

The 1940s Society

For Everyone Interested in Wartime Britain – www.1940.co.uk

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Lockdown continues...



It seems that as far as re-enacting is concerned and the various military shows that are the highlights of many collectors and enthusiasts, 2020 is something of a right off. For me, its not the shows I miss but the opportunity to meet up with old friends and missing the opportunity to make new ones. However good the video conferencing technology is, its really not the same as meeting face to face. It's after much consideration that we continue to cancel our regular meetings but rest assured, we will look closely at the government advice and will only re-open once we feel confident that it's safe to do so. We have also looked at hosting on-line meetings and will be giving that some thought moving forward.

Looking on the bright side, lockdown has finally allowed me to complete my DIY bookshelf project and I have at last retrieved my precious books that have been in storage for the three years since we moved house. A library of (mostly) reference books that I will be looking forward to getting acquainted with again and may even share details of in a future issue. I hope you are all finding equally useful activities during this difficult period.

Best wishes to you all and wherever you are, please stay safe during this emergency

Kind Regards
Ian

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If you have any comments, articles or information of interest we would be pleased to consider it for future use. Please contact us at: The 1940's Society, The Olive Branch, Caen Hill, Devizes SN10 1RB or email us at: magazine@1940.co.uk.

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Friday 31 July 2020 at 8pm

The Canadian Navy in World War Two

Nick Fothergill

Rounding up U boat
brand

**POSTPONED DUE TO THE
CORONAVIRUS**

Like many other events in the UK and around the world we are postponing further meetings but hope that this emergency will soon be over and we can continue to meet up as before.

**We very much look forward to hearing Nick Fothergill
speak to us at a later date**

Consider the role played by
during the War.

8pm at Otford Memorial Hall, High Street, Otford

Doors open at 7.15pm. Please arrive early to avoid disappointment.
near Sevenoaks, Kent TN14 5PQ (free parking in large car park next to hall)

Admission £3 – tea, coffee and cake served during the interval



One of the iconic photographs of VE day in Trafalgar Square. Cynthia Covello, (right) and Joyce Digney (née Brookes, left) with two sailors.

Cynthia was 21 and Joyce 19. Both women were in the Land Army and were life-long friends. On May 8th they travelled up from Surrey where they worked and after going to St Paul's Cathedral where they said prayers for family members they had lost during the war they headed for the West End, a pub and Trafalgar Square. Both married Canadian soldiers shortly after the war and moved to Canada. Sadly Cynthia died in 1983 and Joyce in 2015. Their families remain close.

Their story and other photographs of their exploits can be found here: <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/who-were-the-women-in-the-traffic-jam-on-ve-day>

VE DAY - 1945

by Alan Williams

On 'VE Day 75' in May perhaps, even during a period of 'lockdown', you commemorated the end of the war in Europe. Here we take you back the original VE Day, 8th May 1945.

According to Lord (Professor) Peter Hennessy May 7th 'will always be the day when everybody knew (the war) was over'. A frustrated Churchill, like King George VI, was determined May 7th, rather than May 8th should be VE day and there had been plans for King and Prime Minister to announce victory together at 6.30pm on May 7th. But it was not to be. Why then is May 8th generally commemorated as the day the war in Europe ended?

On Monday 7th May 1945 German General Jodl agreed the unconditional

surrender of all German land, sea and air forces to representatives of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (General Bedell Smith) and the Soviet High Command (General Susloparov) at Reims in France. Locally some parts of the German army had surrendered before then. On the same date the German Foreign Minister broadcast to his countrymen that their troops had surrendered and that the war was over, a report picked up by the British news media, but it was not announced officially.

Soviet leader Joseph Stalin insisted that victory in Europe could not be agreed until the Russian acceptance of the surrender of German forces on the eastern front in Berlin and he proposed an announcement be made just after midnight on 9th May.

Whitehall, VE Day 1945. The Ministry of Health building is in the middle distance, decorated with the flags of the 'United Nations'.
© IWM



Victory in Europe therefore had been anticipated before May 8th. In Britain sales of flags and bunting had been increasing from early May, Selfridges in London's Oxford Street were reputed to have the widest range and plentiful supplies and saw sales increase markedly. The Board of Trade had announced no clothing coupons were required for bunting coloured red, blue or white, 'providing the cost was less than 1/3d a yard'. At 7.40pm on May 7th the BBC broke into a piano recital and the familiar voice of Stuart Hibberd announced that Tuesday 8th May 'will be treated as Victory in

Europe Day and will be regarded as a holiday'. Many people who missed the announcement went to work the next day only to find offices and shops closed.

Differences emerged in terms of how individuals planned what they proposed to do on VE Day, some in elation, some in relief, or grief. Some planned to go to church. (Many churches held packed thanksgiving services on the evening of May 8th. Services were held in St Paul's Cathedral, which had survived the Blitz almost unscathed, throughout the day and an estimated 35,000 people

attended.) Others planned to celebrate and party, some carried on as usual. Many began their preparations for VE Day the previous evening. At midnight on Monday a thunderstorm broke over London, not a particularly encouraging omen.

On Tuesday 8th May the weather forecast was published for the first time in over five years, 'wind freshening, warm and sunny at first but rain can be expected later' according to the Daily Mirror. Predictably, it was Britain after all, it was wrong. In the north of the England it rained all morning. But by the afternoon in London temperatures reached 75 degrees Fahrenheit and the sweltering heat was unseasonal. Much anticipated by some Daily Mirror readers was the expectation 'Jane', the popular cartoon character in the 'strip' series of the same name would appear naked on this day of victory. The 'Mirror' duly fulfilled this promise.

Nothing 'official' had been planned for VE Day to the disappointment of some.

By early afternoon the crowds began to gather, especially in London. Many converged on Piccadilly and Trafalgar Square. Some church bells also rang, for the first time in years, and were broadcast in the afternoon from 3.20pm until 4pm from York Minster and Bath Cathedral amongst others. Flags seemed to be everywhere. A Mass Observation (MO) correspondent in Glasgow commented 'private houses were snowing flags'. That Tuesday was especially good news for the 13,000 former British prisoners of war who flew into the UK. Lancaster bombers also dropped food to starving civilians in Belgium and the Netherlands. (Mass Observation had been created in 1937 as an anthropological research organisation into British society. It is probably most well-known for the diaries which volunteer correspondents kept during the war. The MO files are now housed at the University of Sussex.)

Prime Minister Churchill lunched with King George at Buckingham Palace and then went to the House

of Commons for a short session, the questions were sombre. The Secretary of State for War, Sir James Grigg was non-committal when asked if the recently returned POWs might be sent to the Far East to fight the Japanese. Deputy Prime Minister Clement Attlee (leader of the Labour Party) and Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden were in San Francisco at a conference designed to construct a new world body, the United Nations, both wished they were home in the UK.

