



DECEMBER 2020

**A very Merry Christmas
and a
Happy New Year
to
all our Branch Members
and their families**



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Warning
may contain
mentions of Covid19



It is with deep regret that we report
the death of Branch member
Jackie Fowler in Nov 2020.
Condolences on behalf of the Branch have been sent to Jackie's
family
May she rest in peace.

Branch Standard on Parade

Branch Standard Bearer, Dave Lawrence,
paraded the Branch Standard at the funeral of
Branch member Dave Clough in Mansfield on
10 December 2020.

Plans to parade the Branch Standard at the funeral
of Jackie Fowler in Harrogate on
24 December 2020 have, unfortunately, had to be
curtailed because of the new Covid 19 restrictions.



National Conference 2020 Follow Up

After each Annual Conference
the Trustees publish a follow up
to the motions carried at
Conference. These are
somewhat detailed but contain
items which may be of interest to
members. The follow up com-
ments and actions are contained
in a 'Resolutions Booklet' which
can be viewed online on the
Branch website. Click on this
link: <https://tinyurl.com/yatddkhz>

THE ROYAL BRITISH LEGION



Annual Conference 2020

Motions Carried

Responses by the Board of Trustees

LIVE ON 

Correction

In the November Newsletter we reported that Branch Standard Bearer Dave Lawrence paraded the NMA Branch Standard at the Armistice Day commemoration on 11th November 2020 at the NMA

This was in error - In fact Dave paraded it at the opening ceremony for the NMA Field of Remembrance on 2nd November



The following item will be of interest to members who served in the Intelligence Corps and are perhaps not members of ICA.

From the WO Disclosure.

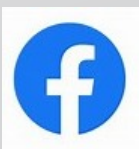
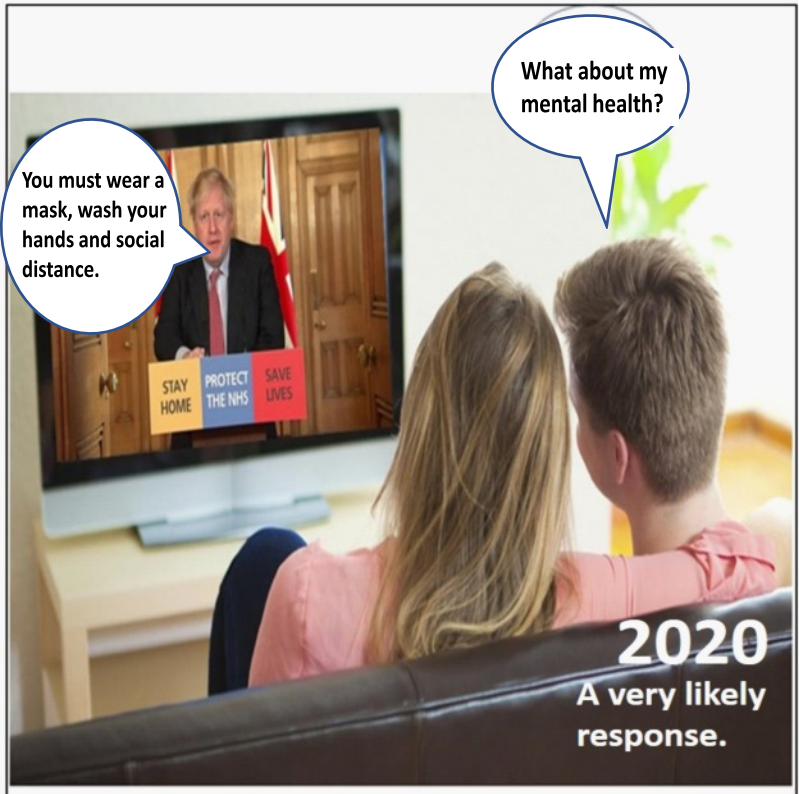
Veteran Approaches by DragonFly TV

It has been brought to the attention of the INT CORPS HQ Legacy and Disclosure Cell that a Journalist from DragonFly TV has been approaching INT CORPS veterans who may have worked for the Force Research Unit (FRU). The journalist is called Emily Jeal and her proposal is for a series focusing on Legacy FRU and Op BANNER individuals and issues.

