



151
156
PARACHUTE BATTALION
ASSOCIATION

151/156 Parachute Battalion Association

Newsletter 1 | October 2020



Dear all members,

Since most of you haven't been able to attend the various events this year, because of the continuing situation with the coronavirus, we thought we would put together a newsletter that not only covered our Reunion in October, but also showed you the photos from John Jeffries' funeral, and some additional ones from John Waddy's funeral – plus remembering our last surviving veteran, Michael Wenner. 2020 has been a year like no other, and we wish all our members every encouragement for the months ahead. From the number of emails John O'Reilly and Rosie Anderson have received over the last few months, we are cheered to know that there is such an interest in the Association.

2021, we all hope, will be an easier year, and plans are already afoot for a walk in Arnhem next September. Ian Henderson has a good idea for the theme for the Arnhem walk, involving the Dutch people who, one way or another, came into contact with the 156 at Arnhem. For example, it could be tracking down the young milkman who shouted a message to St. Aubyn's platoon in Oosterbeek giving the numbers of German armoured vehicles in the vicinity; or the nurse who dragged the seriously wounded Bill Hurst into the cellar of the Crum's bakery. Then there are the many Resistance workers who fed and cared for the 156 members hiding behind the lines. If any of our members have any stories or other accounts relating to this, it would be very helpful. One of Colonel Waddy's requests was that we keep alive the special relationship we have with the Dutch.

Next October is the 80th anniversary of the formation of the Battalion, so there will be a special commemoration in Melton Mowbray when we will remember the early years of the battalion in India. The 151/156 archive, gathered together by Major Thomas and Les Lockett over the years, contains photos of the early years of 151, but if members have photos of that period, please could you let John O'Reilly see them.

Enjoy this Newsletter and keep safe everyone!

Rosie Anderson
rosieanderson@gmail.com
0208 788 0999

John O'Reilly
john.oreilly@thorotonpublishing.com
01949 851354

Will Stark
will@156para.co.uk
01620 481472

Reunion & Remembrance Service 2020

Saltby Airfield and St Mary's Church Melton Mowbray
10th October 2020



For those people that were able to come to the Reunion this year, it was a very special occasion. Not only were we commemorating the lives of our last two Arnhem veterans – John Waddy and Jeffrey Noble – but we also remembered the lives of John Jeffries, as well as one of the stalwarts of our Association – Barrie Mills-Taylor – husband of Jean Shakespeare-Taylor.



151/156 Parachute Battalion Association present at Salby Airfield Memorial.

We started the day at 11am at Salby Airfield aware of the importance of social distancing. However, we all felt safe, as a ‘hurricane’ was blowing and the temperature was about 8 degrees. Military Chaplain Brian McAvoy MBE held the Act of Remembrance and wreaths were laid at the Monument by Jean Shakespeare-Taylor and John Gibbard, veteran of the Parachute Regiment and Chairman of the Leicester PRA. This was followed by the Last Post and Reveille.



(Right) Cathy Lawrance who, with her small team, has provided refreshments for our veterans, their families and friends at Salby for over 10 years. She is a qualified glider pilot. The Bren gun over the shoulder and the wearing of the facemask create an interesting composition!



The hurricane-like conditions at Saltby Airfield create a moment of high amusement.



Wreaths from the 156 Parachute Battalion Association and the Leicester PRA next to the Saltby Memorial. The small garden behind the Monument is well cared for by members of the Glider Club.

Paul Turner brought his jeep, members of the Gliding Club were in attendance – including Peter Shepherd, who the day before had planted the area behind the Memorial, so it was all looking especially attractive – and Ray Bennett from the History Group, who arranged for the Memorial to be built and which was dedicated on 2nd September 2007. All of them added something extra to the occasion. We were also lucky to have Air Marshal Phillip Sturley, CB, MBE, FRAeS (retired), who is the club's Deputy CFI and a very well-respected instructor for gliding and power.

The service at St Mary's Church followed at 12 noon, and what an especially moving one it was too. We are hugely indebted to Military Chaplain Brian McAvoy MBE for giving us such a beautiful service for the occasion and for all the thought he gave to his words. Brian McAvoy started the service by speaking for a few minutes about Michael Wenner, who was with the battalion in India and is currently in hospital. He went on to talk about the four people who have sadly passed away in recent months and whom we were focussing our attention on this year. Andrew Montgomery, son of Hector Montgomery of B Company, then read the Act of Remembrance and added his father's memories of John Waddy. There was not a dry eye in the place when we listened to the theme tune of *The Eight Hundred*, set to the music of 'Danny Boy' (John Waddy's favourite tune). We were not able to sing, but that was more than compensated for by a member of the choir, Sue Elliott, singing 'Abide with Me' (played at John Waddy's funeral) and 'The National Anthem', accompanied by James Gutteridge on the organ.



