



# SOKE MILITARY SOCIETY

Issue No. 55

July 2006

Website [www.sokemilitarysociety.co.uk](http://www.sokemilitarysociety.co.uk)

## Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, 12 July 2006 when Roger Negus will tell us about Women Agents and SOE

### Letters home: Over the top

Company Sergeant-Major James Milne wrote this poignant letter to his wife moments before he was ordered over the top.

It was to be delivered in the event of his death - but luckily James Milne survived and was later reunited with his family.

**July 20, 1918**  
**My own beloved wife**

***I do not know how to start this letter. The circumstances are different from any under which I ever wrote before. I am not to post it but will leave it in my pocket; if anything happens to me someone will perhaps post it. We are going over the top this afternoon and only God in Heaven knows who will come out of it alive.***

***I am in his hands and whatever happens I will look to him in this world and the world to come. If I am called my regret is that I leave you and my bairns. I go to him with your dear face the last vision on earth I shall see and your name upon my lips, you the best of women. You will look after by Darling Bairns for me and tell them how their daddy died.***

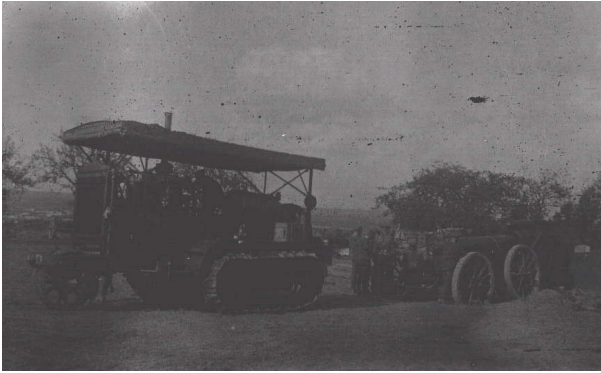
***Oh! How I love you all and as I sit here waiting I wonder what you are doing at home. I must not do that. It is hard enough sitting waiting. We may move at any minute. When this reaches you for me there will be no more war, only eternal peace and waiting for you.***

***It is a legacy of struggle for you but God will look after you and we shall meet again when there will be no more parting. I am to write no more sweetheart... Kiss the Bairns for me once more. I dare not think of them my Darlings.***

***Goodbye, you best of women and best of wives, my beloved sweetheart. May God in his mercy look over you and bless you all... May he in that same mercy preserve me today.***

***Eternal love from  
Yours for evermore  
Jim xxxxxxxxxxxxxx***

This letter is currently on display in the Imperial War Museum's First World War Remembered exhibition.



Somme August 1916

### **The Munitionettes**

In the early stages of the First World War the British munitions industry had great difficulty producing the weapons and ammunition needed by the armed forces. In 1915 the government passed the Munitions of War Act that gave it the power to take direct control of the industry. David Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, announced that normal trade union activities in this industry was now forbidden. Lloyd George was also given power to force the industry to accept unskilled workers. Many of the workers that Lloyd George directed to the munitions industry were women.

Whereas in 1914 there were 212,000 women working in the munitions industry, by the end of the war it had increased to 950,000. Christopher Addison, who succeeded David Lloyd George as Minister of Munitions, estimated in June, 1917, that about 80 per cent of all weapons and shells were being produced by women. These women workers became known as Munitionettes.

The work was extremely dangerous and in one explosion in an East London factory, 12 women were killed. Other accidents at munition factories resulted in over 200 deaths during the First World War. Others suffered health problems such as TNT poisoning because of the dangerous chemicals the women were using.

The trade union leader, Mary Macarthur, led the campaign to protect the women forced to work in the munitions industry. She pointed out that women in the industry received on average less than half of what the men were paid. After much discussion it was agreed to increase women's wage-rates in the munitions industry. However, by 1918, whereas the average male wage in the munitions industry was £4 6s. 6d. for women it was only £2 2s. 4d. In the early stages of the First

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### **War Graves in Britain**

More than 100,000 British and Commonwealth war dead are buried in Great Britain, most of them in Commonwealth War Graves, each marked by the distinctive, simple and dignified headstone.

Many of these war graves are in well maintained cemeteries and churchyards, and are tended to a very high standard.

Sadly, some war graves lie forgotten and overgrown in neglected corners of graveyards, in towns and villages across the country.

Kim Taylforth and John Oliver have created an organisation to bring these forgotten graves to the attention of as many people as possible. They

hope that some of you will be inspired to go out and find an untended war grave and spend a few hours a year keeping it neat and dignified.

They initially adopted a neglected war grave at Old Warden in Bedfordshire. Consider what you can do to help them achieve their goal. Go out and find your local war graves, and please tell others about them.