At 3pm Churchill broadcast to the nation from 10 Downing Street. His speech was relayed across the world and broadcast by loudspeaker across the nation. He announced hostilities with Germany would officially cease at one minute past midnight and paid tribute to the 'military might and prowess of Soviet Russia and ... the overwhelming power and resources of the United States of America'. He concluded 'we may allow ourselves a brief period of rejoicing, but let us not

forget for a moment the toil and effort that lie ahead ... Advance Britannia! Long live the cause of freedom! God save the King!' Many thought they heard Churchill's voice break as he said 'Advance Britannia'. The filmed version of the announcement you might have seen was recorded after the event for posterity.

Churchill then returned by open car, standing on the front seat and through cheering crowds, to a now celebratory Commons. The journey of a few hundred

yards took thirty minutes and the police had to clear the way. In the Commons Churchill repeated his radio broadcast and then moved the MPs process to the Church of Saint Margaret's, Westminster, for a brief service of thanksgiving. At 5-40pm (the appearance had been anticipated for 5pm) Churchill and members of the War Cabinet appeared on the Balcony of the Ministry of Health overlooking Parliament Street at the Westminster end of Whitehall (it is now

Prime Minister Winston Churchill addresses the crowds from the balcony of the Ministry of Health in Whitehall on VE Day. On his right, Ernest Bevin, on his left, Sir John Anderson, Lord Woolton and Herbert Morrison



the Treasury). Churchill pushed Ernest Bevin to the front. As Minister of Labour from 1940 Bevin, a trade union leader, had been a key figure in organising the British labour force for the war effort. 'No Winston' Bevin replied, 'this is your day'. Churchill told the crowds 'this is your victory... It's a victory of the great British nation as a whole'. 'No - it's yours' the crowd roared back.

At 9pm the King broadcast, somewhat hesitantly, to the nation. At thirteen minutes it was the longest broadcast he made. Then he and his family made the first of several (as many as eleven, the last at 11pm) appearances on the balcony at Buckingham Palace. The King was accompanied by the Queen, and Princess Elizabeth (in her ATS uniform) and Princess Margaret, still a schoolgirl. They were joined at one point by Churchill who, perhaps unexpectedly, did not give his characteristic 'V' for Victory sign. After midnight the two Princesses mingled with the crowds in London, Princess Elizabeth later commented 'I think it was one of the most

memorable nights of my life'. Back at 10 Downing Street Churchill calculated Stalin would have eight European capitals under his control. Despite the celebrations the beginnings of the 'Cold War' were already apparent.

The received images and films we see today are generally of central London where the crowds partied-on well into the night. Noel Coward, in the crowd outside Buckingham Palace and shouting himself hoarse wrote '... I suppose this is the greatest day in our history'. By 8pm some London pubs had run out of (watered down) beer and glasses even though the opening hours had been especially extended. Plentiful supplies of beer had been organised, but the planning was not totally successful. Lamp posts, hoardings, the lions in Trafalgar Square were all climbed in scenes that were repeated across the nation. Searchlights played into the sky and many children saw their towns and cities lit up for the first time. There were long queues (people were used to queuing) to get the last, or first,



King George VI and Queen Elizabeth, with Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret, are joined by Prime Minister Winston Churchill on the balcony of Buckingham Palace

train, tram or bus home. There were comparable, though generally smaller celebrations across the country. Most people seem to remember the bonfires which seemed to be everywhere often with burning effigies of Hitler and Mussolini.

For many, Wednesday May 9th was the day for children's parties (parties continued to be held several weeks after VE day) and for recovering from the night before. Many had toiled for hours preparing for the celebrations using rations carefully saved for such an occasion. On Thursday May 10th things began to return to 'normal' even

though the war in Europe was over. Shops were open, queuing became the norm once again, some, especially those who had lost loved-ones in the war or who had relatives or boyfriends fighting in the Far East were relieved the celebrations were over. Others thought about the fate of those suffering in Europe or were appalled by the scenes of the concentration and extermination camps which had recently been published following Richard Dimbleby's report about Belsen which had been broadcast in mid April.

If we consider only British casualties during the war,

over 264,000 servicemen and women were killed, as were over 30,000 merchant seamen and 63,000 civilians. Even for those who survived the war several years of their lives had been lost.

Two weeks after VE Day, the Labour Party left the Coalition Government and a General Election was called for early July. The results were delayed until the end of the month allowing for votes cast overseas to be

brought to Britain. Labour won a landslide victory and, as one of the most reforming governments in British Parliamentary history created the 'Welfare State' (amongst other policies), thus beginning to repay the debt owed to the British population for the sacrifices made during the war. But why did Churchill and the Conservatives lose the 1945 election so decisively? That, as they say, is another story...

Piccadilly Circus on VE Day, 1945



On-Line Resources

VE Day 1945 film extracts. There are many YouTube and other contemporary sources you can view on-line that provide a flavour of VE day 1945. Here is just a small selection:

[LINK HERE](#)

Some contemporary colour film from the Imperial War Museum (IWM) archives. It is amateur colour film shot by RAF Ground Crew electrician Leading Aircraftsman R. W. Johnson and his father William Johnson during VE day in London 1945 and Victory day 1946. The final part of the film shows his own journey to Celle to serve with the British Occupation Forces in Germany in 1946. The VE day celebrations were filmed in central London on May 8th 1945 and the Victory celebrations were filmed in June 1946.

[LINK HERE](#)

The 'Movietone' newsreel covering VE Day 1945.

[LINK HERE](#)

This is a short IWM clip, generally in colour, which includes movie shots of Cynthia Covello and Joyce Digney at Trafalgar Square.

[LINK HERE](#)

This colour and black-and-white film from 'Screen Archive South East' shows VE and later events in Brighton and was taken in May 1945 (with some possibly at a much later date):

[LINK HERE](#)

Vera Lynn is perhaps the British singer most associated with the war years, especially 'We'll Meet Again' which she recorded in 1939. Here she sings 'We'll Meet Again' in the 1943 film of the same name.



