

NEWSLETTER

THE FRIENDS OF

THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM



RGH Camp 'somewhere' in North Africa 1942

SPRING 2022

New Colours for the Glosters – April 1952



It had been a busy time for the Glosters since they had arrived home from Korea in December 1951. Posted to Warminster, after all to brief Christmas leave, they were on parade for the funeral procession of King George VI as it passed from Westminster Hall to Paddington Station for the coffin's journey to Windsor. Then a new challenge as the 'demonstration battalion' at the School of Infantry. Their demanding duties were, however, relieved by the receipt of an honour – the presentation of new colours at a ceremony in Gloucester on Saturday 26 April. These were the first received by either battalion since 1868 and the first to have been presented in the city since 1782.

The new colours were presented at a parade and march pass in Gloucester Park by the Colonel-in-Chief, the Duke of Gloucester, who had earlier arrived at RAF Moreton Vallance and who, unbeknown to all but a few, was in great pain from torn spinal ligaments. The parade formed in four guards in line, in three ranks deep, with the band on the right and drums placed to the front. Addressing the Battalion he said, 'your battle honours bear witness to the part the regiment has played in our national history.... But I would dwell rather on your splendid and more recent action in Korea, in which some of you present took an active part.' CO Lt Colonel Digby Grist replied. A squadron of state-of-the-art Vampire jets flew past before the Battalion marched off, with drums beating and bayonets fixed, through the streets of Gloucester to cheering crowds, exercising the freedom of the city granted in 1945. Mrs Carne, wife of Colonel Carne, was present along with many other dignitaries, including the US ambassador. The old colours were laid up in the Cathedral on Sunday 27 April. The day after the city hosted the Battalion to a civic lunch at the old Waggon Works canteen. At the time about 100 Korean veterans were serving in the Battalion while over 400 were still prisoners of war.

Tim Brain

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT



The optimism following the end of lockdown restrictions and the prospect of returning to something like normality proved all too brief, as it was engulfed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. While our immediate thoughts are with the people suffering from the return of war to Europe, these events do serve to emphasise the importance of the study of history, and military history in particular, to provide context, understanding and a guide to assist in unravelling the tortuous knots of contemporary national politics and international relations. It follows that we need to foster those institutions which aid the study of history and military history, and we have in our own Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum an excellent example of such an institution.

We are most grateful to all who supported our autumn lecture at Chavenage, the first for two years. Author Sinclair McKay gave us an excellent lecture on the Bletchley Park operation in World War II, with brilliant insights into the mechanics of intelligence gathering and handling, and the human side of the story that decisively contributed to the Allied victory.

This edition of the Newsletter contains three articles. Two articles, those by John Penley and new contributor to the Newsletter, historian of Herefordshire suffragism Clare Wichbold, give us insight of military life and warfare at the sharp end, from the soldier's perspective, albeit those experiences are separated by almost 100 years. The third by Ralph Stephenson relates the story of the Polish soldiers who escaped from Nazi occupation and made their way to Britain to form the free Polish forces in the west.

There have been important developments at the Museum. Vicki Hopson has stood down as Director but will take up a new events-planning role. We thank her for her contribution to the Museum and wish her well in her new role. Joining as Director will be Matthew Holden who was previously director at the Weston-Super-Mare Museum. He comes with a wealth of military history experience, having held posts at the Imperial War Museum and the D-Day Museum, Portsmouth. We look forward to his directorship and wish him every success.

Since our last edition of the Newsletter the Friends have made a donation to the Museum to support the purchase of a new system to enable its off- and onsite tills to 'talk' to each other.

Both the Museum and the Friends have recently received generous legacy donations. The Museum has received a legacy from the estate of the late Christopher Newbold and the Friends one from the estate of the late Eric Wood. We record our gratitude for their generosity.

With the coming of spring and summer we have two events to look forward to. In May we will be holding our traditional lunch at the Badminton Horse Trials, and June will see our Summer Reception. This year Rollo and Janie Clifford have very kindly made available to us the beautiful garden at their historic home, The Manor, Frampton on Severn. It will be held on Tuesday 21st June, and we look forward to your joining us on what will be our first Summer Reception for two years.

Dr Tim Brain OBE QPM

THE WINTER BATTLE NORTH AFRICA 1941-42

Sidi Rezegh and The South African Leaguer

Colonel John Penley OBE TD

By way of a follow up to Stephen Keoghane's account of the Battle of Bir El Gubi '22 Armoured Brigade will advance one up, 2RGH leading' in the Autumn 2021 Newsletter, it is worth recording the comments made by Major Bill Trevor 2i/c and acting CO of 2 Royal Gloucestershire Hussars (RGH) in his most readable and thorough record, complete with his own neatly hand drawn (coloured) maps, of the events of November and December 1941. He completed it in May 1942, shortly before he was killed in a bombing attack. Regrettably, it languishes unpublished in the RGH Archive at Gloucestershire Archives and merits much better treatment, although it is at least safe. Trevor visited Bir El Gubi in May 1942 and made these observations:

We realised we had run on to a prepared infantry position at the time but had no idea quite how prepared. Sketch No.2 shows the positions occupied and shows that during the tank battle our tanks were under fire from other sides as well as from the front. Our route between the main positions was perhaps fortunate, but it caused us to be cut off from help from the other Regiments. There is no doubt that we should never have been launched against such a position the location of which must have been known beforehand. However, the task of this diary is only to record and not to criticise.

It appears the 3rd CLY [City of London Yeomanry] when coming up to help us ran into the right-hand main position and lost the best part of a Squadron before they could be withdrawn and had to report they could not get through. The 4th CLY on the left got as far as the left-hand position and had an engagement with tanks and guns. The report (never confirmed) was that some 70 Italian tanks were destroyed, and this figure does not seem to be unreasonable. We had destroyed a dozen before the main battle started and the other Regiments about the same. During the battle we must have done a lot of damage. Anyway, the Ariete Division never appeared as a force again after this day.¹

Trevor's sketches 1 and 2 are reproduced below at Figure 1.²

¹ The Ariete Division was an elite Italian armoured division formed in 1939. In fact, the Ariete Division did reappear as it captured Point 175 to the East of Sidi Rezegh on 29th November; JFP

² These sketch maps are quite faint when reproduced but are presented in their original form because of their value as a primary source. Ed.

