

# The 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association







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*Cover: 151 Parachute Battalion training drop in India – plus battalion badges  
Above: The first 151/156 reunion at St Mary's Church, Melton Mowbray in 1946*

# Introduction

Dear Members and Friends,

Welcome to the 151/156 Parachute Battalion Association Newsletter. Apologies for the delay in sending this newsletter out but we are proud to bring you the latest edition — a space dedicated to honouring the legacy, bonds of friendship, and continued spirit of our proud battalion. Whether you served, have family connections, or simply support our community, this newsletter keeps you informed, connected, and engaged with stories from the past and updates on the present.

Inside this issue, you'll find updates on upcoming reunions, stories from members, and historical insights. Essentially it's more than just a newsletter — it's a tribute to the courage, commitment, and shared bond that define the 151/156 Parachute Battalion and its continuing Association.

Thank you for being a valued part of this enduring legacy.

Will Stark  
Association Chair  
151/156 Parachute Battalion Association

151/156 Parachute Battalion Association

# Melton Mowbray Reunion 2025

Friday 10th – Saturday 11th 2025

As mentioned in an earlier email we have dates for this years reunion in October at Melton Mowbray.

The dates are:

**Friday 10th October and Saturday 11th October**

For those that are new to the Association, we meet at Saltby Airfield over lunch on the Friday, with our dinner at Sysonby Knoll Hotel, Melton Mowbray in the evening, and the service is held on the Saturday at St Mary's Church, followed by refreshments at the Royal British Legion in Melton Mowbray.

Sysonby Knoll, where the dinner is held, have offered members the following special rates, but please phone the hotel to make the booking (01664 563563) and say you are part of the 156 party. For those new to the Reunions, it's fun being part of a large party, so don't miss out on a room!

## Special rates at the Sysonby Knoll Hotel

- Single room - £112.00

All double rooms based on double occupancy

- Standard double - £145.00

- Superior double - £155.00

- Executive/ four poster - £165.00

The prices for this years events will remain the same as 2024.

## Saltby Airfield

**12:30pm, Friday, 10th October**

Buffet-style lunch with refreshments and bar. Talks relating to the battalion and the local area, concluding with a short service and wreath laying at the Saltby memorial.

**£10**

## Reunion Dinner at Sysonby Knoll Hotel

**6:00pm, Friday, 10th October**

3-course dinner with talks and speeches, plus tea or coffee after dinner.

**£40**

## Commemoration Service at St Mary's Church

**10:30am, Saturday, 11th October**

Church service and wreath laying at the 156 memorial in St Mary's followed by a buffet-style lunch with refreshments and bar at the Melton Mowbray branch of the Royal British Legion.

**£25**

## Full weekend | £75

If you are interested in coming to any events then please let us know by emailing [will@156para.co.uk](mailto:will@156para.co.uk) so we can have an idea of numbers attending. No money is required at the moment. More details will follow soon, including the menu for the dinner.



151/156 Parachute Battalion Association

# Arnhem/Oosterbeek 2025

Thursday 18th – Sunday 21st September 2025

This year we have no official association organised events in the Netherlands but a number of us are attending. Along with the usual commemoration activities, there are a number of extra events that members may wish to attend.

## **Bill Larder (11th Parachute Battalion)**

### **Ashes Internment**

#### **Arnhem/Oosterbeek War Cemetery**

***Friday 19th September at 11am***

We will be laying a wreath for Bill on behalf of the 151/156 Association. Any members are welcome to attend.

## **Arnhem 1944 Fellowship Battlefield Walk**

### **Bilderberg Woods**

***Friday Afternoon 19th September***

The walk will retrace the dramatic footsteps of the 4th Parachute Brigade on 20th September 1944 – a day marked by fierce fighting and relentless courage. This walk will also feature the harrowing journey of the 156 Parachute Battalion as it battled desperately to break into the Oosterbeek Perimeter. Please note that you must be a member of the Fellowship to attend. You can do so by visiting <https://arnhem1944fellowship.org/>

## **151/156 Association Wreath Laying**

### **The Hollow & 156 Marker Post**

***Friday Afternoon 19th September***

After the Fellowship walk we intend to lay wreaths at the 4th Parachute Brigade marker post at The Hollow, then at the 156 marker post on the Dreijenseweg. All members are welcome to attend.