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Fred's adventures in North-West Europe, 1944-1945

Part 7, Summer 1945 By Alan Williams

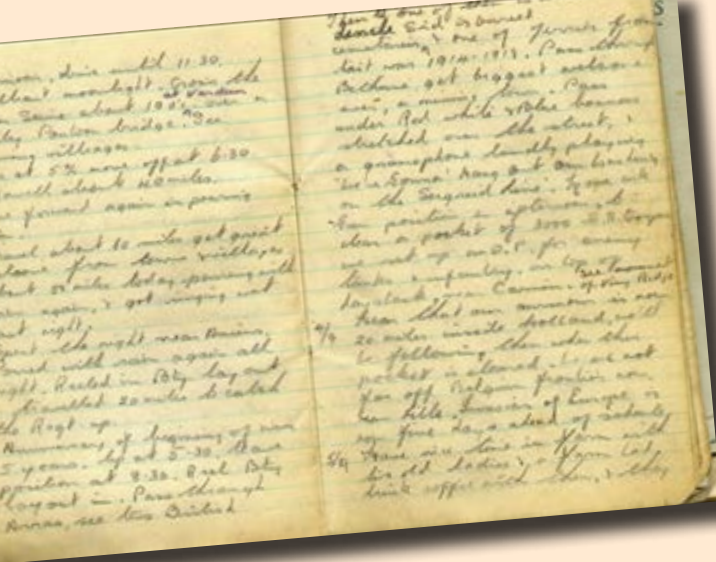
After VE Day in early May 1945, Fred's life in the liberated Netherlands became, as was to be expected, more peaceful than during the months that had followed D Day. For Fred this meant the diary entries tailed off, in some ways his 'adventure' was over.

Mid May 1945 marked the end of his daily diary entries and so our diary story is almost complete, although Fred's army life was not yet over. On 9th May 1945 Fred was granted 72 hours leave in Brussels scheduled to begin a few days later which is where we take up the story again:

Sunday 13th May 1945:
Sergeant Len Ridler and myself set off at 8 o'clock

*Fred Williams
May 1945*





A typical page from Fred's diary. Later entries are in pencil.

a.m. in T.L.E. for Nijmegen. When we arrive find no trains (to Brussels) until 5 o'clock tomorrow morning so as Bill Bartlett T.L.E. driver is running into Eindhoven we go there with him and hitchhike the rest of the journey, about 90 miles takes us about 5 hours. We stay at the Hotel Metropole on Boulevard Adolph Max, get cleaned up, have dinner, then 90 tram to see Margaret. She was in with the family and were they delighted to see us. Betty's (Margaret's older sister) young man (Jules Ferette) saw us home and we make a date for tomorrow.

14th May:

Up at 8 o'clock and go for a wander after breakfast. In

afternoon call in at a new theatre to see the latest news, strolled around, then met Betty's young man outside the hotel. We have our photo taken. The three of us pick up Betty and Margaret and off we go to a theatre. All the talking was in French so we could not understand a word of it but it

was quite interesting, quite unlike our own English theatre. I give Margaret a fancy handkerchief with 'TT' on & the Allied flags as a remembrance of the evening and she gives me a letter M. I've really fallen for her and I think she is feeling the same way, she's a grand girl.

15th May:

A Belgian civvy takes a bunch of us on a tour of Brussels on foot. We see the famous market square, the old post office, the Bourse [Stock Exchange] St Gudule Cathedral (we went inside), statue of St Michael their patron saint, the main station to the future Brussels subway (the tunnels linking the North and South Railway stations. It was eventually completed



The photograph of Fred Williams (left) and Len Ridler (right) taken on 14th May 1945 during their visit to Brussels. Fred enclosed the photo in the letter he wrote to Margaret the next day.

in the early 1950s!) which has been in progress of being built for 30 years, and never looks as if it will be finished. After the town we see the real Brussels handmade lace being made and I get some and send it home to Mum, Dad, Rose and Aunt Rose. Go around Brussels on the trams in the afternoon, changing from one to the other. The services (personnel) do not have to pay, we get to know Brussels quite well like this. In the evening we call at Margaret's house. We have a grand time and I manage to make it last out until 10.30. The last tram has gone so we will have to hoof it, about 5 miles. Margaret, Betty and an uncle and aunt

walk quite a distance with us. Both Margaret and I were quite quiet, neither of us felt like saying much, it might be the last time I shall see her and it felt as if I was just leaving home after a week's leave. I had the same sinking feeling. We kissed and hugged each other each other on the corner of a street and said cheerio, neither of us would say goodbye and then Len and I started off alone back to the hotel which we reached at midnight. Before turning in I wrote a letter to Margaret and crawled into bed around 2 in the morning.

16th May:

The last day of our leave, we go round the town,



Centre right, the Hotel Metropole in Brussels (c. 1925) where Fred stayed during his visit to Brussels in May 1945. An expensive luxury art nouveau hotel opened in 1895, during 1944-1946 it became a base for allied service personnel on leave in Brussels. You can see several of the trams (Brussels was once described as a 'city of trams') which carried allied troops around the city without being charged for any journeys

buying postcards I post Margaret's letter and in the afternoon find two photographic books, one of London and one of Britain before and during the war, so buy one of each and post them to Margaret as a special souvenir from England and myself. We catch our train at 3.30 and it does not pull out until 4 (the Nord station). Travel all night and arrive at Nijmegen around midnight where we are given a sandwich, tea and a blanket and so to bed for a few hours sleep.

17th May:
Up at 7 this morning and learn that the Division

moved yesterday so we now have to try to find out where the Regiment is. We leave the transit camp and leave for the Winter Gardens which is shut, it only being a quarter past nine so we laze about in the park until it opens. Get a lift to Regiment. In a 3 tonner. They are just outside Arnhem.

After about a fortnight just outside Arnhem, we move into Germany and stay near Osnabruck. After a week there (in June/July 1945) I am sent with Freddy Cattermole & some other drivers from the battery, to

become attached to 460 Coy, R.A.S.C. We draw new 3 ton Bedfords from Nijmegen (120 miles away). We are formed into two platoons, Barker & Epton, I'm in Barker. Our platoon stops for one night in Hagen where we start work, then move to Iserlohn, into a school.

ISERLOHN, Germany summer 1945. Part of number 5 section, Barker Platoon, R.A.S.E. in front of their new 3 ton Bedfords. Back row: Fred Cattermole, Ernie Ralphs. Middle row: Bdr Cliff Lorrison, Den Jones, Bill Avery, Fred Williams. Front row: L/Bdr Jack Kenny (fitter). Does anyone know what happened Len Ridler and to the other members of Barker platoon after demobilisation?

However, Fred's relationship with Belgium (and with Margaret) as well as his life in the army was not yet over as we shall see in the next edition of the magazine. He was, understandably perhaps, anxious that having seen active service in North Africa, Sicily

and North-West Europe virtually from D Day he might then be sent to the Far East given the war against Japan was not yet over. Fortunately this was not to be. Fred spent several further months in the British Army of the Rhine in Germany taking part in comparative vehicle tests between British and German army vehicles. There are no diary entries explaining what these involved, but there is a selection of photographs of the vehicle tests Barker platoon were involved in. We shall return to these and the outline of Fred's later 'civvie' life next time.





