



What's in this issue

There are not all that many articles in this issue of the Halifax Herald, the first one for this year.

One of the articles is six pages long, but it is well worth the read.

On page two there is an article titled 'Who will remember us'. Let me know your thoughts about what I've written.

Page five has a story about the SAS Protea, the crossing of the equator ceremony, and Queen Neptune. And guess who that was.

Page six is a long article on the burial of the Unknown Soldier. It is brilliant and every Moth should read it. Thanks Servaas for sending it through.

Finally Page 12 is our usual By the left, quick laugh page.

I trust that you will have a good month. Let's make 2017 a good one. Until next month then.



It's just after midnight on 11 February. In less than 12 hours time our monthly Shellhole meeting will begin. And I'm only just putting the finishing touches to this month's newsletter.

Talk about getting things done by the skin of my teeth. Hey, I did say the magazine would be out before each month's meeting - and it is. It's just been a really busy start to the year. They say you should get eight hours sleep a night. I'm lucky at this stage if I get eight hours sleep a week.

On a less cheerful note Moth John Verster suffered a serious heart attack on Monday evening. He spent the week in hospital and needs a triple bypass operation.

John and I go back a long way and over the years we've shared some crazy adventures together. He will be in my thoughts and I trust yours as well.

I trust that this is going to be a good year for all of us. I would like to see the Moth Order grow in numbers this year and in particular I would like to see our own Shellhole numbers grow.

Now how about making this a really good year and sending me through some material for Halifax Herald. I'm sure you've got a story to tell and we'd all like to hear it. Even if you're from another Shellhole.

Have a good month all.

YUTTH, Matt Tennyson

So who's going to remember us?

The phrase "we will remember them" is probably the most important one in the Moth Order. Yet when we're gone, who is going to remember us.

On Sunday February 5 I attended the annual Border Boy's Parade, as I do every year. As I watched the Border Boy's march around the block I had a strange feeling of *deja vu*.

When I was a kid we would travel from Ireland to London every year for the annual Remembrance Day Parade. My late father was a World War II veteran and he would always take part in the march.

Back then there were still a fair share of World War I veterans that would march in the parade. I would

always look at them with a sense of awe - they seemed so old.

On Sunday I once again saw them march. Except they weren't World War I veterans. They were us.

I realise that none of us are getting any younger. Since I became a Moth a good number of people that fought in the same conflict I did, the Border War, have answered the Sunset Call.

It got me thinking, not for the first time, about the future of the Order. What comes after us? Or rather who comes after us?

When Moth O started the Moth Or-

der it was so that those that had fought in the World War I, the 'War to end all wars', could remember their fallen comrades (Sound Memory) and that they could offer comradeship and help to those that had survived (True Comradeship and Mutual Help).

After World War II it was decided that those that had fought in that conflict could also become members of the Order. This influx of new members would bring new blood to the Order and keep it going. Likewise it was later decided that those that fought in our own war, the Border War, could also become members.

Those that fought in World War I have long since answered the Sunset Call and there are very few survivors of World War II left. Even our own numbers become less every year. So what happens when the last of us is gone?

A few years ago I remember speaking to someone that was high up in the Order. In fact at the time he was the Old Bill of the Order. I mentioned the fact that there was no-one really to replace us once we had gone and that if we didn't do something about it the Order would eventually die out. His response both shocked and saddened me. "If the Order dies, then it must die," he said. Sorry, call me crazy, but how can we let something like this just die?

There has to be some way that we can keep the Order going. Look, I realise that there is certain criteria for becoming a member of the Moth Order, and I have no problem with that. But does that mean we have to exclude anyone and everyone that wishes to be involved with the Order?

Let me give you an few examples of what I'm on about. I had a good friend of mine that served in the same unit as I did. Not only was he a Border War veteran, he was also a Moth. He answered the Sunset Call a few years ago. Now he has a 27 year old son that would like more than anything else to become a member of the Moths in order to pay respect to and remember his late father. Now obviously there is no



ways that this young man could join the Order because he does not qualify to do so. Yet is there not some way we could get him involved with the Shellhole where his father was a long-serving member? A Shellhole which, by the way, is in danger of closing because of dwindling membership.

