



# SOKE MILITARY SOCIETY

Issue No. 53

May 2006

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

## Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, 10 May 2006 when Alan Berrisford will give a Philatelic Display of Military Post.

### 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..

### Women at War

#### Records of First Women to Serve in Combat Zone go Online



The military records of over 7,000 members of the British Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) who served during the First World War have been made available online at [www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documentsonline).

The WAAC, sometimes known as Queen Mary's Auxiliary Army Corps, was setup in January 1917

to free men for service at the front. Recruits carried out non-combatant jobs as telephonists, bakers, waitresses, electricians, cooks, typists, printers, signallers, and clerks.

Of the 57,000 women who served in the Corps, 9,000 were deployed in France, some in areas exposed to bravery following an air raid on Abbeville.

Only 7,016 of the 57,000 WAAC records remain; the others were severely damaged during a German air raid in September 1940. The surviving records were mainly of other ranks, known as "workers", rather than officers.

William Spencer, The National Archives's military specialist, commented: "From a social history perspective, it was fortunate that these files were the ones that survived. Low ranking servicewomen were more likely to come from working class backgrounds, and this is the demographic that appears the least in historical records."

Their files are some of the most detailed British service records in existence. As well as giving a woman's military service, they describe her physical appearance, age, marital status, family details, civilian employment and even character references.

You can search the records by name (including maiden name), place of birth and date of birth.

## Court Martial Records

Details of courts martial of army and RAF personnel between 1991 and 2004 are now available online as part of the National Digital Archives of Datasets (NDAD) at [www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk](http://www.ndad.nationalarchives.gov.uk). You can find records on defendants, the charges brought against them, where and when they were tried and the verdict.

Examples of offences that came before the courts include: "improperly sprayed shaving cream over another"; "flying likely to cause unnecessary annoyance as well as the traditional offences of being absent without leave and drunken behaviour.

One word of warning: the dataset is not terribly easy to use.

## The Last Post Belgium

The Last Post Association welcomes its new Chairman. During the Annual General Assembly of the 30 March 2006 Guy Gruwez announced his decision to take a step down and to hand over the chairmanship to Benoit Mottrie. As honorary chairman he will continue to be a member of the daily executive committee. Guy Gruwez has been a board member for 50 years and chairman for 40 years.

The daily Last Post ceremony as we know it today has been his main achievement. The explosive growth of the number of visitors in recent years has been the result of his indefatigable commitment and sound management. His decision is part of his plans to rejuvenate the LPA executive committee.

The new chairman and his collaborators will continue to pursue the Last Post Association's main aim, which is to commemorate and to remember all those who gave their lives for freedom and the restoration of peace. During the forty years of his chairmanship Mr. Gruwez has welcomed many domestic and foreign personalities under the Menin Gate.

The high point of his career must have been the visit of Pope John Paul II in 1985. The present committee wants to thank and congratulate Mr Gruwez and hopes that for many years to come they will continue to benefit from his "l i f e l o n g " e x p e r i e n c e .

The official farewell will be celebrated during a special Last Post on September 14, to which many prominent figures and members of the Last Post Association will be invited.

## The Zimmermann Telegram

by Charles F. Horne,  
Time clears our perspective upon many matters.

The Zimmermann note was an official letter sent secretly by Zimmerman Germany's Secretary of Foreign Affairs, to her Minister in Mexico, directing him to attempt to unite Mexico and Japan with Germany in war against the United States.

This document was captured by the United States secret service upon the Texas border, and was disclosed to the American public on February 28th, at the height of the brief interval of indignation and uncertainty between America's breaking of diplomatic relations and her declaring war.

Thus revealed, the note had a profound psychological effect. More than anything else, it hardened the peace-loving American people to the conviction that war with Germany was an absolutely necessary step.

Many Americans regarded the note as another piece of German treachery, like the blowing up of their factories and placing bombs upon their ships; and they voiced their renewed anger against the false foe who encouraged secret murder while wearing the mask of peace.

Today, however, most statesmen would agree that the note lay well within Germany's rights. It expressly stated that the alliance against the United States was only to be attempted if and after the fact was certain that there was to be "an outbreak of war".

The deeper influence of the note upon Americans, therefore, depended not so much upon its evidence of Germany's evil methods of attack, but upon its revelation that she had no intention whatever of limiting her U-boat warfare so as to placate them. She had "counted the cost".

If she could coax or frighten them into submitting to this U-boat destruction, good; if not, she meant to fight. Of America's backing down from the diplomatic stand of 1916 with all its background of American patience and German violence and subterfuge, there was no possibility whatever. Americans knew that surely; though Germany apparently did not, Hence the Zimmermann note told them that the war, the Great War, had come to them at last.

What strikes one most about the Zimmermann note today is not its perfidy, but its folly, its utter folly and futility. Mexico knew well that no German

ship, no aid in men or in munitions, could possibly reach her. She delighted much in annoying the United States; but what chance was there that she would deliberately invite destruction by declaring war to oblige Germany?