If you are intending to coming to Arnhem this year and would like to be involved in any events then please do let us know by emailing [will@156para.co.uk](mailto:will@156para.co.uk). If we have sufficient numbers then we may see if we can organise some form of gathering.



*The 4th Parachute Brigade marker post at The Hollow.*

THE  
ARNHEM  
—1944—  
FELLOWSHIP

# Surviving the Storm

By Sheila Wurr

Nations, Associations and Fellowships all over the world come together to honour their war and battle dead on dates significant to them and in their own unique ways. But what about those who survived, who came back wounded in body, mind and spirit. Who saw their mates die in a thousand horrible ways. Who had to kill. Those who survived the camps? Those who died much too young, many years after the war but as a result of the long term effects.

Not only those but we the first post war generation who were victims of the fallout from those times. Those who lost fathers, sons, lovers, brothers, mothers, sisters and children. We too are survivors of a unique time in history.

Dad was known to be wounded (his back was pockmarked by tiny shrapnel he carried 'til the end of his days) and taken prisoner at Wolfheze during Market Garden and marched to Frankfurt. As he said in his letter to Col Waddy. "It became survival of the fittest but no-one in 156 behaved badly". Camp 12A was a transit camp as well as long stay as it was on a crossroads of railway tracks. He was on the Escape Committee and was moved to work in a stone quarry in another camp as punishment for which in my mother's words. "He really did suffer". Having seen a man being beaten with a rifle butt by one of the guards dad stepped in and pushed the guard away. After he was returned to his block having been punished he was refused medical treatment.

My mother knew very little about his war time experience save for a few snippets. One being that my father said "you would be surprised what one man will do to another for a piece of bread". He was repatriated in April 45 weighing six and half stone so that his own mother did not recognise the spectre that stood at her door, having been liberated by the Russians who he said treated the Poles just as badly if not more harshly than the Germans. Rotten potato peelings and anything else they could throw into a pot to supplement their meagre ration was the staple diet.

Some wounds heal, others are a constant reminder

He must have wondered whatever happened to the young lad Grayston he and John Waddy took from the drop zone at Ginkel Heide. Dad had gone back for him but he was gone. Grayston was later found killed and lies in Oosterbeek War Cemetery. Dad believed his CO, Major John Waddy to be dead and vice versa. Only 16 years later did they both find out they were alive, dad having gone to Arnhem after the war to look for his CO's grave such was the respect he commanded. On the one hand happy and grateful at the news, on the other all those lost years of talking and comparing notes, finding out about other comrades, those still missing. John Waddy said in a letter to me, "It would have been so wonderful to sit down with your father and talk over old times". As dad died young and I



was only 9 years of age, my sister 7, like a lot of you, I lost those precious opportunities to sit down and talk to him. Those of you that have had that opportunity, no matter how fleetin, are blessed.

Two Seaforth men, Vic Twist, my dad, who joined in 1938 and Alastair Hill's uncle Jimmy "Jock" Sneddon who joined in 1939 served in China, Malaya and India before volunteering for the 151 Parachute Battalion. One lies in Oosterbeek Cemetery. The other carried the scars and memories until his death in 1966 just before his 46th birthday, still doing his jumps every year. How different it would have been if Jock Sneddon, my dad, Billie Wood, John Waddy and others could have reunited over a pint. What stories would we have heard, what



*Vic Twist in the Seaforth Highlanders prior to volunteering for the 151 Parachute Battalion*

different paths might we have taken. What release for them to talk of things they all went through. Fate had other plans. After being in civvy street for one year dad rejoined the army, first as a territorial then full time back in the Seaforth Highlanders and later when they amalgamated with the Cameron Highlanders, the Queen's Own Highlanders. Soldiering was in his blood, it was his life. He was back in action in Egypt in 1951, first recce into Aden in 1955 and later Malaya/Singapore.

There is a comradeship we are not privvy too. A brotherhood we cannot and have no right to be party to. Therefore as outsiders we must be aware and respectful of boundaries.

In Edinburgh there was one soldier on the streets homeless. He never begged and I asked him one day "what's your story then?" He was in the tank regiment. I sat down on the pavement with him. He told me after his tours he couldn't handle it any more. I said it's always the smell you can't forget. He looked at me and said yes not just the animals and humans, the burning tyres, diesel, everything. He was offered help but preferred to wander on his own with his own thoughts. Sadly he died a few years ago.

