



"SANDBAG"

WINCANTON AND DISTRICT ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER

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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

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Poppy Appeal Launch—Coffee Morning 26th October 10 am Memorial Hall

Poppy Appeal 2019/2020

The branch is launching Wincanton Poppy Appeal with a Coffee Morning on 26th October at 10 a.m. in the Memorial Hall. There will be poppy merchandise etc., with all proceeds going to Wincanton Poppy Appeal. You will have read Dawn's write up in the last Sandbag and if you have not already done so there is still time to help with poppy selling. Please contact Dawn either by email at oldiescottage@hotmail.com or by contacting Georgina on 01963-32874.

Remembrance 2019

Last year we reverted to the traditional time for our Remembrance Sunday parade and church service - in the morning. It had been lost in the depths of time why we held our service and parade in the afternoon of Remembrance Sunday and last year being the 100th anniversary of the Armistice ending the Great War of 1914 to 1918 everyone pulled the stops out and held it in the morning. We will now continue in future to always have our Remembrance in the morning. This year timings are :-

Assemble at the Memorial Hall car park **10 a.m. prompt on Sunday 10th November.**

March off at 10.20 a.m. prompt.

Church Service in the Parish Church commences at 10.45 a.m.

The service will last approximately one hour.

Parade will reassemble at approximately 11.50 a.m. and march back to Churchfields.

Wreaths and crosses will also be laid at the Memorial in the grounds of the War Memorial Hall as well as at the Memorial Roll of Honour within the Parish Church.

We expect to have representatives of the local councils, schools, youth organisations, and the military. We do hope you can attend this important time of the year. Steve, Rob and Dave Hill will be coordinating this year.



Dave Roberts presents Anne Lewin from DMH with our cheque

Branch donation to Dunkirk Memorial House

Over the past year the branch received two major donations amounting to around £1500. At the AGM in June the committee voted to donate from this £700 each to the two RBL establishments in the County - Dunkirk Memorial House (DMH) and Somerset Legion House (SLH). Our vice president Dave Roberts presented the first £700 cheque to Anne Lewin, Home Manager at DMH on 14th October. The team at Dunkirk Memorial House provide nursing and personal care as well as short term respite care for the Armed Forces community and their families. We will be donating the other £700 to Somerset Legion House in the near future. SLH is one of the RBL Break Centres offering the Armed Forces community a chance to get away from it all when things get tough.

Fifteen excellent years !

As I mentioned in the last Sandbag I retired from my role as chairman at the last AGM and I am very pleased to say our new team headed by Rob Dickinson is now well in place and the future for the branch is in very safe hands.

It has been my privilege to have served in several roles at the branch over the last 15 years, including treasurer, chairman and now president. During those years I have met some very amazing people. Fifteen years ago many of our members had served in the Second World War, Korea, Aden, the Falklands and Iraq now sadly many of them are no longer with us to share the fascinating stories but I would like to share just two of them with you. It is not an understatement to say we had some very brave men with us who were so modest that it was an effort to get them to admit their exploits and bravery. When thinking of the word "bravery" two members instantly spring to mind, which their military decorations speak for themselves - they were Walter "Paddy" Smyth Military Medal, 22nd Dragoon Guards and Peter "PADY" Yateman Military Cross., King's Royal Rifle Corps. (Pady got his nickname of the initials of his Christian and surname and "Paddy Smyth from his Ulster birth)

I think Pady's heroism is aptly quoted in his citation for the Military Cross, which really says it all -

"On 10th February 1945, Lt. Yateman was commanding a platoon in C Coy 12 KRRC. The Company received orders after entering Cleve to take up a position in the South West edge of the town in front of some high ground where enemy parachutists were firmly established in the wood. These parachutists presented a real threat to the rear of the Regiment who were fighting in the town. As the Company were dismounting from their vehicles the parachutists put in a counter attack on the right flank of the Company, at the same time engaging them with mortar and small arms fire. Lt. Yateman in spite of the intense mortar fire which was landing on the road refused to take cover and personally led his platoon with the greatest coolness into fire positions from where he could engage the enemy. By his complete disregard for his own personal safety and cool leadership he gave the greatest confidence to his men and there can be no doubt that this prompt and offensive action saved what might have been an awkward situation. Later during the day the officer commanding the platoon on his right was killed and the platoon suffered heavy casualties. Lt. Yateman immediately left his own platoon under the command of his platoon serjeant and under heavy fire made his way to the other platoon positions where he directed operations and restored the situation. Throughout the day the enemy parachutists continued to try and infiltrate from the high ground back into the town and it was entirely due to Lt. Yateman and his platoon that their efforts failed. During the whole time, this officer displayed coolness, dash and courage of the highest order" signed B.L. Montgomery, Field Marshal.

