

Other News

Cost of RBL Membership. To explain why Members' contributions must be increased considerably and urgently, HQ have produced a breakdown of costs and income of the "business" of running the membership aspect of the Legion. If you wish to see a copy ring George Fleming (MH 462711) or Betty West (MH 434923)

Skittles Evening. Despite the wrong venue having been given in February *In Touch, Too*, twelve members and friends arrived at the Old Crown Inn in Fleckney on 18th February where they had a thoroughly enjoyable evening.

Mozambique. At the March Branch Meeting John Liddell gave an account of how local Branches of Rotary International have been fund-raising for life-saving "Aquaboxes". Following a suggestion from another member that those present might wish to make personal donations, a magnificent total of £87 was collected.

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For Your Diary

- 24 Mar Branch Birthday Supper-
7.30pm The Bull at Clipston*
- 25 Mar Musical evening - See bottom p16
- 29 Mar Branch Committee Meeting
- 4 Apr Branch Lunch - Langton Arms,
Church Langton*
- 12 Apr Branch Meeting and "Medals". A
return visit by Mr George Gamble.
- 26 Apr Branch Committee Meeting
- 10 May Branch Meeting + Buffet
- 25 May Coach trip to Winchester & Army Air
Corps Museum (seats still available)*
- 23 Sep 5 day Holiday in Normandy*

* For details or to book please contact Bob
England (MH 464288).

Meetings

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

Following the business part of the next meeting, on 12th April, there will be by popular demand a welcome return of Mr George Gamble with more stories based on his extensive medals collection. Don't miss it!



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The Royal British Legion Market Harborough Branch Founded in 1923

Over
75
Years of Caring


In Touch

Issue 24

March, 2000.

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Branch Internet Web site at
<http://www.mktharbrorbl.ukvet.net>

Editorial

This morning my Lady Wife welcomed me with "It's another Friday", and my reply, as ever was "Tempus fugit". Time flies.

On 20th March the Branch celebrates its 77th birthday. Is it really possible that it is two years since that memorable 75th Anniversary Band Concert? This issue of *In Touch* is No. 24, another milestone on Time's Highway. Here in *In Touch House* Editorial and Production staff celebrate four years of praying for copy, inspiration and that each issue appeared in the month named on the cover!

The theme running through this Issue is "Communication" and providing information. "Messages" covers such diverse examples of Information Technology (I T) as smoke signals and e-mail, and Kenneth West, in another of his amusing tales, solves a technical problem in telephonic communication. Charlie James wrote in his note-book to communicate his memories and the advertisers are communicating information about their goods and services.

"The First Four Years" is about the particular Information medium, *In Touch*, set up as a means of communicating with all members. It has endeavoured to provide news of Branch activities, an insight of some of the interests and experiences of those who have provided stories and to communicate a sense of belonging to a group with a purpose. *In Touch Too* was introduced in August, 1997 to provide more frequent information to members. To allow the Branch to communicate to a wider audience, *In Touch* is now circulated to some other Branches and interested groups and individuals and through its Web-site the Branch is now communicating to a growing world-wide audience.

Well, as I said at the beginning - Tempus Fugit - so I must hurry to get this to Production Department!!



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The First Four Years

by Tom Ashmore

The following message appeared on the back page of the first issue of ***In Touch***.

Dear Member,

If you were at the branch meeting on 13th June, you will know that this Newsletter is the result of a discussion in which I and others strongly expressed the opinion that all members should be kept in touch with Branch affairs whether or not they attend monthly meetings. Although this view was not unanimously supported, it was agreed that I should produce a Newsletter for a 12 months trial period, provided that it did not require the use of Branch funds. Knowing that I can rely on the support and encouragement of many members, including, I hope, you, I willingly accept the role of Editor and Publisher.

Tom Ashmore

Much has happened since I wrote that and now, 24 issues later, I want to say both to those who were members then and to those who have become readers of this publication since, thank you for the "support and encouragement" given to me and to the Editors who succeeded me.

Let us look back at a few snippets from these pages.

From Issue 1, June, 1996,

In agreement with the Market Harborough Millennium Committee, the Branch will be responsible for events during the week to 12th November, 2000. This may seem a long way into the future.....

