



Friends of the Herefordshire Light Infantry Museum



Newsletter

Number 18 - January 2024

Welcome: Your committee welcomes you to this the annual Friends' newsletter - we hope you enjoy it.

The year has been a busy one for the museum, refining and improving our displays, hosting visits and answering enquiries. In the Summer we prepared a display of Coronation and Jubilee medals and deployed this at the County's Cadet Coronation Review held on Castle Green in June. Over 200 cadets were on parade to commemorate the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla.

The website continues to be popular and the podcast is gaining listeners and again proving popular. 2024 sees the 80th anniversary of the D-Day and it is planned to place on the Museum website a monthly post of what the 1st Battalion was doing month by month from landing in Normandy on D+7 (13 June 1944) to VE Day (8 May 1945) – watch this space!



The Curator and Revd Paul Roberts record a Podcast in the Museum

The Friends' Committee

<i>Patron</i>	Mr Edward Harley
<i>President:</i>	Lt Gen Sir John Foley
<i>Chairman:</i>	Maj Robert Wallbridge
<i>Vice-Chairman:</i>	Maj Dave Seeney
<i>Secretary</i>	Revd Paul Roberts
<i>Members:</i>	
	Capt Hugh Patterson Mr Danny Rees
	Mr Pete Weston Sqn Ldr John Scott
	Maj James Hereford

Curator & Treasurer (ex officio): Col Andy Taylor

James Hereford has handed over as Chair of the Friends to Robert Wallbridge. James was instrumental in forming the Friends and was also curator having taking over from Tom Hill. We offer James a most heartfelt thanks for all that he has done for the Museum and The Rifles in Herefordshire.

Dates For The Diary:

- 20 Apr - Herefordshire Light Infantry Officers Dinner
- Jun (tbc) - LI Reunion - Shrewsbury
- 24 Jun - Flag Raising, Armed Forces Week
- 29 Jun - Armed Forces Day – Bromyard
- 7 Sep - Heritage Open Day (Museum Open Day)
- Sept/Oct (tbc) - AGM
- due to dwindling attendance this again is expected to be a 'hybrid' event with the committee meeting in person and others 'zooming' in as desired.



The County Cadet Coronation Review



The Coronation & Jubilee Medal Display



The Museum Gazebo

Acquisitions

The period has seen us acquire 3 deactivated weapons to add to our displays.

The first was a German manufactured Mauser rifle originally purchased by the Government of South Africa in 1896 and 'issued' to boers / farmers who used it for hunting, thus their skills were well honed when the war broke out in 1899 and rifles such as this were used against the British. The origin of this rifle is unknown but it was purchased in UK so was possibly a trophy weapon brought back after the Boer War. It features a 'charger' reload system thus considerably increased the rate of fire over the British single shot, individually loaded magazine fed weapons of the time (Long Lee + Lee Metford) and led to large scale change in British tactics and weapons design.



The second was a Bren Light Machine Gun Mk 1M which was donated to the Museum – the Bren was a favoured weapon gaining notoriety during the Second World War and remaining in use (although re chambered to 7.62mm) into the 1990s. This gun came in its transit box stencilled for Ord Depot Singapore. Its markings show it has been reworked at least twice but was originally manufactured in Australia but includes parts from Birmingham.



The third is a L1A1 Self Loading Rifle (SLR) 7.62mm the standard weapon of the British Forces during the Cold War from the 1960s to the 1990s taking over from the well known .303 Lee Enfield No4 rifle. Originally built in 1959/60, this example refurbished in the 1980s is in perfect condition and appears to have never left the armoury after refurb!

'Finds'

Three interesting 'finds' have been donated to the Museum:

The first was found under the floorboards of a house in Park St and included musket balls, an early Queen Victoria halfpenny and a Militia Button. Suvla Barracks was the Militia Barracks but had no accommodation, it is possible that Militiamen were billeted in local houses and one lost a button!



The second was found in Suvla Barracks, our assistant curator Danny Rees noticed an odd shaped disc on the ground and picked it up – it turned out to be a steel ID Disc from a soldier (Sgt D Wood) who enlisted in 1957 into The Herefords and was awarded the British Empire Medal as a sergeant cook in 1991.



The third was a metal detector find in the north of the county and although in poor condition it is a Herefordshire Volunteers Shako plate centre badge from the early 1800s and something the museum was unaware of.



RUM JARS



The Museum has recently acquired a stone 'rum jar' (sometimes called 'jordies') bearing the initials SRD and I am sure some will wonder what they are!

During the First World War it was the practice to issue soldiers with a tot of rum, the practice was widespread and certainly well received in the trenches:

- Providing warmth (and cheer) in cold and damp trenches - probably its most frequent use.
- As a reward, often for arduous or dangerous work (trench raids and attacks).
- Used externally as a Trench Foot preventer - quite a rare event as most preferred to apply it internally!
- As a pain killer

The ration was supposed to be 2 tablespoons full but was often more. The danger of excess of alcohol can give a false warmth and a loss of reality; this happened to the troops including The Herefordshire Regiment at Suvla Bay. After evacuation from the trenches after 4 days of continual rain and snow, and were much debilitated, they came across dumped rations including full rum jars. Many soldiers drank to excess and curled up to sleep and in the morning were found dead – literally frozen stiff. To many though the ration was a real warmer and comfort.

