

The Desert Rats Association Newsletter Winter 2017

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Introduction

It gives me immense pleasure to say a few words at the end of what has been an incredibly successful year with many firsts for the Desert Rats Association. The Desert Rats Museum is well established after a year of frantic activity from Rod Scott BEM, Paul Smith and many others, who have given up their free time to construct a second Nissen hut, kit it out with displays, models, NAAFI and Desert Rat memorabilia. The Association has also organised and ran a very successful Dog Show, attend several local events and run an outstanding 1940s Dinner & Dance at Lynford Hall Hotel. They have all helped substantially to raise funds, which has allowed the Association to commission a sculptor to design and develop a 'Desert Rat' sculpture for the National Arboretum. A maquette (a model to most of us) is under design and will be present at the Memorial Day next year with the sculptor for viewing and to answer questions.

I would also like to introduce a new member to the committee in the appointment of Association Secretary Mrs Michele Hortenstine, who has had a long association with the military and adds a lot of Yorkshire flare to the committee. I think I speak for everyone and warmly welcome Michele to the Desert Rats Association and to the path, it takes us over the years to come.

Lastly, I thank all those who have supported and helped the Association over a busy year from the committee and myself I wish you all a very merry Christmas and a happy and prosperous New Year. We all look forward to seeing you at one or all the events next year.

Yours aye

Lieutenant Colonel Simon P Copley-Smith

Desert Rat Lieutenant Colonel T H Cole MBE Turns One Hundred – 14 December 2017

As the chairman I often write letters of thanks or instructions to help organise or support events, nevertheless in November this year Mrs Sarah Solel dropped me an email to ask the Association to write a letter of congratulations to her father on his hundredth birthday. Of course I said, which I did with pride as one soldier to another soldier. The Association would also send some merchandise (Red Rat pin badges, stickers etc) and as a mark of respect publish Lt Col T H Coles' story on the Association website to mark this very special occasion. What a story of a full career in the 8th Kings Royal Irish Hussars, over many conflicts, good times and challenging times at a time when Great Britain had a vast Empire. One thing I have been privy to and did not fully realise until I became involved in the Association is that all the veterans have truly amazing stories to tell of their service and lives. Here is Lt Col T H Cole MBE story from his daughter Mrs Sarah Solel:



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The Life and Times of a Desert Rat – Lt Col T H Cole MBE

On December 14th Lt Col T H Cole (MBE) will celebrate his 100th birthday. This will be a milestone for a former Desert Rat who saw active service in both North Africa and Normandy during the Second World War and was part of the Berlin Victory Parade in July 1945. Although his name was Thomas (Tom), he became known as Tim because there were too many soldiers named Tom in the Sergeant's Mess.

As a boy growing up in Hampshire's Meon Valley, Tim often saw cavalry soldiers and their horses alongside the River Meon and decided he would like to be in a cavalry regiment when he was old enough. Years later at the age of 19, he travelled alone by train to Edinburgh and joined the 8th Kings Royal Irish Hussars in November 1937. After completing his basic training, in January 1938 he was sent out to Egypt where he was disappointed to discover that his regiment was to be one of the first to become mechanised and he would never train a horse or be a cavalry soldier.

Tim remembers passing his driving test on the congested streets of Cairo, with camels, carts and people all around him and his vehicle. War broke out in 1939 and Tim trained to be a tank commander. During 6 years in North Africa, he was in Mersa Matruh, Buq Buq, Sidi Rezegh, Gazala and he fought in the battles of El Alamein.

In 1943, following victory for the allies in North Africa, Tim returned to England with the Hussars to prepare for the invasion of France. Six days after D-Day he sailed from Gosport to Bayeux, arriving in his tank with a landing craft. Tim advanced with the regiment through France, Belgium, Holland and Germany - Villers Bocage, the Tower Maas, the Roer and the Rhine - and was part of the fighting force in the final battle with the German army before they surrendered just outside Hamburg. It was during his time in North West Europe that Tim received a commendation from Field Marshal Montgomery for outstanding performance. Early one morning he had discovered a Tiger tank lurking near his unit in the countryside and with the help of

his fellow soldiers and a 17 pounder, anti-tank gun, he was able to disable the beast.

