



HAMPSHIRE LINK

JANUARY 1, 2015

CHARITY NO 219279

'Improvised' then ... commemorated now

Hopefully, during 2014, the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War was commemorated nationally and locally in a measured and tasteful manner.

In Hampshire branches staged concerts and special events, held memorial services and laid wreaths and crosses in memory of men from their own towns and villages who had laid down their lives during The Great War.

In Aldershot, the home of the British Army, there were two significant events, both bringing together the garrison and the community and both focussing on football.



Shahid Azeem, Chairman of Aldershot Town Football Club, described the *Peace and Goodwill Concert* staged at the ESS Ground on December 4 as, "a bringing together of the military town and the civilian town to commemorate the spontaneous game of football played at Christmas in 1914."

A dramatisation of the game, now referred to as 'The Truce Game', formed just part of a remarkable evening of carols and readings that proved to be a true union of the town and it's Army. Thirteen days later an even larger crowd lined the terraces of Aldershot Town's ground to witness a remarkable football match that spoke volumes for the present day relationship between the two major combatants of the First World War.

The 'Game of Truce' Commemorative Match pitched the British Army XI against a side representing the German Armed Forces. It proved to be an exciting, highly competitive, evenly matched game; hugely enjoyed by everyone in the 2,547 crowd. In his programme notes, Vice Admiral Manfred Nielsen, Chief of Staff of Germany's Joint Support Service wrote:



The Bundeswehr (in white) defend a first half corner

A full report on the British Army v The German Armed Forces is carried on page 4.

"On Christmas Eve 1914 a truce that was not authorised by the commands was agreed on spontaneously by the war parties (front line soldiers). Both sides sensed a common Christian feeling for Christmas being a feast of love.

During this 'Christmas Truce', the parties not only exchanged presents and sang Christmas carols together. They also organised improvised "football matches" between British and German soldiers in the no-man's land between the front lines. No details are known about how these matches precisely ended."

Of course, we now know how the Truce Game on December 17 ended. If you don't want to know the score ... look away now!!

BRANCH NEWS

Carols and comradeship at Old Basing

Seasonal sets by the Corps of Drums topped and tailed an excellent end-of-year branch concert staged at the Old Basing Club on December 5.

The Corps, looking resplendent in their full dress uniforms adorned with tinsel and assorted Christmas decorations, opened with a medley of World War I songs before the first of two outstanding soloists, Lucy Keefe, drew generous applause from an appreciative audience.

There was an instrumental duet, an unforgettable performance of 'There's a hole in my bucket' (enough said), further brass, reed and guitar instrumentals before Andrew Frawley, an Old Basing member currently studying at Durham University, stole the show with a faultless performance of 'Bring him home' from 'Les Miserables'.

His sister Helen brought the first half to a close, singing 'Holy Night' while accompanied by the Corps euphonium player Tony Unwin.

Most of the performers reprised in the second half and invited instrumentalists Dave Worsfold and Steve Ambler brought extra sparkle to the evening, Dave moving through the audience while serenading them on saxophone and Steve playing a moving clarinet solo as a tribute to the late Acker Bilk.

The highlight of the evening, arguably, came when Corps Drum Major Bill Prendergast gave a moving rendition of 'In Flanders Fields' while accompanied by his fellow musicians. At the appropriate point, the Corps' Standard Bearer dipped his standard in tribute, caught the Christmas decorations and sent them tumbling to the ground.

The evening was ably compèred by former branch chairman Rick Bourne, whose repertoire of very old jokes said much about his age! The evening ended with a joyous sing-a-long, a mixture of Christmas Carols and wartime favourites. It was an excellent night out and if repeated next December ... apply early for tickets.

Remembrance postscript



In the November edition of *Hampshire Link* we wrote of the daily Remembrance assemblies attended by the students and staff of the Lordshill Oasis Academy School in Southampton. During the week leading up to Remembrance a member of the Hampshire County Committee led the assemblies, some of which were based on the Legion's 'Every Man Remembered' programme.



The following Tuesday, Armistice Day, the school organised its own special Remembrance service in the main atrium concourse. The entire school gathered in front of a wall of poppies created by Lordshill's 600+ students and observed the two-minute silence.

Christmas Spirit as Aldershot remembers



Uniformed men and women from the Garrison sat in the stands, packed the terracing behind one goal and peered through the heavy rain at the covered stage that stood in the goal area at the far end of the ground.

The soldiers formed part of the 2,000 strong crowd that enjoyed an evening that was both joyous and moving, reflective and entertaining. They sang, they laughed and they cheered on a very special evening in Aldershot.