We know that our veteran community is very alive to the potential security issues any such engagements with the media could cause. Such engagements could also be very detrimental to ongoing criminal and legacy investigations.

Should anyone be approached by this particular journalist or indeed any other media organisations, they are kindly requested to decline and to inform the INT CORPS HQ Disclosure Cell. We are available to you 24 hours a day on the following numbers: 01462 752552 or 07970 385893.

HARD TIMES





Branch Membership

We end the year with a grand total of **440** members.

In 2021 your Branch committee will be exploring possible ways to increase membership following a response from a Branch member to the article in the last newsletter about recruitment. The Branch member, who is a Liv-
eryman of the WCIT, an organisation with military affiliations some of which are analogous to our own Branch special interest, has suggested an interesting initiative which we will be exploring. Watch this space.



We extend a warm Y Services welcome, this month, to new member

Michael (Mac) McNelis

Y Services Memorial Garden - Update
Subject to Covid 19 restrictions it is hoped that work to refurbish the Y Services Memorial Garden at the NMA will commence in late January 2021.

Your Branch Committee is also sketching out plans for a rededication event in the Spring. As with the refurbishment, these plans will be subject to Covid restrictions. More details in due course.



Editorial note:

Contributions to this monthly Branch Newsletter are always welcome on any topics members think will be of general interest. We aim to provide uplifting stories and attempt not to duplicate messages already sent from RBL HQ. Copy should be sent by email, to the editor Jim McDermott at jim.mcdermott77@ntlworld.com Preferred format is unformatted MS Word and any photos, cartoons or pictures should be submitted separately as JPEGs



Technical stuff

This newsletter is originated in MS Word Typeset in Serif PagePlusx9 and compiled as a PDF. Using Adobe Acrobat, the PDF is stored on the Branch Web site and hyper-linked as a button in MailChimp and distributed to all our 400 plus members with an email address

Primary layout and hyperlinks are designed for PCs



Poppy Appeal Fundraising the Easy Way



Here is our regular reminder of the easiest way to donate to our round the year Branch efforts for the Poppy Appeal by using **easyfundraising** when you shop online.

With easyfundraising you can raise FREE donations for us every time you shop online. Over 4,000 shops and sites will donate to us when you use easyfundraising to shop with them – at no extra cost to yourself!

These donations really mount up and make a BIG difference to us, so we'd really appreciate it if you could take a moment to sign up and support us. It's completely FREE and only takes a moment. We currently have 80 members signed up to easyfundraising.

You can find our easyfundraising page at <https://tinyurl.com/yah8ggwl>

Thank you so much!

The Corned Beef Hash Recipe - Saga

We regret to inform you that due to Covid 19, Tier 3 restrictions, the closure of the docks at Dover and the conjunction of Jupiter with Saturn we are unable to include the much awaited Corned Beef Hash recipe in this issue.



Editorial Note

A move to a magazine style Newsletter was made in August 2020 and the content was increased to hopefully provide items of interest to our members as a diversion during the several periods of lock down. This new content has included a series of articles about signals intelligence in the trenches in World War One. The narrative for these articles was edited from an academic paper and we hope that members enjoyed these extracts. Items of general interest to our members are always welcome and details of how to submit can be found at the foot of page 4





Telling Our Story



Lincoln 10K

New Branch Standard

NMA Plot

Previous Newsletter issues made members aware of the Legion's Centenary project 'Telling Our Story' which set out to collect the history, personal memories and artefacts from members and branches in order to create a permanent record of everything and anything that anyone wishes to share from the last 100 years.

Our Branch has already submitted a number of items but it appears that generally uptake throughout the Legion has been poor and there is a fear that individual members may not believe that what they have to contribute has any great relevance to the Legion and the Project, which really couldn't be further from the truth.

The information that the Project Team is looking for can be as little or as much as any member would like it to be but what is important is that they really do want to hear from everyone in relation to their personal or organisational experiences and memories.

In addition to personal memories the Project Team would also like to hear about the following:

- What you enjoy about membership
- Who do you connect with within the community with your membership activities and why?
- What are your membership highlights?
- Do you have any photographs, articles of interest etc.

The Project Team believes that everyone has a story to tell and do really want to hear from everyone. Contributors can post their stories by email to - tellingourstory@britishlegion.org.uk

This different approach, using email simplifies the earlier process and will hopefully encourage more members to relate their stories – good or bad, warts and all!

