



"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 20th October at 7 p.m.

Bert Bentley posthumously awarded Russian Ushakov Medal

It is so pleasing to know that at last Bert Bentley's award of the Russian Medal of Ushakov has taken place.

The award of the medal by the Russian government is in recognition of the bravery of men of the Royal Navy who took part in the Arctic Convoys during the Second World War. It is somewhat tinged with a little sadness that Bert was not able to receive the medal in his lifetime. The medal was presented to Bert's grandson Steve and granddaughter Rachel at a special ceremony in Trowbridge recently.

Unfortunately Joyce, Bert's widow, was unable to attend due to previous commitments. Bert who served on the destroyer HMS Beagle on several convoy escort duties to Russia was able to personally receive his Arctic Star last year and we were privileged to have him show us his award then. The Russian government has long wished to make the award to Royal Navy sailors but acceptance had until last year been blocked by subsequent British governments.



Yet another tree !

During the summer Colonel Michael Goldschmidt and I delivered the chestnut tree sapling I grew from chestnuts picked up at the battlefield of Waterloo. As I mentioned before it is being planted at the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst on the 200th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo next June. Five years ago I also picked up acorns from oak trees at Tyne Cot British Cemetery on Passchendaele Ridge near Ypres, Belgium. One of the acorns has germinated into a very healthy oak sapling and is growing well. I suggested to Arthur, who is also our representative on the Memorial Hall committee, that I would like to donate it to the Memorial Hall and asked him if he would raise the offer with the hall committee. This he did and the Memorial Hall committee have agreed and are looking into a suitable site for the tree. I have suggested the 100th anniversary of the First Battle of Passchendaele (12th October 2017) to plant the sapling as being a suitable date by which time the sapling will be very strong and will be a suitable occasion.



The Battleback Centre

At our August branch meeting we discussed our commitment to Legion good causes and internal charity appeals and noted that we have not made any donations of late. I brought up about the “Battleback Centre” in the West Midlands which the RBL run in conjunction with Help for Heroes - the RBL taking the major role. I promised I would get full information about it before **our AGM on 3rd November** with a view to me proposing we make a donation from branch funds.

The Battle Back Centre (Lilleshall)

The Royal British Legion has committed £27 million to provide and operate the Battle Back Centre, an adaptive sports and outdoor facility based at the National Sports Centre, Lilleshall, in the West Midlands. With its focus on what you can do rather than what you can't, the Centre helps 600 wounded, injured and sick Army, Navy and RAF personnel every year to make the best possible recovery and either return to duty or make a new life in Civvy Street.

Undertaking and overcoming challenges has been shown to enhance recovery. The Battle Back Centre provides adaptive sports and adventure opportunities led by world-class coaches and has residential accommodation for up to 24 people at a time. The range of sports and outdoor activities includes climbing, watersports, caving, wheelchair basketball, clay pigeon shooting and archery.

Before being injured, these young men and women were at the peak of their physical fitness. An injury can make them feel like their life has stopped, as everything they hold dear has been taken from them.

By rebuilding confidence and unlocking potential, the Battle Back Centre proves nothing is impossible for these remarkable men and women.

The Battle Back Centre, as part of the Defence Recovery Capability, supports the Battle Back programme, which is an MoD initiative delivered in partnership with Help for Heroes and The Royal British Legion.

How it works

The Battle Back Centre is an Army led Centre that is funded and delivered by The Royal British Legion. Led by world-class coaching staff, our activities are challenging, but safe and enjoyable. They include climbing, watersports, caving, wheelchair basketball, clay shooting and archery.

All the activities build camaraderie with others going through similar challenges.

The Centre has high quality residential accommodation for 24 people at a time, with 16 rooms fully equipped for those who need wheelchair access or have other requirements.

The Team

The Centre has been established by the Legion at the National Sports Centre, Lilleshall in the West Midlands. Army staff look after the health, safety, security and welfare of Service participants attending the courses.

Coaching expertise is provided by the Carnegie School of Sport and Carnegie Great Outdoors and independent evaluation of the programme is conducted by Leeds Metropolitan University, Institute for Sport, Physical Activity and Leisure.

The Royal British Legion has pledged our biggest-ever single donation, **£50 million over ten years**, to support the Defence Recovery Capability programme for wounded, injured and sick Armed Forces men and women. Of this, £27 million is to create and operate the Battle Back Centre Lilleshall; £23 million is to support the operating costs of the UK PRCs as follows: Edinburgh £5.5m; Catterick £8.5m; Colchester £5.5m and Tidworth £3.5m. The Legion is taking the lead role in the delivery of PRCs in Edinburgh and Germany, with Help for Heroes taking the lead role in the delivery (including capital expenditure) of the PRCs in Catterick, Colchester and Tidworth, and delivery of new facilities to enhance those already in existence in Plymouth, all as part of the wider Defence Recovery Capability.

I believe this would be a worthwhile project to make a donation from branch funds and will propose this at the AGM. *Tony*

In a quiet place in Corton Denham churchyard.

In the lovely churchyard of Corton Denham just a few miles from us lies a simple grave of an extremely brave man - that of Rear Admiral **Basil Charles Godfrey Place** VC, CB, CVO, DSC (19th July 1921 – 27th December 1994), known as **Godfrey Place**, he was an officer in the Royal Navy and a recipient of the Victoria Cross, the highest award for gallantry in the face of the enemy that can be awarded to British and Commonwealth forces. It was almost to the day 71 years ago when he was 22 years old, and a lieutenant in the Royal Navy during the Second World War when the following deed took place for which he was awarded the VC.

