



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

Editor Tony Goddard 01963-824193



NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Branch secretary Arthur Pickup 01963-32952

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Next branch meeting 20th July at 7 p.m. in the Memorial Hall
Also a Social Evening on 15th June at the Millers Inn with bangers & burgers in the Beer Garden (weather permitting) - modest cost for food 7.30 p.m.



July branch meeting

Some branch members have said they would like to have a traditional meeting once in a while at the Memorial Hall, so on 20th July we will have a short branch meeting in the hall again at 7 p.m., after which we will have a social get-together. All branch information is in Sandbag every month so in future we could have a formal branch meeting perhaps quarterly and I will ensure dates and details will be circulated well in advance.

Skittles Night 18th May

Our Skittles Night on 18th May was a resounding success and great fun was had by all. It was nice to see so many from both the Army Air Corps and Commando Helicopter Force come to the event. The result of the match was not so good for the branch team though because the Army beat everyone with a resounding score of 139 with the CHF a close second at 135. Members did put up a good show but only managed 122. I hear our team will be practicing hard so who knows, there may be a return contest !

Sandbag is early this month !

I have published Sandbag a few days early this month so that everyone has a reminder of the Social Evening at the next branch meeting on 15th June. Which is a "Burgers & Bangers" Social Evening Barbecue in the Beer Garden of the Millers at 7.30 p.m. It is a no cost event, just pay for any food and drink as required.



70th anniversary Russian Convoys Medal

The Russian Government have issued a new medal to all Arctic Convoys sailors and Joyce Bentley received Bert's medal recently. Sadly the award of Russian medals came

too late and dear Bert did not live to see them. The splendid medal, pictured above is in recognition of the sacrifices and hardships suffered by Allied sailors during the Second World War. Several years ago Bert gave me his story and I would like to publish an updated version



T.S Mantle Sea Cadets & Royal Marines Cadets - Royal Navy Parade



On Tuesday 26th May 2015 Branch members Arthur Pickup, John Pennington, Peter Cox and Steve Lee attended the TS Mantle VC Yeovil Sea Cadets and Royal Marines Cadets Royal Navy Parade at RNAS Yeovilton. The parade takes place every two years and is foremost an inspection of the unit and gives the cadets the opportunity to display their training and skills in front of parents and guests. Through the Branch's affiliation with the cadets a very warm welcome was extended to attending members and the four were treated to a first class parade. After a 'Welcome Brief', the inspection Officer and

Team arrived, followed by Colours and Prayers. The parade then formed up and the inspection was taken by Commander Nigel Morton RN, South West Area Sea Cadets Area Officer and he was joined by RNAS CO Commodore Jock Alexander. Following refreshments the cadets then performed the 'Cadets' Evolution', which was a very entertaining re-enactment of their year's training and which involved a rubber chicken (something of a tradition !)The evening ended with Evening Colours, Presentations and the Inspecting Officer's Address. As always, TS Mantle's CO Lt. Hannah Robinson RNR took full care of the Branch members and through this article we wish to extend our sincere thanks to Hannah and all of the cadets. *Steve. (Photos Pete Cox)*





