



# SOKE MILITARY SOCIETY

Issue No. 50

February 2006

## Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, 8 February 2006 when Tony Stubbs will talk about The Victoria Cross.

This year is the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of its introduction

## Subscriptions

Subscriptions for the year are now due.

Please send a cheque for £5.00 to David Gray, 59 Francis Gardens, Peterborough, PE1 3XT.

or pay at the next meeting.

## **Guest Speakers**

Due to the difficulty of obtaining Guest Speakers Roger and Ted are going to create a web site giving details of willing speakers, on whatever subject, in the Peterborough area.

If you are interested in being included please send an email to David Gray with details of name, contact telephone number and email address, subject of talk, length of talk and any fee charged.

Please also give details of any requirements for the talk, e.g projector, etc.

They will contact other groups for the same information and when sufficient detail has been received publish the web site address.

The site will open up a directory of speakers, not only for us, but for other groups.

David's email address is  
[david.gray50@ntlworld.com](mailto:david.gray50@ntlworld.com)

## **Rorke's Drift Project**

A team of military historians and authors, who have spent many years researching the 1879 battle of Rorke's Drift and the subsequent lives of its participants, British and Zulu, are aiming, in conjunction with a number of leading military museums, to establish a definitive archive of the battle.

They are appealing for assistance to track down any remaining archive material, photographs, letters, medals, family anecdotes or anything that can help them complete the true story of this battle during the Anglo-Zulu War and are keen to hear from the descendants of those who fought there.

The Rorke's Drift Research Project can be contacted at [rdrp@fsmail.net](mailto:rdrp@fsmail.net) or by post at RDRP, PO Box 270, Chichester, West Sussex

## **French Muster Rolls**

Missing Battle of Trafalgar records come to light

After the excitement of last year's commemorations of the Battle of Trafalgar, there is more great news for family historians as a treasure trove of archives from the French side have been uncovered.

TNA has rediscovered the French muster rolls for four ships in the French fleet, which had been captured by the British during the battle — the documents were buried in the High Court Admiralty archives. The four ships: Mont Blanc, Scipion, Duguay-Trouin and Formidable.

The records, compiled from the ships' departure until the battle itself, give the names, ratings, birthplaces and salaries of the men, as well as details of offences, promotions and dates of service during a six-month

period at sea. The records are online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/frenchmusterrolls](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline/frenchmusterrolls) — searches are free and full document views cost £3.50 each.

## **Grandfather was in....**

### **The Royal Horse Guards**

An elite cavalry regiment of the British Army used to gallant charges on horseback was bogged down in muddy trenches World War I

The Royal Horse Guards (RHG) can trace its history back to the mid-17th century, making it one of the oldest cavalry regiments in the British Army. However, despite its long history, the first battle honours it won were in Egypt in 1882. The RHG then fought in the Boer War, and in 1914 went to war as cavalry, before being dismounted and used as infantry for much of the rest of the War. By 1917 an infantry unit had been formed called the Household Battalion, and the RHG itself became part of the Guards Machine Gun Regiment in 1918.

### **RECORDS**

Service records for the pre-WWI period are in class W097 at The National Archives. Those for WWI are in W0363 and 364, and medal rolls are in WO100 for Egypt and South Africa, and W0329 for World War I. There is a good survival rate of muster rolls in W012 and W016 for the 18th and 19th centuries, and there is a special section for RHG Service Records for the period 1799-1920 in class W0400 which was only transferred to TNA in 2003.

### **RESOURCES**

The Regimental Museum of the Household Cavalry has a good collection of artefacts relating

to the history of the RHG and its library has some officers and soldiers' records from the latter part of the 17th century, plus order books, court martial, historical records and private letters, journals, and War Diaries. On the internet the British Regiments site is a good starting point, and The Long Trail has details of the RHG in WWI. The Famous Regiments history gives a good overview, but Packe's earlier work is more detailed on the pre-19th century.

## **German Saboteurs Invade America**

In the summer of 1942, German submarines put saboteurs ashore on American beaches.