Members are now busy on projects for our week. See p3 of this Issue for latest news.

The National Poppy Appeal Fund (during the year to) 31st May (raised) £16,000,000. The Branch raised over £9000.....

The 1999-2000 Branch total to date is over £11,500.

As at the end of April, 1996 the Branch had 70 members of whom 5 were Associates.

At 7/1/2000 there were 101 members including 20 Associates.

The Entertainments committee are to be congratulated on the success of the outing on 20th April (to York)....

Now, every Issue carries a report of a recent social event and notices of forthcoming ones.

Issue 8 - July 1997 was a "Special Edition", with extra pages to carry the story and pictures of the Ceremonies on 8th June - the Dedication of the new Branch Standard and Twinning with American Legion Post #587 of Toledo, Ohio. *"The Royal Navy's Involvement in the Zulu War"* by Bill Cotton and *"Free Trip to France"* by Kenneth J West were also included.

In Issue 14 of July 1998 we find *"Youth at the Menin Gate"*, John Standish's account of the ACF Cadets' visit to Ypres with Lutterworth RBL. Fred Reed's Regiment's Anniversary is *"The Glorious First of June"*, but was not for him in 1945 in Burma. *"Summer"*, one of Jack Stimpson's poems of the Seasons was in peaceful contrast.

Issue 16 in November, 1998 includes *"1997/98- An Active Year"*, a summary of many events and achievements during the Branch 75th Anniversary Year, a report on the AGM and election results and *"Company Car"*, another of Hotspur's amusing tales. *For Your Diary* has reminders about the Civic Reception and Légion d'Honneur presentation, the Local Radio interview and the Xmas Lunch.

A year later, Issue 22 again reviewed the previous 12 months, included *"The Greatest Raid of All"*, the epic St Nazaire assault recalled by shore-based contemporary, Dick Fulford and a farewell Editorial as Bernard Halsall put down his quill pen. Now new Editor Ray Tyler sends Production Department (me) the text on disc and after a bit of "cut and paste", there is another issue to keep you In Touch. Ω

We Will Remember Them

Charles Gawler

died on 29th February.

He was a member of the Branch since 1994 and previously of Radcliffe-on-Trent Branch. Although he did not attend meetings he was one of the team of In Touch distributors. A career soldier he served with the RAOC and reached the rank of RSM.

We extend our deepest sympathy to his wife and family

The Branch was represented at his funeral by Chairman & Vice Chairman.

John Sutton

died on 1st March after a long illness.

The Branch owes John a great debt of gratitude for his energy, enthusiasm and determination.

When he became Honorary Secretary he set about revitalising the Branch and it is from his efforts that the subsequent growth and success of the Branch developed.

To Mavis, his widow, we offer our most sincere sympathy.

The Standard and 10 Members were present to Honour him at his funeral.

March Branch Meeting

New Members. A warm welcome was given to Miss Caroline Windsor and Mr Charles Thorold. They will be presented with their badges once their names have been registered by HQ.

Carnival 2000. The recently confirmed date for the Carnival is the same as that of our next Coffee Morning. It was announced that your Committee had decided that the Branch would not have a Stall this year.

Millennium Update. The 400 crosses for the Garden of Remembrance have been made and are being painted & overhaul of the Memorial Gates is in hand. The WW2 volume of the Book of Remembrance was displayed at the Meeting. Enquiries are already being received for tickets for the Band Concert (on 11th November)!

Birthday Competition. 20 items bearing dates mostly connected with the Branch, had to be identified from a list of clues. Joan Ashmore won 1st prize but as this was a bottle of wine from her own cupboard she handed it back! It eventually went to Betty Jeacock. Tony Johnson got the other prize - a box of dates!!

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Sending Messages

by Ray Tyler.

In the last issue of "In Touch" we gave extracts from an e-mail from East Timor one of the many messages which our on-line members receive and send world wide as a matter of course. But what happened before this invention?

We all know about smoke signals, pigeon post and the Greek messenger's 26 mile run about 500 BC culminating in the Modern Marathon. Messages were sent by the Romans on scrolls about 1 AD, but who read them? Bonfires took less than 20 minutes to travel along the English coast in 1588, warning of the threat of the Spanish Armada.

