GLOUCESTERSHIRE BRANCH

GRENADIER GUARDS ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER – February 2010

To all members of the Branch. ***Issue No.* (56)**

BRANCH MEETINGS – AT THE VICTORY CLUB CHELTENHAM

Thursday 25th March (AGM) Thursday 27th May

Thursday 29th July Thursday 30th September Thursday 25th November

Please note start times of meetings 19:30 hours to which all members are welcomed

Branch Annual General Meeting. Just to remind everyone that the post of Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Social Secretary, Welfare Officer and committee members are all up for re-election. If you would like to consider yourself for election to one of these posts then please let your views be known to the Chairman Peter Jones who will standing down at the meeting.

Welfare. David Leighton our Welfare Officer has had a very busy year in office. He has made many visits and telephone calls to some of our more elderly members and those not in good health. Most visits were accompanied by a gift of flowers a basket of fruit of a bottle of a brand of medicine not available on the National Health. The branch was able to send three members and their wives on an association holiday. A further member was given financial assistance for a stair lift. We also have one member in receipt of an Association Pension.

Obituary. Since the last Newsletter we have lost our oldest member Horace Holmes at the age of one hundred years. Horace was an Honorary Member and the brother of Edgar Holmes VC (Grenadier) Also Patrick O'Donoghue, Graham Clarke and H A Clive Esq. The branch was present at all funerals and formed a Guards of Honour. In respect of Mr Clive it was a Memorial Service which was attended by four branch members. We have also lost Lola Lewis, the widow of Jack, who was living out her retirement in Portugal.

New Members. Five new members since the last newsletter. Grenadiers Mike Fawcett, Dennis Leatherdale, Michael Beasley (Senior) and Michael Beasley (Junior). This is father and son both currently serving with the regiment. Also joined us is former Coldstreamer Brad Murdock. Welcome aboard gentlemen.

Branch Formal Lunch 2009. The lunch held at the Gupshill Manor was a great success. In fact we had a "Sell out" with the highest attendance since the early sixties. The Gloucestershire Cadets Corps of Drums did us proud. The branch as a gesture to the your boys and girls in the Corps had the Lord Lieutenant of the County Mr Elwes who is also a Branch President and who had joined us for the occasion present each members with a framed picture of "The Drummer Boy". The Regimental Adjutant Major Grant Baker also attended and gave a good up to date on the Regiment in all its aspects.

Informal Lunch Sunday 25th April 2010. Venue the recently refurbished Frogmill Inn at Andoversford. Three course lunch with tea/coffee. A lovely venue to enjoy each others company. Anyone wishing to stay over rooms are available at a discounted price. Contact

Alan Holford for any details required on the lunch or accommodation. Full details on reverse of the Proforma.

Regimental Remembrance Day Sunday 16th May 2010. This will follow the usual format picking up at Royal Well, Cheltenham, Gloucester and Cirencester. En route we will stop at the Guards Club, Windsor to consume our packed lunches and to take liquid refreshment. On the return journey we will again stop at the Guards Club for a Fish & Chip (Chicken or Pie) Supper.

Grenadiers Return - Saturday 26th June Formally Grenadier Day To be held at Littlecote House on Saturday 26th June. Yes **Saturday** is the day and not on a Sunday as it has been since the day was first held. Full arrangements will be announced later however anyone wishing to stay over for three nights commencing Friday 25th through to Monday 27th June then please contact Hon Sec for full details.

Scarlet & Gold – Saturday 18th September. A Scarlet and Gold Concert at the Royal Albert Hall in London to look forward to. The concert will feature the massed bands of the Household Division, all seven of them. Those who attended the last Scarlet and Gold, which was held at the Royal Festival Hall, back in 1997 will recall what a magnificent concert it was. Your branch will run a trip staying overnight at the Union Jack Club. Full details by contacting the Hon Sec. We have ordered a 53-seater coach together with rooms at the Union Jack Club. If you are interested in joining us, then please let us know at your earliest, as we are very confident of a very early sell out

Formal Lunch – Sunday 26th September. Please note the date in your diary. Full details in the next newsletter.