The initials SRD were a mystery to many soldiers! Even officially it is not entirely certain what it stood for – the most accepted version is 'Service Resupply Depot' but also quoted are 'Service Rum Diluted' and 'Services Rum Department'. The soldier however interpreted them differently: 'Soldiers Run Dry', 'Soon Runs Out' and probably the most favoured 'Seldom Reaches Destination'! It was generally the Sergeant Major's job to dole out the rum and trench songs were created around this:

If you want to find the sergeant-major, I know where he is, He's boozing up the privates' rum

One soldier remarked (rather poetically!):

And then there's rum. Rum of course is our chief great good. The Ark of the Covenant was never borne with greater care than is bestowed upon the large stone rum-jars in their passage through this wilderness. The popularity of rum increases, till the hour when it is served tends to become a moment of religious worship. After the divine pattern, its celebration is administered by priests in the presence of higher dignitaries. When these priests happen to be old-time NCOs, they want watching, or the communicants are apt to go short, to the degradation of the priests.

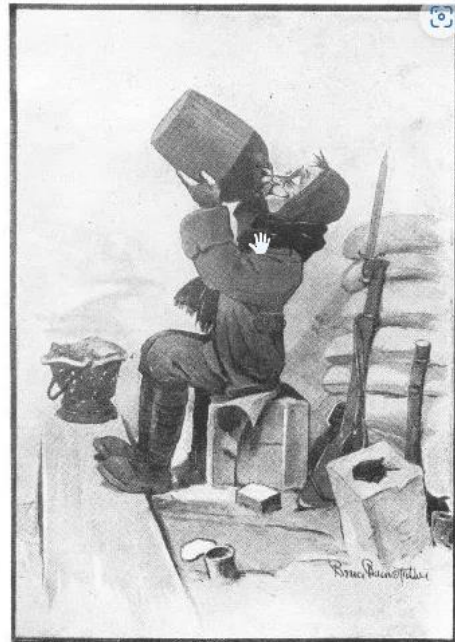
Sometime soldiers not used to drink over-indulged:

I enjoyed my Rum ration. On one occasion our corporal had managed to pinch a jordy of Rum. A generous helping put me out of gear for nearly two days. They hid me in a dugout and covered me with sandbags till I came round.

However the general opinion was that the Rum ration in moderation was a good thing certainly there were many

soldiers that welcomed it and any attempt to withdraw it would have a serious impact on morale. One division did replace the rum ration with hot soup – but it was seldom hot when it was issued and was not well received!

The Times in 1916 reported that the import of foreign spirits had increased to 929,000 gallons almost entirely accounted for by the rum issued by the Military.



The 1914/15 Star Medal

The 1914/15 Star medal is often confused with the 1914 (Mons) Star Medal. The 1914 Star was awarded to those that served in France and Belgium in 1914; if they came under fire a bar bearing the dates 5 August – 22 November could be worn on the ribbon. The Herefordshire Regiment did not qualify for the 1914 Star.

The 1914/15 Star was awarded to those that served in any theatre of war in 1914 and/or 1915. The Herefordshire Regiment qualified by its service at Suvla Bay. 1039 1914/15 Stars are recorded as being issued to the Herefords. On the reverse of the medal is the recipient's number, rank, name and unit. If a 1914/15 Star is named to The Herefordshire Regiment the recipient must have served at Suvla as this is the only place the Regiment qualified for its award.

The museum is aware of the location of 236 of the 1039 1914/15 Star Medals to The Regiment.



Regimental Dinner

A recent 'discovery' in the Museum archive was this photograph of a Regimental Dinner Night held at the Green Dragon Hotel in Hereford thought to have been taken in the late 1920s or early 1930s. Several of the officers can be identified and of interest is Major BSW Taylor who is wearing the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) which was awarded during the First World War when he was serving with the Royal Flying Corps.

For comparison a photo of the same doorway taken in 2023 is included.



Turkish trenches, now in an Israeli Kibbutz on the site of the Khuwelfeh battlefield.

The Battle of Gaza 1917

Many of the names currently in the news from the fighting in Gaza would have been familiar to the 1916/7 soldiers of the Herefordshire Regiment. After the Battalion's evacuation from Suvla Bay they reconstituted in Egypt and took up a position on the Eastern border and repelled the final Turkish attempt to invade Egypt. Maj Capel was in an advanced post, at Romani which received a heavy Turkish artillery barrage and he was awarded the military Cross for his service during this attack.



Post No6 at Romani defended by Maj Capel. (X marks a bursting shell – now faded from sight!)

They then fought across the Sinai Desert and took part in all 3 battles of Gaza (March, April and November 1917). In the 3rd Battle The Herefords were part of the flanking force offering protection from the high ground inland at Beersheba/Khuwelfeh.

The Herefords occupied locations at Rafa(h) (where one of the border crossing points is currently established), El Arish, Khan Yunis and Al Muntar – all places in the news.



*24th March, 1917.
Khan Yunis.*



Near Rafa. "Dishing out the rations. Sq^l Dorrel.