



Unity - Loyalty
Patriotism & Comradeship

Welcome to the latest edition of Up Spirits; the bi-monthly newsletter of the Royal Naval Association – Norwich Branch.

This month we have articles from S/M Alf Wiggins on The Battlefield Tour and S/M Ken Baish on Big Ships v Smalls Ships, as well as an updated Calendar of Events.

Articles from The Monthly Circular and Up Spirits are also available on the Branch Website along with postings on Naval History and Traditions.

Up Spirits!

NORWICH BRANCH NEWS

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From The Quarterdeck – The Presidents Piece

Shipmate Mike Mizen

So. It's all over. By the time you read this article we will have another government, or the same one either better or worse than the one we had before the election was called. No doubt you are either elated or deflated depending on which way you voted so I would like to offer my congratulations or commiserations. Now perhaps we can get on with the rest of our lives.

I cannot help but feel that after all we have had to put up with over the last six weeks that it wasn't the Prime Minister who called the election but the media who called it when she wasn't looking. Then suddenly every television programme and newspaper announced that there was to be an election and we just went along with it. Ask yourself this question, what were you doing before the election was called? Getting the garden ready for new seeds and plants, rubbing your surf board down prior to the holiday in Cornwall, perhaps even applying for your passport for a trip further afield. Then suddenly you get Peston and Kuenssberg and their like on your television EVERY NIGHT! It's not fair, we should be able to relax as we approach our later years instead of which we get nothing but MP's telling you anything to ensure that you vote for them and keep them in a job, or members of the public being asked to give their views on a subject that they probably know little about, and then in a dialect that is hard to understand.

It is sad to relate that even after the terrible terrorist events in Manchester and London, the mainstream media and the political pundits couldn't wait to get back to talking about politics. A sad reflection on the way we live I suppose. Thank God for the on/off switch.

I am in the process of putting together the Branches Annual Report for the Area Secretary; thankfully she has given me a 'stay of execution' as it should have been done ages ago. My fault. However, reading through what the Branch has been up to over the last twelve months or so gives a pretty good indication of the strength of the Branch. I'm impressed to put it bluntly. Talking to people from other ex-Service organisation there is no doubt that we are one, if not the, best of the bunch and the plaudits should be heaped upon the heads of the committee and the members for their commitment to Branch activities. So, forget the election for a while and walk round with a smile on your face, apart from anything else it annoys the hell out of people who don't know what you are smiling about.

Wearing my other hat as a member of the Royal Marines Association, I would like to draw your attention to a major event in our Region, the 350th anniversary of Daryl's Day. The celebration of the event that occurred in 1667 has been remembered annually for a number of years but this year is the BIG one. The actual celebration takes part at Landguard Fort, Felixstowe, on Sunday 25th June and is timed to coincide with Suffolk's Armed Forces Weekend. On Saturday 24th June there are a number of events taking place on the seafront at Felixstowe including military displays, a Military Wives Choir, the Royal Hospital School Band, re-enactors from Holland, Global Stars Aerobatic Team, a battle between re-enactors after the march to Langer Park, tribute bands in the evening and a fireworks display AND all day the Norfolk RMA rifle range! For us however the main day is on the Sunday when all events are around Landguard Fort. At 1030 the 'cloggies' will march from Felixstowe Beachside Events Area to Landguard Fort where over 200 re-enactors will play out the 1667 battle with cannon, muskets and swords which we, the historic defenders WILL WIN! This will be followed by a spectacular parade led by The Band of Her Majesties Royal Marines who will entertain the multitude with stirring music and displays by the Royal Corps of Drums. The Fort will then be open, for free! Events will take place in the Fort for the afternoon when once again the Band will perform 'Sunset' and Last Post. This event is too good to miss so all of you who are going will need to know that there is NO PARKING at Landguard Fort but a free bus service has been laid on from the town car parks to the various venues on both days, see me for a free map.

See you in Felixstowe, be there or be square as they say.

