



SOKE MILITARY SOCIETY

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Website www.sokemilitarysociety.co.uk

Monthly Meeting

The next meeting is on Wednesday, 12 April 2006 when Martin Middlebrook will tell us about 'The BEF Divisions and their changing manpower'.

Revised Programme of Speakers 2006

| <u>Date</u> | <u>Speaker</u> | <u>Subject</u> |
|--------------|------------------|---|
| May 10 | Alan Berrisford | A Philatelic Display of Military Post |
| June 14 | Alistair Goodrum | No Place for Chivalry – Night Fighter Squadrons from the Wittering and Digby Sectors. |
| July 12 | Roger Negus | Women Agents and SOE |
| August 9 | Stuart Orme | Battlefield Ghosts |
| September 13 | Gilbert Smith | German Third Reich and Related Ephemera |
| October 11 | David Prestidge | Differences between General's Lee and Grant |
| November 8 | John Chester | The Maginot Line |
| December 13 | Richard Ward | St Nazaire Raid |

VETERANS' DAY

Chancellor Gordon Brown has proposed a National Veterans Day to remember Britain's war veterans. The day is likely to be held on 27 June each year (the day after the anniversary of the first investiture of the Victoria Cross), and veterans' medals will be presented. The Chancellor has also proposed a national archive of audio and video records of veterans memories.

War Films

The Imperial War Museum is to digitise 20,000 hours of footage over the next three years

The Imperial War Museum is about to embark on a major new project after being awarded a grant of

£997,000, to digitise its extensive film and video archive.

Among the collection is unique footage from the Battle of the Somme in 1916, commemorated for its 80th anniversary this year, and footage captured by army units in World War II.

The project begins on 1 April this year, and is intended to be complete in the spring of 2009.

Details of public access to the material are yet to be finalised but the museum's spokesperson Laura McKechnan told YFT: "We hope to make our digitised films available via our website. Although the charging mechanism for this is not yet

finalised, we may offer short extracts for free as tasters.”

The collection contains more than 20,000 hours of film and video and is one of the oldest film archives in the world.

Website

You can details of the Speaker for each month and a copy of the published edition of the newsletter on the website if you mislay you copy.

Women’s Royal Naval Service

The role of women in the Royal Navy during WWI is a forgotten aspect of the conflicts despite the fact that thousands served their country...

The Women’s Royal Naval Service (WRNS), more commonly called the ‘Wrens’, was established in November 1917. To free up fit sailors from desk jobs, more than 6,000 women were recruited. The Wrens never saw combat, but they carried out vital administration work, and served overseas in locations like Gibraltar and Malta.

When the Wrens were disbanded in October 1919, 23 Wrens had died in the conflict. Although few served outside of England, 28-days continuous service in the Navy entitled the Wrens to a British War Medal and most of those who served would have been awarded this: one of the first occasions in which large numbers of women were awarded medals by the Navy.

Records

There is a great deal of material on the WRNS at TNA. Most records are in the Admiralty (ADM) class of documents. There is a summary of their work in the war in ADM116/1917; one of the few documents that actually chronicle what they did.

Service records for the more than 500 officers of the service are in ADM318. There is an alphabetical listing of those who service papers are in this class, so it is easy to trace someone. For the Ratings, service records are in ADM336. These are arranged by service number, but there is in index available. These records give details of postings, age, name of next of kin and a report on the Wren’s ‘character and ability’. Details of medals awarded are in ADM171.

Resources

The Royal Naval Museum has a useful website, which contains details of the Museum’s many information sheets and further information on their archives. There is little on the Wrens’ activities in WWI on the internet and there are few books on the Wrens.

English Roses of Picardy

August 1914 and England was at war! So what help could a well brought-up young girl offer? Well, many of them rolled up their sleeves and, unaware of the hardships and heartbreaks they would encounter, volunteered to become Kitchener nurses, better known as VADs.

The name derived from the Voluntary Aid Organisation, created in England and Wales in 1909 following the Territorial and Reserve Forces Act of 1907. Its constituent parts became known as the Voluntary Aid Detachments (VADs).

Attached to, and largely trained by, the Red Cross and St John Ambulance Brigade, VADs initially worked mainly in British hospitals.

During the First World War their work was administered by the Joint War Committee of the British Red Cross and Order of St John, under the direction of Dame Katherine Furse.

She wrote to all VADs that: “You have to perform a task which will need your courage, your energy, your patience, your humility and your determination to overcome all difficulties.”

And they did, undertaking a variety of supportive roles including ambulance driving, cooking and elementary nursing, assisting trained personnel and helping to keep the hospitals and ambulance services operational. At the start of the war 46,000 women were serving, but the end this had almost doubled over 90,000.

Despite being called volunteers, VADs were paid, which was perhaps just as well because they had to buy their own kit. This consisted of a camp bed and chair a camp bath, ground sheet, sleeping bag and gumboots. Because for the most part they would be living under canvas, they also needed an oil stove and a collapsible lantern.

In addition they were issued with armbands, identity disks and, in place of passports, certificates, which carried a brief and, according to one recruit “an unflattering description of the holder.”

They did their best to make their quarters more home-like. Sugar boxes were stained with permanganate of potash and converted into dressing tables, while chests of drawers — without the drawers — were contrived from boxes with the sides knocked out and then nailed together to store clothes and books. Sometimes they were fortunate enough to get hold of some material and improvise a curtain for their “chest of drawers”, or a throw for the camp beds.

