

Meetings & Other News

GROWTH

Welcome to all those who have recently joined the Branch. Your arrival brings the membership to 86 compared to 70 at the end of April this year. If you would like copies of previous issues of the Newsletter, please contact the Editor.

REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY

Branch members were well represented in the parade, which was under the direction of our Parade Marshall, RSM Harrald. Led by the ATC Band, our and other ex-service groups headed by their Standards, were followed by contingents from the ACF, ATC, other youth organisations and civilian services. The march to and from the church was quite impressive. After the church service the parade was joined in the Town Square by civic dignitaries and others for the Wreath Laying at the Memorial.

11-11-11

It was encouraging to see that the Royal British Legion call to observe the 2-minutes silence was so well respected by the local community. Armistice Day was also the occasion for the laying of wreaths on the World War II Memorial Gates and at the new memorial in Welland Park.

REMINDERS

If you have not yet paid your **Subscription**, please do so promptly.

The Pilgrimages Department video can be borrowed for viewing at home. Contact the Editor.

Annual General Meeting

8pm Thursday, 28th November

To those members for whom this is the first notification of the date, we apologise for not mentioning it in the last Issue. Although the meeting may be only a couple of days away, we do hope that you will be able to attend. Incidentally, it will be held in the ground floor function room in the Conservative Club building, so the stairs will not be a problem.

The AGM is your opportunity to influence the way your Branch is run, either by being elected to Office yourself or by helping to elect those whom you regard as suitable. If you wish to nominate someone for an Office, you must get that person's approval.

Meetings

Regular meetings are held on the **Second Thursday** of each month at 8 pm in the Conservative Club Building, Fairfield Road, Market Harborough, normally in the upstairs lounge (there is no lift).

The meeting on **12th December** will be followed by a Buffet so making this a pre-Christmas social occasion. We hope to see you there.



Registered Charity No. 219279

In Touch

The Newsletter

for

Members

of

Market Harborough Branch

The Royal British Legion

Issue No. 4

November 1996

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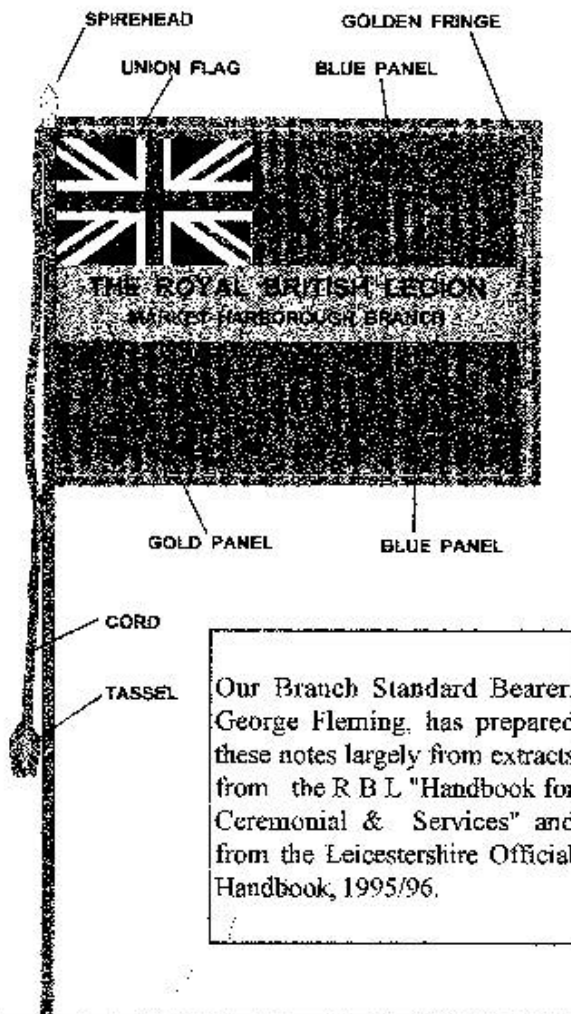
Editorial

Much has happened since the last Issue - a wonderfully successful Poppy Appeal, Remembrance Sunday, the Festival of Remembrance at the de Montfort Hall, rehearsals and preparations by our Standard Bearers, midnight oil burning by our Treasurer and Secretary preparing for the AGM and memorable holidays for at least two of our members. These pages put you *In Touch* with all these matters.

Also, since the September edition, our President, Peter Wilson, has been ill. Happily, he is much better, and, indeed was able to take on some of his Poppy Appeal Organiser duties (but see page 3). However, he is still awaiting necessary surgery. Our best wishes, Peter. Let us hope the medics quickly get you back to full health and strength.