Too little, too late. The 1st Battalion Manchester Regiment receives last minute jungle training in October 1941.

Long Years in Hard Stations

by Mike Tickner

“The first time I smelt Jap was in a deep dry river bed in the Dry Belt, somewhere near Meiktila. I can no more describe the smell than I could describe a colour, but it was heavy and pungent and compounded of stale cooked rice and sweat and human waste and... Jap.”

George MacDonald Fraser “Quartered Safe Out Here”

The Second World War British soldiers’ service in the Far East was bewildering, fascinating, depressing, exhilarating, disgusting, beautiful and frightening. Many remained in India for the duration serving on the North West Frontier and quelling Gandhi’s “Quit India” campaign, while others experienced the freezing rain and mists of Kohima, the impenetrable jungle of the Arakan, the salt water mangrove swamps of Ramree Island or the searing heat of Burma’s central Dry Belt. Much has been written about their experience of combat and the appalling conditions in

which they fought, however, the daily life of the 14th Army soldier is an equally fascinating story of ordinary men who were transformed into an army which resoundingly defeated the Imperial Japanese Army.

Policing the Empire

For the first two years of the war, the British Other Ranks’ life in the Far East would have been familiar to Kipling’s “*Soldiers Three*”. The Indian Army still followed the post-1857 mutiny structures with a network of garrisons and resident brigades each comprising of two battalions of either Indian or Gurkha

Cheerful British troops arrive in Singapore in October 1941 unaware of their fate.



troops and a British battalion. While the Indian Army had previously fought overseas campaigns, its main roles were Internal Security duties and defending the North West Frontier against raiding Pathan tribesmen.

Service in India was a recognised part of a Regular soldier's career, serving seven years without home

leave. Battalions like the 2 Bn Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the 2 Bn Welch Regiment were posted to India in the early 1930s and were due to depart when the Second World War began. They remained out East for the war's duration and did not return until early 1948. Most soldiers disliked India and threw their topis into the sea as their troopship left Bombay believing that if they retained their

Garrison life was often dull and depressing with training almost impossible during the monsoon and the hottest weather.

sun helmet they would be posted back. Few wanted to return.

Life in India followed the same annual pattern dictated by the seasons. Garrison life was often dull and depressing with training almost impossible during the monsoon and the hottest weather. Their life was supported by *punkha-wallahs* (ceiling fans operators), *nappi-wallahs* (barbers), *dhurzee* (tailors), *mekhtars* ("sweepers" to empty the latrines), *bearers* (officers' servants), *bhistis* (water carriers: Gunga Din), *syce* (grooms), *dhobi-wallahs* (laundrymen), *Kits* (Khitmugar: domestic or mess servants) and *bobajis* (cooks). Food was monotonous with stewed buffalo, vegetables, fruit washed in potassium permanganate and steamed puddings regularly served for tiffin. Soldiers supplemented their diet with fried egg sandwiches from regimental canteens and endless cups of hot over-sweetened tea summoned with the cry "*char-wallah Idderao!*" Otherwise, contact with the local people was limited. Venereal disease was common and

regimental brothels were sometimes discreetly run in an attempt to control infection.

Every year, this monotony was broken when training resumed during the cooler weather. Rising before dawn, battalions marched around 15 miles daily along a network of "marching camps" to their training areas. The remnants of these camps may still be found with parts of the low perimeter wall still visible and occasionally a small cemetery for those soldiers who died during the night and were buried before the battalion marched onto their next camp. This method of marching in the morning and training in the afternoon ensured that the battalion was fit, with hardened feet and ready to start the exercise.

A Disastrous Start

The invasion of India by Russia through Afghanistan was considered as the immediate threat in September 1939 and additional troops were rushed to the North West Frontier to repel any incursion. It was not until

May 1940 that the Indian Army began to expand, sending troops to North Africa and the Middle East and nearly another year until the Japanese threat was really recognised.

The Japanese invasion of Malaya, Burma and Singapore in 1942 was swift, decisive and humiliating for Britain. The British and Indian troops who retreated to India had lost much of their equipment, were tired, their morale was weak and they believed that the Japanese were invincible. However, they now understood how the Japanese operated

and their own need to train and re-equip. So the 14th Army was born under the inspirational leadership of Britain's finest general since Wellington: Bill Slim. This army became nearly a million strong with almost 800,000 Indian troops, 90,000 British troops and 80,000 East and West African troops. It trained hard, survived on the most meagre supplies and learnt that the Japanese were not jungle supermen. Described in a 1943 article in the News Chronicle as "the forgotten men", the Forgotten Army developed a unique esprit de corps and revelled in this epithet,

Christmas Day 1944



taking pride in their ability to fight hard and survive in the toughest physical conditions with only basic supplies.

One Round, One Jap

Slim's first challenge was to rebuild morale and to teach the 14th Army to fight and win in the jungle. The sleepy pre-war garrisons of Malaya and Burma considered the jungle as impenetrable and a health risk and so they conducted limited training. On arrival in Malaya in 1941, 2Lt John Randle in 7th Battalion, the 10th Baluch Regiment overheard his Commanding Officer being advised:

"You can't do much training here; it is all bloody jungle."

Everybody was a combatant and Slim directed that all must learn to fight in the jungle and also through the monsoon. The first jungle warfare schools were established and all ranks, including staff officers, had to complete a two month course as a rifleman within an infantry section. The course emphasised marksmanship, live firing, night operations, living and

fighting on light scales, jungle lore (survival skills) and being able to march 25 jungle miles a day fully loaded. Few enjoyed living in the jungle but they became familiar with the environment and grew confident in their own skills, no longer believed the myths about the Japanese. This was their first step towards victory.

Khana

The 14th Army had the war's longest supply chain and remained the lowest priority until the war in Europe was won and so the next challenge was resupplying this Army. India's industry must convert to war production, existing technology needed to be pushed to its limits and innovation was paramount. Road and rail links were limited and aircraft resupplied isolated troops and evacuate casualties. Climate, terrain and distance alone made resupply challenging but the 14th Army's cultural diversity created further complexity.