Paul Turner, Andrew Montgomery, John Gibbard and Military Chaplain Brian McAvoy MBE stand next to the 156 Parachute Battalion Memorial in St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray.



Left to Right: Michelle Kerry, Paul Turner, Andrew Montgomery, Jean Shakespeare-Taylor, John Gibbard, Military Chaplain Brian McAvoy MBE, Fred Cooper and Ian Henderson.

Attendees at the Reunion

Rosie Anderson – daughter of Geoffrey Powell of C Company

Jackie Cartledge – niece of Billie Wood of B Company

Fred Cooper – son of Fred Cooper of B Company

John Crawford and Victoria Dyke

Lynn Foster – daughter of Walter Moffat of B Company

Madeline and John Gibbard

Ian and Julia Henderson – Ian is son of Duncan Henderson of C Company

John and Peter Knott – sons of Harry Knott of C Company

Cathy Lawrance – member of the Buckminster Gliding Club

Andrew and Julie Montgomery – Andrew is son of Hector Montgomery of B Company

John O'Reilly and Michelle Kerry – John is son of John O'Reilly of C Company

Jean Shakespeare-Taylor – niece of Billie Wood of B Company

Pauline and Derek Smith – Pauline is daughter of Jack Brophy of B Company

Stephen and Jayne Sykes – Stephen is son of Bill Sykes of C Company

Paul Turner

At Saltby Airfield we were joined by members of the Buckminster Gliding Club, Peter Shepherd and Philip Sturley, and Ray Bennett of the History Group.

You can watch a video of this year's Reunion by Graham Eustace on YouTube from this link:

<https://youtu.be/fdnAUtYGrOU>

Article in the *Melton Times*

Thursday 15th October 2020

Special sadness at this year's Melton paratroopers reunion services

This year's moving reunion of relatives of those brave paratroopers who left their Melton billets in 1944 to drop into an iconic Second World War battle was particularly poignant.

Members of 151/156 Battalion The Parachute Regiment Association gather every year for a service at St Mary's Church and another at Saltby Airfield, where the men flew off from to fight at the Battle of Arnhem. And on Saturday they paid particular tribute to the memory of the last two surviving paras with 156 Battalion, Maj Jeffrey Noble and Col John Waddy, who both passed away this year. Both men were regular attendees of the reunion services until recent years and John, who died only last month, was instrumental in initially starting them up.

John O'Reilly, whose father also fought at Arnhem and who has written several books about the battalions, told the *Melton Times* about this year's commemoration: "These reunions flash by pretty quickly but this one really did put a strong marker down as it was not just a reunion of the battalion but also a service of remembrance for the last two 156 members who flew to Arnhem from Saltby on September 18, 1944.

"Colonel Waddy died on September 27 and Major Jeffrey Noble, who was officer commanding Machine Gun Company at Arnhem, died on Thursday, June 4. He lost more than half his men, 18 of whom were killed when their Dakota aircraft was shot down on its approach to the drop zone. Both these officers were billeted in Melton, Waddy at Newport Lodge Stables and Noble at The Spinney."

This year's reunion almost did not go ahead due to the coronavirus pandemic, but it was decided to hold a small church service and a wreath-laying at Saltby Airfield for 30 people, given the loss of two of the battalion's most revered veteran officers. Air Marshal Phillip Sturley CB, MBE, FRAeS Retired, Saltby Gliding Club's deputy CFI and a very well respected instructor, was in attendance at the airfield service. In the 1980s he was the base commander at RAF Cottesmore, from where the 156 Parachute Battalion carried out most of their parachute training in 1944.

Military Chaplain Brian McAvoy conducted this service and the one at St Mary's Church, where Dr Andrew Montgomery gave a moving talk about his father, Cpt Hector Montgomery, who lost an arm whilst attacking a tank at Wolfheze. Several association members also attended Col Waddy's funeral in Somerset on October 6. Col Waddy, who had celebrated his 100th birthday in June, was laid to rest by a burial party from the 4th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment, with his famous slouch hat on top of his coffin.

We published an obituary for Col Waddy earlier this month and Mr O'Reilly has this week been giving an insight into what kind of man he was. The Arnhem hero was a military adviser for the 1977 Hollywood movie *A Bridge Too Far*, directed by Richard Attenborough and which was based on the battle.

Mr O'Reilly said: "Looking back on his six months as adviser Waddy considered Lord Attenborough had all the qualities of a great leader. Waddy had frequent arguments with the producers – particularly when the entire fleet of aircraft was painted the wrong colour – and became good friends with Edward Fox, Laurence Olivier and Michael Caine, who all mucked in with the crew. On the other hand, he thought Sean Connery never took any interest in anybody and remembered Robert Redford repeatedly misfiring his gun."