846 Naval Air Squadron Official Homecoming— one of our adopted units

With a Merlin flypast and role demonstration before an audience of VIPs and families, 846 Naval Air Squadron hosted their official homecoming ceremony at RNAS Yeovilton. During the ceremony, the new 846 NAS building was officially opened by the Guest of Honour, Brigadier Richard Spencer OBE ADC, who also presented four Afghanistan Operational Service medals to members of 846 NAS. Marking another milestone in the transition of the Merlin multi-role helicopter from the Royal Air Force to the Royal Navy, the ceremony reflected on the challenges faced by the 846 NAS personnel. Lt Col Derek Stafford MBE RM, Commanding Officer of 846 Naval Air Squadron said, “The challenge of transition has been immense and it is testament to the herculean efforts of both the CHF and RAF that 846 NAS has retaken it’s place within the Commando Helicopter Force, fit for operations with it’s new airframe. I am extremely honoured to be not only the first Commanding Officer of the Squadron in the Merlin era, but also the Commanding Officer with the privilege of returning the Squadron to it’s spiritual home at RNAS Yeovilton.” Just over 24 months ago 846 NAS were operating the Sea King Mk4 helicopter in Afghanistan, moving to RAF Benson to begin the transition in March 2013 followed by the Squadron standing up as the first Commando Helicopter Force Squadron to be equipped with the Merlin in October 2014. Captain Niall Griffin, Commanding Officer of the Commando Helicopter Force said: “The hard work that has enabled this transition across the whole of the Commando Helicopter Force can not be underestimated, but despite the challenges the central purpose of the CHF has always been, and will continue to be, the safe and effective support of Royal Marines Commandos from the sea to the battlefield, across all environments. With the Merlin I foresee a very busy and successful future in doing just that.” Having been through numerous incarnations during it’s 70 year life, 846 NAS has operated many different aircraft in locations all over the world. From Avengers during World War Two to Sea Kings in Afghanistan. Already a proven platform, the marinisation programme will see the Merlin Mk3 equipped with a folding main rotor head and a modified undercarriage for deck landings. The Merlin will ensure the Commando Helicopter Force continue to successfully support the Royal Navy, Royal Marines and the Joint Helicopter Command. The Commando Helicopter Force’s transition from the Sea King Mk4 to the Merlin will continue at RAF Benson when 845 Naval Air Squadron stand up in place of 28 (Army Cooperation) Squadron RAF this month. When fully operational, 845 NAS will return home to Yeovilton to reunite all the CHF Squadrons. The Commando Helicopter Force (CHF) currently consists of four Naval Air Squadrons (NAS); 845, 846, 847 and 848 NAS. The Sea King Mk4 aircraft of the Commando Helicopter Force will gradually be retired from service by April 2016. Its replacement, the Merlin Mk4 will be derived from Merlin Mk3 airframes currently in service with 846 NAS based at RNAS Yeovilton and 845 NAS and 28 Sqn Royal Air Force at RAF Benson. 847 NAS operate the Wildcat AH1. The Naval Air Squadrons of CHF are integrated under the command of a Headquarters, established to operate helicopters afloat or ashore in support of the UK armed forces. It is a combined Royal Navy and Royal Marine force that flies Sea King, Merlin and Wildcat helicopters that specialises in amphibious warfare. The pilots are well-trained as they combine commando combat and survival skills with advanced flying skills. They operate Sea King, Merlin and Wildcat helicopters in extreme climates and conditions and their ability to work in terrain ranging from arctic to tropical jungle is second to none. Operations in Borneo in the 1960s earned them the moniker ‘Junglies’ from the troops on the ground, which current and veteran Junglies covet to this day.

Kerry Randall, Public Relations Officer— Commando Helicopter Force

Armed Forces Day 27th June

Lots will be happening on 27th June in Wincanton when we hold our third Armed Forces Family Event. This year because it has grown so much the free event will take place at the Memorial Hall and its grounds from noon onwards, there will be a big military presence with a chance for the kids (and parents) to get up close with lots of military equipment and items – along with military personnel from the Army Air Corps and Commando Helicopter Force. There will be a fairground carousel, demonstrations, face painting, balloons, stalls with kids items and books etc., and all day there will be a barbecue, music and licensed bar. Refreshments will be available and there will be music. It should be a good day for all the family.

We do have volunteers who have come forward to help but if you are willing to be around in case further help is needed please feel free. If you still have books for the popular book stall please contact me.

Visit to Royal Military Academy Sandhurst

As I mentioned at the last branch meeting and also on the coach to Dawlish, we were offered a limited amount of places to the Commandant's Parade on 5th August at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst. I also did phone as many members as I could and have now filled the coach. If you would like to go on a waiting list please let me know.

For those confirmed on the trip I will need the full payment once final costs are known, which I estimate to be £15 for the coach and £10 for lunch at the Academy.

Timings and dress code details will also be advised in Sandbag next month.

The branch allocation of tickets to Festival of Remembrance at the Albert Hall on 7th November has now been taken up by members. Those confirmed will need to send me a cheque after 1st July when the application for tickets is made. It is however still possible to get tickets to the afternoon performance after 1st July. You will need to arrange your own transport.

Next proposed coach trip to Lynmouth & Lynton on 20th June

Our next proposed trip to Lynmouth and Lynton on 20th June appears to have little interest so I have been forced to CANCEL it. Sorry if this causes anyone disappointment but I do not have any flexibility

July trip 25th July

I have just started a list for the July trip which is to Sidmouth with a coffee and shopping stop at the big Otter Garden at Ottery St. Mary. The advantage of stopping at Ottery St. Mary is that large items can be stored in the compartment underneath of the coach. The Otter Garden Centre will also deliver big items free of charge to their Wincanton branch.

Again prices for seats are as usual £12 and £6 but on this occasion the coach will depart from Wincanton at 9 a.m. so we can have a lay in that day.

Old Faithful Day 25th June

We are continuing our observance of Old Faithful Day on 25th June with our traditional ceremony at the memorial on Bayford Hill at 11 a.m. (assembly 10.45 a.m.) The American Flying Fortress aircraft crashed at Snag Farm, below the memorial, on 25th June 1944 and as usual we will be commemorating the event with the Last Post and prayers at the site. Please attend if you can.

VJ Day 70th anniversary

I am just getting early information that the Wincanton Town Council are organising a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of VJ Day (Victory over Japan Day). The actual anniversary of the total end of the Second World War is 14th August when Japan actually surrendered in 1945 but the RBL has announced that the Nation will commemorate the event on 15th August as the previous day is a Friday. Once I know the intentions of the Town Council I will let everyone know. I believe there may be a parade and possibly a concert or something similar. Coincidentally we have booked that day for our Coffee Morning so we will be doing something too.