



# *The Bulldog Bulletin*



Patron: Her Majesty The Queen

President: Priya Guha British Consul General

**The Newsletter of The Royal British Legion  
California Branch No 1**

**June 2014**



CARDIFF



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**The Royal British Legion**

**California Branch No 1  
2616 Snowy Egret Way  
Elk Grove, CA 95757**



DERBY



GLASGOW

E-Mail Address  
Web Page

[Sweetman@britishlegionusa.com](mailto:Sweetman@britishlegionusa.com)  
<http://www.britishlegionusa.com>



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## **D Day 70th Anniversary**

### **The Sixth of June 1944: The Largest Sea Borne Invasion in Military History, With Adolph Hitler's Stranglehold on the Entire European Continent.**

The **6th Airborne Division**, was an airborne forces division of the British Army. It was formed in 1943, and despite its name, was only the second of two airborne divisions raised by the British Army during the Second World War.

The division's first mission was, [Operation Tonga](#) in June 1944, part of the [Normandy landings](#), where it was responsible for securing the left flank of the Allied invasion [Operation Overlord](#). The division remained in Normandy for three months before being withdrawn in September. While still recruiting and reforming in England, it was mobilised again and sent to Belgium in December 1944, to help counter the surprise German offensive in the Ardennes, the [Battle of the Bulge](#). Their final airborne mission was followed in March 1945, [Operation Varsity](#), the second Allied airborne assault over the [River Rhine](#).

After the war the division was identified as the Imperial Strategic Reserve, and moved to the [Middle East](#). Initially sent to [Palestine](#) for parachute training, the division became involved in an [internal security](#) role. In Palestine, the division went through several changes in formation, and had been reduced in size to only two parachute brigades by the time it was disbanded in 1948.

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**Ian Skone-Rees**, representing the Royal British Legion, laying a wreath at the Inglewood Cemetery Cenotaph as part of the Memorial Day Celebration. Ian is one of our southern California members.



## **FROM JULIAN EVANS, FORMER CONSUL GENERAL** **WORLD WAR I: DISCOVERING FAMILY CONNECTIONS**

I always look forward to reading the newsletter but the February edition was of particular interest because of Pat's article on World War I. One of the photos he included jumped out of the page at me – I had seen it many times before in my research on the part my paternal grandfather had played in the war. The photo (reproduced below) is of HMS Irresistible, a pre-Dreadnought battleship, listing after hitting a mine off Gallipoli in March 1915, taken from HMS Lord Nelson.



**Julian Evans**

British Deputy  
High Commissioner to India



HMS Irresistible

I never knew my grandfathers. One had died in 1929 and the other in 1952. I knew vaguely that my father's father had been in the Royal Navy in WW1 and that my mother's father had been in the army, but little more than that. And then in 2010 the Evans family went from San Francisco on holiday to Australia and took my father with us. In Canberra, we visited the Australian War Memorial museum, one of the world's best, and spent a lot of time in their magnificent Gallipoli section, during which my father announced he had found some old papers belonging to his father, James, and which gave the name of the ship on which he had served in Gallipoli. This was not HMS Irresistible, but HMS Ocean, another pre-Dreadnought which had gone to the assistance of HMS Irresistible and had itself struck a mine, been shelled by Turkish shore batteries and, together with Irresistible, had been abandoned and sunk.



HMS Ocean

HMS Ocean was a Canopus-class warship, mounting 4x12 inch guns, which had been laid down in the last years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and destined for the Pacific. With the British Dreadnoughts based in and around the North Sea to deal with the threat from the German High Seas Fleet, many pre-Dreadnoughts were drafted into



service in Gallipoli, and HMS Ocean was one of them. My grandfather survived the sinking and ended up at Cape Helles for the remainder of the campaign. He died in 1952, having also worked for the Royal Navy (as a civilian) in World War 2 in Portsmouth and Pembroke Dock.

