



THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION

PARIS BRANCH

JULY 2013 NEWSLETTER

Chairman's Report

- “Easy Oar !!”, as we used to hear the Cox bellow in an Eight at School. It's the time of year when, if you are lucky, you can begin to wind down a little, with the summer holidays just round the corner. Having said that the RBL Year is not yet over and a number of events are featured in the Section “For Your Diary” below. So I do encourage members to show their support and appreciation of the hard-working Event Organizers by turning out.
- On your behalf I want to thank Janet Warby and Joan Hicks for their superb organization of the Coronation Anniversary Cocktail at the Ecole Militaire. To attract over 200 guests on a Friday evening in Summer was no mean achievement. Bravo indeed. As Sir Peter Ricketts said, in his address leading to the Loyal Toast, they even managed to provide some decent weather. Fortune favours the brave. Thanks to Andrew Holford and his brilliant music-makers, and to Jon Cooper our Toast-Master in splendid hunting pink.
- The Coronation Anniversary theme is picked up by Gerald Jory in his fascinating account attached of the massive military contribution to that iconic event in 1953. As we watch those black and white television images of the Procession to the Abbey and back to Buckingham Palace it is hard to appreciate the extent of the presence on that day of the armed forces of Britain and the Commonwealth. Gerald said that he played his own small part in that military contribution, hence his encyclopaedic knowledge of the detail. Thank you so much Gerald.
- May I draw your attention to the Talk by Branch member Edouard Plunkett in the Clubhouse on 16th July, entitled “The British Soldier in Afghanistan” (Flyer attached). Edouard, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, has often given this presentation to British units just before their departure for Afghanistan. When the Royal Fusilier was murdered outside his barracks in Greenwich recently I was touched by the remark made by a French TV commentator, when he referred to the outrage felt by the British public, who “hold their armed forces in great respect”. Rightly so.
- Don't forget one of our landmark events, the Ravivage de La Flamme sous L'Arc de Triomphe” on 4th August. This has been our privilege every year on that date since 1924, with the exception of the years 1940-43. This year it is the turn of the New Zealanders to rekindle the Flame, the Dominion with the highest casualty rate as a percentage of their population.
- We hope you enjoy your Summer break.

“We will remember them”

FOR YOUR DIARY

16th July: 7pm “The British Soldier in Afghanistan” Talk by Edouard Plunkett (Flyer attached).

18th July: 12.30 for 1pm. Club Lunch in the Clubhouse. Reservations @16€ to Joan Hicks.

4th August: 6.15 for 6.30pm. Ravivage de la Flamme sous l'Arc de Triomphe + Reception at 7.30pm in Clubhouse.

8th September: 3pm. “Pedal to Paris”. Cyclists arrive at the Arc de Triomphe + Wreath-laying.

4th-6th October: Battlefield Visit to Dunkirk with Colonel Oliver Warman. (Details to follow).

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60th ANNIVERSARY OF H.M. THE QUEEN'S CORONATION
EVENT REPORT

After a rather slow response to the organizers of the proposed event to be held at The Ecole Militaire, on Friday 14th June, to celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Queen's Coronation, we had 202 people from the Paris Branch, British Community and Commonwealth Embassies wishing to attend. Also attending was The National Chairman of The Royal British Legion, John Crisford.

We had a Palm Court Style Orchestra playing for us and a very smart Toastmaster, our very own Jon Cooper, acting as MC .

H.M. British Ambassador to France, Sir Peter Ricketts and his wife Lady Suzanne Ricketts attended. Sir Peter gave the loyal toast to Her Majesty The Queen and gave a well received speech talking about Her Majesty and how she took part in the Olympics last year, she had a starring role!



The food and drink flowed and everyone seemed to be in good spirits. We had a sing-song performed by Andrew Holford, the leader of the Palm Court Orchestra, he arranged to have songs from some of the Commonwealth Countries and finished off with Waltzing Matilda and got most of us singing with him.

After the singing we asked Defence Attaché, CoL. Rupert Hoskin, from the Australian Embassy with his wife Rachel, to cut the cake for us. Most of those at the event wanted to try the cake, some even came back for seconds!

Thank you to all who helped make this a great event, we have some 'photo's which were taken at the event. We have printed them in this Newsletter for you.

Janet Warby
Hon. Secretary

Joan Hicks
Events Organizer





Coronation Day 1953
by Gerald Jory, O.B.E., T.D.