After the war, in 1948 Tim was stationed in Leicestershire at Stoughton East aerodrome, where he met his future wife, Peggy who was training to be a children's nurse. They were married with an 8th Hussars guard of honour in June 1950.



**Peggy and Lt Col T H Cole MBE
Guard of Honour**

Straight afterwards he was sent with his regiment to aid the UN Forces in Korea for 18 months and returned to his wife and their baby son, Simon, in 1952. Tim and Peggy went on to have three more children, Elizabeth, Christopher and Sarah.

Tim received his commission in 1954 and continued to have a long army career with overseas postings in Luneburg, Hohne, Aden, Malaya and Wolfenbuttel. UK postings included Tidworth, Northampton, York, Barnard Castle, West Byfleet (MOD), Ash Vale and Tim completed his 36 years of service at the Aldershot Garrison in 1972.

Tim has been honoured with 17 medals during his army career and received the MBE on January 1st 1965 for services in Borneo setting up the camp at Kuching. More recent honours have been given from Perak in Malaya and he received the French Legion of Honour in 2016.

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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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After the war and during his long and peripatetic army career, gardening has always been a significant part of Tim's life, having grown up working within the family's market garden business in the Meon Valley. From his early days in married quarters in Tidworth, he was growing cabbages alongside the barrack square and in retirement whilst gardening, he always wore a cap with the desert rat badge on the front.



Market Garden in the Barracks

Tim also learned to play golf whilst stationed in Malaya in 1962 and this was an activity that he enjoyed until his late eighties. Following his retirement from the army, Tim and Peggy returned to live in Leicestershire where they had first met and to be close to Peggy's parents. They have been blessed with five grandchildren, one of whom, Adam, can be seen upholding the tradition of the 8th Hussars. Tim and Peggy celebrated 67 years of marriage in June of this year.



Adam a proud 8th Kings
Royal Irish Hussars

Tim is immensely proud of his army career but has been reluctant to take part in reunions and remembrance parades. His family believes this is because of the traumas he suffered, particularly in North Africa where until last year, he still mentioned that he hoped his fellow soldiers who lost their lives in the desert would have been given a proper burial. Although suffering from Alzheimer's, the items that still offer him the reassurance that he is living in his own home are two reminders of the army. The first is the framed display of his army medals and the second, two Gurkha Kukri knives that were presented to him on a wooden shield by the Gurkha regiment in thanks when he retired from the army at the Aldershot Garrison.

Desert Rats Companion Dog Show – 27 August 2017 (scribe – Debbie Wells)

When thinking of raising funds the Association Membership Secretary Debbie Wells decided to organise a Desert Rats Association Companion Dog Show to be held in her home village of Oxborough on the green over the August bank holiday weekend. After only 5 weeks frantically organising; meetings, hundreds of phone calls and a few late nights on red wine (for medicinal purposes of course) Debbie Wells and Michele Hortenstine pulled it all together in quick time. The day proved to be a very popular event taking over 100 entries with 22 classes including pedigree, novelty and obedience classes.

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The weather was perfect, with sun and a nice light breeze. The Judges; Cathy Connelly, Sheila Moore, Val Martin and Elsie Boreham had their work cut out with the numbers and high-standards across all the classes and the whole village came out either to help or support. An enjoyable day was had by all those that were involved, and they raised over £220 towards the Associations fundraising to renovate the Sandhurst Desert Rats memorial stone and incorporate it into a larger memorial to all the soldiers that served in World War II, Northern Ireland, Gulf War 1, Gulf War 2, Operation TELIC and Operation HERRICK. The new memorial will be placed in the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire for the Desert Rats.

Watton Military Show – 9 September 2017

The Association sent representation and a stand promoting the Desert Rats' 75th anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein dinner and selling merchandise and Nuthouse Shortbread. The show was opened by a former Black Rat General Lord Dannatt GCB CBE MC, who commanded 4th Armoured Brigade, in Munster, Germany in the 1990s. The General with Revd Deborah Hamilton-Grey visited our stall and as Lord Dannatt bought two 'Black Rat' pin badges for him and Revd Hamilton-Grey. The association made £61.29 through sales and donations on the day.