Welfare Report

Shipmate Reg McGuire

Norfolk Swift Response

Shipmates who would like to attend and march at the November Remembrance parade at the Cenotaph are advised that once again enhanced security measures will be in place. This will involve the Met Police conducting individual security checks on all participants. Therefore, Basic Personal Information will be required in advance for each applicant and ticket holders will need to bring photo ID and a document showing proof of their address for access to the parade at Horse guards via manned Police entry points. Disabled shipmates are reminded that this year they can be accompanied on the parade by their carer. However, the carer's will be subject to the same security procedures and must forward their details to Nigel. All Shipmates hoping to march in the Remembrance Parade at the Cenotaph must forward the following details to Nigel at Central Office (HQ) – nigel@royalnavalassoc.com by Friday 1 September 2017 Title/Rank, First Name (This must be the name on the photo ID), Last Name, Date of Birthday (DD/MM/YYYY), Place of Birth, First line of address, Town, Postcode, Service number (Where applicable) Finally, Individually Named tickets will be despatched in October and Shipmates should be aware that there will be a compulsory 'no ticket no entry' policy in operation on the day.

The White Ensign Association - Concerning National Insurance and the State Pension.

Many of us may have been invited to sign a petition in Facebook or something similar against the changes introduced last year to the State Pension on the grounds that this action unfairly discriminated against members of the Armed Forces. This campaign caused significant anxiety amongst a number of the serving sailors and marines as well as the veteran community so I offer this wider explanation of the situation.

This is a change that has affected large elements of the public sector and has been on the cards for a while and well published – I would suggest that many didn't understand its implications and didn't appreciate that they were making a lower level of national insurance contribution (approx. 10.6%) than many (12%) before 2016. To help I offer the following facts and observations as I understand them:

- The new state pension was introduced on 6th April 2016.
- The basic rule is that those MEN born ON or AFTER 6 April 1951 and those WOMEN born ON or AFTER 6 April 1953 will be eligible for the new state pension.
- The basic state pension before the change was £119 a week or just over £6,000 a year. This could then be topped up by additional state pension entitlements – either the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) which were in place from 1978 to 2002 or the State Second Pension, which replaced it. The armed forces along with much of the public sector were "contracted out" of these second top up pensions – the explanation offered was that they

already had a public sector occupational pension and thus didn't need the additional state pension entitlement – they were thus charged a slightly lower rate of NI.

Between April 2016 and April 2021 there will be an element of transition for those reaching state pension age but after April 2021 there will be 'flat rate' pension for all. This is currently £159.55 a week, which would amount to almost £8,300 a year.

- The new state pension does not allow “contracting out” thus all those who previously 11 <http://www.royal-naval-association.co.uk/> making the lesser NI contribution saw an increase in their NI charge as of April 2016 to the national standard rate (12%).
- Up until April 2016 individuals needed to have 30 years of qualifying National Insurance contributions to get the current full state pension, but as a result of the introduction of the new scheme they will need 35 years of contributions to get the full flat rate state pension.
- The pension calculation now starts with a default of the full pension (£159.55) and then makes deductions for such things as lower contributions or less than the full qualifying period.
- For those who have fallen short of the new rules there are ways of “topping-up” the deficit to some extent, however for those still serving in the Armed Forces they should not worry about it too much - It has been calculated that for those who have been “contracted out” for 30 years it should take them an additional 8 and a half years paying the full rate of NI to get the new state pension at its maximum rate – which of course cannot be claimed until 66, 67 or 68 depending on your age. The less time an individual has been “contracted out” ie less service before 2016 the shorter the time before they have made up the deficit in NI payments.
- State Pension Age is 66 for those aged 57 to 63, 67 for those currently between 40 to 56, and 68 for those 39 and under.
- In all honesty this change has the greatest effect on those individuals who become eligible to draw their state pension in the next 5 years or so – thus is predominantly a veterans' issue.
- The Facebook petition intimates that this adjustment of the rules has been applied only to former members of the Armed Forces and Civil servants - this is not the case – contracting out was normal practice across the whole public sector and indeed amongst many independent Final Salary schemes as well.
- If an individual is unsure about what their pension entitlement is likely to be they can apply for a State Pension Statement to give an estimate of how much they are likely to get upon reaching state pension age. The statement will be based on the National Insurance contribution record as it stands on the date the statement was produced – link below: <https://www.gov.uk/check-state-pension>

If you want further information or are still concerned please feel free to get in touch with the WEA

The above information is from the RNA monthly circular.

Ray Self's Memorial Bench

For those of you who are not aware, I am pleased to say Ray Self's memorial bench is now back at the Forum looking grand.