When I was in Stalingrad (now Volgograd) I met a Russian Veteran in his 90s. He did 30 one handed push ups on the table. He said the depravation and hardship they went through during the war and the army training gave him the strength. Yet, when we went to a small museum at a farmer's house and he stood transfixed looking at photos on the wall of soldiers, I saw him begin to cry silent tears. No one else noticed. I went up to him put my hand gently on his shoulder and said "I'm so sorry, so sorry", I gave him a hug and he cried on my shoulder and held me like an anchor and said "thank you, thank you". It was a small

moment when barriers came down and the soldier, a man, remembered the horrors he had been through and a stranger recognised his pain. It is a moment I will never forget. A man can never come back the same as he left when enduring years of battle and seeing the things they see, knowing things they cannot speak of.

How many families were destroyed in the aftermath due to the shell shock, PTSD, trauma, whatever the politicians try to call it to make it sound more palatable, it is a deep constant wound that weeps and destroys time and time again.

We know soldiers, sailors, airmen, submariners in all their capacities, sappers, tankers machine gunners, cooks and specialists who expect to take the risks the job demands. That does not mean that we can say you look all right so you must be. Masks should be allowed to fall without shame and we should look at the face behind the mask and say it's all right to fall down, to cry, to scream, to huddle in a corner, to heal if you can and if you can't we will not forget you.

We must remember too the women who served, in Russia on the front lines, nurses, those behind the scenes who went through their own nightmares. The children all over the world who saw the chaos and carnage. My own mother had survivor's guilt post war after pulling rank and the girl she sent to make the tea died instead of her when the King David was blown up. She saw the aftermath. One of her friends went down with the *Hood*. A piece of her never recovered though it was hidden. How true that is of so many others.

When dad was offered promotion to Major he turned it down. "My place is by the men." He was known by all ranks as a soldier's soldier.



*CSM WOII Vic Twist, B Company, 156 Parachute Battalion.*

As a Senior Weapons Officer and a Marksman he ensured that his men were equipped to survive wherever they were sent, especially in the jungle. That was part of his legacy.

Remember the dead who don't hurt any more but don't forget the living whose hurt never ends until they join their battalion in the sky.

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PS. There is no need for rank, status or privilege in this article. Death has no care for it. They all went with the same purpose, the same heart and as brothers in arms. They are all equal when the mortars start firing..



# Harlaxton Manor

## 1940s weekend 26/27 October 2024

By John O'Reilly and Michelle Kerry



*Harlaxton Hall*

Harlaxton Manor is situated around eight miles north-east of Saltby Airfield, close to Grantham. A huge mansion – designed by the architect, Anthony Salvin – building work began in 1832 for local squire Gregory Gregory (yes, that really was his name), with the main work completed in 1837, and originally called Grantham Castle.

During World War Two, Harlaxton was put to military use and in 1943 a company of 1st Parachute Battalion the 1st Airborne Division was billeted there. This company, like the rest of their battalion, was seriously depleted at Arnhem. Those returning after the battle were joined by the survivors of the 156 and,

for a short time, were commanded by Major Geoffrey Powell at Grimsthorpe Castle in Lincolnshire.

During 1944, Harlaxton was used as a training centre for the new No.1 (Airborne) Forward Observation Unit. Many of the 20 officers and 60 other ranks who trained there joined 1st Airborne Division on Operation Market Garden. Captain Raymond Stevens became the 156 FOO and dropped at Arnhem with them on 18th September, 1944. By the 20th, with few officers remaining, Stevens was given the new role of platoon commander by Major Geoffrey Powell. By now the Battalion was down to just 80 men, half of





*Captain R. H. Stevens. The last photo before he left for Arnhem, September 1944*

whom were allocated to Stevens and the rest to The Honourable Lieutenant Piers St Aubyn. After three days of fighting on the Paul Krugerstraat/Mariaweg crossroads, Stevens had so impressed the men under his command that they referred to him as 'one of us'. On Saturday, 23rd September the fighting at Oosterbeek reached its zenith as the Germans tried to break the stubborn Airborne resistance. Stevens was ordered to make a frontal attack which he enthusiastically led with fixed bayonets. He was, sadly, cut down by a burst of enemy machine gun fire, dying later that night. The Germans, however, did halt their advance at this point, realising that the men in the north-east sector were not going to give in without a fight. Two days later, the survivors of the 156 Parachute Battalion escaped across the River Rhine on Operation Berlin.



