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156
PARACHUTE BATTALION
ASSOCIATION

151/156 Parachute Battalion Association

Newsletter 5 | July 2023



Cover image – Men of the Medium Machine Gun Platoon, Support Company. 156 Battalion, The Parachute Regiment being inspected at Oakham School, Rutland, March 1944



Dear Members,

Plans are well under way for our Reunion in October (Friday 6th and Saturday 7th), and John and Michelle have been busy this year meeting – and helping – the people at the Royal Army Veterinary Corps, who are based at what used to be the Remount Depot. Read more of the RAVC's involvement at the Reunion in this Newsletter, and of other things that are being planned, as well as John and Michelle's support of Armed Forces Day.

Will Stark went on one of the Arnhem Fellowship's tours in May, together with Roy Henderson, and you can read all about it, and the special references to 156 at Jonkerbos War Cemetery and the Memorial to the Missing at Groesbeek. And there is information about attending the Fellowship dinner at Arnhem this year, which is being held on Thursday 14th September.

Enjoy!

Rosie Anderson
rosieanderson@gmail.com
0208 788 0999

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

Will Stark
will@156para.co.uk
07854 687772

The Royal Army Veterinary Corps

The RAVC is based in Melton Mowbray in what used to be the Remount Depot during World War II. The horses were looked after by girls (as far as we know), some of whom became wives of 156 men.

The Veterinary Corps has shown a great interest in our Battalion. This began at last year's Reunion when two of the RAVC members joined us at St Mary's Church. Earlier this year Michelle and myself were invited by the RAVC to join them in their Officers' Mess and we were showed around their base. This included seeing the protection dogs in action, followed by a tour of the stables where 310 horses are housed.

While we were there, Lieutenant Colonel Mike Robinson and Regimental Sergeant Major Matthew Eade explained that they would like to learn more about the 151/156 to the extent that they arranged a staff ride in Arnhem during May to view the route taken by the 156 following their drop on DZ 'Y' in September 1944. We were able to assist them by arranging for Gerrit Gijsbertsen – a great supporter of 156 over the years – to guide them on their two-day battlefield tour. It began at the Ginkelseheide where Gerrit took along an original 1944 British parachutist's harness. At the end of what was a very successful tour, in which the weather helped enormously, the RAVC presented Gerrit with their regimental shield.



Armed Forces Day

The Armed Forces Day takes place on the last Saturday in June each year. For Melton Mowbray, it began on Monday, 19th June with a ceremony at the Civic Centre hosted by Mayor and Mayoress Alan and Jane Hewson. It was attended by various dignitaries including Deputy Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire, Brian Moore, a former RAF pilot and England Rugby Union player. Also present were Lieutenant Colonel Robinson and RSM Eade of the RAVC. Michelle and myself represented the 156 Parachute Battalion.



October 2023 Reunion

Friday 6th October – Saturday 7th October



One of the highlights of this year's Reunion in October will be the attendance of members of the RAVC where they will explain how para dogs are used in modern warfare. Colonel Robinson will give an overview of the function of the RAVC and give instances of dogs who have won the Dickin Medal which is the animal equivalent to the Victoria Cross. The RSM will talk about his own dog's actions in Afghanistan whilst serving with the SAS. It might come as a surprise to some that Lieutenant Colonel Martin Lindsay enlisted a dog and handler as part of his recruitment drive for the 9th Parachute Battalion in preparation for D-Day. This tale will be related by an officer of the Parachute Regiment. Please let us know if any members would like to visit the RAVC centre at this year's Reunion as they would be very welcome.

Our dinner on the evening of Friday, 6th October will again have various speakers, and members of the RAVC will be joining us for the first time. Rupert Hague-Holmes will be back, this time accompanied by his wife, and will be telling us more about one of the Battalion's most successful soldiers Lieutenant General Sir George Lea DSO. He hopes to get his book printed in time to bring copies along for the Reunion weekend.



Col Waddy with a spaniel in India

At our service on Saturday, 7th October, there will, of course, be a wonderful selection of musical surprises relating to the Battalion. Our Bugler this year is also joining us from the RAVC and I am told he will be arriving on his horse! Dogs will also be present, as well as the Parachute Regiment's mascot pony Pegasus. Upon arrival at 1040 hours, therefore, you will be greeted by something resembling a menagerie. Colonel John Waddy would certainly approve of the occasion as the dogs will be spaniels.