Pady arrived in Normandy after the initial landings with the 250 replacements joining the 12th Bn KRRC, Once in place he then took command of the 11 Platoon C Coy which was a motorised unit who were fighting near Caen. Pady saw action with them at Caen, Mont Pinlon and Falaise. He was with the 8th Armoured Brigade which were involved in the "Seine breakout" and the many skirmishes into Brussels. Fighting on into Holland reaching the Eascaut Canal and Arnhem the 8th Armoured were flank guard to the Guards Armoured Division. He crossed the Rhine with the Guards at the bridge at Eindhoven. During the winter of 1944/45 the advance continued to Maastricht. Pady then saw action at the Reichwald with night actions through flooded areas. It was in this area around Cleve that Pady's gallant action earned him the Military Cross and he crossed the Rhine with the main assault and breakout fight. He continued up the Dutch/German border, passing many burning farms being involved in four platoon and one troop/tank attack in 2 days with covering fire from tanks. It was at a town called Lastrup that he led his platoon across open ground with tank cover to "Jerry" positions where in his words "I was hit by rifle fire at close range - the attack was successful and I was the only twit hit (12th April 1945)". It was on VE Day that Pady was evacuated to Worcester where his bad wounds (my words) were treated. Just knowing Pady was such a privilege and honour, I met with him often and on a rare occasion he shared some his wartime experiences with me but forbade me to write an article then in Sandbag. It was only after he died that his family agreed I should write about him.



In October 2007 I drove a mini bus to Normandy with a group of our members, three of whom served at the Normandy Landings. Amongst them was Walter “Paddy” Smyth Military Medal. We had been aware that Paddy was in flail tanks during the Normandy Landings but again true heroes are usually modest and rarely talk about their exploits. Prior to the trip I did a recce to Normandy and went to the Pegasus Bridge Memorial and Museum. I mentioned Paddy to the curator, who happened to be English. Through him I made contact with the mayor of Lion Sur Mer which was the town code named “Sword Beach”. Upon contacting the mayor he immediately replied to my letter and promised a civic reception for our group and advised he wished to confer a “Liberation Medal” from the town on our veterans who took part in the Landings, Paddy Smyth, Ron Peet and Fenton Rutter - what unfolded later was an amazing trip.



Paddy was a regular soldier prior to the Second World War and was stationed in Palestine at the outbreak of war. After Dunkirk regular army units were brought back to Britain to strengthen the defences at home and Paddy later retrained on specialist tanks, known as “Hobart’s Funnies” after the inventor of the unusual designs that evolved. We had realised that Paddy must have been amongst the first flail tanks to land on Sword Beach and in the regimental history it confirms that Paddy’s tank was the first flail tank down the ramp, it does say though that he held back to allow amphibious tanks in the water to come onto the beach and open fire. He then went up the beach and flailed mines right up to the sea wall at the road. At that time a German anti tank gun at the end of the beach was positioning to open fire on Paddy’s tank, in a moment of quick thinking Paddy swung the tank around and opened fire on the anti tank gun with the main gun and machine gun knocking it out. He then found he had reached the end of the beach unopposed so he proceeded to flail the beach again enabling the landing craft with the infantry to land relatively unopposed and free of mines. Paddy was ordered to retire to allow the main tank landings and after a few hours he moved forward with the other tanks and relieved the airborne troops at Pegasus Bridge. During the September of 1944 Paddy took part in the assault on Le Havre and finding his officer had been injured took command of his troop “with such great dash” that within a few minutes he had breached the minefield and a 24 foot lane had been cleared. He then went on to clear the wounded under very heavy artillery and mortar fire. After Normandy he was attached to Canadian Army fighting towards the German border and the Rhine. Paddy was engaged in the heavy fighting around the Reichwald and on 6th February 1945 he had to take command of his troop again when his officer was wounded. His tank led the attack on a trench system with a minefield in front under heavy fire enabling the operation to be a total success. As Troop Leader Sgt. Major during the attack on Bremen on 25th April Paddy was “instrumental in getting fresh ammunition to the Squadron” under heavy shell fire, when they were running out of ammunition and in great danger. Paddy’s Military Medal citation reads “if it had not been for this NCO the fire support given by the tanks would have been severely cut down, the entry into the suburbs of Bremen have been considerably slower and higher casualties have been suffered by the troops taking part in the assault”. For all his bravery he was awarded the Military Medal and none of this came out during my conversations with him during his life time - another modest hero !