As this will be the last Newsletter of the year, I would like to thank you for the support and encouragement you have given me since this venture started. May you and yours enjoy a

**HAPPY
CHRISTMAS
&
A PEACEFUL
NEW YEAR**



Donations buy New Standard

A most generous £500 from Mrs M Davis & £25 from the Carnival Committee have been received specifically for the Standard, fully covering its cost and that of the accessories.

The standard cannot be used or displayed until it has been dedicated. It is proposed that this should be done during the Branch 75th Anniversary celebrations, next Spring.

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The Royal British Legion Branch Standard

BACKGROUND

The Standard, originally designed in 1923 by Colonel E. C. Heath, the first General Secretary of the Legion, was to be looked upon as the rallying point of a Branch and as a constant symbolic reminder to Members of the Legion's motto "Service not Self".

SIGNIFICANCE

Immediately after the dedication of a standard, the following declaration is made,

I would remind you that these standards are no mere flags of silk or bunting, but rather are they sacred emblems which have been solemnly dedicated in ample form.

Beneath their folds all poor and distressed brothers-in-arms may seek solace and relief from their afflictions.

Our standards are all of like design as emblems of brotherhood and equality.

Many have lain in the sacred dust of the battlefields of the Empire.

WHAT THE DESIGN REPRESENTS

Each element of the standard symbolises some aspect of the spirit of the Legion.

The **Spirehead** should remind us of the pillar of flames or the finger pointing to Heaven in the same way as the spire of a church.

The **Union Flag** symbolises the great epics of chivalry in British history in the crosses of

St. George, the Patron of Fighting Men

St. Andrew, a disciple of Christ

St. Patrick, the first Christian missionary to this country.

The **Blue Panel** is to remind us of the gallant souls who have passed on beneath the deep water or in the air.

The **Gold Panel** represents those shining warriors who sanctified by service, have passed unsullied to the Throne of Grace.

The **Tassels** remind us of the beginning and end of life and the **Cord**, the golden line along which all good Legionnaires should pass during their brief sojourn on earth.

The **Golden Fringe** is the frame within which we are bound in one great Brotherhood.

Together, these elements of the design of our standard are meant to represent the ideal of Service to GOD, QUEEN and COUNTRY.

PENNANTS, HONOURS AND DRAPES

There are various additions which can be made to a Branch Standard.

50th Anniversary Pennant for a Branch which has been in continuous existence for 50 years.

The formation and anniversary years are imprinted in gold on a royal blue streamer.

75th Anniversary Pennant is similar but is in gold with royal blue figures. Our branch qualifies for this pennant next year.

Scrolls and Stars are added to denote that a Branch has received certain awards.

The **Scroll** for the Haig or Lister Cups and the **Certificate of Merit Star** are placed on the lower panel.

The **Jellicoe Cup Scroll** and the **Jellicoe Shield Certificate Star** go on the upper panel.

The **Mourning Drape**, used at funerals or memorial services, is a black band tied in a bow just below the spike at the head of the pole.

Festival of Remembrance

By Tom Ashmore

The Annual Festival of the Royal British Legion, Leicestershire County, was held in Leicester at the de Montfort Hall on Saturday, 2nd November. Twenty three people availed themselves of the coach which the Branch provided, although there were fewer members than non-members.

The first part of the programme was The Muster, starting with the entry of the Standards, that of the County being carried by John Cox and of the Branch by George Fleming. They were followed on to a tiered stage by representatives of youth organisations, pre-service units, civilian services, military units and War veterans including two very sprightly Chelsea Pensioners.

Next there was an interlude of light entertainment by The Batchelors.

The third part of the Festival, was the Service of Thanksgiving and Rededication in which the address was given by the Bishop of Leicester. Wreaths were laid at a replica of the Cenotaph, "Sunset" was played, the Last Post sounded and the Act of Remembrance recited. Poppy petals fell during the two minutes silence.

Although on a smaller scale, one was reminded of the Festival which we see on TV from the Royal Albert Hall. This was the first time that I had attended and I found the way in which the whole event was conducted, impressive and moving.

Poppy Appeal 1996

by Dick Fulford

In Issue 3 of *In Touch* Peter Wilson gave an insight to his duties as Poppy Appeal Organiser. His order was sent in July and all material arrived at the end of October on the very day that he unfortunately ended up in Kettering Hospital. So Renie & I, as his assistants, with the help of hardworking members of our Branch, went about arranging for the 1996 collections and sales.