By Harvey Ardman

Normandy, Anzio, Guadalcanal, Okinawa. Those are some of the historic landing sites for Americans in World War II invasions, legendary names never to be forgotten. But there were lesser landings, as well, such as Amagansett, New York and Ponte Verdra Beach, Florida. That's right. There were at least two mini-landings in America, engineered by Germans.

In the midst of World War II, two German submarines actually put men ashore at both of these locations. The invaders did not arrive with the intent of seizing and occupying territory. Their mission was sabotage. Their targets were some of the crown jewels of America's industrial might, major hydro-electric plants, important aluminium factories, critical railroad tracks, bridges and canals—and the water supply system of New York City.

Well trained and well equipped, the saboteurs had good reason to be confident, but in the end they failed utterly.

Two teams of four trained Germans, who had spent several years in America before returning to Germany at the beginning of the war, were recruited and after training were taken to America towards the end of May 1942.

The two teams were to bury their munitions crates on the beach, where they could be left safely and dug up later, then proceed to various cities and set up phoney identities. They planned to meet in Cincinnati on July 4.

Each group carried \$50,000 for living expenses, travel, supplies—and bribes. Each member was also given \$9,000, \$5,000 of which was held by the group leader. The remaining \$4,000 was put in a money belt. Everyone was also given \$450 in cash for immediate use. All of this was in genuine U.S.

bills, none larger than \$50. Both team leaders were also given a handkerchief that carried the names and addresses of mail drops and contacts in America, written in invisible ink.

Finally, each team was supplied with four waterproof wooden crates, each about twice the size of a shoebox. Three were filled with dynamite, some pieces disguised as lumps of coal. The fourth box carried fuses, timing devices, wire, incendiary pen and pencil sets and sulphuric acid.

Dressed as German marines--so they would not be shot as spies if they were caught during the landing--the team crawled into an inflatable rubber boat and their crates were loaded aboard. Two armed German sailors rowed the boat to shore, where the sabotage team changed into civilian clothing.

While the others were burying the crates and uniforms, one of the team climbed over a dune to reconnoitre. Suddenly he spotted a young Coast Guardsman headed in his direction, waving a flashlight. The saboteur told the Coast Guardsman that he and some friends on the beach were stranded fishermen, that he and his friends had no IDs or fishing permits. Not surprisingly, the young Coast Guardsman started to get suspicious.

By noon, 13 hours after the team had arrived, the FBI had taken possession of everything the saboteurs had brought from Germany except their clothes and money. In Washington, FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover imposed a news blackout to avoid alerting the saboteurs and ordered the largest manhunt in the Bureau's history. Unfortunately, the FBI had no leads whatsoever.

That evening, over dinner, two of the team began talking about their worries for Germany and for their family members who lived there. Slowly, they began to realize they had identical intentions: to betray the operation to the Americans. On Monday morning, June 15, the two made their plans. One would go to Washington, drop in on J. Edgar Hoover and tell him everything. The other would wait at the hotel and pacify the two remaining members.

The leader a few days later he took a train for Washington arriving by midmorning. The agent he reached thought it was another crank call but, on the outside chance it was somehow connected with the Amagansett investigation, he sent a man to pick him up.

That same day, Thursday, June 18, the other team landed without incident on Ponte Verdra Beach, 25

miles southeast of Jacksonville. They buried their crates, walked to Route 1 and caught the Greyhound bus for Jacksonville. Within hours, all four were on trains-- bound for Cincinnati and Chicago.

He wanted to tell his story to Hoover. He fully believed he would be treated as a hero, perhaps even brought in to help make the arrests. He did get to see J. Edgar Hoover, briefly, but he ended up telling his story, 254 pages of it, to Ladd and Traynor. He rambled on for 13 hours, beginning by revealing where his colleague was staying.

Before he finished talking, FBI agents had staked out the hotel room and were led to a clothing store, where a meeting took place with the remaining two members. All three men were arrested.

