

News in brief

Documentary project to commemorate Norwegian fighter squadrons

Tomorrow, in a ceremony at the Imperial War Museum London, the third volume of a vast documentary project that has been under way for more than three years will be presented to the museum's director, Diane Lees.

The aim of the project, entitled *Spitfire Saga*, is to establish a detailed six-volume history of the two Norwegian fighter squadrons, Nos. 331 and 332, that were part of the RAF during the Second World War, operating in Scotland, England and on the Continent between 1941-45. The units were made up mainly of Norwegian personnel, as well as a few Danish pilots and ground crews and one Swedish pilot. The history, written by Cato Guhnfeldt, describes the work of the pilots, the aircraft they flew and the air battles they fought in provides an insight into living conditions and war-time London. It is built on the memories of 150 veterans of the two squadrons who were interviewed between 1998 and 1999 and private diaries, letters and auto-biographies. Surviving combat reports will be reproduced alongside nearly 3,000 photographs and maps.

The project, which began in 2007, is run by the Air Staff of the Norwegian Air Force. Although written in Norwegian, each book contains chapter summaries, combat reports and captions in English.

Memorial dedicated to fallen Marines

A new memorial has been dedicated to members of 40 Commando Royal Marines, who have died serving Britain, at the unit's base, Norton Manor Camp, near Taunton. The families of 14 Marines, who have died in Afghanistan, attended the ceremony along with civilian fundraisers and branches of the Royal Marines Association. The memorial, in the shape of a black globe, was made of granite by a stonemason in Taunton. It is set in a garden where a memorial tree and plaque will be placed for each of those Marines killed in Afghanistan.

Claire Marsh whose husband, David Marsh, died in a roadside bomb blast in 2008 and who attended the ceremony with her daughter, said: "This garden is a lovely place to come and pay tribute to David. He was killed when driving with his colleague and friend Lieutenant John Thornton on patrol with the Fire Support Group. The garden is an ideal place to meet other families and I have spoken to John's family today."

**Navy remembers Battle of Taranto**

This week the Navy marked the 70th anniversary of the Battle of Taranto, the first time that an enemy fleet was so largely destroyed by naval aircraft launched from a ship. Operation Judgement, the mission to attack the Italian fleet at Taranto, culminated on November 11-12, 1940, and involved Swordfish biplanes, pictured, many armed with torpedoes, taking off from the aircraft carrier HMS *Illustrious*. The head of the Fleet Air Arm, Rear Admiral Tom Cunningham, Chief of Staff (Aviation and Carriers), said: "The success of the strike against the Italian battle fleet in Taranto typified the bravery and spirit of the Fleet Air Arm which continues to this day."



Soldiers from the Light Dragoons Battle Group take cover during Operation Panther's Claw in Afghanistan. The regiment has begun an operational casualties appeal

Uniting comrades past, present and future

Developed by the Victorians, regimental associations are facing up to new challenges

Allan Mallinson

Each November since its founding in 1921 the Royal British Legion — and the Royal British Legion Scotland — inspires the country to remember and honour those who have died serving in the Armed Forces. The Legion's charitable work is funded in large part by the annual Poppy Appeal. Each year, on Armistice Day, November 11, the Legion establishes Fields of Remembrance in London and Cardiff where poppy crosses, stars or crescents can be planted by the public.

This year, for the first time, there is an additional Field at Wootton Bassett in Wiltshire, the town through which the coffins of repatriated servicemen killed in Afghanistan pass after being flown into nearby RAF Lyneham, and in which the local branch of the Legion takes the lead in the unofficial honours for which the town has become famous. Prince Harry officially opened the Wootton Bassett Field on Tuesday. Branches of the Legion will also take the lead in countless Remembrance Sunday ceremonies throughout the country tomorrow.

However, most Legion members, all of them ex-servicemen and women, will also be members of a particular service association, whether of ship, corps or regiment. Army associations developed in the Victorian era to maintain contact between past and present members of the regiments and to foster esprit de corps. Many associations have a memorial to their own fallen, one of the most notable being that in Hyde

Park to those of the regiments of cavalry, to which the combined cavalry associations march in procession each second Sunday in May for a service of commemoration.