From The Monthly Circular

Motorfinity Partnership

Shipmates should be aware that the Royal Naval Association and the Conference of Naval Associations (CONA) are delighted to appoint Motorfinity as their exclusive motoring partner offering discounts on cars, commercial vehicles and motoring related products such as used cards and motorcycles for the benefit of members.

Motorfinity works with all of the top motoring brands in the UK offering great offers and discounts which are easily accessible.

- Save £1,000s on your next new car
- All models available from leading manufacturers
- Motorfinity only works with manufacturer approved suppliers
- All finance options are available including cash, Hire Purchase (HP) and Personal Contract Purchase (PCP)
- Part exchange service
- No fees or charges for using the service

Veterans UK Gateway

The Veterans UK Gateway is now open for business. It provides a single point of contact for veterans seeking advice and support. The Gateway puts veterans in touch with the organisations which are best placed to support their need – from healthcare and housing to employability, finances, personal relationships and more.

Please follow the link for more specific details; <https://www.veteransgateway.org.uk>

Shipmate Submissions

Breakfast Club and Branch Run Ashore

Shipmate Gus Honeywood

The next Branch Run Ashore is organised for **Saturday 1 July 2017** at The Bush, 55 The Street, Costessey, Norwich, NR8 5DD.

We will be meeting at 2000 and a link for the event can be found at [Link](#) for those that use Facebook.

Our next breakfast club get together is organised for 1000 on **Saturday 12 August 2017 (TBC)** at The Woolpack Inn.

Ditty Boxes

Shipmate Ken Baish

Turn out those Ditty Boxes and look to see what you have hidden in there. Recently in London there was an auction which featured the John Goddard Collection of Important Naval Medals and Nelson Letters which raised a total of £1,559,028.00 Among the more interesting medals was a Naval General Service Medal (the red and white one - I have one for the Suez Canal Zone!!) awarded to Yeoman of the Powder Room Richard Levertine whose medal is just one of five issued with six clasps and represents an outstanding naval career, including the great victories of the Glorious First of June, Camperdown, Copenhagen and Trafalgar, besides the gallant lesser-known actions of the frigate Anson. Sold by auction as an individual item for £60000.00. Some guy that one. Clearly a very brave man. Not sure what the current title would be possibly a GI of some sort. I recall my action station on my first ship was the twin four inch magazine (secured from outside!!!) which I argued against and was instead made a loading number on our twin four inch gun. I would think that Richard Levertine had a charmed life to have survived those battles. At least I could have jumped.

Visit to HMS Ganges

Shipmate Keith Smith

Pat Whiley, Martin Williamson and myself decided that we would like to visit Ganges again so on 1st June we set out. No problems getting there, apart from it being the Suffolk Show day and the navigator missing the turn off to Shotley and incurring a twenty-minute detour before we got on track again (OK I admit I was the navigator).

We arrived at Shotley and had a walk around the Caledonia Road area i.e. Main gate viewing the dilapidated mast which all of us had on many occasions ascended. The Central dining hall is still there in a bad condition and whilst talking about it two guys arrived on cycles. Turned out they were ex policeman who had undertaken training there when it became a police training school. One of them told us that the lower half of the hall had been used for storing vehicles when he was there. The Instructional block which is a fine building in its own right still looks virtually as it did 50+ years ago although it's now private apartments.

We left that area and proceeded to the foreshore and stopped at the infamous steps Faith, Hope and Charity which had been rescued from years of undergrowth. There is a new block of apartments being built next to the steps. Pat asked the builder if the steps were staying but he felt they wouldn't as the lower stage had already had to be shored up. General agreement was that it was a shame as with a bit of thought they would have fitted in with the new development and been a piece of history retained.

A lot of discussion about the pier (upon which I spent 6 months as pier quartermaster) took place. To see it completely in a poor state of repair and not a boat in sight was not nice to see but as you know reader we are viewing it as we remember it from many many years ago.

Several other points of interest were pointed out although after all these years and trees, bushes etc obscuring the place it was not easy to remember where various long demolished places actually were.

After a snack van lunch of bacon butties, we tried to locate where the Annexe was located and all we found were some original railings and a garage which we felt was somehow connected.

Last stop was a visit to Shotley church. The church is very interesting in itself, but the surprising thing was the number of graves many of which are WW1 and 2 as well as personnel from Ganges. There are 223 interred here and it is a Commonwealth Graves Commission site and it is kept immaculately. Should anyone be visiting the area a visit to the church is a must.