Lord Dannatt and Revd Deborah Hamilton-Grey

A Desert Rat goes to dinner with the with the Generals (scribe – Ellie Townsend-Jones, Alf Jacksons daughter)

When the phone rang in September and Llantwit Major resident 96-year-old WW2 veteran Desert Rat Alf Jackson answered the call, he found himself invited to attend the annual Regimental Dinner to be held at Army Headquarters 28th September.

Alf had served in North Africa and later in Italy, as a driver of three-ton lorries and Jeeps, supplying ammunition, explosives and water to the front line as a member of the 7th Armoured Brigade, under the Royal Army Service Corps (RASC). Having been called up in Spring 1942 and undergone a period of training on the south coast, Alf and other new recruits were put on a train to Scotland, travelling from there with the Mediterranean Expeditionary Force to North Africa on HMS *Atholl*. He arrived in the scorching September heat, and within a few weeks found himself delivering ammunition and supplies at the long-running Battle of El-Alamein.

This decisive battle that took place near the Egyptian railway halt of that name. It is remembered now for the bold tactics employed by the newly appointed commander Field Marshal Montgomery, who clinched the eventual defeat of Field Marshal Rommel's forces with a seven-hour aerial bombardment followed by a five-hour barrage of 360 guns firing 15,000 shells.

Alf remembers observing the overnight battle from half a mile behind the front line. "The sky was lit up as bright as day, and it went on all night. The sound of the shells was deafening, and it just never stopped."

With October 2017 marking the 75th anniversary of the battle, the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME) had sought out a veteran of the battle to attend their commemorative dinner as guest of honour. There are only a few remaining that are fit and well enough to travel, and to participate fully in a regimental dinner. But



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the Chairman of the Desert Rats Association, had met Alf and knew he was still spritely and invited Alf to attend.

Kitted out in his veterans' garb of navy blazer with medals, grey trousers and black beret, Alf found himself at dinner in the place of honour at top table, in the company of Major General Rob Nitsch CBE and Major General Mark Gaunt CBE, as well as about seventy high-ranking officers and their partners. For the military personnel present, the dress code was Military Formal Mess Kit, in the form of scarlet or black jacket according to rank, embellished with gold braid, and full medals.



Alf debriefing Major General Rob Nitsch CBE

Seated to the right of the presiding General, in front of silver candelabra and cutlery, Alf was amused to find himself reminded, while chatting to the General about his wartime exploits, that he would need to start eating, as form dictates that no one may eat before the guest of honour!

Many of the officer's present made their way to hear Alf's stories at first hand, and his enjoyment of the evening was rounded off by the discovery of a Steinway grand piano in an adjoining bar. This

resulted in Alf being asked to play, which he happily did for the assembled throng until 1:30 in the morning.



Alf entertaining the troops at 0130hrs

The Desert Rats Association Fundraising Dinner & Dance (scribe Mrs Michele Hortenstine)

On 14th October 2017, the Desert Rats Association held what is planned to be a regular event at Lynford Hall Hotel, Mundford, Norfolk, a short distance from the Desert Rats Memorial, at High Ash. The hotel is a magnificent Victorian House, set in spacious grounds with a grand function suite in which the event was held. The evening took the form of Dinner and Dance with a 1940s theme, to commemorate the 75th Anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein, as no national event had been organised.

Guests were encouraged to wear period dress or smart modern attire and many of them dressed for the period. There was a three-course dinner, with entertainment during and after it from the Swingtime Sweethearts, dressed as WAAFs and entralling everyone with 1940s and patriotic songs. There was also a presentation by the Association Historian, Mr Ian Paterson, on the Desert Rats involvement in the Second Battle of El Alamein.

There was much singing along and dancing by the guests during the evening, who demanded an encore from the Swingtime

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Sweethearts, when they finished. Everyone, who attended said they had a wonderful time.

Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance (scribe – Ian and Julie Paterson)

With 2017 being the 75th Anniversary of the Second Battle of El Alamein, the organisers and the BBC requested the Association's help with interviews for the Royal British Legion Festival of Remembrance. This resulted in the BBC interviewing Mr Len Burritt (aged 99), who served in the Divisional HQ from before the start of WW2 until after the end, with the Royal Corps of Signals. In his interview he spoke about the Battle and his time in the Division. This led to Mr Len Burritt, Association Vice President Mr Rod Scott BEM, Association Treasurer Mr Ian Paterson and his wife Julie being invited to attend the festival.