I have another good friend that worked with me as a conflict journalist for 25 years. Although he never served in the military he probably has more combat experience than most Moths put together. He has covered wars on every continent and has been wounded no fewer than five times. He would love to become a Moth, but he realises that he does not meet the criteria. And he doesn't have an issue with that.

Now I know that no-one can become an honorary Moth or auxiliary Moth. Again understandable and I have no problem with that.

Yet wouldn't it be possible to start something where people could become members of a shellhole, be recognised as members, and wear some sort of insignia to denote this. They could have a badge of crossed rifles, crossed swords, or even an old boot - whatever. I'm sure that we could come up with a suitable name for them.



They would not be Moths, but they will also not be mere visitors to a shellhole. They would be members of a particular shellhole.

In this manner we could attract a lot more people to become members of a shellhole. Maybe people that would want to join because one of their parents was a Moth or a veteran. Maybe even people that feel, like we do, that those that fought in wars, those that paid the ultimate sacrifice, should be remembered.

I know that it sounds like a crazy idea but I believe that it's something worth taking a closer look at.

It could be a way of ensuring that what Moth O began nearly 90 years ago does not die out and that there will always be someone that will 'remember them'. And there may even be someone to remember us.

Queen of the Seas

There is a long-standing maritime tradition that when a ship crosses the equator there is a ceremony.

It is normally time for King Neptune to hold court. Those making their first crossing would appear before they court where they would be tried (and naturally be found guilty) and they faced punishment. This punishment usually consists of having to walk the plank.

When the SAS Protea undertook a journey to Portugal in 1990 it obviously had to cross the equator. Almost the entire crew was summoned to appear before the court of King Neptune.

Now if you think King Neptune was scary wait until you met his wife - Queen Neptune. She had a face that



WELCOME HOME: The SAS Protea arrives back at Simon's Town after returning from Portugal in 1990.

could stop a clock. And Queen Neptune was none other than our very own Shellhole Commander Servaas van Breda who was a CPO at the time.

And I for one don't believe for one minute those rumours that Servaas spent most of the trip in a dress and wig.



The Story of the Burial of the Unknown Warrior

This is one of those stories that should be told, and retold. It is a true story of "we will remember them".

As Hampshire/Wiltshire county border based people, we are only too aware of what used to happen along the main street in Wooten Bassett each time one or more of the coffins of the Afghanistan 'Fallen' were driven from the repatriation ceremony in RAF Lyneham to their home towns for burial. Crowds line the pavements; British Legion members dip their Standards and many ex servicemen honour their fallen comrades with a final salute. Some grieving family members toss bunches of flowers towards the slow moving cortège and hundreds of locals turn out in all weathers and stand alongside the mourners, national symbols of solidarity, sympathy and support for the families of the Fallen. Now, these repatriation flights arrive at RAF Brize Norton, but the same honours are delivered.

Reporting on these tragic outpourings of grief, today's generation of journalists, often associate these tributes of personal grief and corporate respect, with those that took place spontaneously outside the iron railings in front of Kensington Palace nearly 18 years ago, in the days following the death of Diana, Princess of Wales. These journalists seem unaware of our nation's military history and tradition.

93 years ago, on the 11th of Novem-

ber 1920, the permanent Cenotaph in Whitehall was formally unveiled by His Majesty the King George V and 'The Unknown Warrior' was finally laid to rest in a marked tomb. I want to tell you the story of his repatriation from the battlefields of the Western Front and his subsequent burial in Westminster Abbey.

Since the earliest times, British soldiers who died in battle in far off lands, were always buried on the battlefields where they fell, It was quite impractical to bring their bodies home. Even as recently as the Falklands Conflict, those who were killed in action, including Lt Col H Jones who was awarded the VC, were buried on the Falkland Islands.