Association numbers gained an enormous boost after the Second World War, and for many years it was the ex-war members who predominated at memorials and other events. This is changing, however, as ex-war members grow steadily fewer. But paradoxically, if not surprisingly, many of those who remain have become more active.

In the Parachute Regiment Association, for example, Arnhem veterans talk to serving paratroopers prior to deployment to Afghanistan about their own experience of combat and to express their admiration for what the present-day Parachute battalions are doing. Senior officers attest to how morale is raised by the veterans of that epic of fighting spirit, the battle for the "bridge too far" at Arnhem in September 1944.

Other regiments organise battlefield tours, with association members who took part in the fighting, to encourage the current generation to emulate the feats of their forebears. One of the unintended consequences of the last round of infantry amalgamations has been to increase the number of Second World War veterans in the amalgamated associations, as the battle honours from the antecedent regiments are accorded to the new ones.

Many ex-national servicemen, who tended to look on their time in uniform as a memory not to prolong, are belatedly joining their associations and taking up the baton from the ex-war veterans, as too are the "baby boomers", who served throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Many now feel an obligation to honour the generation which tutored them in the soldier's art, as well as a sense of commitment to

supporting the present generation of men and women in their regiments who face a greater operational tempo than sometimes did they — although there has only been one year (1968) since the Second World War in which British soldiers have not been killed on operations.

The emphasis in associations is, indeed, on the needs of the present and future as much as on remembrance of fallen comrades, especially with the mounting casualties of Afghanistan on top of those in Iraq.

Every regiment in the Army has seen service in Iraq or Afghanistan, most of them in both, and many of them repeatedly. The majority of them sustained a casualty rate unseen since the Korean War. The Rifles, for example, an infantry regiment comprising five battalions, has suffered 300 serious battle-injured. Although, of course, NHS support will be available to those discharged from duty because of wounds, the broader aspects of welfare may not, especially those related to combat stress and to family — and particularly in economically troubled times.

The service charities, including the

Morale is raised by the fighting spirit of Second World War veterans

Royal British Legion, SSAFA (Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Families Association), the Army Benevolent Fund (The Soldiers' Charity) and those of the other services, are the national focus for fund-raising, advice and support. However as calls on these will grow even greater in the coming years, increasingly individual regiments are setting up their own appeals aimed at those with a sense of particular connection — by family, geography or

whatever — to supplement the funds available from the traditional charities.

One such is The Light Dragoons, a regiment which recruits in South Yorkshire, Humberside and the North-East. In Afghanistan last year it led the break-in battle during Operation Panther's Claw, and its casualties were disproportionately heavy — six killed and 43 wounded out of a regimental strength of 400. They return to Afghanistan in 18 months' time.

This week the regiment launched its operational casualties appeal, with an initial target of £1 million. Although their administrative headquarters is in Newcastle, the Light Dragoons have been stationed in Norfolk for the past ten years, and that county has already begun to show its particular support. For example, the legal work in setting up the charity has been done largely pro bono by East Anglian solicitors.

The regiment was formed in 1992 by the amalgamation of the 13th/18th Royal Hussars (Queen Mary's Own) and the 15th/19th King's Royal Hussars. Their history goes back to 1715, and their service has been remarkable: they charged at Waterloo and at Balaklava, heard the first shots at Mons in 1914, and swam specially adapted tanks ashore on D-Day.

The honorary colonel of the regiment, Major-General Andrew Stewart, whose grandfather served in the regiment in the Great War, and whose father served likewise in the Second World War, hopes that the operational casualties fund will draw donations from all who feel affinity or association with "England's Northern Cavalry".

Donations to the Light Dragoons' operational casualties appeal may be sent to: Home HQ The Light Dragoons, Fenham Barracks, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE2 4NP (cheques made out to: The Colonel's Appeal).