



"SANDBAG"
WINCANTON AND DISTRICT
ROYAL BRITISH LEGION NEWSLETTER
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NEWS FROM THE BRANCH

January
2011

Next branch meeting 21st February 7 p.m.

Sandbag by email

In the early new year the cost of postage will go up substantially and in an effort to keep costs down I have sent an email to all the members I know who have email and I would be very grateful if they would agree to have their copy sent as an email. If I have not contacted you and you are on email would you please let me know.

Coffee mornings 2011

Our branch Coffee Mornings have been set for **Saturday 2nd April. - 30th July and 29th October. All starting at 10 a.m.**
 Our June Coffee Morning will be replaced by the Poppy Party of 11 June.

News from Poppy Appeal

Arthur Pickup (our Poppy Appeal organizer) has passed me an update on how Poppy Appeal is doing this year, which I feel you will want to know about. Our branch total is now £12038 and up to Christmas the entire County of Somerset has so far raised £826.923. Nationally the total is currently £28 million which means we are all well on target to achieve at least the £36 million raised last year. The RBL has committed a record breaking £50 million grant for the care of injured Armed Forces personnel - the Legion's largest single award, which will fund four Personnel Recovery Centres (PRCs) in the UK and capital financing for one in Germany. It will also allow creation and operation of the RBL Battle Back Challenge and Assessment Centre and provide running costs for a "Pathfinder" PRC in Edinburgh. The Legion will take over funding the centre's running costs from 1 January 2011 and provide the £5 million needed to keep it operating until 2020. 3 purpose built PRCs will be created in Colchester, Catterick and Tidworth jointly financed by the RBL and Help for Heroes. All will provide rehabilitation and assistance for injured soldiers. It is nice to hear how our Poppy Appeal moneys gets spent. We intend holding an events in the summer to boost our 2010 appeal before it closes (see back page).

Next branch trips.

Our first trip of the year should be very interesting with a visit to Hall & Woodhouse Brewery in **Blandford on Friday 25th March** . The tour of the working brewery starts at 11 a.m. and the coach will leave Wincanton at 10 a.m. There is a £6 charge (includes a pint of beer) for the tour which lasts around 1 3/4 hours and I have set the price of the coach at £10 as long as we get over 30 people. There will be time for lunch in the brewery restaurant for those who wish and then we will go into Blandford until around 4 p.m. getting home around 5 p.m. Our trip to Poole date is set for **Saturday 16th April** and is still in the planning stage, awaiting finalizing a possible visit to the RNLI Lifeboat Centre. Although we definitely will be going to **Poole** that day I am awaiting RNLI confirmation of that visit. We will depart at 9 a.m. and home around 6 p.m. The cost is £10 as usual. Our May trip will be to Bridport for the famous market and then on to West Bay for the rest of the day - full details in the next Sandbag.

King Arthur's School.

We continued our close relationship with King Arthur's School again this year. Tony Goddard attended two school assemblies in November giving them a presentation on Remembrance and the Poppy, then Ron Peet and Arthur Pickup were guests of honour at the school Awards Evening. It is good to keep involvement with the younger generation, they are our future.

Our Poppy Appeal directly benefitted from a bequest from Laurie Carr this month by receiving £268.50.

“In my opinion the operation by 47 Royal Marine Commando at Port-en-Bessin was one of the greatest feats of arms of any unit, Royal Marines, Army, Navy or Air Force of any nation in the Second World War”.

Major General Julian Thompson - Historian.

Member Jill Carswell mentioned to me a while ago that her relative Captain Terence Cousins, Royal Marines, had a memorial dedicated to him in Normandy and little did I know then that he was in fact involved in the epic action by 47 Commando RM at Port-en-Bessin during the Normandy invasion, described by Julian Thompson as “one of the greatest feats of arms in the Second World War”.

Port-en-Bessin was the planned terminal for PLUTO (Pipe Line Under The Ocean) supplying to Normandy from England the vital petrol supplies required for the British and Canadian Armies.

The Commando, 420 strong, left Southampton in two mother ships and at 0730 hours on D-Day, 8 miles off-shore, the marines climbed into 14 Landing Craft Assault (LCAs).