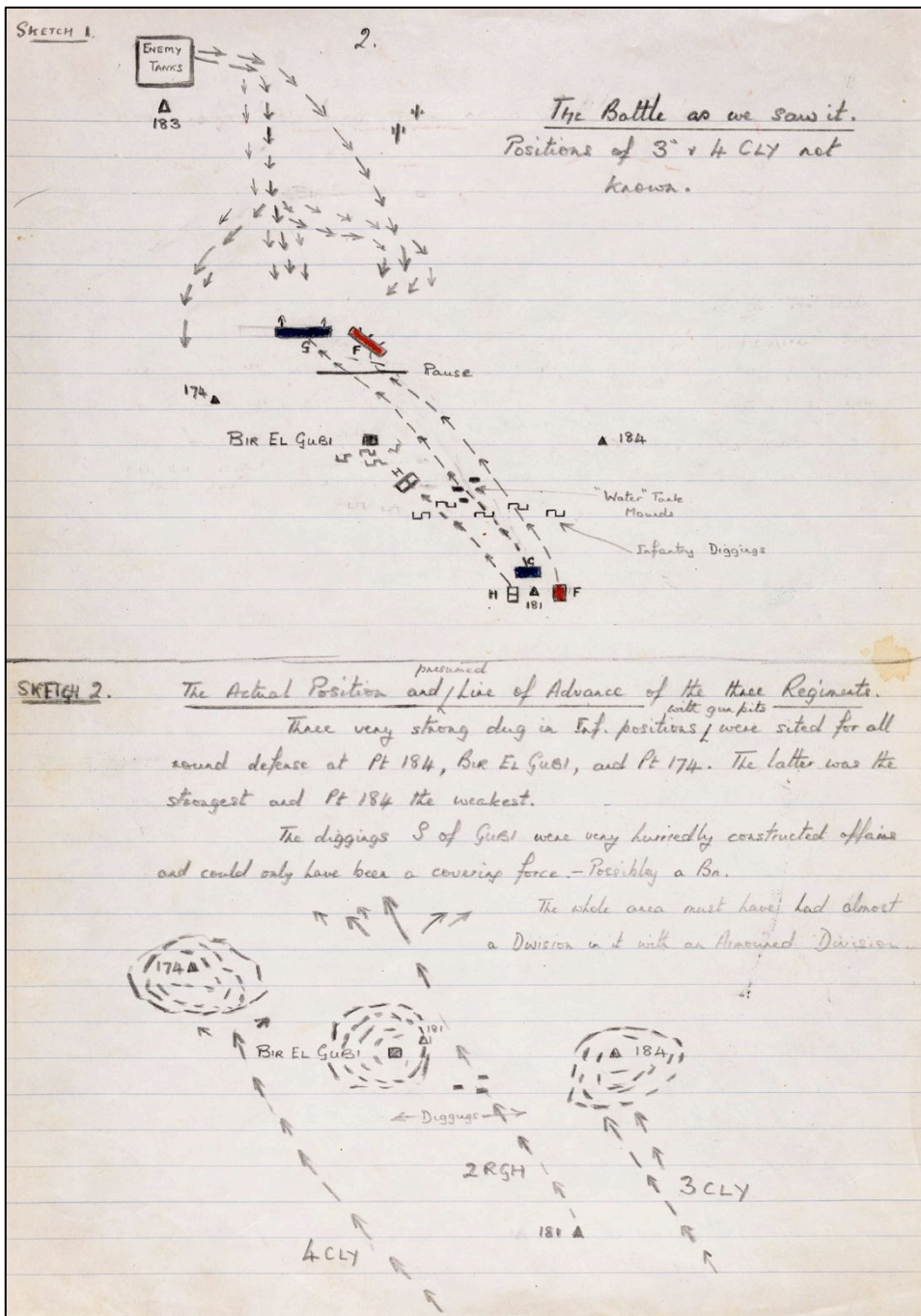


Figure 1: The text for sketch 1 reads: 'The battle as we saw it. The positions of 3 and 4 CLY not known.'

The text for sketch 2 reads: 'The Actual Position and presumed line of Advance of three Regiments. These very strong dug in Inf. positions with gun pits were sited for all round defence at Pt 184, BIR EL GUBI, and Pt 174. The latter was the strongest and Pt 184 were the weakest. The diggings S of Gubi were very hurriedly constructed affairs and could only have been a covering force. — Possibly a Bn. The whole area must have had about a Division in it with an Armoured Division.'

On 20 November, the day following the Battle of El Gubi, Trevor writes that a South African Infantry Brigade carried out a reconnaissance on El Gubi but decided the enemy position was too strong and it was not actually captured until that Brigade was strengthened by a squadron of 'I' tanks³ some 10 days later.

Operation CRUSADER was mainly about Tobruk. General Erwin Rommel (1891-1944), commander Panzer Africa, was determined it should be captured and also he had ambitions to destroy the Allied positions on the Egyptian Libyan boarder and then sweep into Egypt and on to Alexandria. The Allies' aim was to destroy the enemy armour in Cyrenaica and raise the siege. The engagements during 18 November to 5 December became a ferocious war of

³ Infantry tanks such as the slow but remarkably resilient Matildas and Valentines.

attrition conducted over a relatively small area. El Gubi is some 40 miles due south of Tobruk; Sidi Rezegh⁴ about 20 miles south east of Tobruk and about 20 miles due north of El Gubi. By way of comparison a rough measurement of Salisbury Plain Training Area is about 10 miles north to south and 15 miles east to west. The engagements in which 2 RGH were involved in and around Sid Rezegh between 18th to 30th November were, according to the maps of the Regimental Navigator Lt Boyd as reproduced in Stuart Pitman's History, within an area approximately 10 miles north to south and 15 miles east to west.

In or passing through this area were, during this 8-day period, amongst others, three British Armoured Brigades, 6th New Zealand Division, two South African Brigades, two Panzer Divisions and the Ariete and Trieste Divisions. It was a busy patch of Libyan desert. 19th November 1941 was not all bad news for the Allies as 7th Armoured Brigade captured Sidi Rezegh airfield along with 19 Italian aircraft. By the evening Rommel concluded that the Allies were trying to prevent his attack on Tobruk and maybe even raise the siege. He therefore ordered General Ludwig Cruwell (1892-1958), commander of the Africa Korps, to destroy them before they could interrupt his plans.

On 20 November 2 RGH were reduced to 19 operational tanks. The CO, Lt Col Birley, before accepting the Brigade Commander's direct order to be evacuated as a battle casualty, had directed that the 2i/c Major Mylne would assume command and Maj Trevor would command the single composite squadron. Rommel directed Cruwell to redirect the advance of his two Panzer Divisions, the 15th and 21st. His orders were intercepted, and 4th Armoured Brigade were warned to expect an attack by the two Divisions.