When it came to improvisation VADs were past masters. Biscuit tins were converted into colanders by the simple expedient of punching holes in the

base, potted meat jars became sugar basins, and a pie dish was used for everything but pies— being in turn a wash bowl, a bain-marie and a container for making linseed poultices!

Allison is first female soldier to fire the 'one o'clock gun'

A former army chef has made history by becoming the first female soldier to fire the world famous one-o'clock-gun at Edinburgh Castle on Friday, 24 March 2006.

TA soldier, Bombardier Allison Jones, 34, a member of 207 Battery, 105 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers), became the first female soldier ever to fire the one-o'clock-gun from Mills Mount Battery in Edinburgh Castle as a temporary District Gunner since it was first fired in 1861.

105 Regiment Royal Artillery are rotating personnel to fire the 105 mm Field Gun until a replacement District Gunner is appointed following the death last year of Staff Sergeant Thomas 'Tam the Gun' McKay MBE. The title 'District Gunner' is given to the soldier who fires the one-o'clock-gun.

Following the firing of the gun Allison said:

"It was a great honour to be the first female soldier ever to fire the one-o'clock-gun, but it was also tinged with sadness as I knew Tam for eight years. I was so nervous I did not get much sleep last night, but today adrenalin took over.

"Everything went very well which I am proud of, and I'll be expecting a few drinks from my friends in the Regiment when I next see them. I would love to be able to do it again."

Allison added:

"I was also the first female to fire a 25 Pound Field Gun, the predecessor of the 105 mm, but that was as a member of a multi-personnel Battery during 21-gun Royal Salutes to commemorate The Queen's Birthday.

"But standing alone on Mills Mount Battery in Edinburgh Castle with all the responsibility that goes with it to get it right is quite another thing."

"It was a great honour to be the first female soldier ever to fire the one-o'clock-gun."

Commenting on Allison's role her commanding officer, Lieutenant Colonel Eddie Grace, said:

"Bombardier Jones was selected on merit as she

has completed all the training required to fire the 105 mm Field Gun in battlefield conditions. It is particularly appropriate that members of 105 Regiment fire the gun, as it was only yesterday (23 March) that we were officially re-rolled as a 105 mm Field Gun Regiment following the TA Rebalancing announcement made by the Minister for Armed Forces, Adam Ingram."

105 Regiment Royal Artillery was formerly an Air Defence Regiment. Bombardier Allison Jones, formerly an army chef, has been a member of the Territorial Army for 12 years. Away from the TA, in civilian life Alison lives in Glasgow with her son Brian, 15.

The firing of a gun from the battlements of Edinburgh Castle began as a means of giving an accurate time check to the ships in Leith Harbour, two miles away. The original gun used was an 18-pound muzzle loading cannon; the cannon needed four men to set up and fire it. In 1953 the present 25-pounder howitzer, the mainstay of the British artillery in the second world war was introduced. The one o'clock gun was first fired from the "Half Moon" battery on the castle to its present position on the Mills Mount Battery.

EVA BRAUN (1912-1945)

At twenty-five minutes past two on the morning of February 7, 1912, Eva Anna Paula Braun was born in Munich.

Later in life she was to become the mystery woman of Hitler's Third Reich. Wife of Hitler for one day and his mistress for twelve years, she first met Hitler in 1929 while she was assistant to the beer-loving Heinrich Hoffmann the Third Reich's official photographer who had his shop at No 50 Schellingstrasse, Munich. He had already joined the Nazi party with party card number 427.

Eva Braun committed suicide with Hitler on April 30, 1945, in his underground bunker in the Reich Chancellery gardens in Berlin. It was her third attempt, the first having been in November 1932 when she was found, with a bullet in her neck. On May 28, 1935, Eva, who often complained of Hitler's neglect, decided to take thirty-five sleeping pills just to 'make certain'. Late that night she was found unconscious by her sister, Ilse, who called a doctor just in time to save her life. After her recovery, Hitler bought her a villa in Wasserburgerstrasse, Munich, and supplied her with a car and chauffeur. Although she knew about the persecution of the Jews there is no evidence that she knew of what went on inside the concentration camps.

It is interesting to note that Eva never became a Nazi Party member. Outside of Hitler's close circle of cronies she was completely unknown to the general public until after the war.

Eva's mother, Franziska Braun, lived to the ripe old age of 96 and died in Ruhpolding, Bavaria, in January, 1976. Her father, Fritz Braun, died on January 22, 1964.

GRETLE BRAUN

Youngest of the three daughters of Fritz and Franziska Braun, her real name was Margarethe and was born three years after Eva. They lived in an apartment on the second floor of No. 93 Hohenzollernstrasse, in Munich, (the house still stands). An adventurous and carefree girl, Eva nicknamed her 'Mogeri' because she was often sulking. She spent considerable time with her sister at the Berghof, which Eva loved to call the Grand Hotel. She married Hans Georg Otto Hermann Fegelein (37) a lieutenant general in the Waffen SS, on June 3, 1944, in the Salzburg town hall. The reception was held at the Berghof and

later at Hitler's mountain retreat on the Kehlstein (The Eagles Nest) the only real party ever held there.

Gretl survived the war and gave birth to a daughter, Eva, named after her aunt Eva Braun, on May 5, 1945.

Sahib, the British Soldier in India 1750-1914

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

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.

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.

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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