



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Poppy Appeal Launch
28th October 10 a.m. Memorial Hall

Remembrance

As we go into autumn it is that time of year to reflect on Remembrance and the sacrifices made during recent wars and conflicts, Sadly there seems to never be a time when our military are not involved in some sort of active service and real peace seems very hard to achieve. This year our thoughts and commemorations have gone back to the Great War, "the war to end all wars" - the First World War. In our last Sandbag we covered the 100th anniversary of the Battles of Ypres and Passchendaele and just the thought of it typified the horrors our soldiers must have experienced. Passchendaele is a tiny bump in the ground near the old Flemish cloth weaving town of Ypres and the Tyne Cot Cemetery on Passchendaele Ridge commemorates 34,887 British and Commonwealth soldiers who have no known graves plus 11,965 who have named graves as well as a further unknown 8369. The numbers are staggering, it is the largest British and Commonwealth Cemetery in the world. Within the town of Ypres is the Menin Gate which commemorates another 53,896 soldiers who were killed before August 1917 in the Ypres area and have no known graves. Each evening since 1928

The Menin Gate



The Cloth Hall



Destroyed during the war and rebuilt after

volunteer members of the Ypres Fire Brigade play Last Post and Reveille which has only been interrupted by the German occupation from 1940 to 1944. It was also at Ypres that the Canadian military doctor Col. John McCrea wrote the iconic poem in "Flanders Fields".

He also operated an army dressing station in the town and composed the poem there after the death in action of his close friend. Harry Patch served in Ypres and it was nearby that he was badly wounded and a new memorial was erected to Harry, as the

last British soldier to have fought in the First World War. Also in one of the cemeteries is the grave of Valentine "Joe" Strudwick who was killed in action at Ypres aged just 15 years (he lied about his age !)

In my opinion if there is any place in the world that symbolizes the suffering of the First World War, and futility of war in general, it is Ypres - thankfully the local people are still upholding the legacy of Remembrance there.



"Joe" Strudwick's grave

63rd (Royal Naval) Division

We have many members who served in the Royal Navy and some who are still serving. I was reminded at our recent branch dinner that when talking of Flanders in the First World War and especially Passchendaele we generally refer to our combatants as the “army” BUT within the battle were many “sailors”. Although I was aware of it I did not research specifically the contribution made by naval personnel fighting in the trenches and the conversation encouraged me to do so. At the outbreak of the First World War naval reservists outnumbered requirements of the Royal Navy and it was quickly decided to use some of this available manpower to form a Naval Division. A Naval Division, numbered as the 63rd Division was formed partially incorporating Territorial soldiers of the 2nd (Northumberland) Division and reservists from the Royal Marine Light Infantry and Royal Marine Artillery. Numbers were swelled by other naval reservists from various shore establishments. The original idea being to supply troops to defend naval installations overseas, but as manpower was urgently needed to fight at the outset of the war, the Division soon found itself being deployed



Royal Naval Division at Antwerp



on other assignments, notably at the siege of Antwerp immediately after war was declared. At Antwerp, which was defended by forts manned by the Belgian Army, the Germans cut off the forts and the Belgians forced to surrender. Orders from the Admiralty were that the Division were not to surrender but instead make their way to neutral Holland where the bulk of them were interned for the whole of the war. In April of 1915 the Royal Naval Division was deployed at Gallipoli and joined the main landings at Anzac Cove and Cape Hellas, ultimately being withdrawn and returned to Egypt. In the October of 1916 the Battle of the Somme was still rumbling on and the 63rd Division arrived there in time for what was now termed the Battle of the Ancre. They were involved in very heavy fighting at Hawthorne Ridge and Beaucourt and many casualties were sustained. Members will remember that one of War Dead, Harry Hamblin, who was himself in the Royal Naval Division was killed during the next big battle for the Division - the Battle of Arras in April 1917, which happened in the months preceding the battles around Passchendaele, which was probably the most notable battle honour for the 63rd Division.

