



SOKE MILITARY SOCIETY

Issue No. 51

March 2006

Website www.sokemilitarysociety.co.uk

Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, 8 March 2006 when John Thonthwaite will tell us about 'A Bright Shining Lie – Lt.Col. John Paul Vann'.

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.

Web Sites

David Gray has produced a Soke Military Society website. The address is:
www.sokemilitarysociety.co.uk

The Society is interested in having reciprocal links with other military historical groups if you have a contact please contact David.

I mentioned last month about a website for guest speakers. This is now up and running at
www.peterboroughguestspeakers.co.uk

Last Post Ypres

If you have ever wondered who the buglers are who play the Last Post every evening they are:

Antoine Verschoot BEM
Albert Verkouter MBE
Rik Vandekerckhove
Dirk Vandekerckhove
Tonny Desodt
Raf Decombel

The Writing on the Wall

Photographic Exhibition starting 5 September at The National Army Museum

A photographic exhibition illustrating what soldiers think and feel about operations in Iraq opens at the National Army Museum in Chelsea on 5th September.

The photographs show the graffitied walls of a complex of buildings within the larger perimeter of Camp Dogwood, used as a forward operating base for offensives into the southern sector of Baghdad by a succession of US and UK troops.

They were taken in October 2004, when WO2 Giles Penfound, Chief Photographer of the Army Combat Camera team, was on deployment with the Black Watch battle group in Falujah.

GALLIPOLI WAR MEMORIALS

The only tangible thing we can do to remember the sacrifice made by the men and women in two World Wars together with many other conflicts is ensure that the many memorials to their efforts are maintained in their memory.

Gallipoli is no exception – a campaign ill conceived badly executed resulting in so many casualties with the only redeeming feature being that the lessons learnt helped towards the success of “D-Day” on June 6th 1944.

Since my first visit to the Peninsular over fifteen years ago the Turkish Memorials were few and far between but in recent years the authorities seem to have altered this situation by creating more in various locations together with several symbolic cemeteries. The idea, no doubt, is that more people will visit the area and appreciate and understand the Turkish military achievements but to do so there must be something to see – is it a battlefield site or does it become a theme park?

Perhaps all that will happen is that coaches will just go from one statue or symbolic cemetery to the next read the inscriptions and move on not really understanding what actually happened in 1915. Sadly that seems to be happening on the Western Front – several years ago at Tyne Cott CWGC cemetery in a two hour period my wife and I counted ten school coaches which disgorged bored teenagers who just aimlessly walked around then got back on and drove away. On the last coach a teacher actually came up to my wife and asked is there anything of interest in this place!

In the main the new Turkish memorials are rather large similar to the Russian idea that the bigger the memorial the more we will remember the sacrifices made. Overlooking Sevastopol harbour there is an enormous effigy of a charging soldier and sailor, similar in design to the group overlooking “V” Beach. Near Quinn’s Post, there appears a large statue of an advancing Turkish soldier, the intentions are no doubt honourable but the effect never seems to quite achieve the quiet dignity of our memorials.

The memorial at Helles, between “W” and “V” beaches reminds us, on the outer wall, of the individual men their regimental units or ships with which they served and at the base of the centre column the divisions and the areas where they fought and facing the steps as one enters are the names of all the Royal Navy ships that took part. Facing the memorial at the left hand corner under the Lincolnshire Regiment is the name of Pte H P

Cleary, the ticket collector at Bourne Station who died on Scimitar Hill who has been remembered on eight memorials.

The Lone Pine Australian Cemetery and Memorial to the missing on the southern part of the Sari Bair Ridge looks very different today after the results of the fire several years ago whereas before it was shielded by so many trees now it is exposed and on one side can be seen the coastal point of Gapa Tepe where the ANZAC forces should have originally landed and from the other side the road disappears in the distance but follows roughly the old front line and is marked by Johnston’s Jolly CWGC Cemetery so named after Colonel G J Johnston who positioned his guns “to jolly up the Turks” but only held the position for one day. Beyond this area can be seen Courtney’s and Steel’s Post and in the distance Quinn’s Post now small CWGC cemeteries showing the resolve and struggle of the ANZAC forces to hold onto virtually impossible positions.

Near Quinns Post is the 57th Turkish Regiment’s Symbolic Cemetery – although I am not to sure about the plaque stating how two soldiers were found buried locked together in a deadly embrace!

At Chunuk Bair is the New Zealand memorial which prior to the fires during 1994 was surrounded by trees and bushes and commemorates how far the New Zealanders managed to get despite the horrendous terrain and opposition. The area now is quite exposed and very popular since the large statue of Ataturk has been erected. From this vantage point can be seen the Suvla Plain with the Salt Lake, landing beaches and its many cemeteries.

I never tire from visiting these cemeteries in either Suvla or Helles which because to their location are more difficult to maintain due to the lack of water which has to be brought in by tanker – there is no particular favourite but they all serve as memorials to men who deserved better from both politicians and some senior commanders of the time.

A. L. Stubbs

A Remarkable Act of Remembrance

Assisi War Cemetery in Italy is the scene of an unusual adoption programme. An Italian war veteran, Vincenzo Cavanna, noticed that the Commonwealth War Cemetery had few visitors. The relatives of those buried there lived far away and found it hard to visit.

Signor Cavanna set up a scheme of adoption and local people have so far adopted over 300 graves. Priority was given to soldiers from New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, as their families were least likely to visit.

