



Royal Tank Regiment Association London Branch



www.rtr-london-branch.org.uk

President: Lieutenant General A D Leakey CMG CVO CBE

Vice-President: Lt.Col. Simon Ridgway MBE

Newsletter

Sept-Oct 2019

Chairman

John Durrant
123 Lambourne Road
Barking
Essex IG11 9PZ
07802 481 417

Secretary

Eddie Sear
27 Sandwood Road
Sandwich
Kent CT13 0AQ
01304 612980

edwardsear@live.co.uk

Standard Bearer and Welfare Officer

Bob Swiniarski
71 Montpelier Rd
London SE15 2HD
020 7732 0711

bob.swiniarski@btopenworld.com

Vice Chairman

Barry Wicks
29 Muybridge Rd
New Maldon
Surrey KT3 3EH
020 8241 4355

Treasurer

Alan Cooper
8 Gregor Road
Southall
Middlesex UB2 4PP
020 8599 3129

alan.cooper13@btopenworld.com

**Membership Secretary
and Newsletter Editor**

Eric Locke
75 Sandhurst Drive
Ilford Essex IG3 9DD
020 8599 3129

tankregi@btinternet.com

RTRA London Branch newsletter is published every two months

Newsletter Contributions are always welcome by post or email to Eric Locke

Membership renewals should be set to Erick Locke

The Scarlets Appeal – Royal Chelsea Hospital

On the 12th September four of our members, John Durrant, Eddie Sear, Alan Cooper & Eric Locke, had the pleasure and the privilege of attending the 'Scarlets Appeal' closing ceremony at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. They were representing the London Branch at the ceremony, in order that the officials at the Royal Hospital could thank them and all the other attendees, for their efforts in raising the monies with which the Hospital could purchase a new lighter Scarlet coat for the Pensioners. The names of all the Associations and Businesses who had raised the monies were read out and thanked. It was an honour to hear the name of RTRA London Branch read out.

The ceremony was conducted in the Great Hall of the Hospital. Over 300 years old and designed by Sir Christopher Wren, the Great Hall at the Royal Hospital Chelsea is the main dining area for the Chelsea Pensioners. Oil Paintings of Monarchs who had ruled since the foundation of the Hospital, including a magnificent mural of Charles II, painted by Antonio Verrio, dating back to 1690 look down from high and beneath them the walls are wood-panelled and record every War, Campaign & Action in which the British Army has been involved since the foundation of the Hospital. A magnificent setting indeed.

I estimate there were about 100 present looked after by a number of the Pensioners dressed in their 'Scarlets' Our very own, Fred Bolwell looked after the London Branch, and ensured that the wine and the food kept flowing. Thank you, Fred, you and your colleagues did a grand job in helping to make it such a memorable and pleasant occasion.

All being well, the Pensioners will get their new lightweight Scarlets in time for Summer 2020.

John McLintock Reminisces

In 1957, I was serving with the Ayrshire Yeomanry, A Territorial tank regiment in the 52nd Lowland Division; when we had such things. Summer training, lasting two weeks alternated year about between field exercises and gunnery camps, usually at Castlemartin. 1957 was to be field exercises on Salisbury Plain and the regiment took up residence at Tilshead Camp, under canvas, as was usual for T.A. units. We took possession of over thirty Comet tanks some Daimler armoured cars and 'Dingo' scout cars, together with the usual trucks and 'jeeps'. A Squadron of the 8th Royal Tank Regiment were detached from Tidworth to Tilshead for the duration of the summer training season to oversee the maintenance and handover procedures as each T.A. unit attended for their summer camp. They did not appear to be too pleased with this role. Most seemed to be National Servicemen who had little interest in what they were doing and rumours were rife that the 8th were 'due for the chop' (amalgamation). How true that proved to be.

I was on the advance party for the regiment's arrival at Tilshead so we had a lot of contact with lads from the 8th as we took over the equipment. The tank park was on a slope above the tented accommodation that was to be ours. Large chalk embankments had been 'bulldozed' to form a barrier between the tented lines and the tank park above. We were told that Comets must now be left in gear when parked as there had been a previous incident involving 'runaway' tanks which had caused a number of fatalities. The cause was due to tanks being parked up in the tank park after a day in the field, with their handbrakes only applied. As the brake shoes and brake drums cooled off, it enabled the tanks to creep forward down the slope towards the sleeping soldiers. As each hit the tank in front, it also moved until several tanks ran down the slope and through the tented lines, killing and injuring a number of personnel. A lesson learned too late. I put this knowledge to good use during subsequent service in the Regular Army, ensuring that my lads religiously parked their vehicles in gear, wherever they may be.

This incident seems to have been forgotten with the passage of time but I was able to find some sort of reference to it 'online'. It was an article in the Worcester News, which seems to contain some 'inaccuracies' and a bit of 'speculative infill'. It is unlikely that the T.A. had Charioteers. They were lightly armoured 'lookalike' tank with a 20 pounder gun, made for

export to the Middle East. The dimensions of the track width etc. is probably guesswork; however, it may be of interest.

Thanks, John for another fine article. However, I do take issue with you on one point. In 1957 I was a tank commander in A Squadron 8RTR and throughout the summer and well into late autumn we were on many exercises, mainly with the Parachute Regiment and other Regular Army units. On only one occasion did we do an exercise with the T.A. and that was just a one day exercise; and even then it was only my own 4 Troop of three Centurion tanks. We left Tidworth in the morning and returned there in the evening. During the day we had knocked out a complete regiment of T.A. Comet tanks.

From the History of the 8th RTR I have now been able to establish that it was 'B' Squadron who were at Tilshead in 1957 entertaining the T.A. Units.