The 63rd Division arrived at Ypres just before the Second Battle of Passchendaele (26 October – 10 November 1917) On 26 October, immediately to the north of the Canadian Corps, the supporting attack by XVIII Corps involved one brigade each from the 63rd and 58th divisions. The 188th Brigade, of the 63rd Division quickly captured Varlet Farm and Banff House. The centre of the attack was held up on the road between Bray Farm and the village of Wallemolen and the troops dug-in near Source Trench. As dark fell, Banff House was abandoned and the line reformed at Berks House, leaving Banff House and Source Trench the only part of the first objective not occupied. On 30 October, the 63rd Division infantry were caught by German artillery fire at their jumping-off line, made only slight progress in deep mud against German machine-gun fire and were unable to reach their rendezvous with the Canadians leaving their troops at Source Farm and Vapour Farm in precarious positions. Two companies later advanced through the Canadian sector to capture Source Trench but were only able to reinforce the Canadian outpost at Source Farm, then form a defensive flank to Vapour Farm. The 63rd Division had 3,126 casualties from 26–31 October. The division was able to close up to the Paddebeek, by attacking at night from 1/2–4/5 November, a method which took more ground than its attacks in October, for a loss of 14 killed and 148 wounded.

Wincanton road names

I was talking with some of the young people at our recent events and I asked if they knew why Atkins Hill, opposite King Arthur's School was named that way. As the naming took place around 10 years ago I thought it would be good remind the latest generation - the youngsters did not know !

When the New Barnes Farm development was in the planning stage I approached the developers and asked if they would consider naming the roads after our War Dead of the Second World War. To my great satisfaction they agreed and at the time they said that there were 13 roads and footpaths requiring names and on checking there were exactly 13 common names (plus a few duplicates) of our War Dead. On telling the developer that there were three Atkins from Wincanton killed in the Second World War and upon finalising my research found they were all cousins - they replied that they would like to name the main through road (yet to be completed) Atkins Hill. They also agreed to name the first completed road Crocker Way after Victor Crocker who was killed at sea. I will tell Victor's story in our next Sandbag but one of the three cousins was Harry Atkins and his story is so significant that I feel I would like to remind everyone.

William Harry Atkins was born on the 8th December 1907 at Charlton Musgrove, his family called him Harry at home. His father, Harry George Atkins moved from Wales, where Harry senior was a miner. He met Harry's mother, Rose Manning in Bruton, where they married. As a lad Harry Atkins went to school in Wincanton and at the age of 12 years ran errands at Knights Chemist shop. He also worked in the shop with Nurse Nellie Hasket whom he helped fill small jars of Cod Liver Oil and Malt from the large jars it came in. Nurse Hasket affectionately remembered Harry licking the big jars out before he threw them away.

He joined the Royal Navy on the 18th March 1924 and was sent to the training ship H.M.S. Impregnable with rank of Boy 2nd Class. In September of 1924 Harry went on to H.M.S. Ganges which was the boys training establishment for ratings near Ipswich and he specialized in the signals branch, achieving the rank of Boy 1st Class and then Signal Boy. In December 1925 he was transferred to the regular Royal Navy with the rank of Ordinary Signaller and joined H.M.S. Centurion a pre Dreadnought class battleship. From then on he rapidly gained rank and served on many famous ships of the Royal Navy including the battleships Royal Sovereign and Nelson. He also served on the new battleship H.M.S. Maidstone, which was launched in 1938. In July 1938 he joined the destroyer H.M.S. Glowworm as Leading Seaman and subsequently Acting Yeoman of Signals on 14th September 1939, just after start of the Second World War. He married Edith Matthews from Evercreech and had one daughter, Dawn, Venetia.



On 5th April 1940 H.M.S. Glowworm and three other destroyers were escorting the battleship H.M.S. Renown in the North Sea. There had been rumours that German Navy ships were at sea and the group of Royal Navy ships were searching for them. It was at the time of the German invasion of Norway. The next morning Glowworm lost a man overboard and her Captain, Lt. Commander Roop, decided to turn about to look for him but he was not found. Because of this the Glowworm lost contact with the battleship and the other three destroyers and was totally alone in the North Sea. The following day another man was overboard although he was subsequently picked up but died later. The weather was awful and the sea heavy with swell.

