**EKVN - RBL Report**

**July**

D Day commemorations, the ‘Laying Up’ and Dedication of our old and new Branch Standards combined with other activities, has meant that this has been an exceptionally busy period for the Branch. Nothing new there you might say.

On the 6th June we participated in the national commemoration of the 80th anniversary of D Day by holding a short service at the East Knoyle war memorial. Led by the Rector, Kate McFarlane, it commenced at precisely 1100 with a flyover by David Morgan in his Tiger Moth biplane. Our Branch and the East Knoyle Women’s section were well represented, not only by our respective Standard Bearers and readers but also within the gathering of approximately 50 around the perimeter of the memorial. The memorial, in immaculate condition following a recent cleaning by Ian Gurney, was complemented by the beautiful wreath of red and white flowers provided by Helen Lever. Incidentally and completely independently, the same evening many of you will have heard the bells of St Mary’s being rung by the EK’s bell ringers ending our village’s contribution to a nation wide commemorative initiative.

One of the most important battles of 1944 was that of Imphal and Kohima which lasted from April 4th to June 22nd. On the 20th June (2024) we were pleased to hold another of our film and talk evenings at Semley Village Hall in aid of the Poppy Appeal which featured: an introductory film by James Holland that laid out the framework of battles, followed by a most informative talk by Charlotte Carty. Charlotte, accompanied by her children and other volunteers, recently completed a 39 hour walk replicating the 70 mile trek her grandfather, Lt. Col. Felix Brown and the 1st Assam regiment, made through the jungle to relieve our troops at Kohima. Charlotte is an accomplished and entertaining speaker who vividly brought to life not only the experience of walking non-stop in her grandfather’s footsteps, but also the bravery and endurance displayed by the soldiers and local Naga people involved in one of the greatest battles ever fought by British and Commonwealth troops.

You will have previously read that our Branch Standard which had served us well for just over 70 years was to be retired and a new Standard commissioned in its place. The Laying Up and Dedication service of both Standards took place at St Mary’s on June 28th and was followed by lunch at the Fox and Hounds. Guests included county representatives of both RBL Wiltshire and RBL Wiltshire Women’s section. At lunch we were delighted to present a cheque for £500 to RBL County Chairman, Paul Mayo, as a contribution towards the cost of purchasing the new Standard. Thanks to: our Rector, Kate McFarlane and Standard Bearer, Mark Gittins, for organising and leading this special occasion, together with a special welcome to Alex Drake of East Knoyle who played the Last Post and Reveille. Last but not least, the Fox and Hounds team of Murray, Feargal and Kate who laid on another splendid lunch.

Our new Standard was soon on ceremonial duty, parading at the Fovant Badges Drumhead service on July 7th held at East Farm, at the foot of the hill on which the badges are carved.

Future events include a visit to the Gartell Light Railway on the 25th July and the Strawberry and Pimms Tea on the 4th August at which our RBL Branch and the EK Women’s Section combine to thank all our supporters within the village for their contribution to the success of our annual Poppy Appeal. A talk by Col. John Blashford-Snell is scheduled for the 27th September.

**Poppy Appeal 2023/24**

During these summer months appeal funds are boosted significantly by Roy Halsall displaying his WW2 Chevrolet and selling of Poppy merchandise at various commemorative events throughout the country. For instance, over the week he spent camping out at the recent Chalke Valley history festival he collected £760.42. This, combined with other events he attended in June, raising £294, has helped to boost our current total to £10,472.40. Don’t forget, Roy still has a box in aid of the Poppy Appeal at the Wren stores in which you can place any unwanted currency of any age and denomination. If you are clearing out any old watches, medals or similar bric-a-brac he certainly could make use of those too. At the time of writing the appeal has received £235 from our talk on Kohima which means we are now well on our way to reaching the £11,000 mark.

With the months flying by and looking forward to the 2024/25 appeal, please note that Poppy Appeal organiser, Ian Gurney, is always keen to welcome new recruits to his team of collectors up at Willoughby Hedge service area during the main two weeks of the appeal in November. These collections are the backbone of our fundraising year so if you are interested and have a few hours to spare to become involved please let Ian or me know.

Next Branch Meeting: 6th August, 6.30pm, Fox and Hounds.

Ron Clark

Branch Secretary (830354)