Victor Comins 1897-1917, Gunner Tank Corps.

A lovely story from Sue Tidbury re her Great Uncle, Victor Comins. Born 1897, died 1917, Cambrai.

I discovered Great Uncle Victor, born in Lancashire, a Gunner in the Tank Corps, a few years ago when I was preparing a family history for my youngest son's 30th birthday. He was my husband's great uncle on his mother's side. Victor's younger sister, Dora, was my husband's grandmother. Our research discovered that in all probability both Dora and Victor were illegitimate and this coupled with the death of Dora's eldest son in the 2nd World War most likely explains why Victor never came up in conversations. Victor was 20 when he died – we believe. We visited the National Memorial Arboretum earlier this year with poppies and crosses for both Victor and Uncle Dai (Dora's son who was lost in a Blenheim over Germany in a well- documented level day light raid). It is a matter of much regret to us that Dora never spoke of her losses-but of course they just didn't did they? But we do very much remember Victor.

Victor is recorded as having died on 21st November 1917 and was originally buried at K.15.d.5.2 which is marked on the attached map and then later reburied in Hermies Hill British Cemetery on the 18th October 1919. K.15.d.5.2 is west of Flesquieres and quite some distance from where G26 got stuck on 20th November (SW Graincourt). There may have been a Dressing Station there on 20/21 November or it may be where he was buried by his crew.

We have not visited the grave but hope to. I have done a lot of research on this battle and found out as much as possible about G Battalion. 8 Privates are listed as being killed that day. I have had correspondence with David Willey of the Tank Museum trying to establish if Victor could have been the casualty listed but not named in tank G26 Goodbye-ee which suffered a direct hit at Graincourt, but to no avail. My research can only be built around the reference where his body was found and the position of tanks in relation to that. We cannot know if he actually died on the 20th or 21st., and of course he could have moved to a different tank/company at any time. So unless his name emerges at some point in someone's diary, we are stumped, but obviously very proud.

Sue Tidbury reports that she has spent about a year reading book after book and searching the internet. She says "I don't think there are many women who have such a collection of tank books as I have!" Thank you also for the link 20 21 Company narratives which I do check quite regularly as it seems to be up-dated and I always hope for the elusive 'diary mention' one day emerging from an attic. It was in fact largely due to information on that site along with copious notes I had made from other sources that led me to believe that Victor could well have been the man killed in G26 at Graincourt – by process of elimination and body found site. But the risk of stating the obvious too -Victor could have been moved to another company because some other chap got hit smoking outside his tank! It has been a real mission of mine to get as far as I can in my search and it means that Victor and so many like

him who had the chance to have children of their own are so often in my mind. His pipe always makes me smile. His sister, my Grandmother- in- law was very short, so we guess he was too-of course.

Notes extracted from the continually up-dated 20 21 Company narratives.

21 Company had 16 tanks in action on November 20th under the command of Major Broome. 20 and 21 Companies lost six tanks to direct hits caused by two enemy light field guns in front of Graincourt (H7) (G26 suffered a direct hit at Graincourt which wounded 2 crew members and killed another, it managed to rally.

“G” Battalion’s War History states that the Battalion was split into two 30 strong composite companies. 20 and 21 Companies attacked with the 185th Brigade on the right of 62nd Division. The orders contained in the 185th Brigade’s Infantry War diaries state that 28 tanks were to provide support. 21 Company provided sixteen tanks and 20 Company twelve tanks. The two missing tanks are presumably “G” Battalion’s supply tanks. These tanks were split into three groups, red, green and blue (W185b)

Sue Tidbury.



Victor Comins with his pipe.

Thank you Sue Tidbury for this lovely story about your Great Uncle Victor and your quest to establish the truth.

October Branch Meeting

The Branch Meeting for October was held on the 12th at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. It was opened at 1415hrs by the Chairman, John Durrant. The exhortation and the loyal toasts were given by Vice-Chairman Barry Wicks.

The Chairman gave his report, during the course of which he asked the opinion of the Members as to a venue we could adjourn to after the ‘Planting of the Crosses’ on Saturday 9th November. He suggested that we come back to the Hospital. This was voted on, and the result was complete agreement that we should. After the Meeting the Chairman met with officials, from the Hospital who were in complete agreement, and arranged that sandwiches be laid on for when we arrived back from Westminster.

Later, Allan Oliver informed the Meeting that the Major in Command of ‘Badger’ would be attending our Cambrai Dinner together with his Sergeant Major. Allan suggested that they be treated as guests of the Branch. This was agreed unanimously.

The Meeting closed at 1515hrs.

Dates for your Diary

- 18 – 21 October London Branch Weekend in Bournemouth. Price: £41.p.p.p.nt.
- 7 November Opening of Field of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey.
- 9 November Planting of Crosses, Westminster Abbey. 1430hrs for 1500hrs.
- 17 November Cenotaph Parade, Whitehall. Assembly on the Horse Guards at 1030hrs.
- 20 November Informal get-together at Penderel's OakWetherspoons, Holborn.
- 23 November Cambrai Dinner at Imperial Hotel, Russell Square 12:30pm for 1pm.
Must be pre-booked
- 14 December Monthly Meeting.
- 13 – 16March 2020 8RTR Re-union, Bournemouth.
Price Fri and Sat.£48.75p.p.p.
Thur. & Sun. £43.50p.p.p.

Please note!!

The 2020 AGM will be held at the April Branch Meeting. It will not be in March because that date coincides with the 8th RTR re-union in Bournemouth and a good number of the London Branch will be at that re-union.

That's all folks, keep the articles coming.
All best wishes,
Eric.