Arnhem 1944 Fellowship May 2023 Battlefield Tour



Most years The Arnhem 1944 Fellowship conduct a battlefield tour in the Arnhem area over a weekend in early summer. This year covered a large area from Oosterbeek to Arnhem, Nijmegen, Groesbeek and then on to Neder-Betuwe. There was a large turnout with around 40–50 participants from both the UK and the Netherlands, including myself (Will Stark) and Roy Henderson of the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association.

The weekend started on a sunny and warm Friday with a tour by the most excellent and knowledgeable Graham Francis (you are welcome Graham!) at the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery. We had numerous interesting and unusual accounts from behind the gravestones featuring soldiers from the 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment; 4th Parachute Squadron RE; the 1st (Polish) Independent Parachute Brigade and the 11th Battalion, The Parachute Regiment.

Accommodation for the weekend was the Bilderberg Hotel. As most of you will know, the remnants of the 156 Battalion and the 4th Parachute Brigade fought in the woods behind the hotel in their costly attempt to reach the perimeter in Oosterbeek on 20th September 1944.



Graham Francis starts the weekend tour off at the Arnhem Oosterbeek War Cemetery

Saturday morning we all met near the Hartenstein to board the bus for our trip down to Nijmegen. First stop was the Jonkerbos War Cemetery. Graham once again took the tour and talked about the formation of the cemetery before moving on to the stories from behind the gravestones. Again all interesting and unusual accounts.

Geert Jonker gave a talk about a grave marked 'A soldier of the War 1939–1945' with the badge of the Gordon Highlanders. This particular soldier was found in the dunes on a beach north of Amsterdam. Why was a Gordon Highlander buried in a dune north of Amsterdam? It turns out he was a Gordon Highlander, not from World War II but from the late 1800s! This goes to show the hard work and detective-like expertise that Geert and his team do to try and find out who these soldiers are when they are discovered.

Graham then took us over to Plot 8 rows A and B where eighteen men from the Medium Machine Gun Platoon, Support Company, 156 Parachute Battalion are buried. They were all killed en route to Arnhem when their Dakota (Chalk 619) was hit by German flak on the 18th September 1944 and crashed by the Bonegraafseweg at Ochten, about 20km south-west of Oosterbeek. This was the largest single loss of life by a unit in the battle of Arnhem. The gravestones have the inscription 'Buried near this spot' as they could not be individually identified.

The 18 members of the Medium Machine Gun Platoon, Support Coy, 156 Battalion, The Parachute Regiment buried at Jonkerbos War Cemetery

Pte Brownlow, George T, Age 27

Pte Butler, Arthur, Age 24

Pte Clayton, Harold, Age 22

Pte Clayton, John F, Age 27

Pte Fuller, Richard, Age 24

Pte George, Daniel L, Age 27

Pte Gilliver, George H, Age 19

Pte Hopwood, Harry, Age 25

Pte Johns, Eric E, Age 25

Pte Killingworth, Richard, Age ?

Sgt Kinsley-Smith, John C, Age 29

Cpl Lilley, Owen, Age 24

Pte Philpotts, Henry J, Age 19

Pte Stanyer, Harold, Age 23

Pte Stevens, Thomas, Age 21

Pte Taylor, Patrick, Age 19

Pte Tutton, George, Age 24

Pte Wilson, Joseph, Age 24



Jonkerbos War Cemetery





Cross left on the grave of Private Killingworth

Jonkerbos War Cemetery



Next was a trip up on to the heights south of Nijmegen and on to the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Of particular interest to me here is the Memorial to the Missing, which features the names of soldiers with no known grave. There are twenty 156 men on the panels here and includes my grandfather's section commander, Cpl R, J (Nocker) West.

