



# "SANDBAG"

## WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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### NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Branch secretary Arthur Pickup 01963-32952

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Next branch meeting 15th September at 7 p.m.

#### Fenton Rutter

Our branch vice president Fenton Rutter passed away on 13th July. Sadly within days on 17th July Fenton's wife Norah also passed away and many members attended their joint funeral on 7th August. The parish church was full to capacity and branch members formed an honour guard. Harry Mills played a splendid Last Post and Reveille and Heart of Oak was played as the coffins departed the church.

As well as being a very respected solicitor in the town Fenton also had a wartime career in the Royal Navy. Having joined as an ordinary seaman he was quickly commissioned to the rank of Sub Lieutenant and during 1943 was assigned to Combined Operations in preparation for the forthcoming invasion of Normandy. On D-Day as part of the 11th Flotilla Fenton was in charge of Landing Craft converted from Thames barges which landed on D-Day 6th June 1944. He successfully landed supplies on D-Day to the Americans on Omaha Beach after it was secured. Fenton was at the beaches when the big storm came up on 19th June, which was the worst for 40 years. Although many craft were badly damaged Fenton's knowledge of seamanship gained from his yachting days paid off and his ship survived unscathed. Fenton has been a great supporter of our branch and held the post of vice president for many years. His wife Norah was also an active member, they will be both be sadly missed.



#### Ruby Stevenson

Ruby Stevenson passed away on 17th July aged 96. Ruby was for many years our Poppy Appeal Organiser and several members attended her funeral on 30th July. Ruby's hard work gradually built up our Poppy Appeal and she can be remembered sorting out and distributing the poppies around the town. Ruby married David (or Jock as he was known) in 1946 after meeting him at Dimmer Camp where he was a corporal. They spent a short time in his native Scotland but returned to Wincanton where Ruby worked at the laundry for while. She became a town councillor and is remembered for her sharp wits, intellect and being good speaker. We were pleased to see Ruby's son Donald and his wife Glenys who were here from New Zealand on our Swanage trip and it was

nice that we were able to offer our condolences personally and to let them know of the high regard his mother was held in at the branch.



## The Great War

In common with Legion branches throughout the Country members were invited to light a candle between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m. on 4th August, which was the 100th anniversary of the declaration of war. This Legion initiative reflected the quotation of Sir Edward Grey, Foreign Secretary, who uttered the words on the eve of Britain officially entering the First World War. "The lamps are going out all over Europe, we shall not see them lit again in our lifetime". Britain's ultimatum to Germany expired at midnight GMT on 4th August (11 p.m, BST).

Fresh wreaths and flowers were laid and a candle lantern placed at the memorial at 10 p.m.



## One hundred years this month

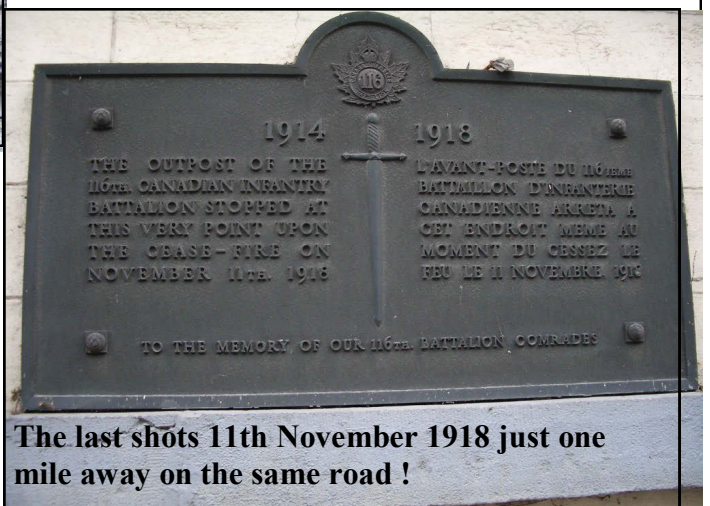
For many of my generation I was brought up with stories of the Great War, I was told them by my grandmother who lost her older brother in the first few months of the Great War. I always remember her saying "Uncle Ted was at Mons - you know !" and she was very proud of him. My uncle Ted was a regular soldier in the 1st Bn. The Wiltshire Regiment and he lost his life in Flanders in February 1915. She did not know (because there were no computers then) where her brother was buried, but I know now and go there almost every year to lay a wreath or cross. He is buried in Kemel not far from Ypres. We all watched, I am sure, HRH Princes William & Harry and the Duchess of Cambridge at St. Synphorien Cemetery in Mons and having been there twice I find Mons a very mystic and evocative place where my mind always go back to the



The first shots 22nd August 1914

"Old Contemptibles" the regular British Army of 1914. The pride I too have that my great uncle was part of them and the admiration I still have for their memory. Their bravery and professionalism far exceeded their size because at Mons 80,000 regular British soldiers engaged a force twice their size and inflicted massive casualties and stunned the German Army into a temporary halt. Not only did they do it at Mons but they did it again at Le Cateau, in another epic action. I am proud to say that both my

grandfathers served in the Great War - and I have their medals - they both survived against tremendous odds, but my paternal grandfather was badly shell shocked and it affected him psychologically all his life. The Great War lasted four years and I think one fact that sums up all the futility was that the first British shots were fired at Mons and the last shots of the British Empire were also fired at Mons by the Canadians just one mile down the same road !



The last shots 11th November 1918 just one mile away on the same road !

## At Hill 112 Normandy



## Hill 112

As we drive along the A303 near Mere we cannot fail to see the flag on the top of Castle Hill Mere and I am often asked to tell people why it is there. Until this year there has been an annual parade of veterans and regimental associations associated with the 43rd (Wessex) Infantry Division of World War Two, which comprised of all the local County Regiments including The Wiltshire Regt. Hampshire Regt., Somerset Light Infantry, The Devonshire Regt, The Dorset Regt., Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry and local Royal Artillery Batteries. The men distinguished themselves in Normandy, taking on the 9th SS Panzer Division at Hill 112 and were the first British formation to cross the Seine.