On June 22, Hoover proudly wrote President Franklin D. Roosevelt that the FBI "had already apprehended all members of the group which landed on Long Island," adding that he expected to have the rest in custody soon. He failed to mention that without one of the team's unexpected surrender and confession the FBI might never have found the saboteurs. Roosevelt could have drawn only one conclusion from Hoover's memo: that Hoover and his men had succeeded in tracking down the spies on their own.

The FBI had a little more trouble rounding up the second team, since the only information available was that both groups were supposed to meet in Cincinnati on July 4. The only help that could be offered was the handkerchief that listed German contacts in America, written in invisible ink. The FBI lab figured out how to read the writing and Agents were then dispatched to watch all the contacts.

Two of the group were identified through a name on the handkerchief and arrested.

The youngest member of the team, had gone back to his parents in Chicago and told them everything. He used some of his sabotage money to buy a new car, and he proposed to his girlfriend, who had had a miscarriage. Then he dropped into the local FBI office to clear up his draft problems. He explained that he had been away when he should have registered and had since reported to his draft board.

The FBI seemed to accept the explanation, but when he left the office, agents followed him. They trailed him for three days in hopes he would lead them to the final member. When that did not happen, they arrested him, and he told them where

they could find the last member of his team.

The fourth member became lonely by himself and spent a lot of time at cinemas. After one visit he was identified by the FBI and arrested.

Only after all his colleagues were in jail did the FBI officially arrest the leader of the first group. To his great dismay, they considered him just as guilty as the others. He begged to be jailed with his colleagues, so they would not realize he had turned them in. Hoover, who did not want Germany or even the President of the United States to know how the saboteurs had been captured, was only too happy to comply.

On Saturday, June 27, exactly two weeks after the first team had landed at Amagansett, Hoover wrote Roosevelt to tell him all eight German agents had been caught.

Roosevelt realized that neither the death penalty nor secrecy could be guaranteed in a civilian trial, so he issued a proclamation that established a military tribunal, the first to be convened in the United States since Lincoln's assassination.

The trial, which was held in secret at the Justice Department, occupied most of the month of July 1942. The Germans were accused of coming to America to wreak havoc and death, basing accusations on their own confessions. The would-be saboteurs pleaded innocence, denounced Hitler and insisted they had had no intention of actually

engaging in sabotage.

The seven generals quickly prepared a report and sent it--and the 3,000-page trial transcript--to Roosevelt who, under his proclamation, was responsible for determining the time and place of execution if that was the tribunal's sentence. Now, finally, Roosevelt found out exactly how Hoover had managed to catch the saboteurs so quickly. He never made any public comment about it, however.

On August 8, six of the eight German agents were electrocuted at the District Jail in Washington, D.C. Of the other two, one was sentenced to hard labour for life; and the leader of the first group was given 30 years. Meanwhile, fearing more landings, the FBI put out an alert for the Head and others at the German sabotage school. Late in 1944, they did manage to place two spies on the Maine coast, but they were quickly picked up. If other such attempts were made, they have never come to light.

In 1948, the two Germans were deported to Germany, after five years and eight months in prison.

### **Military Items**

Mike Baker has some 1,000 military post cards, photos and uniforms for swap or sale including Guards and Infantry.

Contact him on 01733 344127 for further details.

### **Annual Exhibition**

A date to now put in your diary.

The Annual Exhibition has been arranged for the week-end of the 14 and 15 October 2006.

Further details will be announced nearer the time.

### **Notices**

Teas and coffees are on sale at the Meeting each month at a cost of 25p a cup.

**Keith Boucher and Bob Huggett have raised £42.23 on the refreshment stall throughout last year.**

**Thanks Keith and Bob for your efforts. Everyone keep drinking the coffee.**

Please send any articles/notices as soon as possible and in any case before the 7<sup>th</sup> of each month, for inclusion in the following month's newsletter.

Secretary: Roger Negus      01778 349270  
Treasurer: Ted Gray      01733 769434  
Newsletter Derek Lea      01733 572245 email: [derek.lea3@ntlworld.com](mailto:derek.lea3@ntlworld.com)  
Address: 10 Thornton Close, Peterborough, PE4 7UH