A bruised and battered 22nd Armoured Brigade whose morale was not high were ordered to move to assist them. Brigade HQ, struggling to identify both the enemy positions and those of the Allies, made what Trevor described as 'a cumbersome and tryingly slow' advance. They did not arrive until about 17.40 and no orders to go into action were received. 4th Armoured Brigade lost 26 tanks and enemy losses were estimated at 30. The result of this ferocious engagement was considered by the Allies to be inconclusive. The Panzer Army Group's Battle Report for 20 November makes it clear that they now appreciated that the Allies had launched a major offensive. This was conveniently confirmed for them by a British broadcast from Cairo which announced that the object of the large and well-equipped 8th Army was to destroy Axis forces in North Africa and link up with the Free French; scant regard for 'careless talk'.

Rommel now viewed with some concern the prospect of a long struggle for which his resources were none too plentiful. However, ever the optimist, he took the view that 4th Armoured Brigade had been neutralised and ordered his forces to move to Sidi Rezegh and destroy the Allied forces there next day.

The fighting around the Sidi Rezegh airfield from 21 to 24 November was the fiercest yet seen in the Desert and unbelievably confused. The situation changed rapidly, tanks suddenly appearing from one direction and then in another in a haze of dust and smoke. Four Victoria Crosses were won, including one by the legendary Brig 'Jock' Campbell RHA. To add to the

⁴ The only obvious feature at Sid Rezegh is the tomb of an Arab saint and his son which remarkably still stands. Its significance was the airfield just to the east of the tomb which had been constructed by the Axis forces. The airfield was on high ground close to the Trigh Capuzzo road.

mix, on the night of 20/21 November the breakout from Tobruk was launched by 70th Division, adding yet more forces to the melee.

21 November found 22nd Armoured Brigade some 25 miles to the south-east of El Gubi. They were ordered to move north-west towards Sid Rezegh and by 15.00 hours Trevor records that they saw a major tank battle some 3-4 miles to their right. This was the assault by 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions on 7th Armoured Brigade's position near the airfield. 4th Armoured Brigade were ordered north-east to try and intercept these two divisions.

The overall position on 22 November was described in volume 3 of the Official History of World War II as being beyond extraordinary.⁵ Within the 20 miles or so from the forward edge of the Tobruk break out to the open desert south-east of Sidi Rezegh the forces of both sides were sandwiched like some Neapolitan ice cream. Starting in the north (ie, nearest to coast) there were the break out forces of 70th Division, opposed by Axis troops facing north and west; below them a layer of Axis troops facing south opposed by part of the Allied 7th Support Group who were on ground to the north of the airfield; below them, the rest of the 7th Support Group and 7th Armoured Brigade facing south to oppose 15th and 21st Panzer Divisions being pursued by 4th and 22nd Armoured Brigades. There were also German regiments both to the east of the Airfield at Point 175 and to the west of it.

The author of the Official History commented, 'A complicated situation indeed, which, if suggested as the setting for a training exercise, must have been rejected for the reason that in real life these things simply could not happen.' A battery commander spoken to by Trevor on the advance to the airfield said his guns had started the day firing first west, then east and then north, and therefore on the law of averages he considered the battle would open up on the south.

22nd Armoured Brigade were advancing north towards the airfield to support 7th Armoured Brigade; the two Brigades had some 107 tanks between them. They were facing a force of some 70 enemy tanks moving east along the ridge to the north of 22nd Brigade who were ordered forward to deny them the high ground. As 4th CLY came onto the ridge they came under heavy fire. The RGH were ordered to try and work along the valley below the ridge to try and encircle the enemy armour. However, they came into contact with heavy fire from dug in infantry positions with anti-tank guns. Trevor's tank was knocked out and the crew bailed out. They were rescued from the intense fire fight by Captain Ling who took them to where they could walk to safety towards the South African 5th Brigade leaguer, as shown in Trevor's sketch 3 below (Figure 2).

⁵ See Maj-Gen ISO Playfair, *The Mediterranean and Middle East Volume III (September 1941 to September 1942) British Fortunes reach their Lowest Ebb*, in *History of the Second World War United Kingdom Military Series*, ed by Sir James Butler.