A war memorial in Normandy is replicated on Castle Hill in Mere, below which a service took place every July, the last being this July. The first battle for Hill 112 was fought at 10<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> July 1944 the end of Operation Epsom, when the tanks of 11th Armoured Division broke

out from a bridgehead established by the 2nd Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders at Tourmauville. Hill 112 was an intermediate objective on the way to the River Orne crossings but such was the German reaction that the 23rd Hussars were only able to capture and hold the hill with difficulty. Hill 112, at the end of a narrow salient, was held by the infantry of The Rifle Brigade. Here they remained under heavy shell and mortar fire until, warned by Ultra decryptations of German radio traffic that II SS Panzer Corps was arriving and about to attack, Field Marshal Montgomery ordered them to withdraw and the hilltop to be abandoned to the Germans. The British commanders, led by Montgomery, intended to hold the approximately seven German Panzer Divisions, on their front. While the British held the panzers, the Americans captured Cherbourg and broke out from the beachhead. The American objective was feasible because the Americans had only the equivalent of one-and-a-half Panzer divisions facing them throughout most of the campaign.

The 43rd Division attacked positions held by *10th SS-Panzer Division Frundsberg* in what was an extremely fierce battle. The German defenders survived naval bombardment, air attack and artillery fire but held their ground, crucially supported by Tiger tanks from *schwere SS-Panzer Abteilung 102*. These heavy tanks armed with the 88 mm gun had greatly supported a German retirement from Caen previously, and had withdrawn to the south bank of the Orne. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Division attacked down open slopes commanded by dug in German units. Although the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division kept the initiative the Germans had not withdrawn despite the cost of such defensive operations and held commanding views from Hill 112. They realised its great tactical importance and the hill was not captured by the British leaving a no-man's-land, with the two sides dug in on opposite sides.

Several surrounding villages had been taken, although the British were pushed back from Éterville. The 9th SS Panzer Division, which had been in the process of moving out of the line to form an operational reserve, was brought back to contain the attack and the German troops involved in counter-attacks were exposed to such fire power as to inflict casualties which debilitated them and deprived the German defence of the ability

to contemplate a counter-offensive. During the July, the 43<sup>rd</sup> Division took more ground in the Odon valley, kept German panzer units pinned down and inflicted more attrition on the German units. In August 1944, the Germans withdrew from Hill 112 and the 53rd (Welsh) Division occupied the feature with barely a fight. The 43rd Wessex Division had 7,000 casualties from 10–22 July.

The importance of the battles for Hill 112 is remembered by the erection of the 43rd Wessex Division's memorial both in Normandy and at Mere. I shall be visiting Hill 112 in September and will be placing a wreath from the branch.

## At Mere, Wiltshire



### **Record Poppy Appeal**

Arthur is just closing off Poppy Appeal 2013/14 and tells me that we have achieved an astounding £14,441.29 which includes Gift Aid of £193.50 . This is an all time record and an amazing achievement for a small town of our size. On top of this is another £3800 which was collected in Castle Cary as a sub branch to Wincanton. As you know Castle Cary was in danger of closing down and we agreed to provide administration support and assistance to keep them going. Thanks to everyone who has helped achieved this and very special big thank you to Arthur for all his tireless efforts.

### **A nice summer picture !**

Alan Tichmarsh recently visited the Royal Hospital Chelsea and Paddy took the opportunity to show him the dahlias in his allotment. What a nice summer shot ! Paddy will be joining us for our Annual Dinner in October.



### **Eileen's chocolates**

After our Armed Forces Day event on 27th June Eileen Peet got home to find a lovely box of Thornton's chocolates on her door step, with a note saying "Thank you Eileen for all that you have done ". The mystery was that it did not say who it was from. Eileen would like to thank whoever it was and to say she enjoyed them very much.

### **Annual Dinner**

Last month I enclosed in Sandbag the Annual Dinner ticket request and meal choices form, could you please return this to me no later than 12th September along with your cheque for £18 each person. I need to arrange transport for those who require it and catering must be prepaid to the venue. Thank you for your cooperation.

### **Bristol trip—23rd August**

The next trip is going to Bristol on 23rd August and will depart from the Memorial Hall at 8.30 a.m. Cost again is £14 each (half price for juniors). We will be dropped off at the centre of Bristol near the fountains which will enable those who wish to take the harbour cruises. It will also be very convenient for the city centre and the main shopping area. Another good day is promised ! I am pleased to say that the trip last month to Swanage was the first this year not to have made a loss, in fact only just—with a £3 profit ! At present we have just over £200 in the social and trips account which gives me more confidence to continue planning other social activities.

### **World War One Nostalgia Night**

To commemorate the beginning of the First World War I have arranged a night of nostalgia at the Unicorn in Bayford. You will remember that Sarah Lowery, who is a Legion supporter, offered to hold a music event for us during Armed Forces Day last year but was unfortunately ill. Sarah has appeared on television and has a varied repertoire which includes all the old songs of the period. We have settled tentatively on Tuesday 30th September but I will confirm the date at the branch meeting. I have also arranged to have the CAT bus take us to the Unicorn and I will advise the cost of this too. We will have pick ups around Wincanton and return transport, it will not cost much. As we know the Unicorn is a very atmospheric pub and this should be an event to remember. Also that week, the parish church have asked me to put on an exhibition in the church on 3rd October from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. and I am still working on a date (hopefully that week) to present the branch Roll of Honour to the mayor for safe keeping. Update later !