The big guns at Le Hamel and Longues were ranging and soon one LCA was hit and sank, 12 marines being killed or drowned and 11 seriously wounded.

The other LCAs had to cross a wide band of submerged, mine-tipped steel obstacles: 4 were blown up and sank and 7 were damaged. Incoming LCAs were not to stop for rescue and some of the wounded drowned.

Reaching the beach the commando had lost 28 killed or drowned, 21 wounded and 27 missing. Much equipment including weapons and wireless sets was lost.

Under fire, the commando now penetrated the enemy front line and embarked on a 12 mile march through enemy territory towards Port-en-Bessin. Several enemy positions were overcome: one marine was killed and 11 wounded.

Digging in overnight on Mont Cavalier the commando commenced its assault next day. An entrenched position beside the Bayeux road was charged and overcome. Ahead lay the heavily defended concrete bunker positions on the 65 metre high headlands west and east of the harbour, and the harbour defences. The defenders were from the same division which decimated the Americans at Omaha.

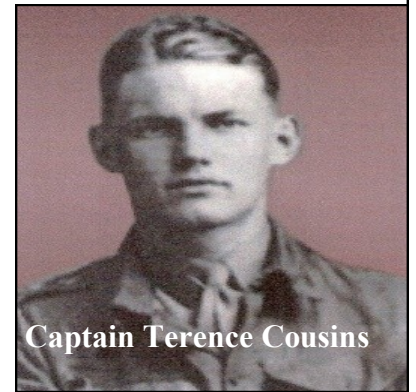
One troop then advanced up the open, mined, flame-thrower protected steep slope leading to the main bunker high on this western headland. The marines were under machine gun fire and grenades thrown from above. They had advanced more than half way up the slope when disaster struck. Intelligence had stated that the harbour was empty of armed ships but just before D-Day two FLAK ships had moved in and had a direct view of the slope. Opening fire they killed 12 and wounded 17, more than half the troop, within a few minutes. Amid this carnage the troop had to withdraw.

This disaster was further compounded when the commando's rear HQ was overrun, suffering casualties. An enemy counter-attack across the Bayeux road then cut off the troop defending Escures. The commando's strength had shrunk to 280.

The harbour defences were gradually cleared but casualties were continuing to rise, the FLAK ships still threatened, ammunition was running low, the marines were tiring and the major defences on the two headlands were unconquered.

At this point a reconnaissance of the eastern side of the harbour revealed a possible route up the eastern headland. With darkness falling Captain Cousins led a small group of 4 officers and 25 men in a desperate assault. The enemy positions were sited above them. They first encountered a concrete bunker which Cousins, with four men, rushed. He was killed by a grenade and 3 men wounded but the bunker was captured. The remaining marines, outnumbered 4 to 1, fought their way upwards against the concrete, entrenched, mine and barbed-wire defences above. One enemy position after another was captured and by midnight the whole of the eastern headland had been captured.

The morale of the defenders in the western headland bunkers unlike that of the marines had been weakened and next day the commando overran these and then re-occupied Escures.



Captain Terence Cousins

In all 46 marines had been killed or drowned and 70 wounded.

Three days later the Commando was assisting the 6th Airborne Division at the eastern end of the bridgehead.

A separate memorial to Captain Cousins who died capturing the bunker was unveiled on 7th June 2009. The text reads as follows:- *"During the afternoon and evening of 7th June 1944, in the battle for Port en Bessin, 47 Royal Marine Commando had suffered serious reverses and casualties were rising. If success was to be achieved the formidable defences of this eastern headland would have to be overcome.*

Captain Cousins, commander of the troop which had suffered severely at the headland West of the harbour, now undertook a reconnaissance of this headland and with a small group of men found the zig zag access path leading up from the southern end of the harbour.

He returned to say to his Commanding Officer, Lt Colonel Phillips, that if he were given 25 men he felt he could capture the headland.