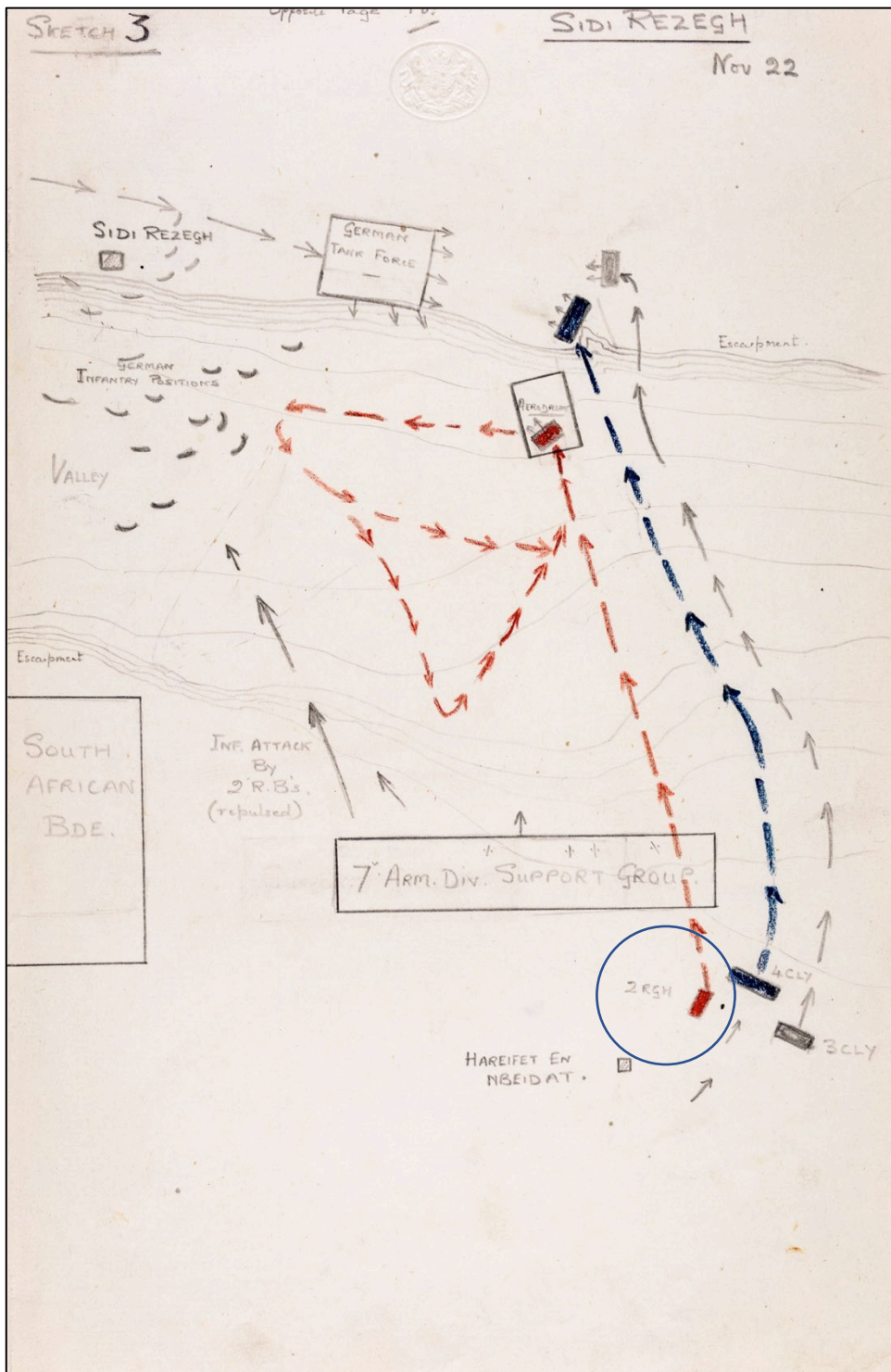


Figure 2: Sketch 3 showing the action at Sidi Rezegh, 22 November 1941. The circle showing the starting position of 2 RGH is editorial.

Capt Ling returned to take command of the squadron that was 2 RGH. There then followed a small piece of comic drama, normally only found in 'Action Films' which Bill Trevor recorded as follows:

Unfortunately for him Ling his internal communication (Tannoy) went out of action immediately after the order 'Driver advance - go like hell'. To everybody's astonishment his tank was seen to race back into the valley and straight up the hill the other side as though to charge into the mass of German tanks. Somehow directions

were shouted at the driver and the tank swung left, amidst a hail of shells, continuing left-headed right through (and over) the dug in infantry as it swept round and back into the valley. Miraculously it came through unscathed, though hit in three of four places.

Lt Norris King also distinguished himself when, on seeing another tank knocked out, he managed to find a tow rope notwithstanding the heat of the battle and returned to tow the disabled tank to safety. This contributed to him being awarded an MC⁶. The RGH covered the withdrawal of 3rd and 4th CLY and as the Brigade were going into leaguer, they were ordered to move again to protect the West flank of the 5th South African Brigade position some five miles to the south of Sidi Rezegh.

The South Africans were under threat from an attack by at least one of the Panzer Divisions. Trevor, although not present, and Stuart Pitman both record that the night move was a nightmare and the hours of darkness which followed were some of the most unpleasant ever spent. The crews were not allowed to sleep outside their tanks and spent a bitterly cold night sitting up in the tanks with two crew members on watch. Pitman recalls that after fighting continuously for a week and taking heavy casualties and being forced to withdraw from every engagement because of German tank superiority, moral was not good. He adds that if they had known that 22nd Armoured Brigade were practically the only armour left to oppose the 100 plus German tanks quietly re-fuelling some 3 miles away, moral would have been even lower.⁷

Trevor and his crew who were on foot linked up with Lt Mitchell whose tank was on tow behind Sgt Anderson's. He (Anderson) had left the battle with a jammed gun, but seeing Mitchell's tank had been hit, returned not only to rescue the crew, but to attach a tow rope under heavy fire and get tank and crew out. He was awarded the MM.

The battle was not going well for the Allies. By the end of the day HQ 4th Armoured Brigade had been overrun as it went into leaguer with the 8th Hussars. Fifty tanks were lost, and 267 prisoners taken. 7th Armoured Brigade was reduced from 28 fit tanks to ten, and 22nd Armoured Brigade from 79 to 34. The Germans still had 173 tanks fit to fight. Rommel was determined to destroy the Allied forces threatening the encirclement of Tobruk and he ordered Cruwell to send 21st Panzer Division south from Sidi Rezegh and 15th Panzer Division east to crush the remnants of 4th and 7th Armoured Brigades who were on the east flank of the 5th South African Brigade box and 22nd Armoured Brigade who were on its west flank.

The night of 22/23 November was not so bad for Trevor who records that he spent the night with four 'derelict' cruiser tanks and their crews including Lt Mitchel, Sgt White and Cpl Brackenbury.⁸ Trevor met up with Capt Brenchley, the Technical Adjutant, in his scout car. He eventually located the Regiment and the Brigade on the north west of the South African leaguer, but not before he had witnessed three German tanks driving unopposed into it. It was not until Trevor encouraged the crew of a semi derelict CLY tank to engage these tanks (which

⁶ In July 1944 King was awarded a bar to his MC whilst serving as a squadron leader of 153rd Regt RAC in Normandy when he assumed command when the CO became a casualty. He was awarded the DSO in May 1945 for his leadership and drive whilst commanding 49th APC Regt being part of 31st Armoured Bde.

⁷ See Stuart Pitman, *Second Royal Gloucestershire Hussars Libya-Egypt 1941-1942* (Uckfield, 2014), p 24.

⁸ Mitchel was killed just after Christmas and White on 6 December in a Messerschmitt attack whilst the Regiment was re-equipping with Stuart ('Honey') tanks.

they did but without success) that the South Africans were alerted to their presence at which point the tanks were destroyed by 25-pounders firing at point blank range. Trevor concluded that the South Africans had no idea what a German tank looked like. He noted that from then on, the South Africans assumed every tank to be hostile and even in a scout car, their route through the Leaguer became very precarious!

22nd Armoured Brigade had by then been reduced to three composite squadrons commanded by Lt Col Carr (4th CLY) and Trevor assumed command of the RGH squadron which had 17 tanks. This meant there was a surplus of officers and Majors Mylne and Reinhold and Lieutenants Adlard, Snell and Pitman were sent back to 'B' Echelon in the South African leaguer (see Figure 3 below) to try and find more tanks and to also to prevent them from the unnecessary risks they would incur by being without cover or the protection of armour in the forward area. As it turned out, the South African leaguer provided no safety at all. Although not known to 22nd Armoured Brigade at the time, HQ 4th Armoured Brigade was still disorganised. The 8th Hussars were no longer a fighting force which left 3rd and 5th Bns RTR, but it would take 24 hours to reorganise the Brigade. 7th Armoured Brigade had suffered tremendous casualties, the 7th Hussars and 6th Bn RTR were no longer capable of carrying on, which left a depleted 2nd Bn RTR in A13 tanks (an earlier model of the cruiser tanks which later evolved into the Crusaders used by the RGH).