By 28th October some 189 trays and collecting boxes had been distributed to 162 outlets in Market Harborough and the Bowdens. Ken Stimpson arranged the collections at 40 village outlets in our Area including those which were part of the old Welland Valley Branch, where he had the able assistance of Maurice Stanton of Medbourne.

This year we were blessed with a much bigger army of volunteers, many of them non members, who knocked on doors of most of the houses in the area during the fortnight before Remembrance Day and on the 8th & 9th November rattled boxes in the town centre.

As a result these collectors raised £3654 which is a 35% increase over the £2700 collected last year. My grateful thanks to each one.

We have always relied upon the cooperation of business houses who, by accepting trays of poppies, account for a great deal of our revenue. This year 70 outlets raised £2160; last year's total was £1547, a 40% increase.

Churches, Hospitals, Clubs, Schools and other public bodies raised £656 this year.

My letter which appeared, appropriately, on 11th November in the Mercury, resulted in phone calls from four people who knew one or other of the two soldiers I had named.

A Mr Bill Cobley of Syston, said that he had been in a convoy of vehicles retreating south down Malaya when it was attacked by Japanese planes. Percy Pargiter was one of the drivers and was killed. Cobley escaped but was later taken prisoner, eventually being sent to Japan. A pre-war friend of Pargiter, Mr Rupert Such who still lives in Kibworth, told me something of the young man and his unsilenced motor cycle. More background came from a Mrs Mason who was a friend of Pargiter's mother and whose husband worked at Kibworth Gas Works as did Percy.

The call from a Mr Stan Hodges from Coalville was particularly interesting. He, too, had been in the 1st Battalion of the Leicestershires in Malaya and in 1983 had returned with a pilgrimage of fellow veterans. Like me he had been intrigued at the lone War Grave in the Civil cemetery at Taiping. On his return, in trying to trace Percy's relatives, he located Mrs Mason, the family friend, and gave her a photograph of the grave.

Mr Hodges was also able to tell me that my namesake, Tommy Ashmore, had been a regular soldier. He also knew of a Cyril Ashmore also in the same Regiment. Whether they would have been distant relatives I still do not know.

My visits to Malaysia, having friends and family living there and these echoes from the past, have aroused a wish to know more of the country before independence. If you served or visited there, please give me a call on M H 433108.



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Quite a Shock

It came as quite a shock to see my name on that gravestone on the other side of the world. The inscription read

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T. ASHMORE

THE LEICESTERSHIRE REGIMENT

1ST JANUARY 1942 AGE 23

Before my wife and I left for our holiday in Malaysia, I had asked the R B L Pilgrimages Department for the location of War Graves Cemeteries in that country. From the detailed information they sent me, I found that there was one at Taiping, towards the north of the country and some 60 miles south of the home of friends we hoped to visit. Incidentally, the operations in which John Cox was involved in 1952/54 were in this area.

We did stay with these friends and they kindly drove us to Taiping, a delightful old town where formerly there was a permanent British garrison. It is now the base for a number of units of the Malaysian Army.

The War Cemetery has nearly 900 graves of Service personnel, about half of whom were from the United Kingdom and most of the others from Undivided India. The cemetery is in a beautiful location on the outskirts of the town with forest covered hills to the south and east. It is immaculately maintained with attractive trees and shrubs, closely trimmed lawns and flowers around each grave.

Whilst we were there four gardeners were at work. Through our Malaysian friend, I thanked each of them and their superintendent for looking after the cemetery with so much care.

The Pilgrimages Department information gave the name of a man from Kibworth, Private Percival William Pargiter, The Leicestershire Regt., who died on 17th December, 1941. He was the son of Mildred Lilian Pargiter. Does anyone know whether any member of the family still live in the area? Strangely, his was the only War Grave in a civil cemetery in Taiping.

My wife and I also went to see the War Graves near the capital, Kuala Lumpur. They are in an enclosed section of a very large civil cemetery. In addition to the 137 graves of those who died during World War II, there are those of many Service personnel who lost their lives during the troublesome years that followed.

Looking at the graves, I was struck by the number commemorating soldiers from the Leicestershire Regiment. With this in mind, I wrote to the editors of the Harborough Mail and Leicester Mercury, reassuring relatives of those who died in Malaya, that the graves and cemeteries are looked after with such care. I would be happy to show any relatives the photographs which I took.

The dedication of the War Graves Commission and their local staff will ensure that, in the words on the simple memorial at Taiping,

THEIR NAME LIVETH
FOR EVERMORE

So the total for the town is £6470 which is a 30% increase over last year. The villages have shown an increase of 25%, from £1167 in 1995 to £1480 this year, the two "Greats", Bowden & Easton doing particularly well.