On the morning of 8th April a destroyer was seen on the horizon but it was not flying a flag and Glowworm challenged the destroyer to identify herself. The destroyer on the horizon was German and began to open fire on Glowworm. H.M.S. Glowworm had sailed straight into a German battle group which was carrying German troops for the invasion of Norway. Not only were there enemy destroyers but they were escorting the German heavy cruiser Admiral Von Hipper. Instead of turning and running away, Lt. Commander Roop, opened fire. Glowworm was alone, very tiny and totally outclassed in this unequal fight. Sailing straight for the Hipper with guns firing Glowworm was taking several hits but managed to fire torpedoes at the Cruiser. Heavy shells from the enemy cruiser had hit Glowworm and her radar guidance system was out of action, but fire from Glowworm did hit the enemy inflicting damage.

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Finally badly damaged and taking in water Glowworm, with all the speed she could make rammed the Hipper. She sank in a hail of heavy fire from the Hipper. On board H.M.S Glowworm that day, 8th April 1940, was Yeoman of Signals William Harry Atkins from Wincanton he was 32 years old. He was on the bridge with the Captain, where the Yeoman Signaler should be, when it took a direct hit, Harry was mortally wounded. He had recently been promoted to Petty Officer and was awaiting transfer to submarines, he had just bought his full Petty Officer uniform. He was one of the reasons Atkins Hill was named. I will tell the story of his cousins and Victor Crocker in the next Sandbag. Lt. Commander Roop, from Taunton, was awarded a posthumous Victoria Cross at the end of the Second World War after prisoners of war from H.M.S. Glowworm were released and able to describe the extreme bravery of the crew of the ship and Captain of the ship.

Remembrance events

As I have said before, our Remembrance events seem to be timeless and are always the same each year. But to confirm :-
Saturday 11th November, assemble at the War Memorial at 10.45 a.m. for the Two Minutes Silence commencing at 11 a.m. Afterwards a very short wreath laying - without ceremony at the Old Faithful Memorial, Bayford.
Remembrance Sunday parade on 12th November and church service. Assemble at the War Memorial, Memorial Hall at 2.15 p.m. for march off at 2.30 p.m. Church service commences at 3 p.m.

Poppy Appeal Launch 28th October

Dawn and Teresa will be hosting the launch of Wincanton Poppy Appeal at the Memorial Hall on Saturday 28th October commencing at 10 a.m. There will be all the poppy items available and they will be available to chat about our forthcoming effort and answer any questions

Christmas Carol Concert 9th December

We are very fortunate to be able to repeat the successful Christmas Carol Concert again this year. Present will be Wincanton Silver Band, Wincanton Choir and Wincanton Youth Theatre and the date is set for 9th December at 7 p.m. at the Memorial Hall.
 We will be jointly hosting the event with Wincanton Live at Home.
 Although final details are not fully available the date and time is firm, so I am sure we will all have another wonderful time.

Future of our monthly trips

I must let you know that I am having extreme difficulty with support for the monthly trips. As you know, we have a small non charity fund account to cover losses in emergencies. Over the last year many of the trips ran at a loss and I do not believe I can handle this situation for much longer. Although my initial reaction has been to end these trips now and not hold them any more I do feel there is a committed group of loyal members who do want to go and I do not want to disappoint them. I do often question the stress involved for me organising these trips but I will continue to organise the first one next year and judge whether it is worth it. It will NOT be as once thought to attempt a visit to Cardiff as this will be too expensive. As you know South West Coaches require prepayment for the coach booking, so in future I will only put people on the list if they pay at the time of making their booking. If I do not get enough people one week before the trip I will cancel it.

Pie and a quiz 27th January

We all seem to have lots of opportunity for festive lunches around Christmastime and in January with the short days we all need cheering up, so we have decided to have a fun evening on Saturday 27th January at the Millers Inn. Things will start with a "pie and mash" meal followed by a light hearted (and not "too" difficult) quiz - don't be fooled though, you will need to think ! The evening costs £7.50 and starts at 7 p.m. contact me for reservations after Christmas. I will remind everyone in the next Sandbag.

Wells RBL branch are launching Poppy Appeal with a Concert in Wells Town Hall on Saturday 28th October, 7pm for 7.30pm, with Wells City Band, Let me know me know if you can go and we will try to go as a group.