



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Next meeting is a Coffee Morning on 12th May 10 a.m. at the Memorial Hall

The Great Pilgrimage

Wincanton branch have now been confirmed as having two representatives attending the Great Pilgrimage 90 which is happening between 5th and 9th August this year. The event will aim to duplicate the "pilgrimage" of First World War veterans and their families which took place 90 years ago during the same dates. Martin Holmes will represent us as our Standard Bearer and Michael Holmes will lay our wreath at the Menin Gate in Ypres. They will both take part in the extensive commemorations taking place in Belgium and France and be at the Last Post Ceremony on 8th August at the Menin Gate. There will be exciting visits included in their trip when they will also visit both the Flanders and Somme battlefields.

Passchendaele Tree gets its plaque

I am pleased to let you that we have at last got the plaque in place at the Passchendaele Tree at the Memorial Hall. We were very fortunate to have had a local craftsman come forward who made the plaque and fixings. He donated his services and the material free of charge and did not want to be personally acknowledged but we must say here how grateful we are and compliment him on the splendid job he has done.



Ceremonial items donated

This year is special in as much as it was 100 years ago that the First World War (also known as the Great War) ended. There are many events commemorating the anniversary and as a branch we intend to fully take part. We were in need of purchasing ceremonial equipment as existing equipment was rather old and some in disrepair. A very generous donation of £200 from one of our members enabled

us to purchase white gauntlets, Standard holsters and gold cords and tassels. We are most grateful for the donation and now smartly ready for everything !

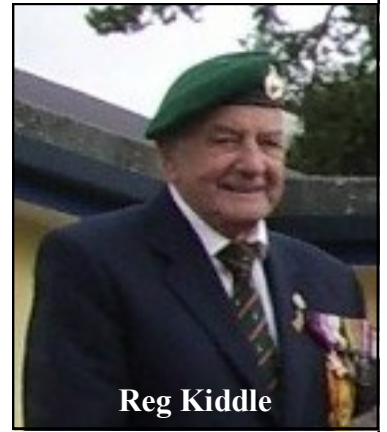


Coffee Morning 12th May 10 a.m. Memorial Hall

Now that winter is over (hopefully !) we will continue with our popular Coffee Mornings at the Memorial Hall. The next is on 12th May starting at 10 a.m. and this will be a good chance for you all to catch up on things that are happening within the branch - now that we have discontinued the monthly branch meetings. There will be another Coffee Morning on 16th June. We will update you on plans for the rest of the year including Armed Forces Day on 30th June and Remembrance Sunday 11th November. We will also discuss social fundraising events including quizzes and bingo.

One of our many heroes from Wincanton

It has been my privilege to have held several roles in Wincanton RBL over the years and as such have met many special people and some very brave men. Amongst them was Reg Kiddle and chatting with him one time Reg asked me if I could find anything on the internet regarding 43 Royal Marine Commando, it was his old unit and it difficult to find books on the subject as 43 Commando was disbanded at the end of the World War Two and never re-formed. I too had some difficulty but there were things about 43 Commando which alerted me to look further and whilst in Portsmouth I thought I would go to the Royal Marines Museum at Eastney Barracks and ask there. When paying for my ticket to the museum I asked the attendant (who was obviously an ex marine from his smart appearance !) “Do you have anything in the museum about 43 Commando and where should I look?”. That is an easy question he said as we have a memorial in the barracks to the Victoria



Reg Kiddle

Cross winner from 43 Commando just outside the door. He also said there was the epic story of the winning of his Victoria Cross featured in a gallery in the museum. How I overlooked this I do not know but that person was Cpl. Tom Hunter VC and indeed his memorial is within the barracks. The Victoria Cross was won during fighting at the Argenta Gap in Northern Italy during the Spring of 1945. When I returned I said to Reg, “you did not tell me there was a VC won in 43 Commando” to which Reg answered in that modest way I now know about our old soldiers, “oh yes” he said “I was his troop sergeant and I witnessed his bravery when winning the VC”. You can imagine I was speechless !

Reg was a butcher by trade and was born and brought up in the small village of Langley, near Maidstone in Kent. He always wanted to join the Navy but when he applied for the boy's service he had enlarged tonsils and was told to go away until he had his tonsils removed. When war broke out he was not quite old enough and was called up in March 1940 when again he attempted to join the Navy. On reporting for call up he again asked for the Navy but was told that the Royal Marines had vacancies and it would be *easy to transfer from the Marines to the Navy ??*

