

Desert Rats Association – News Letter Summer 2017

The Desert Rats Association Newsletter Summer 2017

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Introduction

It has been over a year since the first bi-annual Desert Rats Association newsletter and this is the 3rd instalment of what we believe is a very good way of keeping our members and supporters updated on what the Association is doing over the year. Much has happened since the Winter newsletter; with Orwell Park School event, Association Memorial Day and Church Service and the selection of a sculptor to design and create a fitting Desert Rat memorial at the National Arboretum, Staffordshire. There are also plans afoot for an Association period dinner and dance to celebrate the Desert Rats greatest victory over the Afrika Korps on the 75th anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein. A victory that would go down in the annals of the Second World War as the turning point for the British and her Commonwealth Allies in North Africa. It is also considered one of the three great battles that signalled the turning point of the war along with the Battle of Midway in the Pacific between the United States of America and the Empire of Japan and the Battle of Stalingrad between the Soviet Union and Germany and her Allies on the Eastern front. It also motioned the ringing of the

church bells in Britain for the first time since the war had started and Sir Winston Churchill to write in his 6 volume History of the Second World War:

It may almost be said, "Before Alamein we never had a victory. After Alamein we never had a defeat".

There were of course still nearly three very tough years of war before final victory was secured.

This newsletter will round up the first six months of 2017 and keep you all updated on plans for the rest of the year. We all look forward to seeing you at one or all of the events planned for the remainder of the year.

Yours aye

Desert Rats Association

Orwell Park 2017

On 18th May 2017, at Orwell Park School, near Ipswich, Suffolk, Association members gathered again for a service of remembrance and wreath laying at the memorial situated in the school grounds. This year's event could be sub-titled 'The Return of Mercer's Troop' as will be explained shortly.

On 18th May in lovely Spring weather, members of the Association, including a veteran from WW2 and others who served more recently, gathered at the invitation of the Headmaster (Mr. Adrian Brown), Staff and Pupils of Orwell Park School, near Ipswich, Suffolk. Remember that in 1944 the School was an Operation Overlord Mars Landing Camp. This year's event benefited from displays from 7 Aviation Support Battalion REME, based nearby at Wattisham airfield and also from a detachment of 'G' Parachute Battery (Mercer's Troop) 7

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7th Armd Div
Pre – 1940



7th Armd Div
1940 – 1944



7th Armd Div
1944 - 1958



7th Armd Bde
1942 – 1946



4 Armd Bde
1943 to 1946

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Parachute Royal Horse Artillery (from the Colchester Garrison), who were stationed at the school for a few weeks in May 1944, when as 'G' Battery (Mercer's Troop) RHA they were part of 5th Royal Horse Artillery, which was a unique and welcome addition to the day. As mentioned it was lovely warm Spring Day and the aim of the event was to commemorate and remember the men of 22nd Armoured Brigade, who spent several days at the School waterproofing the vehicles before their journey to Normandy, via nearbylixstowe, as part of the follow up troops after the initial D-Day, landing on 6th and 7th June 1944

As normal the event consisted of a parade, led by a Lone Piper, from the school to the memorial in its grounds, followed by a short service. The Last Post sounded by Mr. Bill Wells, followed by a two-minute silence, after which wreaths were laid by the Association's Vice-President Mr. Rodney Scott, veterans, the Head Boy and Girl from the School and Mr. Ian Paterson (Treasurer) and Mr. Bryan Burnikell, whose fathers were both in 5th Royal Horse Artillery. General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE spoke to the whole school, before the parade returned to the school buildings. After the parade Mr Pyatt (veteran) spoke to many of the pupils as did General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE.

The pupils of the school were given an extended break to spend time at the Army and vintage vehicle displays from the Norfolk and Suffolk Military Vehicle Trust. It was an enormous success with pupils, vintage vehicle owners & restorers and servicemen thoroughly enjoying themselves.