Well we had a perfectly beautiful day to remember times past. Sun all day.

New Members

Welcome to the following new members of the Branch

Shipmate Daren Mason

Full Member

Daren served between 1987 – 1991 on HMS Dryad – HMS Invincible – HMS Seahawk – HMS Drake

Shipmate Brian Whileman

Full Member

Brian served between 1963 – 1971 on HMS Ganges – HMS Diomedea – HMS Raleigh – HMS Vernon – HMS Hermes – HMS Sultan

Shipmate Paul Dale

Full Member

Paul served between 1963 – 1972 on HMS Raleigh - HMS Collingwood - HMS Lion - HMS Maxton - HMS Neptune - HMS Drake - HMS Victory - HMS Ulster - HMS Tamar - HMS Naiad

D-Day Service - 6th June**Shipmate Keith Smith**

As usual the annual D-Day commemoration service took place at the City Hall Cenotaph.

Luckily the rain held off for virtually all the service and only became heavy as we were leaving.

The service unusually had a two minutes silence one minute of which was to remember the victims of the recent atrocities in London and Manchester.

There were 8 standards in attendance and the City was represented by the Lord Mayor and other officials, with our branch being represented by S/M Mike Mizen who took the parade, S/M John Kett parading the RNA Standard, myself and S/M's Pat Whiley and our own D-Day veteran S/M Freddie Fitch whose birthday it was. Some birthday for Freddie in 1944.

At the going down of the sun

And in the morning

We will remember them

Big Ships V Small Ships Don't Mess with The Royal Marines**Shipmate Ken Baish**

I do make a point of looking at some of the statistics that involve modern navies and match them against what we are doing. We seem currently to be in a bit of a mess with our two new aircraft carriers.

The first of the new Queen Elizabeth class carriers are struggling to acquire aircraft, struggling with manning requirements and we appear to have some difficulty in finding an appropriate base where these ships have freedom of movement. The Queen Elizabeth is to be based at Portsmouth we are told but at the moment the harbour is being dredged to accommodate the ship. It is also reported that exit and entry to the dockyard can only be achieved during high tide where there appears to be an hourly slot where the ship can move in and out without difficulty. The ship already has manning problems with insufficient trained sailors available to fill all the slots. There is also a planned reduction in Royal Marine numbers where proposals have been announced to reduce the Corps by 250 Marines mainly comprising "roles like drivers and administrative staff". These Marines will be what is described as "re-purposed" from the Royal Marines to other parts of the Navy. Berets swapped for round hats it would appear. Not very clear what happens if you say that you joined the Royal Marines and do not want to work as a sailor. However, no redundancies are planned.

Apparently, there are currently about 7000 Royal Marines and this number has maintained since the 1980's. The number of sailors has declined in line with the steep decline in ship and submarine numbers. However, if you look statistically at the other navies of the world you would be alarmed to note that the major powers, i.e. the United States, Russia and China are working at full speed to increase the size of their naval manpower and ships. The Chinese for example currently have a Marine Corps of 20000 which is being increased to 100000. They have a total of some 235000 sailors. It is intended that some of the proposed Chinese Marines will be based in China friendly countries around the world. Landing craft are being built which it is again reported to include one of 35000 tons with "considerable transport capacity" along with "substantial helicopter platforms." Russia appears to be upgrading most of its fleet. The US figures are equally mindboggling. Donald Trump has signed off budgets which will allow the USN a fleet of. of 355 ships by the end of his first term as President. The US Navy have seven shipyards building these ships with some 50000 workers. Interestingly welders engaged on building nuclear powered vessels must serve a seven-year apprenticeship. The US fleet is by far the biggest and most powerful in the world currently boasting more aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered attack submarines than the rest of the world put together. We have no chance whatsoever to catch up in this arms race, we cannot possibly afford it and more to the point do we need to. Clearly these countries are years ahead of us and being sensible about it our time has been and gone.

Many smaller countries with what would appear "very little need" are now buying conventional diesel-powered submarines and small craft at an alarming rate all equipped with an array of weapons that

are formidable and frightening and on their own could win a war!!! It appears you buy a basic U-boat and then select your extras from a wish list.