The provision of food, or khana, provides a snapshot

into the challenges faced by the 14th Army's logisticians with 28 different ration scales to meet the different cultural and religious requirements. The staple for all Indian troops was roti and dhal (flat breads and curried chickpeas) with Northern Indian troops preferring roti and those from the South preferring rice. Dehydrate fish was eaten by all the religions and there were also religion specific tinned rations with green labels for Muslim troops and orange labels for Hindus and Sikhs. East and West African troops loved bully beef but also ate meali (white maize) which they made into a type of porridge called

posho. British troops predominantly ate bully beef which liquefied in the heat. This was augmented with other tinned rations and George MacDonald Fraser, a Pte in the Border regiment, recounted carrying a large tin without a label all day on patrol. His Section fanaticised that it contained fruit in syrup but were disgusted when their pudding was in fact carrots in brine. They blamed him. American K Rations were originally issued to the Chindits and then to other units during the final days of the Burma campaign with each meal in an individual box. They were bulky and heavy but did contain Camel rather than hated V

cigarettes. While bully beef was monotonous, K Rations quickly became unpopular as explained by one Chindit:

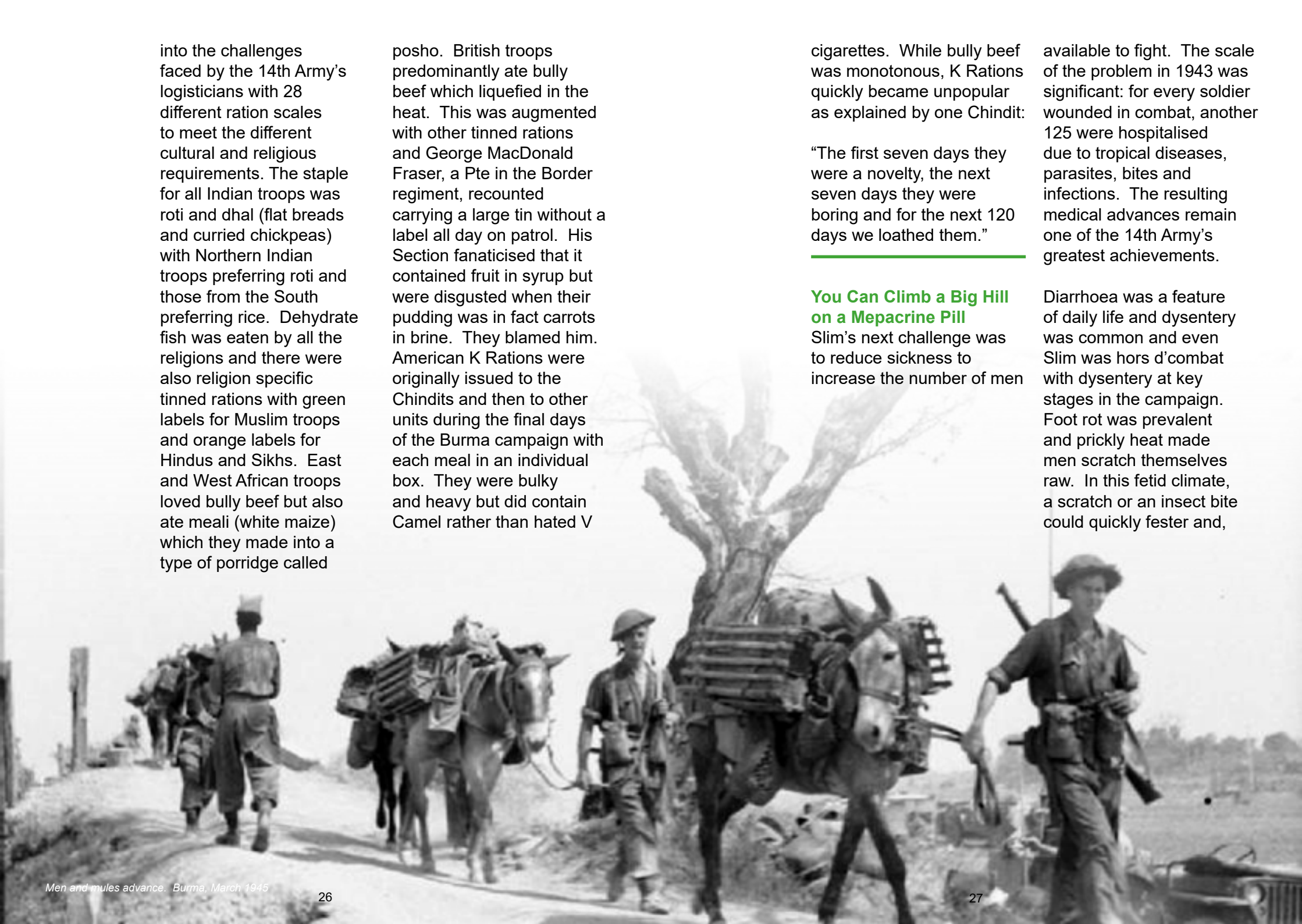
"The first seven days they were a novelty, the next seven days they were boring and for the next 120 days we loathed them."

You Can Climb a Big Hill on a Mepacrine Pill

Slim's next challenge was to reduce sickness to increase the number of men

available to fight. The scale of the problem in 1943 was significant: for every soldier wounded in combat, another 125 were hospitalised due to tropical diseases, parasites, bites and infections. The resulting medical advances remain one of the 14th Army's greatest achievements.

Diarrhoea was a feature of daily life and dysentery was common and even Slim was hors d'combat with dysentery at key stages in the campaign. Foot rot was prevalent and prickly heat made men scratch themselves raw. In this fetid climate, a scratch or an insect bite could quickly fester and,





Men of the 1st Battalion Royal Scots pose with a captured Japanese flag. Shwebo, January 1945.

if untreated, sepsis or a jungle ulcer could develop with amputation common in prisoner of war camps as the only means to contain infection without proper drugs. The new Sulphonamide compounds were a major improvement but real progress was not made until penicillin became available at the end of the war.

The greatest medical challenge was malaria which debilitated 84% of the army at some stage during 1943. Carried by the Anopheles mosquito, the cause was attributed to bad or "mal" air found in swamps until 1895. Strict anti-malaria measures were imposed and Slim sacked

three Commanding Officers who failed to reduce infection rates in their battalions. Sleeves were rolled down at dusk, long trousers worn in preference to shorts, DDT insecticide was used liberally and Mepacrine tablets issued. These prophylactics discoloured their skin yellow and was rumoured to cause impotence but failure to take them was a military offence. Originally patients were evacuated to India until Malaria Forward Treatment Units were established later in the campaign to reduce the amount of time out of the line. An infected soldier was still be away for at least three weeks.

Vs and Vera

The guides written for British soldiers posted out East described exotic and fascinating lands filled with mystery and adventure. The reality was different and free time hung heavily and the sense of isolation felt by many soldiers was profound. The welfare facilities were more restricted than any other theatre and, although provisions improved, the morale of British and Indian



House clearing. The 1st Battalion Royal Scots conduct house search a Burmese village.