The first mail, used by the public, was started in France in the 1400s, and travelled by horse and stage-coach. We followed soon afterwards. It was not until about 1800 that mail was sent by train. In 1840 the penny post was started with the famous penny black stamp, the first adhesive stamp.

The telegraph, using Morse code, was used from 1835 and used extensively in Wartime. In 1866 a cable was laid under the Atlantic Ocean to send messages to and from America in minutes rather than about 10 days by sea mail. And of course there were telegram messages.

Alexander Bell invented the telephone in 1876, but could he have foreseen international Direct-Dialling, of phone messages being transmitted along fibres of glass or via satellites in space?

E-mail was used from 1971 to send messages from computer to computer at Universities and

commercial and military offices but has only been more widely available since 1990 and the development of the Internet, that now vast world-wide system of interconnected computers. But even this sophisticated method of sending messages uses the same two basic principles as the original telegraph: a means of connecting sender to receiver and converting the message into and from a code (which Morse would have seen as a development of his).

The first computer installed at a University was in 1948 but personal computers did not become available until 1981. I wonder how the 1948 or the 1981 computers would compare with the modern Lap-top PC? Ω

The Editor 487 and 488.

At our last meeting I was given a piece of paper with the numbers 487 and 488 written on it. I tried to understand just what they were all about. Not the lottery. Then it dawned - they were Channel 4 Teletex numbers. This morning I spent an interesting hour with 487 and 488.

488 was a list of 30 pages of Service Clubs and their meetings. 487 could be of more interest to you. It was called "Service Pals" and had about 100 requests for fellow service colleagues to get in touch. Maybe some one is looking for you, or you might like to contact an ex Service Pal, with whom you have lost contact. If so, try 487.

There are, of course, other ways of trying to trace old comrades. Legion Magazine has its "Lost Trails" section, as does the RBL web-site. Our own web-site offers the same facility and Mark Hudson will be happy to include your request. Ring him on MH 469527. Ω

A Tinkle on the Line.

By Kenneth West

The winter of 1944-45 in Holland is still known as the "Hard Winter" and we of the 49th Infantry Division whose job it was to defend and hold the Nijmegen Bridge over the River Waal, recall the bitter weather and equally bitter fighting to repulse numerous attempts by the Germans to reach this vital bridge. A fierce battle at Zetten petered out after a 3 day blizzard and our battalion, 11 RSF, took over from the battered Leicesters who had held out despite ferocious attacks from Paras and S.S. troops. Our farthest section was in an isolated house now reduced to rubble, about 1/2 mile from 'A' Coy HQ.

Contact was by field telephone which was barely audible (strength 2-3 of 5). After about 3 days the line went dead about 9 o'clock in the evening, and as duty linesman it was my job to re-establish communications. I was allocated an escort of a young lad of about 18 years who had just joined the Coy, and subsequently his first excursion into the wild unknown. With the experience of my 22 years, I impressed upon him the necessity to have 'one up the spout', and to take the single signal wire in one hand and let it run through his hand as he walked about 10 yards to my rear. The only way to trace a line in the dark was to follow it by hand as it was looped along the hedgerow and fences by the side of the country road. On reaching the break, usually done by shell or mortar fire, the second man held the line as the linesman searched for the other end.

We were just over halfway to the section when the line came to an abrupt end. No blackened

shell hole, just a single set of footprints in the knee deep snow leading from the German lines and across the road and fields to the outskirts of Zetten. With the youngster in a covering firing position, I reported the break to Coy HQ which was strength 5. Tying the single wire around his wrist, I went in search of the other end to contact the section. They were still very faint so I said I would make the joint and come to them and change their handset, checking the line as we went.



The handset was duly swapped, but there was no improvement.

Army telephones were then earth return, so I checked the earth pin and everything seemed OK. By now we

had been exposed to the elements for about 1½ hours and the bladder was calling for relief, This I did in the proximity of the earth pin before returning to the cellar. The Corporal was all smiles and asked what magic I had performed as the signals were now almost full strength. When I told him of my simple remedy he scarcely believed me but showed his thanks with a tot of rum and a mug of hot char. We left them with the instructions that if they wanted to keep perfect contact, just give the line a tinkle from time to time.