Because of the generosity of all concerned, all of this money has been raised without any deductions for expenses.

When Church collections, money from wreaths and donations (including £300 that Members agreed should come from the Branch Welfare Fund), are eventually received, it is estimated that over £9000 will have been raised. Wonderful. And for what a good cause!

Thank you, Dick for recording the highly successful achievements of all those involved in helping to further the work of the Royal British Legion. What is so clear is the tremendous support and respect for our Legion shown by the general public.

You referred to the cooperation received from "business houses", but permit me to single out for particular mention the traders in the town's Market Hall. It was they who paid the rent for the stall which for two days attracted so much attention (and produced heavy collecting boxes). The traders gave us their generous support, we should give them ours.

*Finally, and firmly wearing my editorial hat, I feel sure that the readers of **In Touch**, your fellow Branch members, would wish me to say, "Renie and Dick, you've done a Grand Job"*

Editor.

The Soft Under-belly?

By Bernard Halsall

It was June 1943 and North Africa was in Allied hands. At a watering point near Mascara in Algeria, about 120 miles inland from Oran, we met up with over 100 wooden crates, each of which contained a WACO Glider, an American product which none of us had seen before. We had to assemble these craft, and then, towed by U. S. Dakotas, we each had a very few flights, and no more than two of them at night, trying to get familiar with the glider.

Within three weeks we were to embark on the first ever mass flight of gliders by the Allies, a 600 mile flight over the Atlas Mountains, flying at 9000 feet to land near Souse in Tunisia. Severe turbulence was experienced over the mountains and the heat in the cockpit was extreme. The flight took over four and a half hours and was by far the longest flight any of us had done. About ten gliders failed to make the full trip.



We had just over a week to study photographs and for all the other activities in preparation for the attack, culminating in a Church Service on

the edge of an olive grove. The 1st Air Landing Brigade which comprised about 1250 men, flying in 130 gliders was to land on Sicily, in darkness, about 8 hours before and 25 miles ahead of the main assault by the 8th Army. This would be the first return to European soil by the Allies since Dunkirk. The objective was to land near to and then to capture by midnight, the Ponte Grande, a bridge over both a river and a canal, just south of Syracuse. During the night we were to occupy Syracuse town which the 8th Army units would reach before 11am.

I was airborne around 7pm. The navigational plan was elementary. Fly due east to Malta, round the beams of three searchlights which would be pointing vertically upwards, and then due north to the target. To avoid enemy radar, we were to fly at under 100 feet for the estimated flying time of 4½ hours!! To make the flight even more hair-raising, a 30mph wind caused navigational and stability problems.

At about 11.15pm I saw the coast line (of Europe!) but did not readily recognize it from the photographs we had been shown. The tug was anxious to return home (the tugs, flown by the U.S.A.F., were unarmed and unarmoured, even lacking self-sealing petrol tanks) and as we had seen firing on the ground as well as flak coming up at us, we released at about 800 feet. At about 250 feet we crossed the shoreline and flew on into the darkness. We hit the first tree of the olive grove at about 80mph.

Several minutes later, after we had all regained consciousness and gathered ourselves together (one had a broken leg but the rest were more or less all right), we moved off in the direction of

the firing. It took us about four hours to reach the bridge, picking up stragglers and having to fight through several enemy positions. One glider had landed only 20 yards away and had captured the bridge without difficulty. However, most of the gliders had been released too early and had come down in the sea. Many men were drowned, others were scattered over scores of miles. With the arrival of our party there were just 87 of us to hold the bridge.

During the rest of the night and throughout the morning the enemy launched a series of vicious counter-attacks. Completely surrounded by an estimated 1000 enemy, and with very little ammo left, the eight survivors finally surrendered at about 3pm. About 20 minutes later the 8th Army arrived and their tanks swept over the bridge we had managed to occupy long enough to prevent it being destroyed.

History had been made that night of the 9th July, 1943. This was the first mass landing by glider behind enemy lines by the Allies. Four more were to follow before the end of hostilities.

Bernard went on holiday to Sicily in September this year, the first time he had been back in 53 years. Time did not allow a visit to his landing site (the olive grove has since been built on), but he saw the new bridge which has replaced his and he did go to the War Graves Cemetery where so many of his comrades are buried and commemorated. This must have been a highly emotional experience and, on your behalf, I thank Bernard for recalling a seldom remembered but historic mission. It started the assault on what Churchill called "The Soft Under-belly of Europe". To those who took part in the Campaign, those words were far from apt.

Editor