Reg did in fact join the Royal Marines reporting to Eastney Barracks, Southsea and then sent for training at Haverford West where he noticed a course for butchers and duly applied. The course was at Smithfield Market, London and Reg was able to go home at night. He then after completion of the course went back to his unit not to become a butcher but being assigned to the 2nd Battalion Royal Marines who were ultimately to undergo Commando training. In early 1942 the unit moved to the Isle of Wight and Reg was billeted in civilian quarters, but some of his comrades moved into Osborne House, the royal residence. Training in amphibious warfare and landings were undertaken in Southampton Water and the battalion formed up with J Force. Reg's first son was born at this time in Pembury Hospital near Maidstone and he was allowed a short leave. In October 1942 the battalion embarked in the *SS Duchess of Richmond* in the Clyde for an operation which would have involved action in French West Africa which was under the Vichy French control at the time. It was decided to attack the French garrison and sink the battleship Richelieu which was at anchor off Dakar. Before any action took place the Vichy French stationed there defected to the Allies and the battleship sailed under escort for a refit in New York. The operation was called off and Reg found himself in Sierra Leone which was a British colony and somewhat of a backwater, Reg recalls that one did not believe there was a war on there. What transpired was a very good posting for six months. Some of the marines stayed in Sierra Leone and formed part of the Freetown garrison, including Reg. He was given the enviable task of calling in on all the Royal Navy ships stationed there collecting and delivering their mail by liberty boat. The mail would be taken to a sorting office at King Tom Point which was near Lumley Beach and of course there were lots of opportunities for swimming and plenty of sunshine ! After six months in the sun Reg returned to his unit who were now at Hursley Park near Winchester.

In August 1943 the 2nd Bn. Royal Marines was reorganised and became 43 Royal Marine Commando. The unit moved to Achnacarry House in Scotland, affectionately known as “Commando Castle”. Marines would speed march from Spean Bridge Railway Station and the welcoming cry at the drive gates of Achnacarry Castle would be “Only a couple more miles to go lads...” Here Reg became a commando, joining soldiers from many countries, he undertook basic training and eventually the right to wear the coveted Green Beret.

Training was very tough and included crossing the training ground under live machine gun fire on fixed lines and crossing a ravine by rope with phosphorous shells exploding beneath. The Sergeant Major would yell at them to keep their heads down and Reg remembers marching into the castle grounds with his comrades and on passing a grave yard being told “see that’s what happened to an earlier intake, they didn’t keep their heads down !” During his commando training Reg also gained his parachute wings. Firstly jumping from the side of an abandoned railway line but then graduating to actual parachute drops from old bombers completing three ordinary daytime, one night time and one delayed action drops.

After training in Scotland the unit moved south to Ramsgate and Dover training for raids that never materialised. Instead on 11th November 1943 the unit embarked on the *SS Monarch of Bermuda*, bound for Algiers, where it stayed until 27th December. Christmas in Algiers was very “different” and Reg said he saw some very “unusual” things ! Reg was by now a Lance Corporal. Unknown to everyone at the time was the fact that on 22nd January 1944 the invasion of Italy would take place and at the forefront of the landings at Anzio would be 43 Royal Marine Commando, they encountered very bitter fighting. Eventually moving up through Italy Reg was involved in some of the heaviest fighting with the assault of the Gustav Line and the Battle of Cassino. Reg casually said to me, “actually we were not involved in the fighting to take Cassino but **only** took part in fighting on the lower slopes and villages”. As the fighting moved north it was deemed necessary to start harassing German garrisons in the Adriatic and give support to Marshal Tito’s partisans. 43 Royal Marine Commando, including Reg, then spent about 6 months in the Adriatic being based on the island of Vis where they bivouacked in tents undertaking raids against enemy garrisons on the islands off the coast of Yugoslavia. It was a difficult time as in some places the local Yugoslavs (Chetniks) actually supported the Germans and sometimes it was difficult to know just who was occupying the islands. Anyway Reg said they did manage to “blow up a few things” and generally cause havoc for the Germans. The unit then returned to Italy on 9th January 1945 disembarking at Castellano. Reg was by now a Sergeant and Troop Sergeant of C Troop.

On 3rd April 1945 in the Battle of Lake Comacchio, known as the Argenta Gap, 43 RM Commando’s objective was the Valleta Canal, although not in immediate sight when ‘C’ troop began its’ advance. Most of the houses south of the canal had been demolished and the scrub-land cut to afford the German defenders a clear field of fire. However, the advance seemed to have taken some of the Germans by surprise as the Marines pressed through the confusion, firing at those who engaged them, and ignoring those who raised their hands to surrender. Armed with a Bren gun, Reg’s Troop Corporal, Tom Hunter, was ahead of his troop and within four hundred yards of the canal when he realised the enemy held the ruined houses ahead and would soon engage his troop out in the open. Charging alone over two hundred yards, he cleared the defences and attracted the fire of enemy positions on the north bank of the canal whilst his troop advanced for cover. He was eventually hit and killed while engaging pill-boxes as his troop re-grouped. There was no doubt that Corporal Hunter offered himself as a target in order to save his Troop, and only the speed of his movement prevented him being hit earlier. For this action he was posthumously awarded the VC. At twenty-one, he was