British troops brew up in a deserted temple. Ramree Island, January 1945.



Signallers from the 1st Bn West Yorkshire Regiment in a temple near Meiktila, 28 February 1945.

troops was a constant concern to South East Asia Command (SEAC).

Post was the most controversial issue and a letter could take over six weeks to reach soldiers. In response, the Aerogram system was introduced which allowed soldiers and families to exchange a weekly 15 line letter which was photographed on microfiche and flown to Britain or India to be printed and posted. The benefits to morale were immediate.

Regiments, the NAAFI, churches and charitable organisations ran canteens in static locations and also mobile canteens up-country. "The Elephant Arms", the Toc H canteen in Imphal, served up to 1,000 soldiers nightly and many canteens remained open throughout the fighting. The Rev Walter Corbett and his wife kept open the YMCA canteen in Imphal throughout the battle.

Regiments organised entertainment and ENSA sent concert parties, but the iconic image of this campaign was Vera Lynn. As a major pre-war star,

as well as a wife and a mother, she volunteered for the Far East when others refused. She travelled to the most remote locations, experienced some of the hardships and most importantly found time to talk to the soldiers. Her dedication and kindness created a unique bond with the Forgotten Army and this mutual affection remained until her recent death.

The cinema was a popular pre-war activity but there were very few cinemas showing English speaking films. The Army Kinema Section responded although sometimes the choice of films was explosive. The Royal Enniskillen Fusiliers

watched the Errol Flynn film "Objective Burma" which portrayed the Americans singlehandedly winning the war in Northern Burma. Drink had been taken, fighting broke out and they burnt down the cinema.

The Directorate of Army Welfare in Delhi instigated the "Calling Blighty" films and 400 films were made between 1944 and 1946. Soldiers from a nominated area, eg Brighton or Manchester, recorded short messages and their families were then invited to a special showing at their local cinema. However, this could occur up to 12 weeks after filming and there are recorded examples of

Soldiers inspect 'pin-ups' at the Royal Welsh Fusiliers' temporary camp near Indaw, December 1944.



Tough. Sunburnt. Dirty. Pte George of the South Wales Borderers typifies a soldier of the 14th Army. Pinwe, Burma. November 1944.

families watching loved ones who had been killed during the interim. Interestingly, 47 films have survived with clips available on YouTube and the soldiers' awkwardness on camera provides a fascinating view of the pre-Instagram world. Despite of the cheery messages of being well and coming

home soon, their smiles are forced and the sense of melancholy is palpable.

By September 1944, each soldier was allocated a weekly ration of 50 V cigarettes (increasing to 100) and a monthly ration of five bottles of beer. Air resupply was essential to welfare improvements



Khana time

and post, rum and beer, newspapers and two million cigarettes were parachuted to troops in the very front line during the Battle of Kohima in spring 1944. By 1945, British newspapers arrived seven days after printing, SEAC published 30,000 copies of their daily newspaper,

printed "Phoenix" (a weekly magazine) and ran a radio station.

Home leave, even on compassionate grounds, was impossible and SEAC realised the detrimental effect on morale. Operation PYTHON was introduced in December 1944 and repatriated those with over three years and eight months overseas or granted 28 days leave for those ineligible for repatriation. Calcutta or "Cal" was the most popular leave location with organisations like the Salvation Army and ACES running lounge clubs, libraries and welfare centres. Cal also boasted bars, cinemas, dance halls,

opportunities to meet nurses and "Wack-Eyes" (Women's Auxiliary Corps India) and the *lal bazaar* (red bazaar). There were large numbers of American servicemen in Bengal resulting in tensions and jealousies in Calcutta over girls. Clashes with American military police were common and baiting them became a popular off duty pastime of British servicemen with stealing their jeeps a particular favourite.

Blighty Bound

Walking down the troopship gangplank onto the quayside at Liverpool or Southampton, post-war Britain was a shock to the returning 14th Army soldier.

Britain had become a cold, damaged, dreary, dirty and hungry country which seemed so very different from the world which they had just left. The previous few years had been a roller-coaster experience where a defeated army transformed into a world class, war winning organisation which defeated the most ruthless enemy, in the most demanding terrain and in the most brutal climate. Such change was hard won and the war fought beyond the view of the British public, but this Forgotten Army did not care. They knew what they had achieved and that was enough.

Going in with the bayonet.



Photo Album

Original Period Photographs with a Story



Air Shelter “De Luxe”

December 1940

Women sleep in a corridor of the Grosvenor House Hotel in London, their bodies stretched over chairs and deck chairs. This is what might be termed a “De Luxe” air raid shelter.

Dr Penny Starns

Foreword by
Richard Kornicki CBE DL
Chairman, Polish Air Force
Memorial Committee

TRULY OF THE FEW



The Polish Air Force in the Defence of Britain

TRULY OF THE FEW

The Polish Air Force in the Defence of Britain.

The 15th July was the 80th Anniversary of the start of the Battle of Britain. We took a trip to Bristol to interview Dr Penny Starns whose new book highlights the contribution that the Polish Air Force made not just in the Battle of Britain but in the defence of Britain as a whole.

Hello Penny, thank you so much for talking to us about your new book. Can you give us a brief overview of what the book is about?

The book follows the Polish Airman, the Groundcrew, all those involved in the Polish Air Force from just before the outbreak of war to the end of the war and the post war period. So obviously it covers the Battle of Britain period but it also covers those other aspects such as those that took part in defending the coast in Coastal Command and those that defended cities at

night, the Night Squadrons. I knew about the Polish contribution to the Battle of Britain but I hadn't realised how difficult their journeys were from Poland to Britain. I hadn't realised how difficult it was for them to actually get here to fight and how determined they were to fight. Let's face it, they had escaped Poland and could have taken refuge in a neutral country and sat out the war but they didn't, they were determined to fight. So the book follows the stories of certain airmen, certain squadrons, right from the very beginning of the war.

What made you write a book about the Polish Air Force in Britain?