**The 20 members of the
156 Battalion, The Parachute Regiment
remembered on the Memorial to the Missing at Groesbeek.**

Pte J BOYD

Age 19
Unit: No known unit
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte W POLLOCK

Age 20
Unit: 6 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte J MANNING

Age 25
Unit: HQ, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Lt J DAVISON

Age 23
Unit: 7 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 1

Pte D E FORD

Age 26
Unit: 8 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

LCpl A T G STIRLING

Age 20
Unit: 4 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 8

Pte S HOSKINS

Age 27
Unit: 10 pl, C Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte H E FLETCHER

Age 19
Unit: 5 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Sgt A G WALKER

Age 28
Unit: 8 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte JT COBB

Age 22
Unit: 4 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte D HAGGERTY

Age 23
Unit: 10 pl, C Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte W G GOLLEDGE

Age 27
Unit: HQ, C Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

LCpl R FROST

Age 23
Unit: Carrier pl, HQ Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 8

Cpl R J WEST

Age 22
Unit: 5 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 8

Pte D MALCOLM

Age 25
Unit: C Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte A W EVANS

Age 20
Unit: 9 pl, C Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte D H HUNTER

Age 20
Unit: 7 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte L SMITH

Age 25
Unit: 8 pl, B Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte A MUNRO

Age 22
Unit: 5 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9

Pte E COOPER

Age 31
Unit: 3 pl, A Coy
Groesbeek Panel: 9



Memorial to the Missing, Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery



*Memorial to the Missing panel
Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery*



Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery

An exhibition called Faces to Graves, which attaches photos and personal stories to the graves, was on show during our visit. I was hoping to uncover new photos of the 156 men here but no such luck. All of those on show have appeared in *Delhi to Arnhem*.

It was back on the coach and down into central Nijmegen for lunch on what was a pleasantly warm day. Niall Cherry gave an informative talk on the operations of the Guards Armoured Division and the 82nd Airborne Division to take the Waal Bridge on the 20th September 1944.

It also struck me that you could see all the way to Arnhem from the viewpoint overlooking Nijmegen bridge. I could imagine the American and British troops in 1944 seeing the smoke from the battle to the north.