I knew even less about my other grandfather, except that he had died from sleeping sickness in 1929, having survived the war. But in 2013 my cousin, who is a lecturer at Swansea University in Wales, wrote to me about a project which the university was conducting on Welshmen in WW1 and my grandfather was going to feature in it – because he had kept a (probably illegal) diary for part of the war and it had survived intact. A professional lorry driver, he joined up in 1915 at the age of 20 (the day after he got engaged to my grandmother). He was in the Army Service Corps and became an ambulance driver in Egypt. He also appears to have driven ambulances at the Battle of the Somme. Edgar Williams is at the top of the photo below, possibly with his brothers.



Edgar Wyn Williams

After the war he returned home and married my grandmother, only to die in 1929 at the age of 34 from the disease he had probably caught in Egypt. His story was featured on BBC Wales' website in August 2013.

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#### ARMENIA (November 7, 1941)

Russian hospital ship sunk at 11.29am by German torpedo-carrying planes while evacuating wounded soldiers and sailors from the Crimean Peninsula.

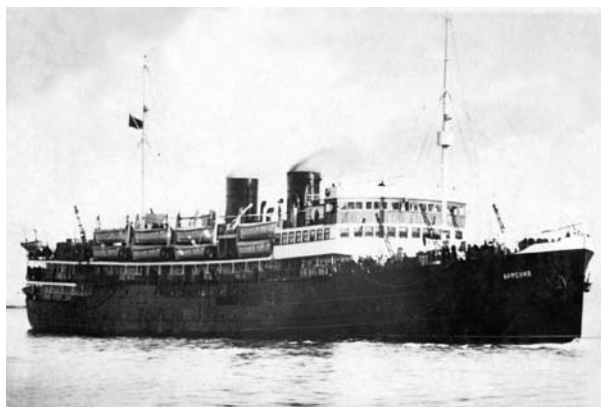
As well as the wounded servicemen from Sevastopol and Yalta, the ship also carried around 2,000 unregistered civilians and medical personnel.

The Armenia was a two deck passenger/cargo vessel launched at Leningrad in November, 1928.

After the torpedoes struck, the ship took only four minutes to sink to the bottom of the Black Sea at a depth of 472 meters.

The Red Crosses painted on both sides were ignored by the pilots during the attack. It is estimated that over 5,000 people died in the sinking.

There were only eight survivors who were picked up by an escort vessel. (The latest Russian sources put the death toll at 7,000)



# British Army Dog Joins List of Animal War Heroes

LONDON - British soldiers and military dogs gathered at a British army barracks Thursday to honor a fallen hero with selfless courage, nerves of steel - and four legs.

Theo, a bomb-sniffing springer spaniel who died in Afghanistan on the day his soldier partner was killed, was posthumously honored with the Dickin Medal, Britain's highest award for bravery by animals.



Theo worked alongside Lance Cpl. Liam Tasker, searching for roadside bombs in Helmand province, a Taliban stronghold.

Tasker, 26, died in a firefight with insurgents in March 2011, and Theo suffered a fatal seizure hours later.

**Tasker's mother, Jane Duffy, says the pair were inseparable. She's convinced Theo died of a broken heart.**

"They'll be watching us, and they'll be so proud," she said. "I just wish they were here to get it themselves."

Since 1943, the Dickin Medal has recognized gallantry by animals serving with the military, police or rescue services. Some of these animal Theo is the 28th dog to receive the medal, awarded by animal charity PDSA and named for its founder, Maria Dickin.

One of the earliest winners was Rip, a mongrel found abandoned in a bomb shelter and adopted by a London air raid warden. He was credited with finding more than 100 people trapped in rubble by German bombs during the 1940 Blitz.

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**Madagascar** The French colony island of Madagascar (228,000 square miles) off the east African coast, remained loyal to the Vichy regime until 1941.

Fears that the Axis forces might use the island as a base from which they could use to cut the Allied supply line to India round the Cape of Good Hope, British and two East African brigades invaded the island on May 5, 1941, (Operation Ironclad).

This was its first action against French troops in World War II. British casualties were 109 killed and 284 wounded. French casualties were some 200 killed and 500 wounded. The total number of deaths from malaria has never been published but is estimated to be higher than those who died from battle wounds. After the invasion of the island most of the French troops who had surrendered volunteered to join De Gaulle and fight the Germans.