I recall the US dealt effectively with a Syrian airfield strike with missiles fired from a "destroyer". Why do we want huge carriers costing fortunes that we are unable to crew let alone fill with strike aircraft and of course man!!! Statistics again, it is estimated by the National Audit Office that employing the two carriers will require a "significant proportion" of the Navy's already over stretched fleet. It is estimated a carrier task group was likely to represent around 27 per cent of the overall British fleet by tonnage and a fifth of the fleet's entire personnel strength. Extra sailors are also needed to man the RN's new Astute class attack submarines with a sixth and seventh already on the blocks. (£1.4 billion each I believe).

Germany has designed and built a new "U-boat" known as the 214 U-Boat and is described as the "Global Weapon of Choice". and is supplying bits and pieces to various countries so that can build their own. These submarines have torpedo facilities which can be adapted to fire missiles, have very superior safety features both for the submarines and for the crew with massive high tech automatic activity that comes into play in any type of emergency. Crews are maximised at 45 including five officers and seem readily available. South Korea and Turkey, also customers, are buying them in quantity, but have smaller crews and more automatic functioning equipment. (I noted in the customer list Greece have acquired four

such vessels totaling some £2 billion pounds the last one being delivered in 2016. Thought they were broke!!) My question once again, do we really need these two big carriers. Watch out for the mothballs coming out shortly for that second one?

In announcing the changes to the Royal Marine Service the First Sea Lord said that the RN had to adapt to meet the challenges of a dangerous and uncertain world. The Government is investing in a new generation of ships, submarines and aircraft. "As we introduce these capabilities we must ensure we have the right mix of skills across each of the Navy's fighting arms to optimise how we use them and I have sought to find the right balance between Sailors and Royal Marines in responding to this challenge. The First Sea Lord issued a reassurance that the Royal Marines remain bound into every part of the Royal Navy's future from conducting sophisticated operations from the sea at a variety of scales and against a range of threats, using our new aircraft carriers as a base to leading the service's development of information warfare. They will continue to be as vital to the defence of the realm in the years ahead as they have been for the past 350." The Commandant General of the Royal Marines has pointed out that the Corps "is seeking to ensure we remain as relevant tomorrow as we do today." Further reports indicated that the Royal Marine Commando divisions would be jointly known as Maritime Operation Commando. It will consist of 600 elite Royal Marines and the suggestion was made that 60 such Royals could be carried in each of the relatively new and troublesome Type 45 Daring Class destroyers which it suggests also would amount to "a significant embarked unit". It would be expected to deploy to frigates, destroyers and other vessels to provide boarding teams and other groups for front line tasks. In some ways, the change sees a return traditional roles for Royal Marines, offering the hard edge of highly trained groups of sea soldiers that can handle a variety of jobs in demanding environments. Further words of wisdom declared that "SAILORS COULD NEVER TAKE ON SUCH TASKS (NOR WOULD THEY WANT TO). Says who???? I know one or two choice jobs that could be allocated.

As well as reducing the number of Royal Marines the Navy is also considering cutting the number of amphibious vessels and will next year de-commission HMS Ocean the Navy's current flagship and sole assault carrier seven years early in order to provide crew for the second super carrier. The MoD envisages the new carriers providing some capacity to support amphibious assault missions via helicopter lifts and not via landing craft. However, modifications to the carriers for this role have yet to be funded. It has in the meantime been reported that HMS Ocean is to be sold to the Brazilian Navy for £80.3 million pounds. Although the MoD has not confirmed this sale it has not ruled out such a move. Generally speaking this decommissioning of HMS Ocean seven years early has been strongly criticised by previous Sea Lords. There is no current replacement and to use the super carriers would mean them working close to shore performing an amphibious role and make them vulnerable. We seem to be between a rock and a hard face all the way round.

There were a lot more notes that I researched but my ink is running out. The best quote I read was from Lord Ashdown (Paddy Ashdown one time MP) and I can only repeat what Lord Ashdown who served in the Royal Marines as a Special Boat Squadron officer mentioned on a Radio 4 interview when asked his view. He said that, in an unpredictable age the UK needed forces that were "fast, flexible and mobile" and he doubted cutting the Royal Marines was the way to do this pointing out that the Royal Marines are a response force that can work "at world class level". I am sure no one would ever deny that.