The Aldershot Military Wives Choir, the Hart Male Voice Choir and the North East Hampshire Area Schools' Young Singers performed a number of feature items as well as supporting the crowd participation carols.

The amalgamation of Garrison and town was never more apparent than during the presentation of readings with the Aldershot Garrison Commander, the celebrity Aldershot Butcher, the Mayor of Rushmoor, the Chief Officer of Rushmoor CAB, the captain of Aldershot FC and Chaplains from the Football Club and the Garrison all playing their part.



Members of a living history group, dressed in World War I uniforms, exchanged fire from behind two lines of sand bags representing the British and German trenches.



As the story of 'The Truce Game' was told small Christmas trees began to emerge above the German trenches (top left), the combatants climbed from their defences, moved forward cautiously, shook hands (centre left), exchanged cigarettes and embarked on the historic football match (bottom left).



The Aldershot crowd cheered every British goal and good-heartedly jeered every German miss until the final whistle blew and hostilities resumed.

Hampshire Area Manager Jim France and County Chairman Bill Bates led their own team of regional and County staff accompanied by members of Hampshire Branches during a commemorative evening that served as an excellent prelude to Christmas.

'The Game of Truce' Commemorative Match

The Bundeswehr National Football Team, a selection of the best footballers serving in the German Armed Forces, received an extremely warm welcome when they ran out at the EES Stadium in Aldershot on December 17.

They faced a British Army side containing players with football league and non-league experience in a game high of quality. Strictly a friendly, there were no holds barred, it was keenly contested and a real crowd thriller to the very end.

The Bundeswehr maintained territorial advantage throughout the first half, their overwhelming possession counting for nought as they persisted with long range, inaccurate shooting. The Army, quick on the break, looked the more likely to score, going close on a number of occasions.

An early goal from Lance Corporal Callum Wilkinson after just 3 minutes had given the Army the perfect start. The Royal Logistics Corps striker was to prove a constant threat, profiting from some excellent service from the wings and midfield. Despite the end to end, nip and tuck, nature of the first period the British Army held on to their one goal lead until the interval.

The Bundeswehr's fixation with the long range barrage prevailed and limited their chances of hitting an equaliser. Meanwhile the Army were giving the German 'keeper a golden opportunity to showcase his courage and agility and he denied the Army a second goal on numerous occasions.

The second half developed into passages of unproductive approach play mixed with bursts of sublime skill and goalkeeping heroics. The Bundeswehr went for the final push and on two or three occasions went close to producing what many would have considered the perfect result – a draw. But, the home side held their ground and the 'Game of Truce' Commemorative Match ended in a hard-earned 1 – 0 victory for the British Army.

Among the dignitaries in the director's box was soccer legend Sir Bobby Charlton and Football Association chairman Greg Dyke. The Legion was also well represented with Aldershot and Farnborough branch members helping Hampshire Community Fundraiser Dave Moore with bucket collections. Area Manager Jim France and County Chairman Bill Bates were also in attendance along with officers from headquarters.

For National Chairman John Crisford it was his last Legion engagement of the year and Bob Gamble, Assistant Director Membership and Armed Forces Engagement, declared it a thoroughly good night out.

"It was a good night and a good game and there was huge media interest from BBC Five Live, BFBS, Canada and America," he said. "We have to understand that in 1914 the players embarked on the 'Truce Match' with absolutely no understanding of what was to come. What resulted was why the British Legion was formed and why we are still involved today."

A memorable night reviving memories of a historical incident of huge significance.



Peace and Goodwill - Christmas 2014



Don't mention the score!

Your chance to hear the National Chairman

As we embark on a New Year we anticipate another Hampshire County Conference which convenes at 10.30am on Saturday, January 24. There are numerous reasons why members should consider attending this year's event and the County Conference Committee are hoping for an increased number of delegates, branch officials and interested members packing the conference floor - it's an open meeting and everyone is welcome.

Conference will provide an opportunity to thank retiring County Chairman Bill Bates for the excellent job he has done on behalf of Hampshire members over the last six years. Bill has faced a number of difficult challenges calmly, effectively and in the best interests of the Royal British Legion and he will be greatly missed.

We are delighted that National Chairman John Crisford (right) will be joining us as our guest speaker. He was elected to his current position in 2013 and will serve until 2016.

John's father served with the RAOC, which may explain why John was born in Jerusalem. He attended The Duke of York's Royal Military School in Dover and then served for nearly 25 years with the British Army in the UK, Germany and Kuwait.