*Information banner on the No 1 (Airborne) Forward Observer Unit at Harlaxton Hall.*



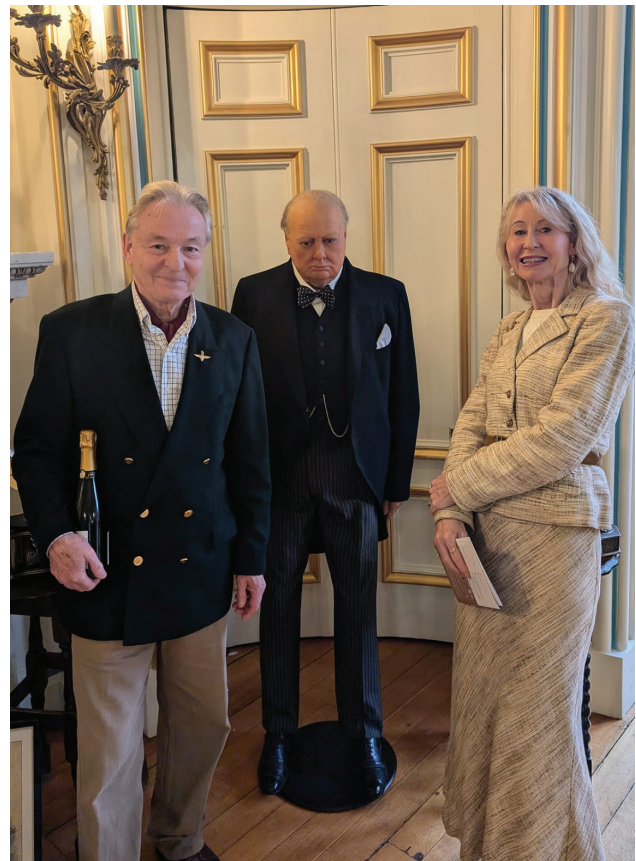
*Michelle sitting in a Willys jeep with period re-enactors.*





Following World War Two, Harlaxton was used by a variety of educational organisations until, in 1971 (to the present day), it was taken over by the University of Evansville, Indiana. The 156 Living History Group – recently formed by James Wilkins and Will Godfrey (grandson of Private Frederick Tappin KIA Arnhem) – created an excellent display of uniforms and equipment in the grand setting of the Long Gallery, surrounded by works of art and the beautifully painted ceiling. A variety of wartime units were represented by re-enactors, such as the RAF, the French Resistance, and a particularly strong US Army presence, enhanced by singers and musicians. Over the two days, several thousand people attended, which ensured that the importance of the 156 and men like Captain Stevens would be understood and remembered.

One thing, however, that has definitely not changed from the war years is the fact that the 156 Living History Group spent two nights billeted in the stables – such undaunted enthusiasm!



*John and Michelle make a new friend.*

# A Letter from Nick St Aubyn

Son of Lt The Hon Piers St Aubyn  
Intelligence Officer, HQ Company, 156 Parachute Battalion



*Dear John and Michelle,*

*Jane and I were both honoured and delighted to take part in the events to mark the 80th anniversary of Market Garden. The entire two days were so carefully planned and the atmosphere could not have been more in keeping with the theme of 'hope.' I am so glad that we were able to partake in all of it.*

*It was a huge pleasure to meet so many descendants of members of the 156 Battalion and to hear them relate their father's stories of how they fought alongside my own. On the Friday, the team who displayed the paras' kit were fascinating and the service on the airfield was held with great dignity.*

*I took great pride in being able to relate a few stories about Piers to such a receptive audience, while being fully conscious of my debt to your own success, in teasing so many details out of him before he died.*

*The service in Melton Mowbray was beautifully arranged and the memory of it will remain with us. Thank you once again for all you have done to bring this 'Arnhem' family together and I look forward to remaining connected.*

*With warmest regards*

*Yours sincerely,*

*Nick*



# The Life and Military Service of Leslie Thomas 'Jock' Grier

By William Lawrence



*"As Good a Man as the King Only Poorer,"*

## Early Life and Enlistment

Leslie Thomas Grier was born on 8 July 1919 in York. Demonstrating an early inclination towards military service, he enlisted in the army at a young age. In 1936, at just 17 years old, Jock lied about his age to join the Lincolnshire Regiment, marking the beginning of his remarkable career.