Mr Pyatt Royal Tank Regiment talking to the pupils & Warrant Officer Class 2 Farthing (7 Battalion REME)

The school kindly provided a hearty lunch, hosted by Mr. Brown and his wife, over which much discussion of the day's events and of those 73 years ago took place, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed. All who attended enjoyed themselves very much and the Association would like to thank Mr. Brown, his wife, pupils and staff of Orwell Park School for hosting such a fantastic event this year.

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Front and centre Mr Pyatt and General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE behind, with The Association members and the Headmaster and his wife to their flank .

Memorial Day 18th June 2017

The Desert Rats Association Memorial Day and Church Service was held in blistering heat on Father's Day at High Ash Thetford Forest. At the Associations, pristine memorial 'Little Audrey' a MK IV CROMWELL tank. This year's event was supported by over 20 military and historic stands and stalls, which ranged from the Burma Mule & Bill the Chindit, Royal British Legion, The Ghurkha Association, to Derrick Eagles' model soldiers and The Edith Ellen Foundation plus over 40 historical military vehicles. There was also Army support from 3rd Battalion the Royal Anglian Regiment and 7 Aviation Support Battalion REME and Staff Sergeant Andy Tongue with impressive his array of small arms, machine guns and .5 Browning Heavy Machine Gun. It also saw for the first time the doors of the Desert Rats Museum opened and the curator and Association Vice President Mr Rod Scott BEM welcome all present to the Aladdin's cave he has created in their honour.

The Memorial Day saw over 650+ people attend and experience the outstanding array of vehicles, stands and chatted with veterans past and present. Visitors were able to grab a cup of tea or beer or food from Monty's Rolls and watch the Associations favourite 1940's Swingtime Sweethearts and a new addition this year with 40s jive group 'The Baker Boys'. In attendance were 8 of the Associations esteemed veterans from the original 'Desert Rats' and many more from the post war period up until the present day, including General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE and Major General Paul Nanson CBE, both past Brigade Commanders of 7th Armoured Brigade. The parade was inspected and addressed by General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE who gave a moving speech. Also in attendance was Deputy Lord Lieutenant Holly Rawkins and the mayors of Thetford, Swaffham and Watton, who all laid wreaths and spoke with many of the Association members and supporters.



The Phoenix Pipes and Drums lead the way in 2017

The Memorial Service was well attended and the parade was led by the Pipe Major from the Phoenix Pipes and Drums, over 12 standards including The Royal Tank Regiment and Royal British Legion, to name but a few, followed by veterans, Junior Leaders Adventure Corps and the Army Cadet Force. The service began

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with the Chairman Lieutenant Colonel Simon Copley-Smith REME saying a few words before the parade was inspected and addressed by General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE who gave a moving speech. The service was led by Reverend Zoe Ferguson, who gave a thought provoking sermon. Wreaths were laid and the Poppy drop delivered an ever-poignant cargo of thousands of poppies by pilot Paul Young.



General Sir Adrian Bradshaw KCE OBE and Major General Paul Nanson CBE.

The Association raised nearly £1400.00 on the day in donations and public fees which will be used to fund the planned 75th Anniversary Battle of El Alamein dinner and dance in October and Remembrance Service in November. There are many pictures and media coverage of the day and these can be seen by visiting our Facebook page or website - <http://www.desertrats.org.uk/assoc/>



Norman Whyte and his grandson Paul



The Parade

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G Parachute Battery (Mercer's Troop) 7 Parachute Regiment Royal Horse Artillery – Waterloo Day.

Following the attendance of G Battery RHA at this year's Orwell Park School event, Ian Paterson (Association Treasurer and Historian) spent a great deal of time talking to the detachment (105 Light Gun crew) who were there. The Battery, contacted Ian and invited him to attend this year's Waterloo Day meal and give a talk to the Battery on their history, especially their role in the Battle of Waterloo on 18th June 1815. This is an annual event the Battery holds to commemorate the Battery's involvement in the Battle of Waterloo, where it did not withdraw to the Infantry squares when the French Cavalry attacked. Instead it stayed with the guns and successfully defeated three French attacks, with the French casualties piling up in front of their guns. This action was a key contribution to the outcome of the battle.