Her Majesty recently celebrated at Westminster Abbey the 60th anniversary of Her Coronation and it may be interesting to recall one major aspect of that event in 1953, namely the military involvement. Much has been written about the Abbey ceremony itself, and rightly so, for this was of course the "raison d'être" of this great occasion, but the processions themselves, of which very little has been written, brought about a military involvement on a scale which is unlikely ever to be experienced again.

This description will bring nostalgic memories to those who actually recall the occasion, and may well astonish by its splendour and scale those who were not then born.

As many as 36,000 troops were involved, the main procession consisting of more than 12,000 participants and the street liners numbering 16,000 on a route 5 1/4 miles long through Westminster, the West End and The Mall. Reserves and support personnel of some 8,000 were also required.

The Central London barracks, namely Chelsea (since acquired by property developers), Wellington and Knightsbridge Cavalry Barracks were clearly too small to cope with the numbers involved. A major operation therefore took place to erect and/or adapt temporary accommodation. A large tented camp was erected in Kensington Gardens in spite of protests from local inhabitants claiming to have difficulty in exercising their dogs(!), for some 20 to 25,000 men (including a large contingent of 7,000 Police brought in from the provinces). In those days, men and women were not mixed; female military personnel were accommodated in Richmond Park.

Earls Court (8,500) and Olympia (5,500) were hired, but for a very limited number of days because of the cost involved. For this reason the Royal Engineers could not move until 23 May and begin construction two days later in order to provide dormitories, beds, eating halls and so on for the 14,000 troops who arrived at the end of the month (Coronation Day was on 2 June) requiring several days of rehearsals. Troops were then evacuated and everything had been dismantled, cleaned and returned to the owners by 5 June. This was an exceptional achievement.

The Clapham Deep Shelter, built as an air raid shelter during WWII, was adapted in order to lodge some 3,000 naval personnel.

A satellite camp was erected in Hyde Park, opposite the Knightsbridge Barracks, in order to accommodate a large number of horses. The Canadian Mounties brought over some 50 of them, and many more came from other Commonwealth countries. In all, some 600 horses took part in the processions, a spectacle unlikely ever to be seen again on such a scale. In the previous Coronation in 1937, the sight of the many splendid Indian Army cavalry regiments must have been even more awe-inspiring but there were none in 1953. The Empire had ceased, and Mr. Nehru of India was the only Prime Minister of the Commonwealth taking part in the main procession who did not wish to have a military escort accompanying his carriage.

28 horse-driven carriages took part, in addition of course to the State Coach in which travelled the Queen and Prince Philip; the Royal Mews could not altogether cope, and many carriages had to be hired from film companies !

The procession itself comprised representatives of each of the Infantry and Cavalry regiments then part of the British Army, and large numbers of Commonwealth and Colonial troops. All three Services took part, including many members of the T.A. and Reserves, and even a Home Guard detachment. These latter units were called up a fortnight before 2 June in order to undergo fitness and drill training. They had to be prepared for a 15 mile march on the day, including approach into and dispersal from the processional route, in full ceremonial dress and with their individual weapons. There were 50 bands to enliven the occasion, comprising over 2,000 musicians.

It was an astonishing feat of organisation. All went well and without a hitch except for the heavy uninterrupted downpour. This rain brought the State Coach itself to a halt in St. James Street, and Police and troops had to push it up into Piccadilly! Sadly, all coaches were closed up except for that of the Queen of Tonga who insisted on keeping hers open. Drenched though she was throughout, she waved joyfully to the crowds along the route, and the crowds roared their delight. The poor Sultan who shared the carriage and whose plumed hat had become a sorry sight was distinctly less amused.

And so, this Coronation may well turn out to be the last occasion on such a lavish scale. There is no certainty that the world of tomorrow would be prepared to accept such splendour and pageantry, even if the Armed Forces were able to provide it.

Even the ceremony in Westminster Abbey could also be profoundly affected, for would our next Monarch be the Defender of the Faith or that of the Faiths?

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LEGION



The British soldier in Afghanistan Ground Roots

Royal British Legion, Paris Branch, 28 Rue des Acacias,
75017 Paris

Tuesday 16th July, 1830hrs



Captain Edouard Plunkett, Queens Royal Lancers (2012), was a Multiple Commander in Helmand Province, Afghanistan in 2010.

He spearheaded a major offensive against the Taliban over a 7 month period, having also served in Iraq.



Edouard will give a basic account of life on the ground during the most kinetic period of operations in Helmand province since 2002 (HERRICK 12, April – November 2010).

Parfaitement bilingue Edouard sera ravi de répondre à vos questions en français.

12€ including snacks. Cash Bar

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Net proceeds to the RBL Paris Branch General Fund