On 22 September 1943 at Kåfjord, North Norway, Lieutenant Place, commanding Midget Submarine X7, and another lieutenant (Donald Cameron) commanding Midget Submarine X.6, carried out a most daring and successful attack on the German Battleship *Tirpitz*. The two submarines had to travel at least 1,000 miles from base, negotiate a mine-field, dodge nets, gun defences and enemy listening posts. Having eluded all these hazards they finally placed the charges underneath the ship where they went off an hour later, doing so much damage that *Tirpitz* was out of action for months. The full citation was published in a supplement to the *London Gazette* of 18 February 1944 (dated 22 February 1944) and read ADMIRALTY. *Whitehall. 22nd February, 1944.*

The KING has been graciously pleased to approve the award of the VICTORIA CROSS for valour to: Lieutenant Basil Charles Godfrey Place, D.S.C., Royal Navy and Lieutenant Donald Cameron, R.N.R. Lieutenants Place and Cameron were the Commanding Officers of two of His Majesty's Midget Submarines X 7 and X 6 which on 22nd September 1943 carried out a most daring and successful attack on the German Battleship *Tirpitz*, moored in the protected anchorage of Kaafiord, North Norway. To reach the anchorage necessitated the penetration of an enemy minefield and a passage of fifty miles up the fiord, known to be vigilantly patrolled by the enemy and to be guarded by nets, gun defences and listening posts, this after a passage of at least a thousand miles from base. Having successfully eluded all these hazards and entered the fleet anchorage, Lieutenants Place and Cameron, with a complete disregard for danger, worked their small craft past the close anti-submarine and torpedo nets surrounding the *Tirpitz*, and from a position inside these nets, carried out a cool and determined attack. Whilst they were still inside the nets a fierce enemy counter attack by guns and depth charges developed which made their withdrawal impossible. Lieutenants Place and Cameron therefore scuttled their craft to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy. Before doing so they took every measure to ensure the safety of their crews, the majority of whom, together with themselves, were subsequently taken prisoner. In the course of the operation these very small craft pressed home their attack to the full, in doing so accepting all the dangers inherent in such vessels and facing every possible hazard which ingenuity could devise for the protection in harbour of vitally important Capital Ships. The courage, endurance and utter contempt for danger in the immediate face of the enemy shown by Lieutenants Place and Cameron during this determined and successful attack were supreme.

In 1950, he took the unusual step for a submariner of transferring to the Fleet Air Arm, training as a pilot and gaining his "wings" in 1952. Later that year he saw action in the Korean War, flying the *Sea Fury* in 801 Squadron from the deck of the carrier *HMS Glory*. He later achieved the rank of rear-admiral. Godfrey Place and his wife Althea purchased a house in Corton Denham named "The Old Bakery" not far from the church where they lived 30 years.



Amazing medal collection

Sometimes people ask me to help identify military service records, military historical dates and medals of relatives. Often the questions are quite routine and I thought this was the case when Chris and Doug Louth asked me to identify a medal collection belonging to their daughter in law. The medals were from the Great War and were issued to a relative, Pte. J. Williams of the 5th/6th Royal Scots Fusiliers. I immediately thought they would be the three common medals The British War Medal, The Victory Medal and the 1914-15 Star. Sometimes a 1914 Star will appear, these are slightly rarer and are often referred to as the Mons Star. They were in a box and when I opened it, I was very excited to see five medals in all. I double blinked because the foremost medal was the Distinguished Conduct Medal which was second only to the Victoria Cross. There were the usual three medals which did include the 1914-15 Star but the fifth medal was somewhat rarer because it was the India General Service Medal Warzistan 1921-24 for service on the North West Frontier. To get an idea of values (which I realised would be substantial) I checked the internet and the exact set of medals was being offered for sale at £2495 ! The Warzistan medal alone was worth £110. It was a great privilege to actually see such medals and I am now trying to find exactly how Pte. Williams won his DCM. It must have been an act of great bravery. Needless to say the medals are now lodged with the bank and are insured. I am told they will not be sold .

Pictured - DCM first on left , followed by the 1914-15 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal and Warzistan Medal last on right.



Nostalgic music from the Great War

All is now confirmed for our evening of nostalgic music from the Great War at the Unicorn Inn Bayford on 30th September starting at 7.30 p.m. and will end around 9.30 p.m. Sarah Lowery has confirmed she will sing for us. There is no charge for the event but for those wishing to use the CAT bus from central Wincanton there is a charge of £3 each. Please let me have your names as soon as possible.

Annual Dinner

The final date for bookings for the Annual Dinner on 10th October will be 19th September, all dinner selections and bus pick up bookings must be in by this date.

New cadet affiliation.

I am very pleased to say that we will be affiliating with another Cadet group in the very near future. This will be with the Sea Cadets of the T.S Mantle VC based at RNAS Yeovilton. More details next month.



War Memorial seat damaged

Unfortunately vandals have damaged the seat at the side of the War Memorial. It happened during daylight on Saturday 23rd August. Whilst it is not the responsibility of the branch to fix it we are in the process of getting it repaired and all will be finished by Remembrance Sunday.