In the days after the Battle of the Somme in 1916, an English padre David Railton conducted a series of battlefield burials. He noticed afterwards that one of the graves was marked with a rough pinewood cross inscribed in black pencil 'A British soldier known only unto God'. Throughout the rest of the War, Padre Railton could not erase that image from his mind. In his private War Diary, he wrote: 'What can I do, to ease the pain of that father, mother, brother, sister, sweetheart, wife and friend?' After days of reflective prayer, there came to him, out of the mists of his thoughts, a clear and

strong answer:

'Let this body, this symbol of him, be carried reverently over the sea and be buried in his native land.'

About 2.3 million British and Empire soldiers were killed in The Great War. Of those, almost 1½ million lie in marked graves, mainly in War cemeteries in Western France and Flanders. The others, the names of about 800,000 were listed either as 'missing presumed dead', or were so damaged in death that they could not be positively identified.

The later were buried and their graves marked with a simple wooden cross with the inscription 'Known only unto God'. It was one of these graves that left such a lasting impression on Padre Railton but it was not until early 1920 however, that he was able to take forward the answer to his prayer. He approached the Dean of Westminster Abbey, and the Dean was able to persuade the Government to accept the padre's proposal.

A committee headed by the Foreign Minister Lord Curzon, recommended that his office should arrange for an unknown soldier to be disinterred in France and brought to Westminster Abbey, the parish church of the nation. And so, an unknown British soldier, probably one with the rank of Private, was brought from the battlefields of France and buried with ceremony among the tombs of the most illustrious in the land.

Brigadier General Wyatt, as General Officer in charge of troops in France

and Flanders, was given instructions that the body of a British soldier, which it would be impossible to identify, "should be brought in from each of the six battle areas – the Aisne ('Ayn'), Marne, Cambrai, Somme, Arras and Ypres, on the night of 9 November 1920 and placed in the Chapel at St Pol."

The party bringing each body was to return at once to its area, so that there would be no chance of anyone knowing on which area the choice fell. Working parties carried out these instructions and the six bodies, carried in ambulances, were received by Padre George Kendall, at an Army hut not far from Ypres. A guard was set on the door. In front of the altar, was an empty roughwood coffin, which had been sent from England to receive 'The Remains'?

At midnight 9/10 November, the Brigadier General entered the hut. He was blindfolded before he turned towards the bodies. They had been placed in a row, on stretchers, each covered with a Union Jack. He was then turned in the direction of the stretchers and moved slowly forwards towards them. The body on the first stretcher that he touched was to become that of Britain's 'Unknown Warrior'. With the help of his ADC, he placed the body in the coffin and screwed down the lid.

He said later "I had no idea even of the area from which the body I selected had come, and no-one else can know it."

The guard remained over the solitary

coffin and nobody entered the hut that night. The other 5 bodies were reburied in the Military Cemetery at St Pol.

The following day at noon, Padre Kendall arrived with a military ambulance and the coffin was sent, under escort, to Boulogne.

On arrival at Boulogne Castle, the rough coffin was placed inside a second coffin, made from an oak tree grown in the grounds of Hampton Court, that most English of royal palaces, and presented by the British Undertakers' Association. This oak coffin was placed on a French military wagon, drawn by six black horses and escorted, by French troops. It was taken to Bou-

On shore, the French guns on the castle ramparts fired a 19 gun salute – honours due a Field Marshal in their army.

logne Quay, where a British warship lay at anchor.

The Admiralty had sent a battle cruiser, HMS Verdun as a special tribute to the French nation, as a symbol of French resistance during the war, in their the gallant defence of that city, the site of three quarters of a million French and German deaths.

The funeral cortege from the castle to the port was over a mile long. The French Government sent a Division of All Arms (some 16,000 men) to pay their last tribute and thousands of ordinary citizens lined the road, their heads bowed in silent tribute, as one French-

man put it” to the representative of the hundreds of thousands who died’, ‘for our country as much as for his own.’