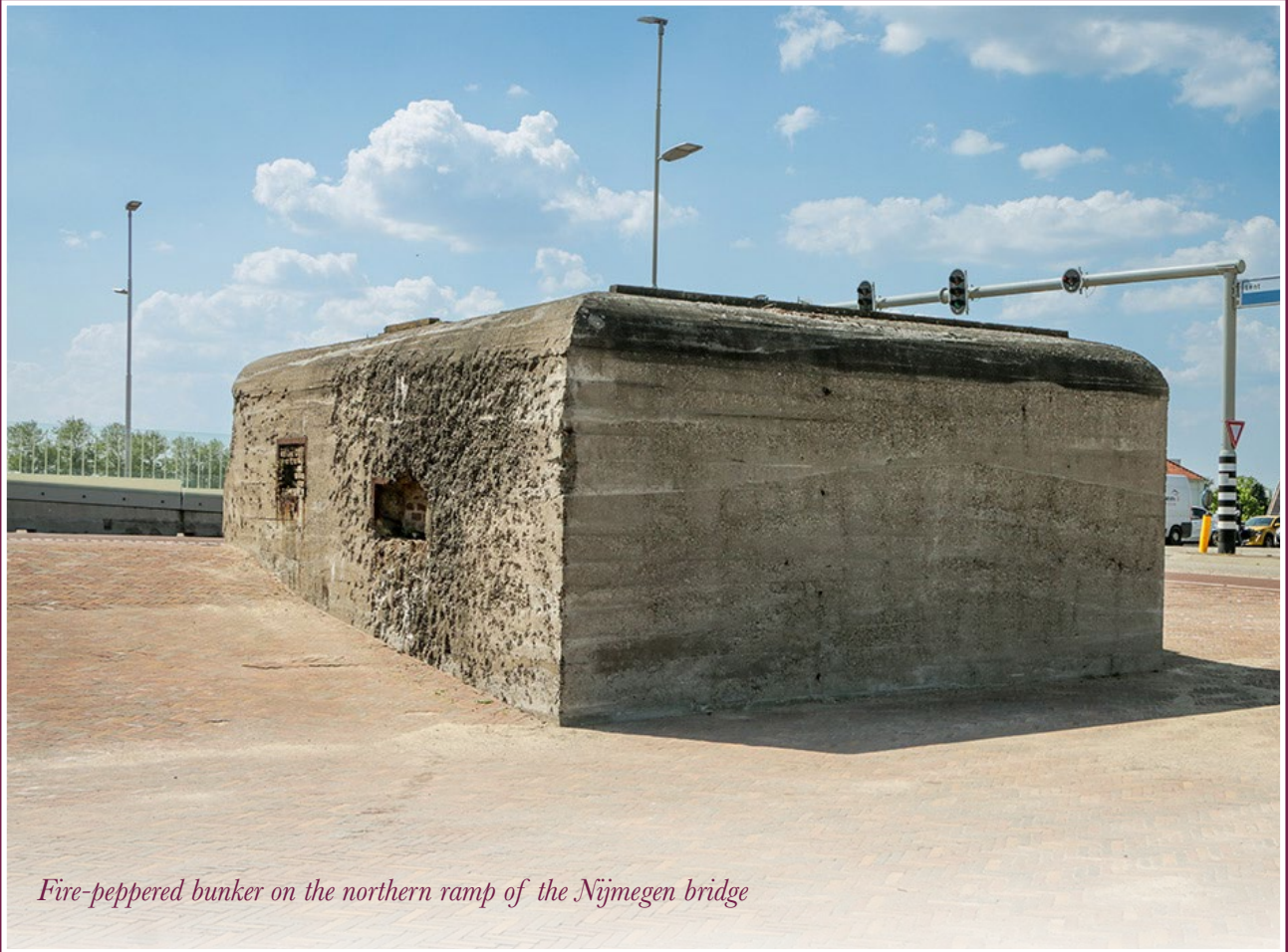


Niall Cherry gives his talk on the actions to capture the Nijmegen bridge

We then popped over the River Waal and parked up on the north side of the bridge. Here we had a look at Harmel's bunker from where he tried to blow up the bridge. We also got a close look at the pill box and newly unearthed roadblocks which protected the north end of the bridge.



Looking north across the Nijmegen bridge towards Arnhem



Fire-peppered bunker on the northern ramp of the Nijmegen bridge

Last stop of the day was a short trip out west on the Betuwe to Opheusden and the ‘Airmen in the line of fire’ Memorial dedicated to the crews of the 16 aircraft shot down in this area during the war. Bart Belonje (who designed the memorial that was unveiled in 2019) gave us a talk on the construction of the monument and some stories of the aircraft and crew remembered here. This included Chalk 619 (mentioned earlier) which was shot down a few miles south of Opheusden.

It was back on the coach and back to Oosterbeek and dinner at the De Oude Herbergh which I can highly recommend, although there is no need to put mushrooms in every dish.



'Airmen in the line of fire' Memorial at Opheusden



Bart Belonje talks about the construction of the memorial.

Sunday was another warm day as we headed into Arnhem for the last day of tours. First up was a look at the failed breakthrough on the 19th September, focussing on the actions of the 1st Battalion, The Parachute Regiment. Paul Meiboom and Bart Belonje took us round a number of locations in western Arnhem looking at the battle with a then and now perspective.



A short lunch break was held at the newly refurbished museum (art gallery), held for a while in 1944 by the 2nd Battalion, The South Staffs. The second tour of the day was by Luuk Buist looking at the German counter offensive in western Arnhem through the use of new photographs and great detective work.

From there is was a short trip to Arnhem station and back to Amsterdam and eventually home.

If you are a Fellowship member then I would highly recommend the May battlefield tours. They are not only really informative but great social events.

79th Arnhem Commemorations

September 2023

There are no official 151/156 Association events in Arnhem/Oosterbeek this year but 151/156 Association members have been invited to The Arnhem 1944 Fellowship dinner. This takes place on Thursday 14th September at the Lebret Hall, Oosterbeek.

18.45–19.30 Drinks

19.30 Dinner Served

If you are not a Fellowship member but would like to attend then get in contact with Will Stark via email at will@156para.co.uk





SEPTEMBER 1944

On 20 September 40 members of
4 Parachute Brigade met the enemy
against German armor, assisted
with tanks and heavy weapons.
They then broke through to
control the light in Duxford.

They were then to 30 members
and the remaining 10
of 4 Parachute Brigade were
killed or captured. The
Mediterranean Division
of the British Army.

Marker post at The Hollow



Written by John O'Reilly & Will Stark
Designed by Will Stark
Photographs by Will and John
Edited by Rosie Anderson
www.156para.co.uk