Lord Ashdown went on: "To cut their numbers to fill a naval manpower black hole is not just poor reward for their service over the past years, but a folly which plays fast and loose with the nation's defences. The Royal Marines have carried the greatest burden in the defence of our country over the last decade, they have fought in more theatres and won more battles than any other British unit. They are also the crucial manpower tool from which we draw many of our special forces. The Royal Marines were paying the price for "foolish decisions" made in the UK's last Strategic Defence Review in which service chiefs were allowed to hang on to their prestigious equipment even if they made little or no contribution to the nation's strategic long-term defence needs. He finished by saying, "We are now saddled with cuts to the Royal Marines to pay for sailors to man two huge aircraft carriers which many fear are little more than floating white elephants". Sadly, I am afraid I share the views of Lord Ashdown.

Shipmates, I am afraid that we have been relegated to the lower divisions and when next the shout goes up "The Navy's here", the response will be, "Which one?".

I have requested that Chairman Mike reads this before it is published and lets us know his feelings acknowledging his obvious pride at having served in the Royal Marines.

My kind regards to all,

Shipmate Ken Baish

Battlefield Tour 2017

Shipmate Alf Wiggins

The tour this year was to Holland, a country where our own county regiment did much campaigning during the last war. Four RNA members went this time, Reg and Bernadette McGuire, Pat Whiley and me.

Travelling via the Channel Shuttle and then through France and Belgium made it a long journey. Leaving Norwich at 05:15 on the Friday, we arrived at our destination twelve hours later. However, this did include a two hour stop in Brugge.

Brugge is a beautiful city often referred to as the 'Venice of the North' owing to its many waterways. Its prosperity was based on the cloth trade and no doubt in the 16th and 17th centuries had dealings with Norwich. Unfortunately, coaches are not

allowed within the city limits but have to be parked on the outskirts. This means there is a good twenty-minute walk into the centre on cobbled streets. I suppose the ban is understandable, some of the streets are very narrow and there are the horse-drawn tourist vehicles to contend with.

Hotel Van Der Valk in Tilburg is very large and modern. At first it is not easy to find your way around. We were lodged in the Royal Wing which entailed a lengthy walk through many corridors to get to the dining room. The hotel seemed popular and at dinner the restaurant was always full. The staff were friendly and helpful. Although we had a set menu they were prepared to change it where necessary to suit our tastes. This is the best hotel that we have stayed in on our trips.

The first visit on the Saturday was to the Hartenstein-Oosterbeek Airborne Museum. It is situated at the entrance to an attractive park which even has a herd of deer. The story of the Battle of Arnhem is well known (Operation Market Garden) and the museum houses many artefacts associated with the conflict. In addition to the usual exhibits, on the ground floor, dioramas have been created depicting both British and German troops in action. Accompanying everything is the constant sound of battle. Film shows give even a more graphic sense of action.

The Arnhem-Oosterebeek cemetery contains 1,678 British and Commonwealth dead together with some Polish and Dutch. Sadly there are 26 unidentified. One sobering thought as you walk around is the age of some of the troops. Eighteen, nineteen and twenty is not uncommon. We held our first remembrance and wreath laying ceremony here. Just as we were finishing another coach party arrived. Amongst their number were some Australians. One had served in the Aussie navy so we shared a 'tot' from Reg's flask with him.

Next was a ride over the John Frost bridge, the famous 'Bridge Too Far'. It is not the original of course, it has been replaced at least three times. One has to use a great deal of imagination to conjure up the scene of mayhem that was occurring in 1944.

The Jonkerbos cemetery, near Nijmegen, has the grave of a Royal Norfolk, Private Stanley Bennett who was killed on the 15th October 1944, aged 23. The bridge at Nijmegen was another which had to be captured before the Rhine could be crossed.

The highlight on Sunday was the visit to the Overloon Vehicle Museum. The first part tells the story of Holland under German occupation. Life under the Nazis was not pleasant. One difficulty was that the dialogue on the films and the captions on the exhibits were only in Dutch and German but I was told that by using a smartphone an English version could be obtained.

The centre-piece of the complex is the magnificent collection of military vehicles. Over 200 of them are displayed in a building the size of two football pitches. They are mainly from World War Two and from many countries. A few represent the Cold War etc. There are tanks of various sorts, guns of different size and calibre (and ordnance to fit), lorries of every description, aircraft and even some big landing craft. There is enough material to start a battle. The museum is set in a park covering 35 acres. For those with an adventurous nature there is a Tarzan assault course high in the trees.