Christmas Social – Sunday 5th December. This will be a lunchtime event at the Victory Club, Cheltenham. Full details will be announced at a later date

Meetings. All meetings during 2009 were very well attended, thank you gentlemen for taking the interest in your branch. Let us keep the support going for this year 2010.

Chairman. The post of Chairman becomes vacant at the AGM. We are looking for a volunteer to step forward. Please give this your active consideration

Well I never. Our Social Secretary Alan Holford has now entered the electronic age as he is now on line – al.nonoyes@yahoo.co.uk

Visit your branch site – www.gloucestershiregrenadiers.co.uk Your views and or comments are most welcome. Also any stories news items or interesting accounts would be appreciated**.** Past editions of the newsletter can be retrieved by looking in the Newsletter Section.

Please try and make the next meeting on Thursday 25th March. (AGM). Your Branch. Your meeting, to which **all members are most welcome.**

Finally. "Thank you" Norman Mitchell for submitting your account as to your wartime experiences as a young Guardsman in London. I know that you were also a very proud member of the 6th Battalion who saw active service in war torn Italy**.**

Colin Knight **Honorary Secretary.**

If you require further information on any of the items in this Newsletter, then please telephone **Alan Holford 01452 534175** or **Colin Knight 01594 530154** Alternatively e-mail **grenadiersglos@tiscali.co.uk** For any event. On the day of any event the mobile telephone number to use is:- **07980 019017**

PROFORMA

St. George's Day Service – Friday 23rd April. Gloucester Cathedral. Tickets are complimentary. I apply for ……. Tickets for the Service.

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Informal Sunday Lunch at the Frogmill Inn

Sunday 25th April 12:00 for 13:00 Hours

Starters

Chunky Vegetable Soup
Chicken Liver Pate and a Prune & Apricot Chutney with a Fresh Salad
Melon & Parma Ham

Main Course ******

Roast Lamb, Yorkshire Pudding
Roast Chicken Breast
Poached Salmon, with Herb Butter
Mushroom Risotto

(All served with bowls of Roast and Boiled/mashed Potatoes, Carrots, Greens and Parsnips & Gravy)

Desserts ******

Warm Bread & Butter Pudding with Custard
Tangerine Mousse with a spiced Orange Sorbet

or

Cheese and biscuits with the usual accompaniments

Tea & Coffee

Name	Starter	Main Course	Desserts

Should any guest wish to stay over for either the Saturday and or Sunday Night then the Frogmill are offering us the incredible low rate of just **£29.50 per night per room**. (£14.75 per person). Breakfast is available at a reasonable additional charge. To take advantage of this offer then please telephone the Frogmill 01242 821101 ask for Natalie and quote Grenadier Guards.

Thank you to Norman Mitchell for providing us with an interesting account of your early days in the Regiment which is reproduced below.

The large and ever increasing number of recruits joining the Regiment Both by volunteers and through conscription naturally produced an accommodation difficulty. In 1940 recruit initial training of the Coldstream, Irish and Welsh Guards was carried out at Caterham. For the Grenadiers and Scots it took place at Chelsea Barracks. Grenadier recruits underwent eight weeks Depot Training followed by six weeks Field Training at Windsor before joining the Holding Battalion at Wellington Barracks to await posting to a Battalion.

After Dunkirk without a Battalion overseas, and even after all three Battalions had been brought back to strength, Wellington Barracks was becoming overcrowded and various out stations were opened in the Home Counties area. Detachment of approximately Company strength were billeted in (empty) requisitioned houses in such places at Chistlehurst, Kenley and Windsor where further training was carried out and guards provided for certain vulnerable points. It should be remembered that the threat of this country being invaded was very real and there was much talk of "Fifth Column Activity" so that having well trained disciplined troops in sensitive areas was of considerable advantage.

We normally moved to these outstations by train and to us it was always amusing to be marching in Battle Order to Charring Cross and to hear cries of "Good luck boys" from civilians on the way who, quite justifiably, thought that we were off to war.

