

GENERAL COMMENTS

Editor: Ken Ferguson

It is impossible to write an editorial to this Newsletter without reference to the death of our President, Mr George Taylor and I feel I speak for our entire membership when I offer our sincere sympathy to his wife Rose and all the family. This man epitomised the spirit and continuity of the Branch having been member, standard bearer for 40 years, Chairman and finally President for the last four years.

It has become something of a press cliché nowadays to talk about the end of an era but when it is considered that George Taylor's service to the RBL added to that of his father Ernest, spans the entire life of the Sedlescombe Branch, it is impossible not to realise that an important era has ended. What it still gives us however is something to be proud of and to act as an inspiration to all present members and those who come after them

- I think I can speak on behalf of all members when I say, very simply, thank you George, for all your service to the Branch -you will be sorely missed.

This year has proved, so far, an important and eventful one for the Branch. Although only some two thirds through the year we have had our membership spiral to an all time high, been recognised by the award of the Jellico Cup for our achievements, unfortunately saw the deaths of three of our members including our President and have had notice of the impending resignation of our Chairman. Change indeed and when it is considered that only twelve months ago the branch was faced with the resignation of the former Secretary and Treasurer the 'everything change' mode seems to have been in place almost constantlyand yet the Branch continues to go forward with those latter posts being filled very quickly and more than adequately.

There is an old and well used saying in the armed services which is taught to all newcomers - "never volunteer", yet when the time comes and it is seen necessary to do so it is amazing how many of the people who give this advice are the first to come forward and there is no doubt that this Branch will roll on with new office holders who will have the same determination as those who have gone before, to continue to make this the best and most progressive Branch of the RBL in the U.K.



I joined the Army 17/12/1942 - at K camp Donnington, Shropshire (never been any further than London by train, but made it OK), for 6 weeks primary training. Nissan huts, loads of mud, no proper parade ground so used the streets in a housing estate.

Sent to holding unit at R.A. Barracks, Woolwich. Lots of guards and fire pickets sleeping on the floor. I came home on leave for a short while. I went to Silverhill one day, it was bombed and strafed by several Jerry fighter bombers. My Aunt and several other people were killed and a lot of damage was done especially Silverhill Junction.

After several weeks I was posted to Mitcham Road Barracks on a Motor Mechanics course. We lived in a big house in Wellesley Road close to East Croydon Station, had bunk beds, quite a pleasant time and learnt a lot. Passed Trade Test 3rd Class Motor Mechanic. I was sent to Mill Hill Command Workshops working mainly on Daimler Dingo Scout Cars. A one shilling return ticket and we could have a day out in London.

.....One day we had orders to pack up, went in convoy up the A3 and across London to near Grays in Essex. Under canvas in a marquee. We had orders to waterproof all the vehicles. I didn't feel well, didn't know what was wrong so I went on a special sick report. The MO said he thought I had jaundice. I was put in a small room by myself, didn't see a soul for two days. I was eventually taken to a Canadian Hospital at Colchester, had only white meat and no butter to eat. I was in hospital when I heard on the wireless that D Day had started in Normandy, which I should have taken part in with the rest of the lads in the LAD.

My sister Doris was killed by a Doodlebug that was shot down.

.....A lot of us from all sorts of units were taken to Eastleigh, near Southampton. In the morning we loaded up and went through the streets to the docks, loads of people lined the streets and bands were playing, we were off to Normandy. We were loaded on to a Liberty Boat at the docks and taken to Arromanches in Normandy, where we went over the side of the boat to a Tank Landing Craft going up and down about six feet on scramble nets, quite an experience. We went along the pontoons to land in France and with all our kit we marched about two miles to a Holding Unit in an orchard.

..... Eventually I was posted to the Armoured Recovery Section of the 5th Royal Tank Regiment, the 7th Armoured Division Desert Rats - a good crowd of chaps. Most of them had been in the desert and Italy. The first night I joined them a shell landed in the (Leager) tanks in a circle with soft vehicles in the middle, luckily only some water carriers were punctured. We soon crossed over the River Seine on a pontoon bridge and the great advance started. We had one or two skirmishes and a night drive in pouring rain, we reached the border with Belgium. All the chaps who were on that drive had sore faces as we were covered in chalky Somme dust. Then on to Audearde where we had a real taste of liberation. After a couple of pockets of resistance we arrived in Ghent to a great welcome. Then the road was cut and we were shelled a lot. Eventually the road was cleared and after several days we were off again to Eindhoven in Holland, where we saw a lot of gliders and planes going to where the road was cut to Arnhem.....

We had a short rest at Neder Weert in Holland to prepare for the next advance into Germany. In the middle of March we set off,..... We soon met up with a 6th Airborne Division where they had landed, many dead among the Gliders. Going was slow as we made our way into Germany. Ground was very soft, many tanks bogged down. A squadron completely bogged down one night - a lot of work getting them all going again so not much rest for about 48 hours. Very wooded country, a lot of German parachutists with Bazookas picking off tanks and Armoured cars.....

.....Later the same day we were bombed, two planes shot down. A bit later strafed with fighters. A lot of bridges over canals and rivers had been blown up. The REs did a marvellous job putting up Bailey Bridges often under fire. Our tank driver Joe Casey's mate was killed in a Scout Car, hit by a Bazooka. They had been together since the Desert days, it makes you think. As we made our way towards Bremen opposition began to get stronger especially in the Leckenburg Hills area.

On 3rd May 1945 we made our way across the big bridges over the Elbe into Hamburg. It was just a bombed wreck, just acres of rubble. We had our photos taken in the Town Hall Square and made our way towards the Keil Canal. It was here that the Jerries surrendered in their thousands in every sort of vehicle that would go - 10 ton trucks with trailers, horse and carts, bikes, walking with little carts. It was here that the war was officially at an end in Europe. We celebrated at a place called Brunsbuttel Koog on the Keil Canal with a bottle of rum. We could not believe it.

.....A lot of chaps who had been in the army a long time started to get demobbed, including our Sergeants.....I was promoted Troop Sgt all in one go. Frightened me going into the Sergeants Mess, the Holy of Holys, don't go in with your beret on - I learned very quickly.....

.....We had a fairly easy time just waiting for the demob numbers to come up. Mine was 49 and I was demobbed at York at the end of April 1947.