Some people have put aside their bitterness and embraced the project by adopting the graves of their former enemies.

Assisi War Cemetery contains the graves of 945 members of the Commonwealth forces.

Commonwealth War Graves in Iraq - Statement

The security situation in Iraq continues to give cause for concern, making it impossible for the Commission to commence work on its five year renovation and restoration programme.

Work has continued at Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery, which has been cleared of undergrowth after the autumn rains, and in the south at Amara and Basra, on general tidying maintenance and boundary definition with the assistance of coalition forces.

There is twenty-four hour watchman's surveillance at Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery and the Commission's local representative is able to visit a number of sites on a regular basis. A recent review decided that the situation could not be properly assessed until the security situation in Iraq has improved.

Fresh Look for Local War Graves

Renovation of war graves in two Lincolnshire cemeteries began last month.

New turf and headstone borders will be planted in Grimsby (Scarcho Road) Cemetery which will also benefit from a new evergreen oak hedge and shapely crab apple trees. New turf and border will also give a fresher look to Cleethorpes Cemetery.

A spokesperson for the Commission said,

“Our duty is to commemorate the men and women who gave their lives in the two world wars forever. These renovation projects will create areas of great beauty around the war graves in Grimsby and Cleethorpes. We can never repay the debt we owe them so we seek to create a fitting tribute to those who laid down their lives in the defence of their country.”

Shot At Dawn

During the First World War 350 members of the British and Empire Forces were executed by firing squad. No judgement is drawn here on these men but two have been chosen to illustrate their fate.

The Communal Cemetery at Bailleumont contains a plot, in the east corner, of over 30 1914-18 war casualties. The headstones are of a deep red earth colour of the standard Commonwealth War Graves style.

Side by side in graves B. 12 and B. 13 are Private 10495 Albert Ingham age 24, and Private 10502 Alfred Longshaw age 21, both of 18th Battalion, Manchester Regiment. Both had been clerks in Salford Goods Yard and had arrived on the Somme from Egypt and had been posted to their Brigade's Machine Gun Company. In October 1916 the two friends deserted and managed to stow away on a ship in Dieppe. They were discovered and eventually subject to Court Martial proceedings where they were sentenced to death.

They were executed on Friday 1st December 1916 and their deaths were reported to their two families as being 'died of gunshot wounds' and 'died of wounds'. Ingham was the son of George Edward and Eliza Ann Ingham of Lower Kersal, Manchester. Longshaw was the son of Charles and Elizabeth Longshaw of Pendleton, Manchester.

For many years both families were unaware of the true cause of their deaths. Later when he realised the truth George Ingham requested what is now a unique inscription to be placed on his sons headstone:

SHOT AT DAWN
ONE OF THE FIRST TO ENLIST
A WORTHY SON
OF HIS FATHER

Special Constabulary

The First World War meant that a large number of regular police officers and reservists had either joined or been recalled to the armed forces. This created a vacuum which could only be filled by the creation of Special Constables.

Men who were above the military age or not of the required medical and physical fitness were able to make a contribution to the war effort by joining the Special Constabulary. Men from all walks of life took the King's oath and then performed various duties without any form of payment.

Although there had previously been Special Constables, they had normally been enrolled for a limited period and purpose and it was not until 28th August 1914 that an Act of Parliament established rules and regulations for the formation of this new volunteer force. An Order-in-Council passed on 9th September 1914 gave Special Constables the same duties, powers and privileges as a regular Constable.

Many of their new duties were of a semi-military nature in guarding the essentials of national life such as gas, water and electricity supplies.

The Special Constabulary was itself hit by changing recruiting regulations but as contemporary documents reveal more men was lost to the armed services than through any other form of wastage

FIRST ALLIED SHOT

The first Allied shot of the war in the Far East was actually fired over the bows of the Australian coaster *Woniora* (Captain F. N. Smale) from a 6-inch gun emplacement at Point Nepean, guarding the entrance to Melbourne's Port Phillip Bay. The 823 ton coaster had entered the bay at 9.15 pm on September 3, 1939 after a trip from Tasmania. Ordered to heave-to for inspection, the coaster gave her identity but continued on without stopping. A 100 lb shell, fired across her bow, soon changed her captain's mind.

By a remarkable coincidence, this was the actual, same gun that had fired the first shot of

World War I when, hours after war was declared, it fired on the German Norddeutscher Lloyd 6,500 ton steamer *Pfalz* while it attempted to leave Australian waters on August 5, 1914. The *Pfalz* was then returned to Williamstown where the crew was detained. The captured vessel served out the rest of World War I as the Australian troopship *HMT Boorara*.

COMING SOON FOR 2006

At The Royal Artillery Museum

3 March to 3 September DRAGONS - Artillery of the East Exhibition

The development of gunpowder weapons and warfare in China and other parts of Asia over the course of the last 600 years.

24 & 25 June

150th Anniversary of the Victoria Cross

Display of the VC Guns

Remember the Alamo

On February 23, 1836, General Antonio Lopez de Santa Anna and a force of approximately 3,000 Mexican regulars arrived outside the walls of an old mission in San Antonio, Texas called the Alamo.

As Santa Anna approached, approximately 230 Texans in the area took refuge in the fortified grounds and prepared their defenses under the joint command of William B. Travis and Jim Bowie.

By the 6 March all of the Texans lay dead - along with more than 1,500 Mexicans.

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 7th of each month, for inclusion in the following month's newsletter.

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