During our 2007 visit to Normandy the mayor of Lion Sur Mer walked with Paddy along the beaches and through an interpreter Paddy pointed out landmarks he remembered, including the sea wall which he penetrated in his tank. We also visited the Normandy Museum at Bayeux and to all our amazement just as we entered the museum was a large photo of British tanks advancing (see below) after the Normandy Landings and who was in the turret of the leading tank ? Paddy Smyth MM—also pictured at the Mayor’s reception are Fenton Rutter RN and Ron Peet RN who were also present at the Landings. *Tony*



Race day at Wincanton racecourse Sunday 27th October

Wincanton Racecourse is once again supporting Combat Stress, a charity which for one hundred years has been delivering specialist mental health treatment for veterans. A Sunday at the races makes a great day out for all the family, and what's better is that under 18s attend free when accompanied by a full paying adult. (It is half-term)

Two Grandstand tickets cost just £30 if booked in advance. Gates open at 11am, approximately 2 hours before the first race and there will be lots to see and enjoy. There are seven races on the card, including the Desert Orchid Handicap Steeple Chase, named after the famous grey racehorse, whose flamboyant jumping and steely determination earned him a place in the hearts of a nation. www.wincantonracecourse.co.uk

There is also a fantastic online auction **open now and to everybody**, whether or not you are attending the race day. 57 amazing lots ranging from £20 to £2,250! You can view the auction and start bidding by typing or clicking on app.galabid.com/cs100-2019 and follow the registration instructions.

“From nowhere to Normandy”

This year was the 75th anniversary of the Normandy Landings which led to the end of the Second World War. Wincanton Historical Society are marking this with a guest lecture given by Brigadier Richard Folkes entitled “From nowhere to Normandy - The glider assault Pegasus Bridge, Normandy 1944.”

Richard Folkes commanded 659 Squadron during the First Gulf War, is a former Brigadier and Commandant of the Army Air Corps. He commanded 659 Squadron during the First Gulf War, and Commandant of the Army Air Corps.

It has all the makings of a very interesting and enlightening evening by this acknowledged expert on the history of the Army Air Corps and the Glider Regiment - forbears of the modern regiment.

The evening starts at 7 pm on **25th October** in the War Memorial Hall tickets (on the door) cost £5 each (members of the Historical Society £2) which will include light refreshments.

Looking back

Continuing our looking back, we were very fortunate on 16th December 2007 to have had a visit from Britain's “Last Fighting Tommy” - Harry Patch. The then last



surviving British soldier of the Great War to have fought in the trenches. We see Harry pictured with Bill Rumbold past chairman and leading figure in the branch.

Pre Christmas function

I sounded out a few people to see if it is viable to hold a branch Christmas function this year and it is obvious to me that we cannot achieve the minimum numbers required. However on speaking to Paul at the Dolphin he tells me that we could join an open public function he is organising in the restaurant of the Dolphin throughout December. The date we have chosen is Friday 20th December commencing at 7 pm. The Wincanton Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club members are also invited. Choice is from a two or three course meal with price of £16.95 for 2 course and £21.95 for three course.

The menu is as follows :-

Starter :

Pork, duck liver and port pate, served with bread and salad garnish, or breaded goats cheese and beetroot fritters served with caramelised onion chutney, or spiced parsnip and honey soup served with crusty bread and butter.

Main course :

Roast Beef or Roast Turkey
Vegetarian option - Brie, hazelnut wellington
All served from the carvery with all the festive trimmings.

Dessert : Espresso martini cheese cake or traditional apple crumble or Blackforest torte or Christmas pudding.

Tickets are in demand and I would appreciate it if you could let me know if you wish to go by 30th November.

Some people have asked if the Dolphin are serving Christmas Day lunches this year and I can confirm yes they are.