**It was the Nazi intention to solve the Jewish question by settling the Jews in Madagascar but the plan was never implemented.**

## **The last execution in the Tower of London**

This historic even occurred on August 14, 1941. German spy, Josef Jakobs, was executed while seated tied to a chair, by an eight man firing squad from the Scots Guards.

The white lint target patch placed over the area of his heart bore five bullet holes from the eight shots fired. Jakobs had parachuted into Britain on January 31, 1941, and broke his leg on landing.

He lay all night in a field until his cries for help were heard next morning. He is buried in an unmarked grave in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cemetery at Kensal Green, London. (The chair on which Jakobs sat during his execution is now on display in the Royal Armouries museum in Leeds.)

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## **Fire brigade tragedy**

April 20, 1941, was Hitler's birthday and the Luftwaffe celebrated the event by dropping 1,000 tons of bombs on London. Many schools in the city were standing empty, the children already evacuated to the country. The Old Palace School in St. Leonard's Street, Poplar, was now sub-station 24U of the London Auxiliary Fire Service. The playground was ideal for training and the parking of fire appliances.

On the night of April 20, fire service crews were standing by in anticipation of a heavy raid on the Capital. At precisely 1.53am, a land mine, dropped from a Luftwaffe bomber, scored a direct hit on the school. Thirty two firemen and two fire women were killed.

The bodies of the two firewomen, mother of three Winifred Peters and twenty one year old Hilda Dupree, on duty in the watch room, were never found.

This was the largest loss of Fire Brigade personnel ever suffered in the history of the fire service in Britain.

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## **Munich Germany**

Johann Georg Elser, born January 4, 1903, had served an apprenticeship as cabinetmaker (Schreiner) and from 1929 to 1932 worked in Switzerland at this trade then returned to Germany to assist in his fathers lumberyard. He bitterly resented the Nazi stranglehold on labour unions and the growing restrictions on religious freedom. He then decided to kill Hitler by placing a time bomb in one of the columns behind the podium where Hitler was to give a speech in the Burgerbrau Beer Cellar in Munich. The bomb was set to detonate at preciesly 9.20pm on Wednesday, November 8, 1939. At 8.10 Hitler enters the beer hall but at 9.12pm he suddenly ends his speech and departs. Eight minutes later the bomb explodes killing eight people and wounding sixty-five including Eva Braun's father. Seven of those killed were Nazi Party members. Elser, who, since 1933, refused to give the nazi salute, is later arrested as he tried to cross the border into Switzerland at Konstanz. He was held for questioning due to the 'strange content' of his belongings. He was transported to Sachsenhausen concentration camp, and later confined in the concentration camp at Dachau. On the 9th Of April, 1945, two weeks before the war ended in Europe, Johann Elser was executed by the SS. In the city of Bremen a street was named in his honour, Georg-Elser Weg. In Berlin a memorial has been erected and a plaque to his memory is sited in his hometown, Koenigsbronn. (In September, 1979, the Burgerbraukeller was demolished. On its site now stands the Munich City Hilton Hotel)

## TRIGGER OF THE WAR

Hitler's revenge for Germany's defeat of 1918 brought about the cataclysm that was Europe between 1939 and 1945. The incident which triggered World War II was the fake simulated attack by the Germans on their own radio station near Gleiwitz on the Polish border. To make it appear that the attacking force consisted of Poles, SS officer Alfred Naujocks secured some condemned German criminals from a nearby concentration (protective custody) camp and dressed them in Polish uniforms before being shot and their bodies placed in strategic positions around the radio station. A Polish-speaking German then did a broadcast from the station to make it appear that Poland had attacked first.

On January 26, 1934, Germany and Poland signed a ten year non-aggression pact but the refusal of Poland to comply with Germany's request for the return of Danzig and the Polish Corridor, which was granted to Poland in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, led to the Gleiwitz incident. Hitler had stated 'Danzig was German and sooner or later would return to Germany'.



This gave Hitler the excuse he needed to invade Poland, which he did on September 1, 1939, an act which was to develop into a war embracing 56 nations and causing the deaths of some 55,014,000 persons, military and civilians. About 85 million men and women of all nationalities served as combatants in this, the world's first total war, in which more than twice as many civilians died than did uniformed soldiers.