The battle which took place here was fierce, some 1878 men, forty tanks and three aircraft were lost. Not since June in Normandy had such opposition been faced.

The battle of Molen Beek was fought on the 15th and 16th October 1944 and in which the 1st Battalion Royal Norfolk Regiment took part. A memorial has been erected to them in the field where they campaigned. It takes the form of a pyramid made of Norfolk flint. We laid a wreath and observed a short silence.

Venray Military Cemetery has the graves of eleven Norfolk's but there is no record of where they came from. An RAF sergeant named Kenneth Kemp is here. His name appears on the Old Catton war memorial.

The Norfolk's liberated the town of Helmond and a memorial has been created in their honour. It is a stone set in an open space with plants around. The space itself is surrounded by nine oak trees. They represent the 9th Regiment of Foot, a former name. We said a few words of remembrance and placed some small crosses.

Miele cemetery has 664 British and Commonwealth graves, thirteen of which are Norfolk's. We held the second and last ceremony of the weekend here and I was given the honour of laying the wreath.

Back to the hotel for our last dinner. As a parting gesture the staff placed sparklers at the end of each table. Whether this is normal routine or whether we were considered special it is impossible to say.

Monday came and time to start the long journey home. The ride to Calais was quicker because we returned via Dunkirk and did not have a stop. Some time was spent in the City of Europe buying gifts and goodies before boarding the shuttle for home.

Once on our side, Barry had arranged a visit to the Battle of Britain Museum of Hawkinge. Here there is an extensive array of memorabilia from the battle. It is claimed to be the most important collection of artefacts from this time on display in the country. I found the most interesting items the remains of the aircraft, both British and German, which had been recovered from crash sites. These objects were the very essence of the battle. The amazing thing is that the whole museum is run by volunteers. It does great credit to them.

Apart from a stop at the Welcome Break for refreshments, this was the end of the tour for this time. On reaching Norwich it was time to say goodbye. A good number of us will not meet again until next year. Speaking of next year, looking at the replies to Barry's questionnaire, most votes seemed to be for the Western Somme.

Calendar of Events – 2017

June

- 25th Dunkirk Veterans and Armed Forces Remembrance Service – Honingham Church - 1100
 28th-29th Royal Norfolk Show

July

- 1st Branch Run Ashore — The Bush, NR8 5DD
 4th Committee Meeting
 11th Branch Meeting
 16th Summer Lunch – Bawburgh Golf Club – TTBC

August

- 1st Committee Meeting
 5th Area 5 Quarterly Meeting – Stowmarket
 Bucket Collection – Hoveton
 12th (TBC) Breakfast Club — The Woolpack, NR1 3EH
 8th Branch Meeting

September

- 2nd Branch Run Ashore — The Eagle, NR2 2HN
 5th Committee Meeting
 12th Branch Meeting
 17th Battle of Britain Service – Norwich Cathedral

October

- 1st Breakfast Club — Venue (TBC)
 3rd Committee Meeting
 7th Edith Cavell Service - Norwich Cathedral 1030
 10th Branch Meeting
 21st Trafalgar Night
 22nd Service to commemorate the 75th anniversary of the Battle of El Alamein – Honingham Church – 1100

November

- 4th Area 5 Quarterly – Harwich
 Branch Run Ashore — Trafford Arms, NR1 3RL
 5th Dunkirk Veterans Remembrance Service – Honingham - 1000
 6th Pickle Night
 7th Committee Meeting
 11th Armistice Day Parade - City Memorial 1030
 11th Remembrance Service - Hethel 1500
 12th Remembrance Day and Parade - City Memorial 1015
 12th Remembrance Service - Honingham 1055 (Muster 1030)
 14th Branch Meeting

December

- 2nd Breakfast Club — Venue (TBC)
 5th Committee Meeting
 12th Branch Meeting

2017

January

- 2nd Branch Run Ashore — Venue (TBC)
 6th Committee Meeting
 9th Branch Meeting

February

- 4th Breakfast Club — Venue (TBC)
 6th Committee Meeting
 13th Branch Meeting

Future Editions of Up Spirits

Shipmate Gus Honeywood

The next edition of Up Spirits will be published for the August Branch Meeting, and I would request that all submissions for that edition are forwarded to me by 24 July 2017.

If you have any submissions for Up Spirits, then you can email them to me at rna.norwich@gmail.com.

All submissions will be gratefully received.