The Telling Our Story project has only three more months to run so contributions should be submitted as soon as possible please BUT direct to the Project team. Thank you.



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918

This final part explores the daily life and working conditions encountered by German-speaking men trained to operate the IToc equipment, sat underground listening to German messages.

From September 1916, these linguists were designated as IOs, Interpreter Operators (Wireless), a separate trade within the Royal Engineers Signals Service. They worked and liaised with members of the Intelligence Corps. The Intelligence Corps was a temporary wartime organisation and its personnel management systems were complicated. However, from 15 July 1918, following the creation of Intelligence Corps companies, for administrative purposes, some degree of order was imposed with the transfer of all other ranks to a notional battalion of the Royal Fusiliers (RF), known as 10(B)

IOs were almost exclusively wartime volunteers or conscripts who were recruited to IO duties while serving in the wartime army. Before the introduction of conscription, men enlisting in the infantry tended to join their local regiment and it is possible to see location, and to some extent class, carrying forward into the IOs' initial military service. Just over half (53%) the IOs were drawn from the infantry and, 43% of these came from regiments associated with London and the South East. There was also a marked tendency for enlistment into battalions with a middle-class recruiting ethos. In this context, many future IOs joined Territorial 'class corps' such as the London Rifle Brigade, which had a long association with the City of London, Britain's financial hub. It was a similar story for those who joined war-raised, 'New Army' battalions, with men enlisting in the 'Bankers' and 'Public Schools' battalions of the Royal Fusiliers and the Middlesex Regiment. Nor was this just a Home Counties phenomenon. Some IOs started their military life in class-based units such as the Glasgow Chamber of Commerce battalion and the 'non-manual' battalions raised in Birmingham. Given the IOs' predominantly middle-class origins and prior membership of class-conscious units, it is not surprising that several were commissioned.



... a marked tendency for enlistment into battalions with a middle-class recruiting ethos



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918 - Continued

The IOs' military life was rather different to that experienced by other British soldiers, especially those in larger units such as infantry battalions. The location and activities demanded by the IOs' military role shaped their relationship with the wider military environment. Like other specialist intelligence collectors, such as flash-spotters, sound-rangers, and the Lovat Scouts, they were deployed to dispersed and static locations where they remained for lengthy periods of time. These IToc stations were usually located in dug-outs or the cellars of destroyed buildings towards the rear of the British trench system. According to the army's 1917 guidelines, IOs should have been rotated out of the stations every third week, a tour of duty very similar to those of the artillery. However, the IOs were also detached sometimes to intelligence duties in the rear for extended periods and this would have reduced their 'trench time' overall. These other intelligence duties included prisoner handling and interrogation, document translation and eavesdropping on officer prisoners.

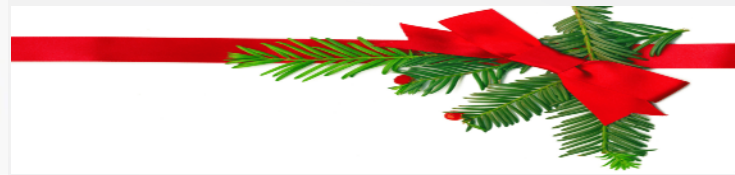
IOs were used in two specialised signals intelligence roles. The first was to intercept air/ground communications. All armies used aircraft to direct artillery fire and, from late 1915, the British sought to intercept these coded Morse messages to provide warnings,



Lovat Scouts

locate German artillery positions, and direct their own aircraft against the aerial 'spotters'. By 1918 the Germans were using wireless voice messages which were difficult to 'live log' except by interpreters familiar with shorthand. These were difficult to get and eventually modified "Dictaphones" were used with considerable success. The second specialised role was cryptanalysis. Within the BEF, German codes and ciphers were attacked by the intelligence section at GHQ. In the spring of 1917 a separate cryptanalysis organisation,

designated as I(e), was formed at Saint Omer. Smaller I(e) sections also existed at army-level but appear to have been primarily focused on traffic analysis. At least one IO was employed on cryptanalysis in GHQ from October 1916 and a later draft establishment for I(e) called for ten 'interpreter and wireless operators' in the 'Wireless Section'. However, this was amended at the insistence of the RE to ten 'interpreter clerks' on the grounds that an 'interpreter operator' was a specific RE trade. This would suggest that perhaps not all German-speaking other ranks employed in signals intelligence were IOs.