John was a member of the Band of The Royal Horse Guards (The Blues) and the REME Staff Band. He later moved to The Royal Army Pay Corps. On leaving the Army in 1981, he attained a BSc (Hons) degree through The Open University, worked in local government, private industry and the Royal Mail before retiring in 2005.



John is a member of the Hunstanton Branch in Norfolk, the Sedgeford and District Branch and also the National Memorial Arboretum Branch of the Legion. Our 2015 Conference will provide him with an opportunity to talk about the current state of the Royal British Legion.

After lunch Mariëlle Postill, the RBL Head of Membership, will be speaking about a number of significant changes that are likely to have an impact on Legion members.

We will also hear from our County President, Brigadier David Harrison and our Area Manager Jim France. We will confirm the election of a new County Chairman and witness ten nominees contesting 8 places on the County Committee.

We look forward to seeing members from all Hampshire Branches at Conference.

STANDARD BEARERS

Our Standard Bearers are taking a well-earned break at the moment. The County Standard Bearer, Steve Forward, regards this as 'the quiet time of the year for ceremonial.' Dates, times and details for the 2015 Eastleigh Standard Bearer's Schools should be published soon and will appear in a future edition of *Hampshire Link*. We have been offered a venue for additional schools in Aldershot and would be delighted to hear from anybody willing to run the training classes. Please contact any member of the County Committee or use the e-mail address at the end of this newsletter to contact the Area Office. Finally we send our best wishes to County Standard Bearer, Dave Graham, who competes in the South West Regional competition in Bridgwater on Saturday, February 28.

POPPY APPEAL

Young players support the Poppy Appeal



Hampshire's Community Fundraiser (North) Dave Moore ponied over to the Chesil Theatre in Winchester on Sunday, December 14 to watch 'Mrs Gill's Grand Matinee', an immersive experience that puts the audience right at the heart of a local community during World War One.

Dave was invited to the production to collect a cheque as the Fluid Motion Youth Theatre Company were donating half of the proceeds to the Royal British Legion.

This Basingstoke & Farnham Youth Theatre had been researching the Home Front for three months, exploring their own family links and creating their own charity fundraiser.

Dave, along with the other members of the audience, was carried back to late 1914. The story told how swathes of men who signed up, convinced that the war would be over by Christmas, quickly discovered this was not to be the case.

As Christmas approached the troops dug in for the winter and the long, hard stalemate. Local communities sent presents and food and some organised fundraising events to raise money or equipment for the troops.

Mrs Gill and some local children did just that. Dave was lucky enough to be a guest at 'Mrs Gill's Grand Matinee' - full of music, theatre, variety and a surprise from a Sergeant Major.

The presentation of the £300 cheque was not part of the script, but none-the-less very gratefully received, a generous donation for which we thank the talented members of the Fluid Motion Youth Theatre Company very sincerely.

EVENTS DIARY

WHAT'S ON

Information for the Events Diary is understandably a little thin at the moment. We rely on Branch Secretaries and / or event organisers to forward information to our Membership Support Officer, Steph Harris, or to *Hampshire Link* via the e-mail address on the newsletter's last page. Please also remember to inform Dave Taylor, the County Events Co-ordinator, with any LIC forms. Thank you.

Saturday, January 24, 2015

2015 Hampshire RBL County Conference
Jubilee Hall, Bishops Waltham

10.30pm

Non-delegates and guests welcome

For details:

sharris@britishlegion.org.uk

LEST WE FORGET

Our sincere condolences go to the family and friends of these members:

Mr S Ingram	-	Botley
Mr S M Kirby	-	Gosport & Alverstoke
Mr A Murray	-	Winchester
Mr D Peckham	-	Romsey
Mr B C Wells	-	Headley & District

SEND US YOUR NEWS

We would be delighted to hear from many more Hampshire branches during 2015. If you are organising an event, function or interesting activity, if you have a special person in your branch who deserves some recognition or a pat on the back or if you have some information relating to Legion matters that may well interest others please contact *Hampshire Link*. Our New Year resolution? ... Oh yes! ... to provide some news on every Hampshire branch during 2015. Simply send the information to the Area Office or the e-mail address below. Happy New Year.

jshantsrbl@hotmail.com

OR TO: STEPH HARRIS, MEMBERSHIP SUPPORT OFFICER, ROYAL BRITISH LEGION,
104 ABOVE BAR STREET, SOUTHAMPTON, HAMPSHIRE, SO14 7DT

ALL OTHER ENQUIRIES SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO THE CONTACT CENTRE ON

0808 8028080