Three days later in Britain, one and a half million civilians were successfully evacuated from the largest cities into the country.

Also on this day, Britain, France, India, Australia and New Zealand, declared war on Germany. In the House of Commons Prime Minister Chamberlain said with a trembling voice 'For no one has it been a sadder day than for me, everything I worked for has crashed in ruins'.

On October 19, 1939, Hitler incorporates the western half of Poland into the German Reich. In the town of Bydgoszez the German 111 Corps units found hundreds of German residents massacred in their homes by the Poles fleeing to the east to be succumbed there to the Russian forces.

About 694,000 Poles were captured by the Germans. On September 18, German forces joined up with the Soviet Russian forces which had invaded from the east (In spite of a non-aggression treaty signed on November 27, 1932) and quickly formed plans to divide Poland up between them along the Brest-Litovsk line. Germany obtained an area of around 73,000 square miles, the Russians about 78,000. In its invasion of eastern Poland the Russians lost 737 men. (The campaign in Poland cost the Germans 13,111 killed or missing and 27,278 wounded.)

Much of what is known about the Gleiwitz incident comes from the [affidavit](#) of [Alfred Naujocks](#) at the [Nuremberg Trials](#).

**Alfred Helmut Naujocks**



**Leslie Thomas Manser** was born in New Delhi, India during his father's employment as an engineer with the Post and Telegraph Department and, when the family returned to England, they settled in Radlett, Hertfordshire. He was a student of Victoria Boys' School, Kurseong, Darjeeling and Aldenham School, Elstree, Hertfordshire.

He was accepted by the Royal Air Force in August 1940, and was commissioned as a Pilot Officer in May 1941. After a navigational course and final operational training at 14 OTU, RAF Cottesmore, he was posted to No. 50 Squadron (which was operating the Handley Page Hampden) at RAF Swinderby, Lincolnshire on 27 August.

Two days after joining his squadron Manser experienced his first operation: as a second pilot, he took part in a bombing raid on Frankfurt. During the next two months he flew six more sorties against targets like Berlin, Hamburg and Karlsruhe before being posted to 25 OTU, Finningley on 7 November and a month later posted back to 14 OTU as an instructor.

Manser served briefly with No. 420 Squadron RCAF (Hampdens) from March–April 1942 when he rejoined 50 Squadron then operating from Skellingthorpe, and converting to the new Avro Manchester heavy bomber. He piloted one of the new aircraft during a leaflet drop over Paris, and flew a further five sorties during April and May. Manser was promoted to Flying Officer on 6 May.



For the 1,000 bomber raid on Cologne on the night of 30 May 1942, Manser was captain and first pilot of Avro Manchester bomber 'D' for Dog.

As he came over the target, his aircraft was caught in searchlights and although he bombed the target successfully from 7,000 ft (2,100 m) it was hit by flak. In an effort to escape the anti-aircraft fire he took violent evasive action, this reduced his altitude to only 1,000 ft (300 m) but he did not escape the flak until he was clear of the city. By this time the rear gunner was wounded, the front cabin full of smoke and the port engine overheating.

Rather than abandon the aircraft and be captured, Manser tried to get the aircraft and crew to safety. The port engine then burst into flames, burning the wing and reducing airspeed to a dangerously low level. The crew made preparations to abandon the aircraft, by then barely controllable and with a crash inevitable.

The aircraft was by now over Belgium, and Manser ordered the crew to bail out, but refused the offer of a parachute for himself. He remained at the controls and sacrificed himself in order to save his crew. As the crew parachuted down they saw the bomber crash in flames into a dyke at Bree, 13 mi (21 km) north east of Genk in Belgium.

P/O Barnes was taken prisoner, but Sgt Baveystock, P/O Horsley, Sgt King, Sgt Mills and Sgt Naylor all evaded capture and made their way back to the UK. The testimonies of the five evaders were instrumental in the posthumous award of the VC.

The citation for the VC read: "In pressing home his attack in the face of strong opposition, in striving, against heavy odds, to bring back his aircraft and crew and, finally, when in extreme peril, thinking only of the safety of his comrades, Flying Officer Manser displayed determination and valour of the highest order."