Col Waddy, who met wife Ann during the war when she worked at the Melton Remount Depot, was badly wounded in fighting after parachuting into Ginkel Heath in 1944. It was the second day of the battle when Waddy flew to Arnhem. A full set of the plans for Operation Market Garden had been captured by the Germans the day before so they were well prepared. When Col Waddy spoke about his experiences in the battle he recalled that the American pilots and crew of the Dakota aircraft which carried his men to Holland were as green as his battalion. He said: "The flak was becoming more intense as we travelled across the Dutch countryside when the aircraft to my right was hit on the port wing and caught fire; it began a steep dive of around 45 degrees. When it hit the ground, it exploded into a fireball. I looked at my men who were seated each side of the aircraft who, in the din, had not noticed what had just happened – I said nothing."

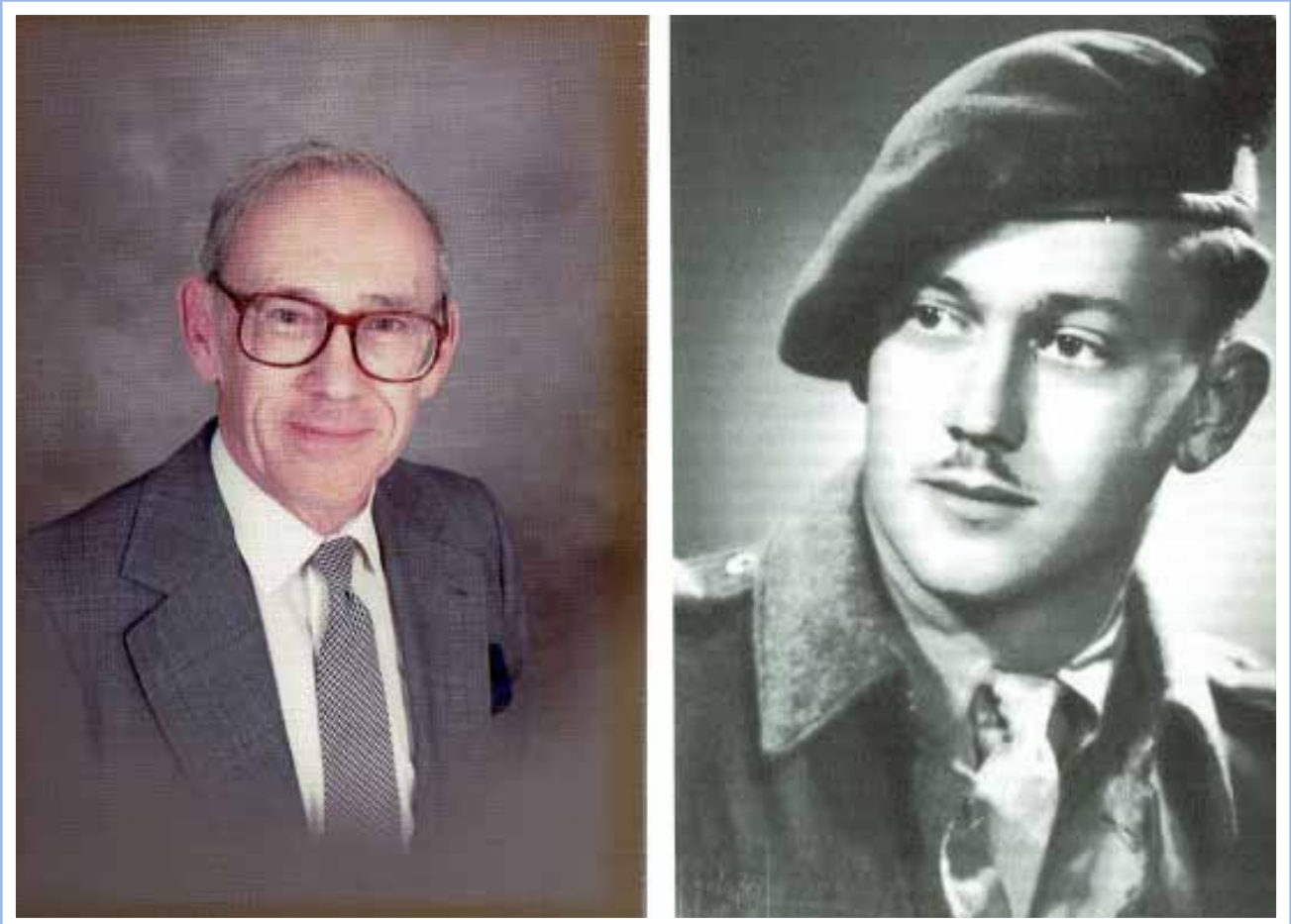
The day after landing on the outskirts of Arnhem, Waddy, who was the commander of B Company, was advancing through a wooded area under heavy fire from elements of the 9th SS Panzer Division. He was hit by gunfire and was taken to the Hotel Tafelberg at Oosterbeek, where doctors began operating on him on a billiard table. For five days Waddy watched a stream of casualties brought in as the battle raged outside and bullets smacked into the walls of the room. A mortar bomb scored a direct hit, killing six other patients and wounding him again.