Royal Marine bugler
at Reg’s funeral

the youngest Royal Marine to earn the medal. Reg witnessed the heroic act and was then able to follow through with his troop to overwhelm the German positions. Reg sadly remembered a popular South African officer advancing next to him stepping on a shoe mine and being killed outright. Later in the battle Reg was shot through the throat and evacuated to hospital at Vico Equense where he lay on VE Day. The wound was so severe that Reg lost the use of his voice and after a long convalescence did in fact fully recover. Reg then went with the Marines to be part of the Army of Occupation at Minden Barracks in Germany, being demobbed in Plymouth in November 1946. Reg died in 2008 and because of our close association with the Commando Helicopter Force at RNAS Yeovilton and them being made aware of Reg being a member here, we were very pleased to be able to have a Royal Marine bugler play Last Post at Reg’s grave side in Wincanton Cemetery. Reg was accorded full Legion Honours with our Standard and many members attending - an officer from the Royal Marines attended as a mark of respect. I have the greatest respect for Reg and fond memories of a very brave man.

First trip to the “seaside” this year 28th April

I have been somewhat worried lately about costs of our monthly trips but I am pleased to say it looks like we will be able to continue them this year. Many members who wanted to go to Teignmouth had compelling reasons not to be able to attend. Because of the low numbers we had to arrange a smaller vehicle to Teignmouth which is now totally full. Costs have risen sharply and I now need to charge all the trips this year at £15 for adults and £7.50 for children (under 5 years free). The Teignmouth trip will now depart from the Memorial Hall at **9 a.m.** prompt to get a full day in at Teignmouth and home around 6 p.m.

Great day planned for 19th May

A place we have not been for a while is Bristol and we will remedy this on 19th May. This could be an ideal place for a family day out as we will get off the coach right by the harbour, it is also very convenient for all the other sights in Bristol and the inexpensive ferry boat goes from there to the *S.S. Great Britain* and the replica of John Cabot’s ship the *Matthew*. There are lots of places to eat and the new Bristol museum is nearby. Prices as for the April trip (above). We will depart from the Memorial Hall at 9 a.m. and also home around 6 p.m.

Visit to the Passing Out Parade Royal Military Academy - Sandhurst 8th August

We will be attending the Passing Out Parade at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst on 8th August. There is a maximum amount of places we can have and they will be allocated on a first come first served basis. I am not able to let you know exact costs but will be similar to last time at a total of around £25 each. Final details will be available very soon. People are putting their names on the list so I would advise you to let me know soon if you would like to go.

Although we had good support for our trip to Winchester we made a loss again. I am working through the social float we have to subsidise trips but will now only be able to confirm trips two in advance. May is confirmed and will be a large coach. The float will run out soon, so please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to go on these trips to enable a smaller vehicle when necessary.

MEDALS MOUNTED TRADITIONAL STITCHED METHOD

I often get asked by members where they could get their medals remounted in “Court Style” and chatting with Neil Anderson (Corenza’s husband) he tells me he has been doing this for some time. I asked Neil for information and he sent me this :-

“I had my miniature medals mounted as a Sergeant when I received the Queens Golden Jubilee Medal. To say the least, I was not impressed at the charges or quality of work on them. Double sided sticky tape and glue should not be near anyone’s medals!

I researched the procedure involved and realised I can do a better job. Since then I have been mounting medals using the traditional method of hand stitching ribbons. I also offer a discounted price for veterans.

Prices are:

Miniatures – £4.50 per medal

Full Size Medal – £6.00 per medal

Strip and Clean - Full Size Medals – £5.00 per medal.

Your medal is removed from the current ribbon mounting, silver dipped, polished and then stitched back into place.

Note: When you are issued a medal, the medal office provides you with enough ribbon to have it mounted. If you have no ribbon for your medal, additional charges may apply. Serving soldiers please contact me for prices
Contact: Mobile 0780 4451 471

Email: neiljohnanderson@hotmail.com

Regards, WO2 Anderson”.

I understand the word has got around and I know of at least one member who has had Neil remount his medals and he is delighted with the result. *Tony*

World War One “Thank you event” 7th July Dunkirk Memorial House, Bishop’s Lydeard

As I mentioned in last Sandbag, the County of Somerset main event commemorating the end of the First World War is being held on 7th July at Dunkirk Memorial House Bishop’s Lydeard. In the main arena there will be marching bands, the Military Wives Choir and Shire Horses. In the grounds will be a World War One Field Hospital, vintage vehicles and a children’s World War One Assault Course. There is also a licensed bar. We will be arranging a coach (if numbers justify) from Wincanton Memorial Hall departing at 9.30 a.m. and cost £15 adults, £7.50 children (under 5 free). It sounds like a great day out so please let me know as soon as possible if you wish to come as I must book a coach.