22nd Armoured Brigade was tasked with protecting the left or West flank of the South African Leaguer. 4th and 7th Brigades were to do the same on the east flank. They started by facing north but then an armoured car reported that a hundred German tanks were advancing from the south. The general plan was that, if attacked, the Brigades was to withdraw in the hope of drawing the enemy tanks onto the South African 25-pounders and 2-pounders. However, as these were not dug in and were surrounded by 'B' vehicles, Trevor commented that they did not have much confidence in this plan. (See Figure 3 below.)

Trevor described the 'South African Leaguer', as it was known, as comprising some one thousand 'B' vehicles in the Leaguer with the guns on the outside poorly dug where the rocky ground permitted. He concluded that whoever was responsible for the SA Brigade on the ground could have had no idea of what they were up against and that all round defence was essential when tanks were about. There should have been a small defensive box and the 'B' vehicles should have been evacuated rather than being parked up 'somewhere in the desert' as if on a training exercise.

The enemy tanks were clearly visible refuelling behind a quickly constructed Infantry/ Anti-tank screen and both sides were able to watch each other through binoculars. Regrettably the South African 25-pounders failed to engage this sitting target and the only allied aircraft seen all day was a single Hurricane so a further opportunity to inflict serious damage was lost. The enemy tanks withdrew from view to split up out of sight. During the next four hours the leaguer was attacked by the enemy armour from the south on two fronts and by lorry borne Infantry from the north. The RGH lost contact with the CLY squadrons. They continued to engage the enemy tanks attacking from the south but were unable to make much impact on the enemy armour, being as Trevor described 'a miserably small and ineffective force' and were down to ten tanks. Crews whose tanks had been knocked out made their way into the leaguer.

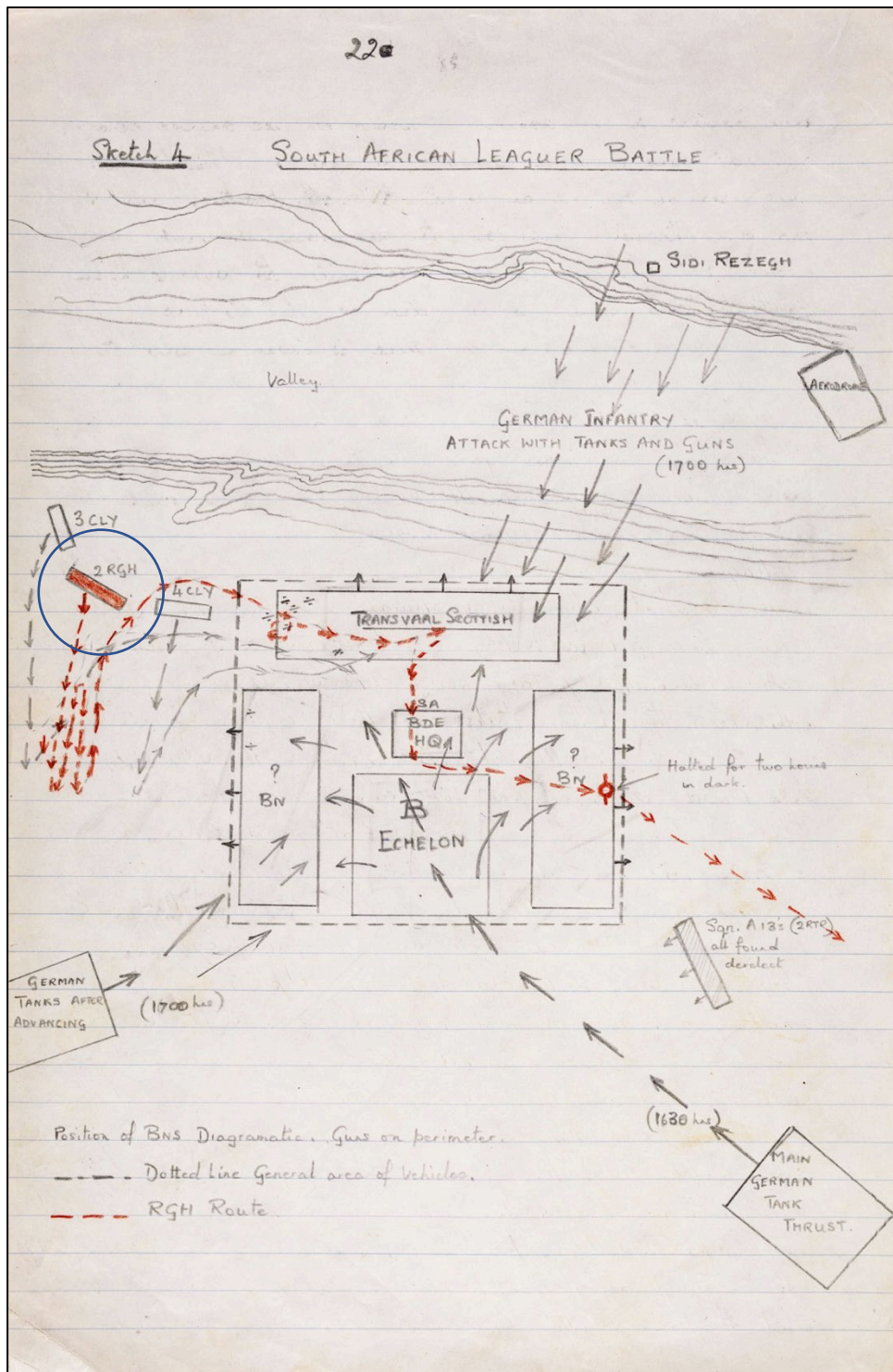


Figure 3: Trevor's sketch 4, showing the South African leaguer, the lines of German attacks, and the original position and following movements of 2 RGH (the circle showing 2 RGH is editorial).