I have a number of Polish friends and I had conversations with them in the pub or over a meal which sparked my interest. I ended up looking at all the books that were available on the Polish Air Force in Britain and what I found was that there are quite a few well researched and well written books. They are very technical, covering the types of aircraft, the detail, they go into incredible depth, they're very very thick books. But not many of them have any context

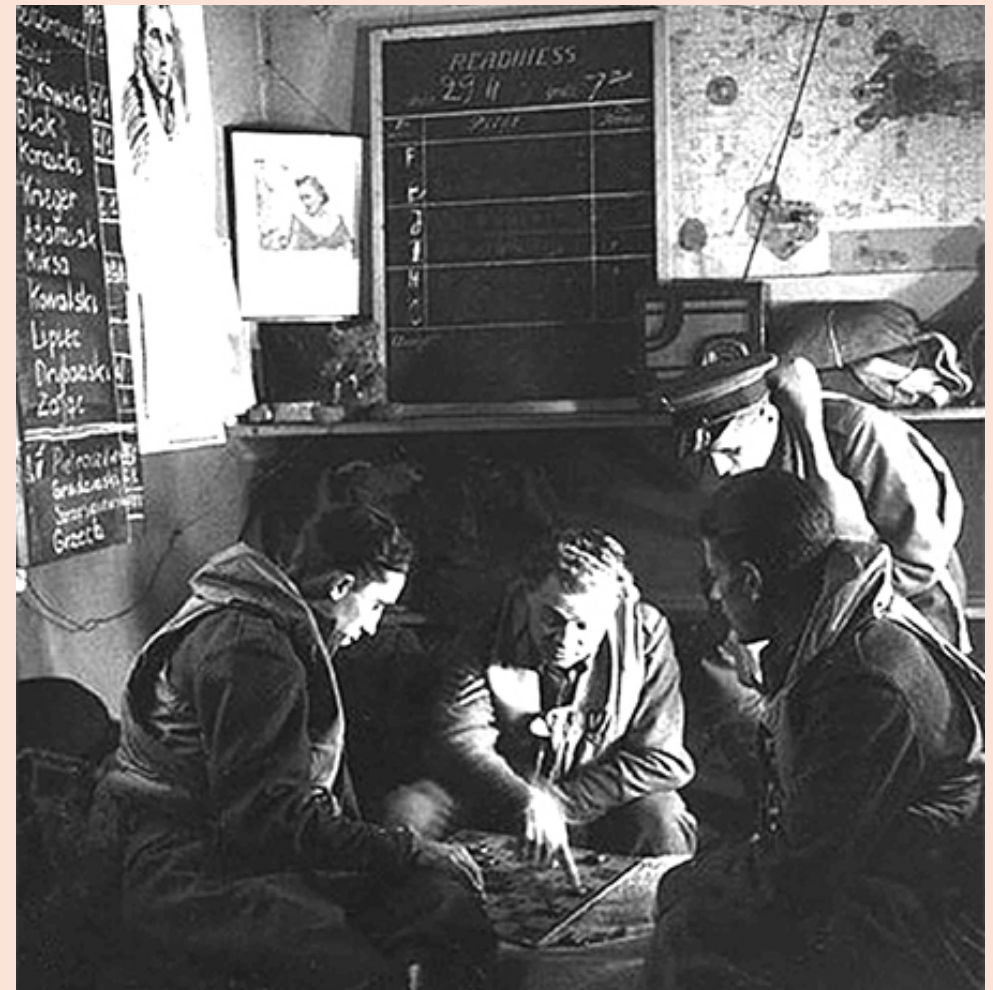
to them. So what I wanted to do was to show the general reader, somebody who can pick up the book and knows nothing about the war, who knows nothing about the Polish Air Force, I wanted to get through to those people how important the Polish contribution was. Part the way through our conversations I was sent a 1942-43 version of the role of the Polish Pilots in the Battle of Britain but at the time this was quite heavily censored. Both for security and because if the names of Polish pilots had become known to the Nazis their families back in Poland would have

Group Captain Johnny Kent, nicknamed Kentowski by his Polish colleagues from "Truly of the Few" by Penny Starns



been killed. Those Polish pilots who were incredibly brave and amazing weren't given any recognition and I wanted to know who these people were, what their names were, and I wanted to rescue some of these people from history so that readers can get to know them when they read the book.

Franciszek Kornicki with 315 Squadron playing chequers at RAF Northolt, waiting to be scrambled into action. Their names chalked on the blackboard to the left. From "Truly of the Few" by Penny Starns



Do you think it's appreciated how much of a contribution the Polish Air Force made both generally and during the Battle of Britain?

No. I don't think there is that appreciation. I see there to be a gap in the knowledge of the general reader. Whilst I was writing this book I

went to a friends barbeque and was talking about the book and was told by a man I met there that I was only studying the Polish as I was being 'politically correct'. I said; "These people were here; they defended our country". I was trying to get that through to him and part of the writing process for me was thinking of 'barbeque man'. I wanted him to pick up the book and know how important this contribution was because I think there are an awful lot of barbeque men and women, and youngsters,

that don't know what a huge contribution the Polish made. We celebrate Battle of Britain day on September the 15th because that was a particularly big battle in the skies above Britain and what most people don't realise is that 1 in 5 of the pilots taking off on that day were Polish.

Do you have a favourite incident or story from the material you researched?

I have a few. They aren't necessarily favourite stories but interesting stories.

Dr Penny Starns standing with the Clifton Suspension Bridge (Bristol) in the background. The scene of the tragic death of two Polish pilots.



The bridge behind me for instance (The Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol) features. There was a pilot called Josef Jaworzyn and he had two friends based in Oxfordshire learning their flying skills. They were practicing their flying skills and decided to fly under the suspension bridge, lost control and flew into a tree. Both were killed. That's not a favourite story as its quite sad but what it does show you is that these were very young men who were brave and loved their flying skills. Even Josef had been disciplined for his flying but he passed his tests and was deemed 'average'. Josef was really annoyed about that because he said; "I knew I was good".

There are a lot of good stories and anecdotes in the book.

From reading the book I get the impression that the Polish pilots were extremely committed. In some ways more focussed than their British colleagues as they were fighting for a country that was under German occupation?

I think that definitely comes over in the research and record offices. It was important for them because they had been invaded and they knew their families were still under enormous pressure. They were fighting here and writing letters home which they didn't know would be received and they were homesick. If they thought the RAF were being lenient, they would speak up. There are occasions when an RAF pilot might have seen a German pilot, for example, floating in the sea and they were left. The Polish pilots would get quite cross talking about what the Germans had done to Poland. They were committed and were very focussed. They had a reputation for constantly scanning the skies and spotting the enemy when they were a little speck on the horizon.

When we think of the Air Force, we tend to think of just the pilots but your book covers the supporting staff on the ground as well?

Yes, there were lots of people on the ground. There were the mechanics,

the fitters, the riggers, the electricians, there were loads and loads of women doing all sorts of jobs including the plotting, the medical staff, all sorts of backup on the ground. I've included details of the groundcrew who are often forgotten. The pilots themselves are very quick to give credit to the groundcrew. As the pilots said, when you scramble you ran to your plane and you knew it was fuelled and everything was ready, you knew it was as safe as it was possible to be.