## Service in India

Jock's military journey took him to India with the Lincolnshire Regiment. During his tenure, he encountered various challenges, including dealing with the pervasive threat of malaria. These experiences served to harden his resolve and prepare him for the difficult times ahead.

## Joining the Parachute Regiment

In 1942, Jock made a pivotal decision to transfer to the Parachute Regiment. He became part of the 151 Parachute Battalion,

later renumbered as the 156 Battalion. This period involved rigorous training, preparing him for the demanding operations that lay in wait during WWII.

## Battle of Arnhem

One of the most defining moments of Jock's military career was his participation in the Battle of Arnhem during Operation Market Garden in September 1944. Parachuting into Arnhem with the 156 Battalion, Jock demonstrated exceptional bravery. Despite his valiant efforts, he was eventually wounded in the conflict and subsequently captured by enemy forces.

## Prisoner of War

Following his capture, Jock was held as a prisoner of war at Stalag XIB in Germany. The conditions were harsh, testing his endurance and resilience. He endured these difficulties





# A Friend of the 156 Family

By Alastair Hill

*October 2024 saw the passing of Dr S.A.G. de Graaf, a valued honorary member of the 156 Family*

Since 2019, Stef, and his wife Robinetta had tended the grave of Private Jock Sneddon of B Company, and each September also set up a memorial in the garden of their cottage, close to Wolfheze Hotel.

In 2019 Stef was contacted by Alastair and Jillian Hill for permission to lay flowers outside the rear garden perimeter, as that was the area Jock Sneddon was killed in action on 20th September 1944. Although a very private

couple, he insisted that the wreath and a small plaque were situated at the front gate, so everyone could see them. In the couple's own words, they had 'adopted Jimmy', with Alastair and Jillian being invited into their garden and their house. Contact with Stef and Robinetta continued with regular visits, and many shared emails and photographs.

Stef was born in Harlem, Netherlands in January 1941 and had childhood memories of the



*Alastair Hill, with Robinetta and Stef outside Wolfheze Cottage*



German occupation and allied bombings. He studied general chemistry, physics and maths in his first three years at university, followed by three years of organic chemistry, physical chemistry and biochemistry. In his last four years he worked on a synthetic organic subject for his thesis called "Reactions of conjugated enamines with carbenes".

During these years he had met Robinetta, and they married on her birthday, November 19th 1969. After gaining his doctorate in 1973 he started work with a chemical company in Arnhem, specialising in plastics. In 1984 the couple purchased Wolfheze Cottage close to the Wolfheze Hotel, living there until March 2024. As assistant professor in charge of 200 scientists, his work took him all over Europe, the United Kingdom, USA and Russia. He fondly remembered the first-class travel and the chauffeur driven cars whilst on business. Due to work he could communicate in Spanish, French, German, Russian and English.

Stef and Robinetta loved tending their garden, and both enjoyed Formula 1 racing. Up to recent

years Robinetta had bred and successfully shown Bernese mountain dogs. Stef had owned gliders, along with a light aircraft, in which he would regularly take Robinetta to lunch in France and Belgium. He also owned a 6.2 litre Mercedes Benz, and with a very heavy right foot had his wife pleading for him to slow down from the rear seat, as witnessed by Alastair and Jillian.

After the Airborne Commemorations last year, Stef was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumour.

The couple sold their house and moved to sheltered accommodation. Stef's condition deteriorated quickly after the summer, moving to a hospice in late September. He died peacefully on 29th October 2024.

Dr Stef is survived by his wife Robinetta. He will be sadly missed by his wife, family and friends, and also the 156 Family.



*The memorial to Pre Jock Sneddon at Wolfheze Cottage near to where he was killed in action.*





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<sup>151</sup>**156**  
PARACHUTE BATTALION  
ASSOCIATION

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