are not of metal but of stone (marble?) and surely he would have approved the imposing setting they were given in a colonnaded portico forming the entrance to the new wing.

Of : lintel supported by the two front columns is a bronze plaque with the inscription,

THIS EXTENSION IS ERECTED BY PUBLIC SUB-
SCRIPTION IN COMMEMORATION OF THE
SERVICES OF THE MEN OF THE URBAN DIS-
TRICT OF MARKET HARBOROUGH IN THE
GREAT WAR 1914 -1918

Above the doors leading into the hospital is another plaque with the inscription

THE NAMES INSCRIBED ON THESE PANELS
ARE A RECORD OF THE MEN FROM THE UR-
BAN DISTRICT WHO SERVED IN THE GREAT
WAR. THE NAMES OF THOSE WHO GAVE THEIR
LIVES ARE INDICATED BY A CROSS

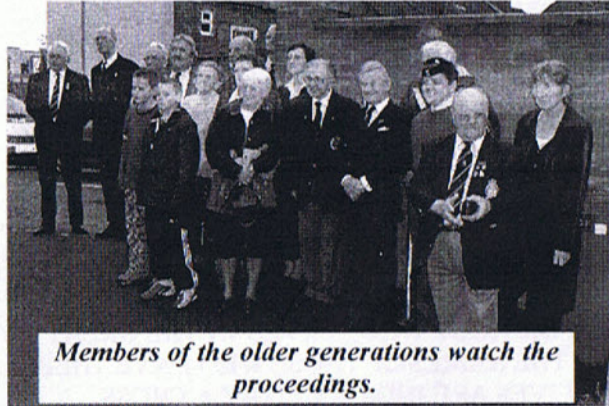
Each panel is engraved with names arranged in four columns in alphabetical order, just surname and initials with no rank or other Service detail. A cross, coloured red is engraved to the left of the name of a man who gave his life. There are 254 of these and the names correspond with those on the plaques on the Memorial cross in the Town Square. There are a total of 1655 names on the four panels.

To be concluded.

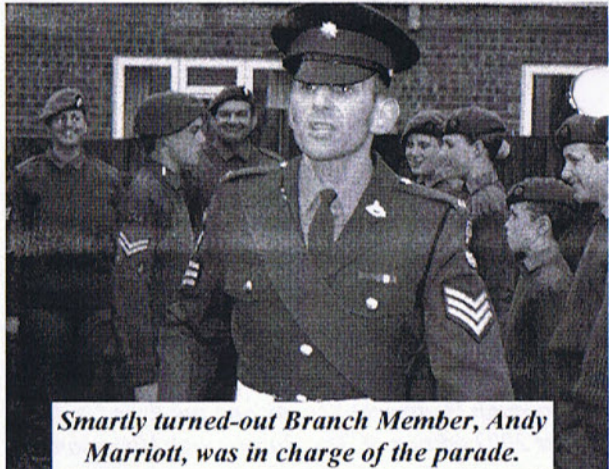
(This paper was submitted by Tom Ashmore to the Market Harborough Historical Society and published in the September 2002 edition of 'The Harborough Historian'.)



The Cadets are inspected by Con Halsall, representing the Legion Ladies.



Members of the older generations watch the proceedings.



Smartly turned-out Branch Member, Andy Marriott, was in charge of the parade.

Forging Links

Legion Veterans join Young Cadets in Affiliation Ceremony

A second link was forged on 29th April between the Harborough Branch of the Royal British Legion and local cadet units.

Time it was the turn of the Army Cadet Force and Staff Sergeant Andrew Marriott, Market Harborough



Young and not-so-young Standard Bearers attend the signing ceremony with Staff Sergeant Marriott and Mark Hudson.

Detachment Commander, and Legion Branch Chairman, Mark Hudson, signed the Affiliation Certificates. British Legion representatives then inspected the smartly turned-out young soldiers on parade at the Detachment's HQ.

Brian Marshall, the County Youth Officer, congratulated the Detachment and thanked them for the help willingly given, particularly at Poppy Appeal time. "As you can see this evening," he said, "Legion members are growing old and we look to the younger generations to follow on."



Watched by Mark Hudson and Andy Marriott, old soldier, Bernard Halsall, casts an experienced eye over young cadets.

A comparatively youthful Staff Sergeant Marriott replied, "As a member of the Market Harborough Branch myself, I object to being described as old!" He promised that the detachment would continue to work closely with the British Legion at every opportunity.

Mark Hudson offered further congratulations, and the Cadets served refreshments, bringing a pleasant evening to a close.



A smart line-up of Cadets awaiting inspection.