Your obviously very passionate about the Polish Air Force and their contribution to the defence of Britain. So passionate in fact that all the royalties for the book are going to a Polish charity?

Yes, all the royalties are going to the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee. I know it sounds really daft but when I listen to all these pilots and I've got their laughter in my head, I've got their fears in my head. I've got the pilots telling me that sometimes their legs used to tremble before

they went into a dive but when they went into a dive their nerves were gone. I remember thinking that not enough people know about these pilots, they don't know how important they are and I think if we can encourage people to understand that contribution it's really important. So, by giving the royalties to the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee I'm hoping that will help to keep their memory alive.

Thank you Penny for taking the time to talk to me. I've read the book and found it a fascinating read and I'm sure it will do very well and hopefully raise lots of money for the Polish Air Force Memorial Committee.

The book 'Truly of the Few – The Polish Air Force in the Defence of Britain' (ISBN 9781781220191) is published on 1 August but the 1940s Society have a limited supply of signed copies available now.

Visit the 1940s Society website [HERE](#) to place your order.

Right:
Flt. Sgt. Mieczyslaw Popek with ground crew.
From "Truly of the Few" by Penny Starns.



Events Diary

Not a complete listing of everything that's going on but a few events that may be of interest to members.

More are listed on the website at www.1940.co.uk

DUE TO THE CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY MOST EVENTS IN THE NEAR FUTURE HAVE BEEN POSTPONED OR CANCELLED - PLEASE CHECK WITH THE ORGANISERS AND I HOPE WE WILL BE BACK TO NORMAL IN A FEW MONTHS TIME.

12 - 13 April 2020

CRICH TRAMWAY VILLAGE WW2 Homefront Event
Crich Tramway Village, Crich, Derbyshire
A real taste of life during the Second World War in this unique setting.
Visit www.tramway.co.uk for further details.

23rd - 25th May 2020

Overlord to Victory - Military Show/Event
The Lawns, Denmead, PO7 6HS - 9.00 to 17.00 each day
The Overlord Show is the south coast's premier military spectacular.
I attended last year and very much enjoyed the weekend. Entry prices vary with discounts available for families, veterans and currently serving HM forces. Full details and more information at www.overlordshow.co.uk

23 - 24 May 2020

Ironbridge Gorge WW2 weekend
This beautiful location is the setting for a WW2 weekend with re-enactors, vehicles, stalls, and talks. Visit the website at ironbridgeww2weekend.co.uk

29 May 2020

May 1940s Society Meeting - Otford, Kent
POSTPONED DUE TO CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY
Victory in Burma. Mike Tickner. From Kohima, Imphal, Meiktila, Mandalay and finally Rangoon, the British and Indian Armies defeated the once invincible Imperial Japanese Army. Transformed after the Fall of Singapore, Mike will explore how the Forgotten Army learned how to win against the most brutal enemy in the most demanding climate and terrain of Burma.

28 July - 1 August 2020

The War & Peace Revival
The Hop Farm - Beltring, Kent
CANCELLED DUE TO CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY
A huge military vehicle event with masses of stalls, vehicles and entertainment. A real experience if you've never been. Check the website for full details as there just isn't enough room to list everything here. Be aware that this years event runs from Tuesday to Saturday
Visit www.warandpeacerevival.com for more details.

31 July 2020

July 1940s Society Meeting - Otford, Kent
POSTPONED DUE TO CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY
The Canadian Navy in World War Two. Nick Fothergill
Rounding up U boats and applying the depth charge brand - the extraordinary story of the Royal Canadian Navy in World War Two. Regular contributor to the '1940s Magazine' Nick Fothergill will consider the role played by the Canadian Navy during the War.
Meetings are held in Otford Village Memorial Hall, High Street, Otford, TN14 5PQ. Parking in the adjacent car park is free from 18:00. Meetings start at 20:00. Refreshments are available. Admission £3. All are welcome to our informative, entertaining and often thought-provoking event.

8 - 9 August 2020

Crich Tramway Museum WW2 Home Front Weekend
CHECK EVENT BEFORE TRAVELING
The National Tramway Museum, Crich Tramway Village, nr Matlock, Derbyshire, DE4 5DP
If you haven't been before then Crich is a wonderful place to visit anytime but if you have a love of the 1940s then choose this weekend. Lots going on and lots to see. If you are a re-enactor, veteran or wish to display a vehicle (built in or prior to 1945) then you will need to register in advance. Full details at www.tramway.co.uk

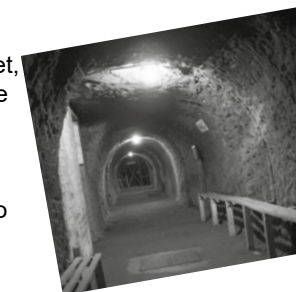
25 September 2020

September 1940s Society Meeting - Otford, Kent
THIS EVENT MAY BE POSTPONED DUE TO CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY
'Doodlebugs' over England in the summer of 1944. Alan Williams
In summer 1944 London and the south-east of England were on the receiving end of 'V1' Flying Bomb attacks. Alan will explore the onslaught and its effects and also show the short nine-minute 1944 documentary film 'The 80 Days' which explored the defences against the attacks.

Meetings are held in Otford Village Memorial Hall, High Street, Otford, TN14 5PQ. Parking in the adjacent car park is free from 18:00. Meetings start at 20:00. Refreshments are available. Admission £3. All are welcome to our informative, entertaining and often thought-provoking event.

27 November 2020

November 1940s Society Meeting - Otford, Kent
THIS EVENT MAY BE POSTPONED DUE TO CURRENT HEALTH EMERGENCY
'Entertainment in World War Two. Mike Brown
Popular author and regular speaker Mike Brown returns to talk about entertainment in Britain during the war years.
Meetings are held in Otford Village Memorial Hall, High Street, Otford, TN14 5PQ. Parking in the adjacent car park is free from 18:00. Meetings start at 20:00. Refreshments are available.



The 1940's Society

The 1940s Society has been organising events, running meetings and producing a regular magazine since 1998. The Society continues to have subscribers with an interest in different aspects of World War Two and from many different locations both inside and outside the UK. They are brought together by a shared interest in learning about the Second World War.

Our regular magazine is now available **ONLY** in an electronic format and email subscription to this is completely **FREE**. If you would like to subscribe then please fill out the application on our website at: www.1940.co.uk.

Regular meetings are held in Otford, near Sevenoaks in Kent (UK). Past speakers have included, Authors, Historians, Personalities and Second World War Veterans.



One of the many wartime posters available to purchase on the 1940s Society website at www.1940.co.uk