In gathering darkness, accompanied by Captain Vincent and Lieutenant Stickings, Cousins now



Captain Cousins Memorial

led his 25 marines up the zig zag path. Towards the upper reaches, ignoring possible minefields, the party came under fire from this bunker. Ordering the rest of the party to wait and taking Marines Delap, Howe, Madden and Tomlinson with him Cousins broke through a wire fence guarding the bunker and under covering fire from the four marines and firing as he went he rushed the bunker. As he reached it a grenade was thrown from the bunker and he fell mortally wounded, Marine Madden was also seriously wounded. The waiting party then continued the assault on the bunker and overcame it.

Inspired by Cousins' determination, initiative and courage the marines now advanced onwards and upwards. Outnumbered four to one, in the open but taking advantage of darkness they steadily overcame an enemy possessing greater fire power and occupying secure mine protected entrenched positions above them. By midnight all of the defences had been overrun and the whole position was in the hands of the commando. Cousins' outstanding leadership had turned the battle. "

Port en Bessin and 47 Commando RM Memorial.



Bruton trips 2011

I have now received the list of trips organized by Bruton branch for 2011.

17th March - Cardiff

21st April - Gloucester Quays

19th May - Lymington & Lyndhurst (New Forest)

16th June - Minehead (Part of journey by steam train for those who wish)

21st July - River Exe (Via Exmouth & Topsham)

15th September - Lynton & Lynmouth

20th October - Swanage

17th November - Cadbury Garden Centre.

All trips are priced at £10 each

Amazing sequence of events

Whilst I was on my November holiday an amazing sequence of events took place which has a very exciting prospect for later this year. Firstly I received photographs and an email from an English family - the Southwoods, who live in Pernes Lez Boulogne regarding events there on Armistice Day 2010. Pernes Lez Boulogne is the resting place of L/Cpl Humbert Cox, Jean Pipe's father, and another soldier L/Cpl George Wilson a story which has been unfolding throughout last year. I will only briefly remind everyone (as I have covered it in depth before) but it was L/Cpls Cox and Wilson whom I have established were killed during the defence of Boulogne in May 1940. Secondly and very unexpectedly I received an email which turned out to be from the family of L/Cpl Wilson, I had left my card with our wreaths and never dreamed that his family would make such speedy contact. The Wilson family live in the North East of England and George along with his parents lived in Middlesborough. It turns out that George Wilson's sister has visited the cemetery on a number of occasions but had never been able to make contact with anyone in the village. It was her son who contacted me and it looks like there may well be a visit by them in May 2011 and I am hoping not only to go myself but hope Jean Pipe and her son may be able to meet them too. Already the Southwoods are making plans to involve the mayor of the village and trying to find more

information on the circumstances around the discovery of the bodies of the two English soldiers. I was in Pernes Lez Boulogne in October with David Mills and Peter Cox on our way to Loos and we left fresh wreaths

Alistair placing our wreaths



for the graves and I also gave a wreath to be placed on our behalf for Fallen of the village, also at the request of Alison Southwood I left a few poppies for the school children of the village (Alison is a teacher). On 11th November last, it appears that the village, as is tradition turned out at their war memorial and Alistair Southwood one of the sons of the family placed our

Wincanton RBL wreath being laid at the village memorial



wreath at both the memorial and the soldiers graves. I am so pleased that we can still show that we do care about those who lost their lives for the Country and it is very gratifying that although it is in a foreign country they too respect our war graves. I am told that the school children wore poppies throughout Remembrance period.

Events 2011

County have told us that Somerset will participate in the national cathedral concert initiative, one in Bristol on 9th July and the other at Wells on 16th July a further concert is being planned for Bath Abbey. The RBL is the official charity of the Bath & West Show this year and will hold an hour long arena display at the Show on 3rd June.

Poppy Party Weekend will be 11th-12th June and we will be holding our party then as part of our Poppy Appeal fundraising events (more details next Sandbag). It will be in the Memorial Hall with food and good quality entertainment.

Because of the heavy snow in December, as you know we cancelled the December branch meeting, we attempted to phone everyone but we do not have a few people's numbers on file. If the weather is bad for future meetings please check with Secretary before you set out.