As HMS Verdun's White Ensign was slowly lowered, the boson's mate piped the coffin on board, with the honours normally accorded to the Admiral of the Fleet. Five barrels of French soil were also stowed on-board, to be placed in the tomb in Westminster Abbey, so that the body should rest in soil on which so many of our troops gave up their lives. HMS Verdun moved off slowly, bound for the port of Dover. On shore, the French guns on the castle ramparts fired a 19 gun salute – honours due a Field Marshal in their

army -. The battle cruiser was escorted across the English Channel by 6 destroyers from the Atlantic Fleet, 3 in line abreast ahead and 3 in line abreast astern.

As HMS Verdun entered Dover Harbour, she was greeted by a 19 gun salute from the ramparts of Dover Castle. Having tied up alongside, 6 Warrant Officers, from the Royal Navy, the Royal Marines, the Army and the Royal Air Force acted as bearers and they escorted by 6 very senior officers, 2 Admirals, 3 Generals and (at that time,) the only Air Chief Marshal. They brought the body ashore and carried it on its

short journey to the Marine railway Station, where it was taken over by a officer and 15 Other Ranks from the 2nd Connaught Rangers. They were to escort the coffin on its journey to London. (The saloon wagon in which the body was placed, was the same one that had carried Nurse Edith Cavell to her funeral.)

A second coach carried the military escort and these two coaches were then attached to the rear of that evening's Dover to London boat-train.

At each station between Dover and Victoria, the train stopped briefly, to allow the crowds on the platform a glimpse of the coffin. The majority were women, watching and silent, many dressed in deep mourning.

A huge crowd was waiting for the train at Victoria Station.

On the following morning, the 11th of November, the coffin was again placed on a gun carriage. As the cortege moved off from Victoria, a gun battery, stationed in Hyde Park, fired a 19 gun salute. The journey to Whitehall, by a long route, was crowded 15 deep on either side by mourners.

On arrival in Whitehall, the gun carriage drew up beside the newly erected Cenotaph, designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens. As Big Ben began to strike the eleventh hour of the eleventh day, of the eleventh month, King George V wearing the uniform of an honorary Field Marshall, stepped forward, and pulled a rope to unveil the Cenotaph.

Next he placed his personal wreath of red roses and bay leaves on the cof-

fin (Poppies, as a symbol of the war dead, were not adopted until 1921). As the last stroke of eleven reverberated and faded, the deepest silence anyone present had ever experienced began - The Great Silence – what we now call ‘the Two Minutes Silence.

As it ended, the gun carriage moved forward again. King George, as the nation's Chief Mourner, took his place on foot immediately behind it, followed by the Prince of Wales, the Duke of York, Prince Henry, the Duke of Connaught, the Marquis of Milford Haven, the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Speaker, the Prime Minister and Ministers of State.

Outside Westminster Abbey, the coffin was lifted from the gun carriage and borne by Senior Non Commissioned Officers drawn from the Brigade of Guards. It now passed through two lines each of 100 recipients of the Victoria Cross, some in uniform, others in plain clothes, under the command of Colonel Freyberg VC; behind them, stood many widows and mothers of the Fallen.

Inside the Abbey, the coffin was placed on the bars laid across the open grave, sited just inside and in front of the West Door, and I quote: “squarely in the pathway of kings and queens for not a monarch can ever again go up to the altar to be crowned, but they must step over the grave of the man who died that the kingdom might endure.”

The Queen, the Princess Royal, Queen Alexandra and the Queens of

Spain and Norway had been driven from the Cenotaph to the West Door of the Abbey and had already taken their places. The congregation consisted primarily of war widows. The seats closest to the grave were reserved for those who had lost the most.