On return to "A" Coy HQ I suggested that the forward section be kept adequately supplied with T.S.M. for their brew-ups, though I didn't envy the bloke who would eventually remove the earth pin! Ω

Coffee Morning Success.

Congratulations to the Social Group and all the helpers at the last Coffee Morning at the Harborough Theatre. The final profit was £276.15 well over our previous best of about £240.



There was also a display of the progress on the Book of Remembrance Millennium Project and this aroused much interest. The occasion was most enjoyable and so well supported both by Branch members and by the public. Well done but let's see how well we can do at the next coffee morning on Saturday, 10th June. Ω

Takings

Coffee	£85.83
Raffle	£69.10
Tombola	£73.00
Books	£10.71
Bric-a-brac	£27.30
Cakes	£41.30
	<u>£307.24</u>
Less	
Expenses	£31.09
Profit	<u>£276.15</u>

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To The Front Line - 1917.

Continuing the life story of the late Charles James, Légion d'Honneur. Having been home on leave with the bottle of whiskey for his Father, Charlie James was sent to France in January, 1917. He remembers,

"Having entered Le Havre after a long wait of several hours I felt unwell. I thought this was caused by the sea, but I was sent to the Medical Officer who decided I had got Mumps After weeks in isolation and a short time in convalescent camp, I volunteered to tidy up some British Graves which were about a mile away. Whilst marching to the cemetery we passed a French family with a donkey. I could not resist imitating the call of the donkey, which caused the donkey to stop and caused me trouble. That is how I got my nickname "HEE-HAW".

"At Honfleur I was sent for a medical and promptly sent to the Dental Board, as I had some bad teeth. Whilst having extractions I discovered that Mr. Coltman, the dentist from Harborough, was also working there..... I was then sent to the Army Veterinary Corps to help with wounded horses and mules. I did not enjoy working there. It is a good job that today's army is mechanised. I saw a sergeant whom I thought I knew. He was Sgt. Stimpsons who taught me at Stanground. He took a friend and me to see Bombardier Billy Wells box which we thoroughly enjoyed."

"Later I was transferred to the wagon line of the 33rd Division at Dickebusche. Two of us were given a small tent which we pitched. Jerry came over and bombed the horse lines. My mate was

hit in the arm. I took him to a first aid post, but never saw him again".

"I was next sent to Potigije to take ammo to the guns using pack mules. Each Mule carried ten shells in a pannier. Eighteen pounder ammunition was like a big rifle bullet, shell and charge joined together.....After another break a Gunner named Pepper and I were sent



Gunner Charles James
June 1916.

to prepare for an advanced ammunition dump. After preparing our own camp and the base of the dump, ammunition arrived daily, often after dark, and we never knew when it would come or go. Nearby was an observation balloon which Jerry planes regularly tried to shoot down but were always chased away by our planes. We were often shelled with shrapnel which we called 'coal boxes' because of the black smoke. One day my mate was hit by shrapnel. We phoned and got an ambulance for him. I never saw him again".

In December 1917 I was sent, with 8 other Gunners, to work with the Royal Engineers to help making shelters. The R.E's., had a rum issue which we normally did not have but we were included whilst we were working with them. A young officer issued the rum from a dugout. When I took my small cup back he noticed I had a very bad cold (which I had had for some weeks). He said 'you could do with some more of this'. I asked How do I get it? He sent me round the corner and gave me about 5 tots. It did not cure the cold but I slept very well that night".

"One of our jobs was to take timber to where the R.Es., were making the shelters. Shells often came over causing many casualties. I hated to hear the Whiz-Bangs, Jerry's smallest shells, falling short and making a rushing noise seemed to be coming straight for you".

"One night I was separated from my mates as a party of officers came past. Just after they passed there was a Woof-Thud. I found myself sitting on a tree stump. I checked that I had not been injured. It was then that I noticed all the Officers were lying on the ground with no movement. An ambulance came and took them away.When I got back to my billet my mates asked where had I been? I said I had waited for the officers to go by. They all thought that I had had it".

Ω

More to come. Editor

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | America entered the War |
| 9 | Russian Revolution followed by an Armistice with Germany |
| 1 | First large-scale use of Tanks |
| 7 | Paschendael Ridge captured |
| | Gen. Allenby takes Jerusalem |