The RGH continued to take the battle to the enemy and moved to the north east to engage the reported assault by enemy infantry. Lts King, Bourne and Cookson 'found' the infantry attack, which was supported by tanks and guns, and engaged it. King's tank was eventually knocked out, its barrel being blown off. He was awarded the MC for his actions on this day and the previous one; Lt Bourne became a POW. Lt Cookson somehow linked up with Lt Col Carr whose tank then went up in a sheet of flame. Cookson collected Carr and his crew (which

included Maj Kidstone 2i/c 4th CLY) and managed to make his way out of the leaguer, albeit with a holed radiator which meant the engine eventually seized up although it lasted long enough to get everyone to safety. Lt Adlard had taken a tank into the leaguer for repair and when the assault came in, elected to stay and work with the SA gunners directing fire and helping them to distinguish the enemy tanks from our own. He was awarded an MC on their recommendation.

By dusk the remnants of the RGH Squadron were on the north east side of the leaguer. The two HQ tanks linked up with Capts Ling and Hart, and Lt Anderson joined them with an SA truck complete with a 25-pounder in tow. Lt King and his crew and Lt Bourne arrived on foot. They moved out onto the east flank of the leaguer which had clearly been overrun by the enemy. There was a bright moon and German voices could be heard whilst SA vehicles were being looted. 2nd Lt Muir's operator made contact with Brigade who gave him their position in clear. Capt Ling worked out the bearing and distance Whilst they waited for the moon to set a German column passed within 150 yards from them. When darkness fell four tanks, a SA armoured car and Lt Adlard with his 15-cwt lorry set off at a speed seldom seen in the desert. When a halt was called there was no sign of Lt Adlard who was subsequently reported as captured nor the armoured car. A more normal pace was set eventually reaching Brigade HQ with Capt Hart's tank on tow.

Trooper Young was killed and Trooper Pearce was wounded. He was taken to a first aid post by Lt King which was later overrun by the enemy and then recaptured, a not uncommon occurrence. In addition to Lt Adlard, Lts Snell and Skinner and twelve other ranks were captured. Sgt Caudle was thought to be missing but he had in fact been 'captured' by 5th RTR and made to command a tank for two days. When he found out the location of the RGH he handed over his tank to the Operator, raised his hat and walked back to the Regiment. The South Africans had 3,394 casualties, mostly POWs. Trevor concluded his account by recording, 'We all sincerely hope that we never have to take part in such a depressing and demoralising battle again.'

Elsewhere events were more positive for the Allies. The New Zealand Division were continuing their advance towards Tobruk and the breakout by 70th Division. Considerably to the south what was known as the Oasis force was advancing west and despite German and Italian bombing captured first Aujilia and then on 22nd November Jalo capturing over 600 Italians. Their objective was El Agheila in the Gulf of Sirte south of Bengazi on the western coast of Cyrnaica. However, a shortage of fuel meant they were then more or less static until 20 December and on half rations.



Figure 4: Bill Trevor (third from left) in conference.



Figure 5: Map showing principal locations and actions of the RGH during winter 1941-42.



Figure 6: Antalat 1942,¹ from left to right, Bob Mansell, Bill Jerden, Jeff Gordon-Creed, unknown, unknown, Bill Trevor, Tim Slee, Norris Reinhold, Mic Muir, Bill Llewelyn, Tim Pitman, Tommy Crossman, Leslie Coqn, Teddy Milvain, Tommy Lawton and Sam Lloyd.

John Penley

**COLOUR SERGEANT JAMES CLOW,
28TH (NORTH GLOUCETSHIRE) REGIMENT OF FOOT,
1824-1855**

Clare Wichbold MBE

With an unusual surname like Wichbold (my married name), there are lots of interesting opportunities for my husband Dave and me to do genealogical research. I was fascinated to discover someone in Dave's family tree who married a soldier in the 28th Regiment of Foot and decided to find out more about him - and her!

James Clow was born in the village of Parham in Suffolk in March 1824. The son of a gamekeeper, he first appears in the records as a private during the time the Regiment spent in India. James arrived at Camp Poona at the end of October 1844 and became a corporal on 1 January 1845. A year later he was promoted to sergeant, but then he appears to have suffered ill health during the summer of 1846, spending time in hospital at Camp Deesa. He returned to duties in the autumn and finally travelled back to England in 1848 with the Regiment, spending a long sea voyage aboard the *Emperor*.

He then spent the next few years on home service, including recruiting campaigns across the country encompassing places such as Bristol, Gloucester, Cheltenham and Manchester. Prior to that while in Portsmouth in 1851 he met Clarissa Wichbold (1827-1868), one of eight daughters of the late Johan Gottlieb Wichbold (1787-1840), a Prussian sea captain who made his home in England after the Napoleonic War - and Dave's three times great grandfather. Clarissa was living in Portsmouth with her widowed mother Louisa and four of her unmarried sisters; James was probably seen as a good marital prospect. He is found on the 1851 Census stationed at the Regents Road Barracks in Salford; on 18 October that year the couple were married nearby at Richmond Chapel on Broughton Road. This was an Independent chapel, opened in 1846, with 800 seats and a Sunday School; the building is now demolished. Why they married there is a bit of a mystery, as both were from Anglican stock, and there were no family members present. However, there appears to not have been a rift as Clarissa returned to Portsmouth in 1854, when the Regiment sailed for the Crimea.

James wrote home to his parents on 22 June from Gallipoli, with a remarkably descriptive letter was printed in the *Ipswich Journal* on 22 July. Note how he commences each paragraph with a fresh endearment to his father.

My dear father and mother, after an absence of a long time, I now sit down on the ground to write a few lines to you which I hope will find you all quite well, as I am happy to say they leave me at present: thank God for it. I dare say you thought me dead, but thank God I am in the land of the living yet, but a dangerous one. We have not been engaged yet, but I think a few days will tell tales, and we are now laying in tents on top of a high hill, where we have been ever since Easter Sunday. We left England on the 22nd of February for Malta, and we landed on the 4th day of March, and stopped there until the 7th of April. Then we set sail for Gallipoli where we landed on Easter Sunday, an Easter Sunday I shall forever remember for the snow fell very heavy, and then we had to march up to the top of a high hill, there to encamp; and it

was very cold, but at 3 o'clock, to our great joy, the sun broke out upon us and to our great pleasure the snow disappeared, and made us more comfortable; but now the sun is hot; very nearly as hot as when I was in India. We are now going up to a place called Varna, nearer to the Russians; we shall expect to begin within a short time. I believe all the army are to assemble around that place - English and French - and then we shall be very strong. We have a great number of French encamped with us. I have not seen brother David [serving with the 1st Battalion Coldstream Guards] since I left Malta; he is at Constantinople but he is going to Varna so I shall soon see him.