He was captured by the Germans and woke to hear two German doctors discussing amputating his foot. A German nurse then pulled out a two-inch mortar splinter in a moment of excruciating pain. Recovering after six weeks, Waddy was put on a hospital train for Stalag Luft VIIA at Moosburg, Bavaria. There he was sentenced to five days in solitary confinement for cheekily slowly walking with his hands in his pockets past the office of the kommandant.

From the mid-1980s Col Waddy played a leading role in establishing 156 Battalion reunions each autumn in Melton. He was the last surviving member of his battalion who fought at Arnhem. His battalion suffered the highest casualty rate – 75 per cent – with more than 100 men killed. Only 37 men, some escaping on Operation Pegasus, would return to their base in Melton, and the battalion was disbanded in October 1944.

Our Last Veteran

Michael Wenner is our last veteran, and we were sad not to see him at our Reunion and wish him well for his return from hospital very soon.



Michael was with 151 in India and then with 156 in North Africa, but, after breaking his leg twice, he was not allowed to jump any more – hence the reason that Michael was not with 156 at Arnhem. However, he was allowed to join the No. 9 Scottish Commando and here is a picture of Michael wearing their beret, reproduced in his book *So It Was*, plus a more-recent photo.

Michael must have been chuffed that his son, Martin, played the Governor of Singapore in episode 3 and 6 of ITV's series *The Singapore Grip*. The irony that Michael himself was a member of the diplomatic service, serving as an Ambassador to El Salvador from 1967 to 1970, would not have been lost on him.



We Will Remember Them



Colonel John Llewellyn Waddy MBE

B Coy OC 156 Parachute Battalion at Arnhem

Born 17th June 1920. Died 27th September 2020, aged 100.

One of the founders of the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association and The Arnhem 1944 Fellowship. The full obituary by John O'Reilly can be read or downloaded on the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association website here:

<https://156para.co.uk/colonel-john-waddy-obituary>



Major Jeffrey Fraser Noble

MMG PL OC 156 Parachute Battalion at Arnhem

Born 15th October 1923. Died 4th June 2020, aged 96.

The full obituary by John O'Reilly can be read or downloaded on the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association website here:

<https://156para.co.uk/jeffrey-noble-obituary>



Private John Jeffries

Signaler attached 4th Parachute Brigade at Arnhem

Born 22nd March 1922. Died 30th August 2020, aged 98.

Although not a member of the battalion John was very much part of the 151/156 family. John was the last Arnhem veteran to attend the annual Battalion Reunion at Melton Mowbray in October 2019: the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Arnhem.

Read the full obituary here:

<https://156para.co.uk/john-jeffries-obituary>

Funeral Service for John Waddy

Church of St Andrew & St Mary, Pitminster, Somerset
Tuesday 6 October at 12 noon







A fitting farewell at the graveside of Colonel John Waddy, father of the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association, at the church of St Mary and St Andrew in Pitminster. The small village is at the foot of the Blackdown Hills, close to where John grew up and in later life walked with his beloved wife, Ann, and his faithful spaniels.



When almost everyone had left the cemetery, Froggy the Spaniel – a favourite of Colonel John’s – arrived at his graveside with owner Richard Waddy (nephew) to say goodbye.



Colonel John Waddy’s carer, Colleen de Villiers, wearing his bush hat.

Funeral Service for John Jeffries

St Mary's Church, Richmond, North Yorkshire

17th September 2020



John Jeffries' coffin is carried up the steep hill into St Mary's Church past the Airborne signallers' guard-of-honour and a crowd of 50-60 mourners.



Left to Right: Mike Hurst, Adrian Tait, Ian Henderson and Dave Petfield.



151/156 Parachute Battalion Association members with Standard Bearers outside St Mary's Church, Richmond, Yorkshire.



The Airborne Bikers and other clubs show their respect to John Jeffries as they join his funeral cortège.

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Words by Rosie Anderson & John O'Reilly
Design & Layout by Will Stark
www.156para.co.uk