Contact them at [kimandjohn\\_oliver@hotmail.com](mailto:kimandjohn_oliver@hotmail.com)

## Imperial War Museum

To mark the 90th anniversary of the Battle of the Somme London's Imperial War Museum is launching an on-line exhibition exploring the longest and most costly land battle in British history.

A number of key items from the Museum's extensive First World War collection will be digitized and readily available to the wider public for the first time in this unique on-line display covering the Battle itself, the stories of the people involved and the battlefields today.

## New 'Rifles' Cap Badge Revealed

On Wednesday 21 June 2006, the **Light Division announced the future cap badge for 'The Rifles', a new regiment that will be formed in February 2007.**

The cap badge is simple and yet summarises the famous history of the four Regiments that now comprise the Light Division.

The Rifles cap badge consists of the bugle horn surmounted by the Sovereign's Crown. The silver bugle with its cords and tassels has long been the symbol of light infantry troops who first used the clarion call of the bugle instead of the drum to deliver messages and orders across the battlefields of the late 18th Century.

The horn itself is derived originally from the jagdhorn or hunting horn of the German Jaeger regiments. This tradition, based on a combination of formed line infantry and a screen of more freely manoeuvring light infantry, employing skirmishing tactics and marksmanship skills, constituted a radical evolution to battlefield tactics.

The formation of The Rifles will create a modern and forward looking Regiment that will be the biggest Infantry Regiment in the British Army. The

Rifles will be formed from the merger of The Devonshire and Dorset Light Infantry (DDLI), The Light Infantry (LI), The Royal Gloucestershire, Berkshire and Wiltshire Light Infantry (RGBWLI) and The Royal Green Jackets (RGJ).

The formation of The Rifles is taking place as part of the creation of the Future Infantry Structure announced by the Secretary of State on 16 December 2004. These changes are designed to deliver an Infantry fit for the challenges of the 21st Century, whilst preserving the traditions and ethos of the regimental system.

The Rifles is the direct descendant of the Rifle Regiments and Light Infantry Light Companies brought to television screens in the series "Sharpe's Rifles", starring Sean Bean. Andy McNab also served in one of the former regiments before joining the SAS.

All four of the Former Regiments of The Rifles fought with distinction during the Battle of the Somme and representatives from across the Regimental Family will be attending the Annual Remembrance Service in Thiepval (France) on 1st July 2006 to commemorate the 90th Anniversary of the start of the Battle.

The battle honour, "Somme" will be carried forward into The Rifles and worn on a belt-badge by all ranks as part of ceremonial dress. Members of the Former Regiments were also the first troops to land in Normandy, some years later, when inserted in gliders at Pegasus Bridge at the start of D-Day.

Between them the four Regiments have amassed a staggering 913 battle honours and 123 Victoria Crosses (the highest award for gallantry in The British Army).

One of The Light Division's battalions has recently returned from Afghanistan, two are currently deployed in Iraq and the remaining three battalions are scheduled to go on operations before the middle of next year.

## Home Front 1914-1918: How Britain Survived the Great War

Author Ian F.W. Beckett; Publisher The National Archives; Price: £19.99.  
Britain's reaction to the First World War and how it invigorated as well as devastated society.

Every war has its 'home front', but World War I – the 'Great War' – was the first to utterly transform civilian life. Not only did families risk their fathers

and sons in active combat, but every member of society was mobilized in some way to contribute to the war effort. In the course of these eventful years the population experienced rationing, shortages, aerial bombing, thousands more women in work (known as 'dilution' of the workplace!), industrial unrest, a large influx of foreign refugees, and a host of other shocks. Even the king was not exempt: he, too, had a ration card, and the flowerbeds of Buckingham Palace were planted with vegetables.

Ian Beckett examines the full story – one that is, by turns, grim, humorous, touching, surprising, and even inspiring. Among other details, learn how the feeding of pigeons was declared illegal, why a town council forbade punctuation, and what 'Belgian flush' was. The author's narrative is reinforced by a welter of photographs, original documents and letters, and poignant personal stories of life on Britain's home front.

Contents:

The Outbreak of War  
Manpower, Industry and Labour  
Women and Children  
Everyday Life

Enemies Within and Without  
War's End  
Further Reading, Chronology and Index

Ian F.W. Beckett is currently Professor of History at University College, Northampton, and has formerly taught at Sandhurst and in the United States. His publications include *The Oxford History of the British Army* and *The Great War 1914–1918*. In 2002, for The National Archives, he published *The First World War: The Essential Guide to Sources in the UK National Archives*.

## Articles

If you have a story or article that will be of interest to other Members please send it in for future publication.

You can send it in any format—I have received them in different forms from handwritten to electronic formats.

Do not be afraid to write about your experience.

## Website

There is now an opportunity for Members to buy and sell through the site.

Also it will be changed as regularly as possible. However if you have any suggestions that you think will improve it please let David and Roger know in whatever format is easiest.

## 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.

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.

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