A little band of about 100 women received the most reverent attention. They had been given seats of honour because each had lost her husband and all her sons. After those, the next to be considered were those mothers who lost their only son or all their sons. After them, sat mothers who had lost a husband and one or more but not all their sons. One hundred nurses,

the privacy of their own thoughts, to assume a personal link with the Unknown Warrior, and many thousands of grieving people – perhaps even all of them – can convince themselves that their missing loved one really might be buried in the Abbey. The mystery as to whose son he was, makes him the son and brother of us all.”

As an aside, Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, later Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother, laid her bridal bouquet on the grave of the Unknown Warrior, before walking to the altar for her wedding to the future King George VI.

Her tribute was in memory of her brother Fergus, a captain in the Black

Last Post rang out, then another Great Silence, followed by the bugle call - Reveille. Finally the two lines of the holders of the Victoria Cross filed past on either side of the grave. The service was the mourning of the Nation. The honours that had been paid to the Unknown Warrior were those due to a fallen Field Marshall.

The inscription on the Tomb reads:

‘Beneath this stone lies the body of a British Warrior, unknown by name or rank, brought here on Armistice Day, November 11th 1920, in the presence of His Majesty King George V, his Ministers of the State, the Chiefs of his Forces and a vast concourse of the Nation.

Thus are commemorated the many multitudes who during the Great War of 1914-18 gave the most that man can give, life itself, for God; for King and Country, for loved ones, home and Empire, for the sacred cause of justice and the freedom of the world.

They buried him among the Kings, because he had done good towards God and towards His House’.

So, the answer to Padre David Railton’s 1916 prayer about a way to ease the pain of the loved ones of that British Soldier known only unto God’, was accomplished. ‘Let his body, this symbol of him, be carried reverently over the sea and be buried in his native land.’

For countless numbers of mothers and widows, the burial of the Unknown Warrior, including all the traditional mourning rites, would stand for

the funeral that had been denied their own son or husband.

By 27th November, it was estimated that two and a half million people had passed slowly by the Cenotaph and over a million had filed passed the Unknown Warrior’s tomb. An estimated 300,000 floral bouquets had been laid in piles, eventually over 10 feet high, around all the approaches to the Cenotaph. They knew, they understood.

There had never been an outpouring of public emotion on this scale and nothing like it has ever been seen since. The great state funeral of Queen Victoria, the later funerals of George V and Sir Winston Churchill, and even the public displays of grief at the death of Diana, Princess of Wales, were modest in comparison to the overwhelming emotional response to the burial of the Unknown Warrior.

Today, a few hundred may pass by the tomb inside the West Door. Do they know? Do they understand? We who do, have a responsibility to retell this story and keep this annual act of homage alive and understood.

It is, at least in part, an explanation for what was still happening in 2012, when the bodies of those, killed in action in Afghanistan, were repatriated through the Wiltshire town, now renamed Royal Wootton Bassett.

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wounded or blinded in the discharge of their duty, were also given places as was a young girl, who wrote that she had lost 9 brothers killed or missing, so too was a 12 year old boy, who wrote to the Dean: “the man in the coffin might be my Daddy”.

The funeral service was conducted by the Dean of Westminster, the Rt Revd Herbert Ryle. In his Address he said: “the Unknown Warrior is not merely a symbol of all the dead. The very anonymity of the body to be buried allows every person, if only in

Watch, who had been listed missing in action at the Battle of Loos in 1915. Who is to know that she was not laying the flowers on her brother’s grave?

During the singing of the hymn Lead Kindly Light, the Bearers came forward, removed the helmet and side arms from the coffin and, at the conclusion of the hymn, lowered it into the tomb.

At the Committal, the King scattered earth from the Ypres Battlefields from a silver shell. After a long roll of drums, the poignant notes of the

By the left, quick laugh



Control I'm tracking the target and have a confirmed missile lock. Permission to fire.

The new Armscor boobytrap.



They should have given us more training instead of a copy of 'The Dummies Guide to Flying Fighter Jets'.



Yes, okay. I know it looks stupid. But how else are we going to be able to afford to fight the war?



Don't know about you, but I'm getting really tired of these budget cuts.