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918 - Continued

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Assuming enemy messages could be intercepted, the May 1917 guidance for IToc stations gives us some insight into the core work of the IOs. First of all, the IO on duty had to record which wire loop or earth had detected the message, along with the details of the enemy call signs and their Morse equivalent. Then, 'every conversation [was] written down in conversational form and, wherever possible, a separate line and number given to each speaker'. Space was to be preserved for subsequent, side-by-side translation. Similarly, Morse messages had to be noted along with remarks on the strength of the enemy buzzers. Any cipher messages were to be recorded verbatim, including details of how the speaker had chosen to pronounce any four-number groups. And all of this was to be done at speed and probably by candle-



light. Given a 'noisy' signals environment and that many messages would have been barely audible, even after amplification, this 'live logging' would have been very challenging. Clearly this role demanded considerable mental focus when working on the amplifier during a busy period. The IOs also experienced all the normal stress and danger of a troglodyte life in the trenches. Additionally, the continual need to manhandle sixty-pound batteries to and from

the trenches was a particular irritation for the IToc stations' personnel. Understandably, some suffered from health difficulties, both physical and mental. For example, one man's subsequent claim for a disability pension blamed his 'heart and lung trouble' explicitly on 'too long periods in dug-outs'. One IO 'broke down with strenuous work at a listening post', while another developed 'nervous, suicidal thoughts'. It is also possible that IO service was a factor in the post-war suicide of a third man.



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918 - Continued

Theoretically, the IToc stations were manned by nine men with a corporal in command, but they often operated with fewer personnel due to leave, sickness, or other mundane reasons. Significantly, the stations were usually some distance from the headquarters of their parent signals unit. Their officers made near-daily visits to the stations, but they did not stay for long periods and almost certainly not overnight. This contact was augmented by station personnel, particularly the commander, making trips to the rear to rendezvous with officers or senior non-commissioned officers to replenish the amplifier's batteries or pick up rations. Additionally, there were occasional visits by local sector commanders and their intelligence officers, or technical checks.



The disciplinary context is also important. Extracts from an IOs war diary provides considerable insight painting a picture of how he commanded his team as much by negotiation as by the formal authority of his rank. His account also suggests that disciplinary matters were usually resolved internally, suggesting a rather consensual command relationship between their wireless officer superiors and the IToc station commanders. The primary explanation for this blurring of the rank hierarchy probably lies in the IOs' backgrounds, two-thirds had professional or commercial civilian occupations, a significantly greater proportion than the thirteen percent of wartime other ranks who had the same 'white collar' employment. In these circumstances it is perhaps unsurprising that one wireless officer annoyed his superiors when he admitted treating the IOs 'as equals' because of their 'superior education' in comparison to other signallers. Similarly, underlying class-based resentment towards the IOs might explain them being seen as 'odd men out' and apparently 'disliked by all' within one frontline signals unit.

A secondary factor may have been that IOs as a group were generally older than the junior wireless officers who directly supervised them. However, it should be noted that a differential in officers/other ranks' maturity was not unique to IOs and quite normal within the wider RE(SS), where signals officers were predominantly in their twenties while most signallers were mostly divided evenly between their twenties and thirties. This rather light-touch supervision also helped the IOs make the most of their off-duty time. When combined with special 'intelligence' status and passes, long periods in one area, and often French language skills, they were able to take full advantage of the relaxation opportunities available behind the lines.



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918 - Continued

Although the IToc stations were formally subordinated to the RE(SS) and relied upon that organisation for tasking and technical support, they also interacted with local infantry units; the latter helping to provide suitable accommodation and sometimes rations. Given they could provide warnings of enemy intentions and other forms of intelligence support, the IToc stations were presumably welcomed by local commanders but their communications security function required them to report any breaches of signalling regulations. One signals historian suggested that these 'police activities often brought wrath from above on their infantry hosts, [and] the unfortunate detachments usually met with an unfriendly reception' That said, a pragmatic relationship between the stations and their neighbours could emerge. As one battalion history noted, in June 1917:

"We [...] received a rather futile complaint from the authorities, so to prevent a repetition of similar rebukes we made a suitable arrangement with the Listening Set personnel, who were [re]located [to] a dug-out they had long coveted, and after that, our conversations, when picked up, were treated with more discretion."