Dear father I have often wished to go into battle, and I think I shall soon have my wish now, for I think a few days more will bring us into it, but I do not care as long as I have my health and strength. As soon as it is over, if the Almighty spare my life, I will let you know all about it. How is Mr and Mrs Clarke? I hope they are quite well likewise my brothers and sisters and all enquiring friends around my native home.

Dear Father, my wife is at Portsmouth, with her friends. She was quite well the last time I heard from her, and I live in hope of seeing you all again. Turkey is a fine country, but very hilly, and good soil, if the Turks could till it. If we had some of our old English farmers here they would soon make a fortune. There is no beer here - nothing but wine: we get a pint of wine for twopence, so you see it is very cheap, and it is pretty good. You must excuse this bad writing and mistakes, as I am now laying on the ground, for we have no table or stool to sit on, and our bed is our greatcoat and one blanket. I often get up with sore bones in the morning, but nothing better can be provided for us in this country, and I think most likely it will be worse before it will be better. Let it be as it may. I am contented. Our living is middling, cannot complain where we are. I have not more at present to say, but give my love to all enquiring friends, and brother Frederick and his wife, and hope all is well, so I remain your affectionate son for ever, Sgt James Clow, 28th Regiment.

On 11 August 1854 James was promoted to Colour Sergeant and would have been with Ensign James Williams as he carried the colours at the Battle of the Alma. He was also recorded as being at the Battle of Inkerman. However, as the autumn turned to winter and the siege of Sevastopol continued, James' hopes of returning to England were not to be fulfilled. He was transferred to the Hospital at Scutari and died there on 2 January 1855, the cause of death being given as 'gelatio' (frostbite); he was one of over 150 men who had succumbed to disease and the cold as reported to the Commandant's office by the medical authorities between 31 December 1854 to 3 January 1855.

And what of James' wife, Clarissa? She never remarried and appears on the 1861 Census as a fundholder residing at Hoxton in London. Clarissa lived until 1868, when she died of cancer aged 41 in the care of her sister Eliza back in Portsmouth. All Clarissa's sisters did eventually marry; their brother Edwin became a successful mariner like his father and carried on the Wichbold family line to the present day.

Clare Wichbold

THE POLISH SOLDIERS OF GLOUCETERSHIRE

Lieutenant Colonel Ralph Stephenson TD

On 3 September 1939, Great Britain declared war on Nazi Germany as, in the words of Neville Chamberlain, ‘unless we heard from them [Hitler’s Government] by 11 o’clock that they were prepared at once to withdraw their troops from Poland, a state of war would exist between us. I have to tell you now that no such undertaking has been received, and that consequently this country is at war with Germany.’

On 23 August 1939 an agreement of neutrality between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, had been signed in Moscow. This document guaranteed peace between the two nations, but it also included a secret agreement regarding the Soviet and German interests in Poland and the future of the Baltic States.

Following this agreement, Nazi Germany invaded Poland on 1 September 1939. A short, fierce war against Germany, from 1 September to 6 October followed. It was not always an easy victory for the Nazis invaders, as 37 Polish divisions, many of them newly formed and fighting with little unit training and poor communications⁹, fought the 56 full-strength German divisions. The Polish Army inflicted significant losses to the leading German troops; over 16,000 were killed before 28 September and some units retired before the Polish tenacity. As hastily erected defensive positions were broken, severe reprisals were taken on Polish civilians; executions of unarmed civilians and the burning of villages occurred daily throughout September, many captured troops, police, postal and railway workers who had joined the defence of towns and cities, were shot in the streets after surrendering. About 420,000 Polish soldiers became prisoners of war of the Germans and many were murdered, but probably as many as 84,000 troops evaded or deserted from forced conscription into the German Army. They fled to the west, driven by the desire to continue the fight against the Nazi regime. By May 1940 there were 84,000 trained Polish soldiers in France or French controlled Syria.

While still fighting the Nazis in the west, Poland was invaded from the east by the Soviet Union just 17 days later. By the end of the month Poland was a divided country. About a quarter of a million troops were captured by the Soviet forces and sent into exile across Russia and Siberia to exist under a harsh regime in appalling conditions. Those remaining as fighting units, probably up to 120,000, were ordered



Figure 1: Zones of German and Russian occupation of Poland, September 1939.

⁹ ‘It did not help, to put it mildly, that the Poles had given in to Anglo-French pressure and cancelled the order of mobilization on 29 August, before re-issuing it the following day. The result was widespread confusion and only about a third of the Polish Army were correctly deployed at the time of invasion.’ Tim Bouverie, *Appeasing Hitler*.

by the existing Polish command to leave Poland through the 'Romanian Bridgehead' to neutral Romania, at that time still sympathetic to Poland's plight, or Hungary and make their way to France or the Middle East. In the Soviet occupied provinces between one and two million citizens were forcibly deported to the USSR, whilst many from the educated or professional classes were executed. (The Katyn massacre of nearly 22,000 Polish officers in April/May 1940 is an example of this brutality). All Polish institutions, banks, schools and universities were closed and the Russian language compulsorily introduced. Over the period of German and Soviet occupation it is estimated that 5.7 million people, one fifth of population, died or were murdered.



Figure 2: Polish POWs captured by the Soviet Army. Many were executed, including a massacre of about 20,000 army and police officers by the Soviet secret police (NKVD) in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk, in 1940.

Those who had gathered in France in 1939 formed a new Polish Army, under General Sikorski, at the direction of the Polish Government-in-exile, which was based in Paris. They formed four Polish Divisions (1st Grenadier Div., 2nd Infantry Fusiliers Div., 3rd and 4th Infantry Divisions), a motorized brigade (10th Bde. of Armoured Cavalry) and an infantry brigade (Polish Independent Highland Bde.). The 1st and 2nd Divisions fought alongside the French whilst the further two infantry divisions and the motorized brigade were still in the process of training during the Battle of France. Troops arriving in England formed the Polish Independent Highland Brigade and fought in the

Battles of Narvik, during the ill-fated expedition to Norway in 1940.

After the Fall of France, the Polish Government-in-exile reformed in London and between 20,000 and 35,000 troops were evacuated to Great Britain. These formed the basis of the Polish I Corps (Polish 1st Armoured Div., Polish Independent Parachute Bde., 4th Infantry Div. and the 16th Independent Armoured Bde.) commanded by Gen. Stanislaw Maczek.

Units that had escaped through the Romanian Bridgehead, travelled through Romania, Hungary, Greece and Yugoslavia to the French Mandate of Syria, where they formed the Polish Independent Carpathian Brigade. Refusing to be interred in Syria at the collapse of the French Government in 1940 they marched into British Administered Palestine and thence to Egypt to join the Allied forces.