Or, even if we conceive Mexico guilty of such murderous madness, what effect could it have upon the United States beyond the holding of a few thousand troops upon the southern border, while the rest of the nation turned with increased anger and determination to Germany's overthrow? When to this we add the absurdity of supposing that Mexico could at all sway the policy of Japan, the Zimmermann note becomes so monumental a stupidity that many men did not believe it could possibly be genuine, until Herr Zimmermann himself acknowledged it.

It would seem more logical to assume that Germany meant the note for just what it achieved, meant it, that is, to be revealed and thus to confirm America's intent for war.

### **Restoration project brings cinema back to life**

**Movie mad military personnel have just completed a project which saw a ruined cinema at a logistics base in southern Iraq brought back to life.**



Flight Lieutenant Stuart Quinn and the cinema he helped restore.  
[Picture: Cpl John Hawkes]

The art deco style open-air picture house at Shaibah Logistics Base near Basra had been out of use for years and had fallen into dereliction. But it's a place remembered by thousands of former servicemen and women who passed through the former RAF Shaibah in the 1930s and during the Second World War.

Flight Lieutenant Stuart Quinn who led the restoration project said:  
"It was a real mess when we started – part of the wall had fallen down and covered the terraced floor in debris and you can still see some of the shell holes in the walls that remain from the Gulf War."

Flt Lt Quinn, 30, from Banbridge, Northern Ireland, studied old photographs of the auditorium in its heyday 70 years ago before beginning work to get an idea of how it looked then. Six volunteers drawn from each of the three services helped in the clean-up, all of whom work at Headquarters National Support Element at Shaibah Logistics Base.

Flt Lt Quinn continued:

"It involved a lot of running around; we had to borrow a generator from one place, lighting from somewhere else, a projector from somewhere else. We even managed to get a makeshift kiosk set up that sold soft drinks and popcorn."

And despite first-night nerves, made worse by recent mortar attacks on the base, the re-opening was a sell-out attended by 150 personnel from British, Danish and Czech units on the base. Admission cost was \$2 with all proceeds, a total of around \$3,000, being donated to the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund.

Flt Lt Quinn said:

"It was so popular that we're now planning to screen another film in the near future – probably Gladiator."

And as you would expect with the RAF, top of the bill on the first night was the Tom Cruise fighter pilot epic.....Top Gun.

### **Mirror, signal, manoeuvre - a driving test with a difference**

Sappers have been proving they are the safest military drivers in Iraq during a tri-service competition held at Shaibah Logistics Base near Basra.

A total of 18 teams took part in the Theatre Driving Skills Competition, Exercise Desert Challenge, which tested their skills at anti-ambush drills, manoeuvring different types of vehicle, and driving on a skid frame.

Event organiser Force Master Driver WO1 Darren Smylie said:

"The aim of the competition was to promote safer driving, particularly for the younger service personnel, and this has made them more competent, confident drivers.

"The roads in Iraq are amongst the most dangerous in the world and driving remains one of the most hazardous activities service personnel

are involved in on a daily basis."

He added the contest was one of a number of road safety initiatives being conducted in Iraq to make people aware of how to prevent unnecessary accidents.

And after the competition 26 Armoured Engineer Squadron, 32 Engineer Regiment, emerged victorious with just half a point separating them from 76 Squadron RLC, UK Logistic Battalion, in second place, while another Sapper unit 15 Squadron, 32 Engineer Regiment, came third.

In addition to the main competition, long serving personnel went head to head for the prestigious champion veteran award, won by the GSM, WO1 Ritchie Jones.

### **Official War Graves Adoption Ceremony**

A unique ceremony took place in Broadstairs, Kent, on Saturday 1st April. The Mayor of Broadstairs & St. Peter's, John Fullarton, the Vicar of St Peter's Church, Brian Moore, and several war grave adopters were joined by David Symons, Director of the Commission's UK Area.

Following a visit to Assisi in Italy where local residents have adopted the war graves of a number of Commonwealth soldiers, members of the St Peter's community decided to do the same with their local churchyard. The subsequent improvement in the standards of maintenance of St Peter's Churchyard and the war graves within them has involved the intervention of the Church, the Mayor's Office, the local Parks Manager, the

Probation Service and the Community Service Workers scheme, some 50 volunteers and the Commission's District Inspector for the South East and his staff.

During the churchyard tour volunteers gave a short speech on the research they had undertaken on their adopted grave. The Rev. Moore conducted a series of prayers for the lives of the war casualties and the volunteers who had adopted their grave.

At the end of the ceremony the Director of UK Area paid thanks to all the volunteers and those involved in this project, presenting Commission plaques to Brian Sleightholme, the leader of the volunteers and to Mayor Fullarton, in acknowledgement to his community's support and interest in the Commission's work.

### **Sahib, the British Soldier in India 1750-1914**

Thursday 18 May, 19:00 - 20:00 at The National Archives, Kew

The well known military historian Professor Richard Holmes will examine Indian soldiering in peace and war. He will address the experience of ordinary soldiers, why they joined up, how they got to India and what they made of it when they arrived. Professor Holmes will be signing copies of his book Sahib: The British Soldier in India after the event.

Tickets £5 / £4 concessions.

Booking essential. For credit/debit card bookings you can call 020 8392 5202

### **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.

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