Ian addressing G Parachute Battery (Mercer's Troop)

The event took the form of a mess dinner in the Battery gun park, with the Officers and Senior NCOs in mess dress, as the event was also to commemorate the departure of the Battery Commander to a new posting as well as the annual Waterloo Day event. Before the meal was served, Ian presented his talk to the Battery which was very well received by all ranks and parts of it were later used when the Battery Commander said his farewell. Ian thoroughly enjoyed the event as it was a chance to meet up with a modern-day Battery that had been part of his late father's Regiment in the Second World War and he was honoured to have had such a unique opportunity.



G Parachute Battery (Mercer's Troop) at the start of the evening

Association Mascot - Warrant Officer Laddie

Laddie (Ladnar Highland Lad) passed away on Wednesday 26 July 2017 at 12.50 hour. Born 19th August 2005, he took over the appointments of mascot to the Royal British Legion Downham Market and The Desert Rats Association from Mascot Dog Lane (Chrisarion Counterpoint) who had been in the role since 1995. Laddie carried out his duties at funerals of veterans of all three services for 7 years, attending well over one hundred. Along with attending many home coming parades at Downham Market supporting our troops, Armed Forces Day, Rededication of RBL Standards and the Laying up of Standards. After one such memorial parade for the Desert Rats Association High Ash, Mundford, Laddie was promoted to SSgt by the Brigadier. Laddie attended many local fetes to demonstrate how dogs were used in the two world wars and the more recent conflicts of today. Carting, searching for explosives, message carrying and supporting soldiers and airmen on patrol. Laddie appeared at many Desert Rats Memorial events at Orwell Park School and on one such occasion was presented to HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. He was then promoted to Warrant Officer after



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attending the dedication of a memorial at RAF West Raynham by the Station Commander.

In his spare time and that of his dedicated owner, Bill Wells, he would collect donations outside Sainsbury's at the annual Poppy appeal launch. Mr (WO) Laddie was also a Canine Concern Therapy dog visiting Q E Hospital Kings Lynn. He was also an honorary member of the Red Arrows, and a great ambassador to his breed and military working dogs. His successor Glenn (Stregatto Highland Glenn) has been in training whilst living with WO Laddie, and has carried out some duties to Laddie's high standards. He will be sorely missed and the Desert Rats Association salute Laddie as he makes his final journey.

***Warrant Officer Laddie "YOUR DUTY DONE, YOU MAY STAND DOWN"
Thank you for your service, run free as you will always be in the
Associations hearts.***



HRH The Duchess of Cornwall & WO Laddie

Future Events for 2017

The Association committee intend to execute the following events over the next 6 months:

- **Saturday 19 Aug 2017** – Supporting the village fete at St Mary's Church Cranwich, IP26 5JL.
- **Sunday 27 Aug 2017** – Desert Rats Association Companion Dog Show on Oxborough village green starting from 9 am to 1 pm Judging starts at 10 am Pedigree and Novelty 11 am. Classes ranging from pedigree to novelty. Full details on the association website and Facebook page or call 01366 347316 and speak to Debbie Wells.
- **Saturday 14 Oct 2017** – Desert Rats Association Charity fundraising dinner/dance with a 1940s theme at Lynford Hall Mundford. Including a 3 course meal and coffee, Swing the Sweetheart's, raffle and tombola to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein. Full details on the Association Facebook page or website, or call 01366 347316 and speak to Debbie Wells. dinner dance link www.desertrats.org.uk/dance
- **Sunday 12 Nov 2017** - Remembrance Day Sunday Service, at the CROMWELL Memorial, High Ash.

Joining the Association Membership

If you are interested in the Association and would like to join or give up some of your time please contact us. Membership is £12.50 with red rat lapel pin and you can join the Association by signing on at the website and sending the details to the Membership Secretary Mr Bill Wells.

Association Website link - <http://www.desertrats.org.uk/assoc/>

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