Mr Len Burritt was treated as a guest of honour, with he and Rod Scott being picked up by limousine from his home and being driven direct to the Royal Albert Hall, sitting in a box on the same tier as the Royal Box, seated next to another veteran Dr. William Franklin (aged 105). Mr & Mrs Paterson, shared a box on the opposite side of the hall with the wife of Mr Richard Livett, who survived the London Bridge attack having been saved by Captain Peter Bryan (Royal Artillery) and Lieutenant Jared Bambridge (Yorkshire Regiment), who were both off duty at the time. Captain Bryan's wife was also in the box and he was the Bearer of the Book of Remembrance, escorted by Mr Livett and Lt Bambridge, during the service.

During the festival a two minute video of Mr Burritt's interview was shown and it is now available to view, along with some photographs of the Festival, on the Associations website www.desertrats.org.uk/assoc/OpenDays/rbl_festival2017.htm and on YouTube via this link https://youtu.be/P2w_vN9hZi4. Also after the video was shown Mr Burritt and Dr. Franklin were welcomed to the Festival by the presenter, Mr Huw Edwards, with the camera picking them out for everyone to see, along with Mr Scott's whiskers! Both

veterans received a standing ovation from the audience and Royal Box. After the festival, Mr Burritt and Mr Scott attended a drinks reception at the venue before being driven home again.

All of those who attended the Festival were proud to represent the Association and for the opportunity to attend such a memorable event.

Remembrance Day Service – High Ash 12th November 2017

The Association Remembrance Day Service was held at High Ash on a bitterly cold November morning. It started with the Ride of Respect arriving with over 450 plus scooters and motorbikes at High Ash from the direction of Mundford after considerable organising and marshalling from Ian Hindle and a company of supports. A very impressive sight and could not be believed unless seen. The service and the Ride of Respect was filmed and the link - <https://www.facebook.com/slimmskaraoke/posts/1457719227611181> will take you to a fabulous film which gives you an idea of the day.



The Cavalry arrive

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Capt Chris Hall delivered a very touching and poignant service. The Last Post and Reveille was delivered with style by Bill Wells the Association Bugler and wreaths were laid; Ken Harris laid the first wreath at the end of the service for the Association along with Mrs F Dinning the wife of the founding member of the Association, Trooper Leslie Dinning, Ian Hindle's Ride of Respect and representatives from the Merchant Navy, Royal British Legion and Mr Rod Scott BEM.

The Association had a stall selling merchandise and Ian Hindle turned up with his family *on masse*, with 'Monty's Rolls' providing hot drinks and beautiful bacon and egg butties to sustain the crowd. Some of the scooter and motor bike riders made round trips of over 150 miles to be there. The generosity and support on the day was also outstanding with over 1000 people in attendance and the Association took the following on the day:

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| • Ian Hindle and the 'Ride of Respect'- | £535.50 |
| • Taking on the Association stall- | £551.00 (sales and donations) |
| • Collection tins | - £385.33 |
| • Total donations and sales | - £1,471.83 |



Opening address by Lt Col S P Copley-Smith

More pictures of the Remembrance Day Service can be found on the Association website.



Association Bugler, Bill Wells with our mascot Glen

Future Events for 2017

The Association committee intend to execute or support the following events over the next 12 months:

- **Thursday 12 April 2018** – Annual General Meeting at School house, Forestry Commission HQ, Santon Down.
- **Thursday 17 May 2018** – Orwell Park School service.
- **Sunday 17 June 2018** – Desert Rats Association Memorial Day and Service.
- **Saturday 14 July 2018** – Desert Rats Association is supporting the Mundford show organised by Revd Zoe Ferguson (Association Padre) and committee on the Mundford sports pitches.

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- **Sunday 19 August 2018** – Desert Rats Association Companion Dog Show Oxborough on the green.
- **1 to 14 October 2018** - Sponsored March; Stanford Bridge to Hastings/Battle; 10-day march, 2 legs 180 miles & 60 miles. Blessing in Westminster Abbey and then on to Battle.
- **11 November 2018** - 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 Miss Debbie Wells.

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



Christmas 1944 – Low countries

Lastly, the Association wishes you all a merry and festive Christmas and New Year

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