The Holding Battalion continued to increase in numbers until 1941 when the 4th, 5th and 6th Battalions were formed and, despite rationing restrictions, we were well fed thanks to that great Quartermaster, Captain Tubby Aston.

Life was never dull in barracks – in addition to the normal regimental routine of Public Duties (In Battle Order), Drill Parades and Specialist Training, there was the manning of the Whitehall Defences. These consisted mainly of a series of concrete pillboxes around the Whitehall area, manned by a L/Sgt or L/Cpl with either three or six Guardsmen depending on the size of the pillbox. It was a twenty-four hour rota and we were fed by rations brought round to each post by a MT vehicle. Apart from our own rifles each post was armed with a Bren Gun and boxes of magazines, but orders for the post were rather sketchy and in retrospect it is hard to see what our military function could have been other than a "Moral boost" for the general public to see alert and confident young Guardsmen in evidence on the streets.

Conditions in the pillboxes were rather primitive – blankets for use by the off-duty men at night were seldom changed an oil lamp at night unless an air raid was on and damp. Indeed it is unlikely that the Bren Guns would have fired as, due to the damp conditions the magazine springs were usually rusted and the rounds could be shaken out !!

The Pillbox furthest from the Barracks was in the public gardens near Hungerford Bridge and as a personal reminiscence; I was on sentry as dawn broke following an air raid. On looking up there was a landmine

dangling from the bridge by its parachute cords swaying gently in the breeze. The words of Cpl Jones spring to mind "Don't panic". The largest of the Pillboxes was in Parliament Square and was painted to resemble a Smiths Bookstall but without the books. Other points were the sand bagged entrance to the War Office, the roof of Drummonds Bank in Trafalgar Square (during air raids as a fire-watch) and so called Rance House at the top of Birdcage Walk, which was of course, the building where, deep underground, were the War Cabinet rooms. Looking back it is not clear what our function was, on sentry duty thirty feet down, other than to pay compliments to the various very Senior Officers and War Leaders with an occasional glimpse of the Prime Minister himself. However it was the "Plumb" as owing to the extraordinary conditions, the rota over 24 hour guard was 2 hours on and 10 off!!!

Another of the vulnerable points was the East Greenwich Gasworks, south of the Thames near to Blackwall Tunnel. A detachment of the company strength would be stationed there for a 7 or 14 day period and there were specific orders for patrolling sentries. To watch out for seaplanes landing on the water and U-boats coming up the river, even then neither eventuality seemed likely. Air raids were frequent and one night during a heavy raid showers oil incendiaries were dropped on the gasworks and the detachment was deployed in an effort to extinguish the jets of flame spouting from the two huge gas holders. The only material provided was a quantity of wet rags and clay held in containers at the foot of the holders and the drill was to carry a bundle of rags or a dollop of wet clay up a ladder and cover the flaming holes in the domed top. But the dome consists of metal plates and on moving away they dipped, the rags and clay fell through and up came the flames again. Consequently by first light the gasholders were empty.

While at the gas works we were accommodated in the Meeting Hall and Theatre, which had been used by the pre-war employees at the works. This building had also suffered firebomb damage. We were instructed to report to the Pay Sergeant any items of kit, which had been destroyed, and apart from odd items, it transpired that, to a man, everyone had lost two pairs of socks. Just imagine the incendiaries jumping from kit bag to kit bag.

I have written this intentionally as a light-hearted account, it is in no way intended to diminish the element of danger of those days, but as so often when looking back, it is the humorous angle which surfaces.

Finally it is worth remembering that apart from the splendid Wos and NCOs mainly from pre war days, we were a huge group of erstwhile civilians, who in the main, would have been unlikely to have ever joined the Armed Forces had there not been a war. Our transformation into Guardsmen fit and equipped to fight the actions to come was carried out very well in the most difficult circumstances.

Norman Mitchell 2620362 (6th Battalion)

Thank you Norman for taking the time and trouble to write this for the newsletter. Norman is now resident in the Royal Hospital Chelsea. Please give the lads in the Royal Hospital our fraternal greetings.

Hon Sec.