In June 1941 'Operation Barbarossa', the unexpected and ambitious invasion of the Soviet Union by Nazi Germany, changed everything for the imprisoned Polish army and thousands of innocent civilians who had been deported to the gulags of Russia. Troops and civilians alike were released by the Soviets under an agreement between Stalin and the Polish Government-in-exile. General Anders was able to form an army 75,000 strong but with little logistical support from the Soviets to train his army, Anders transferred them and 20,000 civilians, across the Caspian Sea to Iran to join the British 8th Army, forming the Polish II Corps (essentially the 3rd Carpathian Infantry Div., 5th Kresowa Infantry Div and 2nd Armoured Bde).

Polish troops from I Corps crossed to Normandy with the Canadian Army in August 1944, fighting in the battle for Caen, the Falaise Gap and the 'Para' element memorably at Arnhem,

and into Holland. Those of II Corps, after fighting on North Africa, were part of the forces in the Italian campaign, distinguishing themselves not only at Tobruk but also at Monte Cassino, where the Polish troops finally took the fortress, aiding the collapse of the Gothic Line in Italy. Other freed Polish soldiers formed Polish Divisions within Soviet Russia and fought alongside the Russians all the way to Berlin.

At the end of the War there were about 200,000 Polish troops in the west and this number increased after Polish soldiers were released by the Allies from



Figure 3: top, Lt Gen Wladyslaw Sikorski (1881-1943), prime minister Polish government in exile and C-in-C Polish Armed Forces, and bottom, Lt Gen Wladyslaw Anders (1892-1970), GOC Polish II Corps.

prisoner-of-war camps and forced labour camps in Germany and Russia. Over the next year Polish units acting as ‘Occupation Troops’ were withdrawn from Germany and Italy and brought to the United Kingdom, bringing the total to about a quarter of a million. Many families were reunited after those who had been cared for in Red Cross camps in India and Africa, after travelling from Russia, were also brought to England. Once it became clear that Poland was now under the Communist ‘Polish Committee of National Liberation’ Polish troops knew that, to them, the war had brought defeat and not victory. Some were unable to consider returning to their homeland for fear of punishment, detention or even execution, but about 100,000 did return to their homeland.

The final insult to the Polish Army was to be refused an invitation to join the Victory Parade, in London, on 8 June 1946, by the newly installed Labour Government for fear of upsetting Stalin. Many senior political and military figures protested strongly against this exclusion as ‘an affront to the Polish war effort as well as an immoral concession to communist power’. Of the remainder, many accepted assisted passages to Canada, USA or South America but 160,000 remained in the UK and were housed in empty army camps across the country, after public opinion was seen to support their cause. The Polish Resettlement Corps was created under British Army supervision, allowing Polish troops to be transferred to the Corps and await discharge from wartime service and promising accommodation, English language classes and offering courses in differing trades and business skills.

Eight of these camps were in Gloucestershire and the Museum has created a display case with some Polish artefacts and explanatory wallboards to remember these ‘Soldiers of Gloucestershire’.

Some longstanding residents of Gloucestershire will remember some of these camps:

Northwick Camp – Built in 1943 as the American 327th Stationary Hospital. After conversion to a German POW camp, it was occupied by Polish families from 1947 until 1970. A Polish Cemetery at Blockley contains the graves of 122 Poles.

Springhill Lodges Camp – Built as an army camp it housed German POWs during the war until 1947 when it became a Polish Hostel run by the National Assistance Board.

Stowell Park – Built as an American 160th General Hospital it became a boarding grammar school for young people connected with the Polish 2nd Corps and the 1st Polish Armoured Division, as well as those liberated from prisoner of war camps, the numbers reaching 419 by 1950. It was closed in 1954.

Ullenwood Camp – Originally built as the American 32nd General Hospital, which was the first Allied Hospital to land in France in July 1944. It then became a camp for German PoWs before being used by Polish families.

Babdown Camp – Opened as an RAF station in 1940, it was primarily a camp for single Polish men & women working locally and at R.A. Listers at Dursley, but there were some families with children there from 1948 until 1955.

Daglingworth – Originally built as an American Army camp, it was used as a Transit Camp for Polish families arriving from Displaced Persons Camps in Africa and Europe before being reunited with their families in other camps in the UK. It held several hundred families from 1947 to 1962, mainly from the Polish II Corps.

Fairford Camp – Built as American 32nd Field Hospital it was one of the largest camps, eventually holding 1215 Polish residents from 1947 until 1958.

Southrop Camp – Built in 1940, this served as an RAF Relief Airfield to South Cerney Airfield, with a Maintenance and Serving Area. Between 1947 and 1950 it housed Polish families.



Figure 4: The 'No Greater Ally' display at the top of the stone staircase in the Museum illustrates the journey that thousands of Poles from Russian POW camps took through the Middle East to join British forces during WWII. A quarter of a million remained in the UK after the war and were accommodated in empty military camps. The camps in Gloucestershire are described in the boards either side of the main display. The main display case illustrates the wartime history of one Polish soldier who fought in Europe and later lived and worked in Gloucestershire but never saw his homeland again.

Ralph Stephenson

FRIENDS OF THE SOLDIERS OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE MUSEUM

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Badminton Horse Trials – FOSGM Lunch

Thursday 5th May 2022

RGH Association Marquee

Two course meal with coffee, £20 (tbc, any surplus to the Friends), pay bar
Tickets available from Hon Sec, simoncolbeck@msn.com, book by Monday 2nd May

For further information please call 07444 701884 or leave a message

‘Come and have a break from shopping and bring your friends.’

Summer Reception

Tuesday 21st June 2022, 6.30-8.30 pm

The Manor, Frampton on Severn

By kind permission of Lt Col and Mrs R Clifford

Chavenage Lecture

Friday 28th October 2022, 6.45pm

Chavenage House, Tetbury

Lecturer: Nick Welch OBE

Annual General Meeting

Tuesday 1st November 2022, 7.00pm

The Long Room, Soldiers of Gloucestershire Museum, The Docks, Gloucester,
GL1 2HE

MUSEUM FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Gloucester Tall Ships 2022

3rd-5th June 2022, The Docks, Gloucester

Calling all budding authors...

We welcome contributions from members and our associates on subjects related to the Museum, the military life of Gloucestershire, and more general aspects of military history. Please contact the Editor, Dr Tim Brain on timothy.brain@btinternet.com, who will be very pleased to offer advice.