Although not positioned at the front of the British trench system, the IOs experienced daily dangers. The continual requirement to leave their dug-out to maintain the loops, earths, and lines of the interception equipment put them at risk, particularly from bombardments. But they were in most danger when British positions came under infantry attack. Trench raids were a potential problem, but the stations' locations meant the enemy would have to penetrate very deeply to kill, wound, or capture an IO. More serious was the threat from a more general offensive because the IToc stations could produce vital tactical intelligence they had to remain in situ until the last safe moment before withdrawing.

On the Italian front one IToc station was overrun during the Austro-Hungarian offensive in June 1918. Although the team managed to destroy the amplifier and set their station alight, they left it too late as the surrounding infantry had already pulled back. Most evaded capture and made it back to the British lines 'through [an] intense barrage'. Of the station's five IOs, one was killed in action, another later died from his wounds, and a third was subsequently found 'several miles behind the line suffering from shell shock'. A least six IOs were captured on the Western Front; four in March 1918 and two in May 1918. Although direct evidence regarding their captivity has not been found, their German language skills would presumably have been useful in a prison camp.



British Signals Intelligence in the trenches, 1915–1918 - Continued

Conclusion

Within an army of three-and-a-half million, a couple of hundred IOs were but a tiny fraction of Britain's war effort but the intelligence capability they provided was much greater than their small numbers might imply. Their core work and everyday life in the trenches was captured by one of their number in September 1917:

Asleep after my 2 am to 8 am spell [on the amplifier] did me some good and after dinner a walk [...] to fetch water did me still more good [...] During my 4 pm to 8 pm spell came to the conclusion that the Bosche had been relieved and, advising Battalion HQ, found my conclusion was justified.



...a significant contribution to the all-source tactical intelligence picture.

This snapshot is, on one level, utterly unremarkable; there is no great intelligence 'coup', nor any other form of military drama. But the context is important. The IO in question was, at that point, three weeks into his tour of duty in the trenches and it would be another week before he would be relieved. Therefore, on another level it reveals the individual stoicism needed to spend long periods living underground in order to wear a headset for up to six hours at a time, so as to listen to enemy messages. As the quote implies, the intelligence snippets gathered were rarely in themselves significant but, when built up incrementally, they could offer a significant contribution to the all-source tactical intelligence picture. Taking a long view, because their raison d'être was to provide signals intelligence linguists, it can be argued that these Interpreter Operators (IOs) were the British army's first formally-recognised intelligence trade group



Poetry Corner



Perspectives?

by Jobe

(for our Grandson Daniel Thomas Chandler)

So, your situation's bleak
 now Covid's bugged Freshers Week!
 The fun and games are now on hold
 (it could be months from what we're told!)
 The year you've lost? That was your "gap!"
 The Uni food you get is crap.....
 Those online lectures a disgrace...
 you thought you'd paid for "face-to face"
 (and lord knows, were you ever keen
 to spend time staring at a screen???)
 Social distanced.... half locked down....
 Wearing face masks like a clown.....
 When socialising, loathe to mix.....
 Sticking to the rule of six.....

D'you think this Government delights
 in...fringing on your human rights?

Just try to picture if you can
 your great grandfather (my old man!)
 Apprentice to a cab'net maker...
 just sixteen when he took a break, a
 mandatory pause, delay
 'cos World War One got in the way!
 (and didn't finish Christmas Day!)
 Though wounded, he still made it through
 and didn't catch the Spanish Flu!
 But hundreds of his teenage mates
 are listed on those Menin Gates.
 His armistice went not to plan -
 they sent him to Afghanistan
 and so he spent an extra year
 in lockdown on that damned Frontier!



Poetry Corner



But following this five year “blip”
 he finished his apprenticeship.
 Your grandpa’s dad was seventeen.
 when Kaiser Bill came on the scene.
 That stymied his career, of course!
 He joined the Northern Irish Horse
 and spent the best part of his war
 seconded to the Flying Corps....
 a key man in a key platoon
 observing from a kite balloon.
 Renowned for airborne spying tricks
 these guys were called “Balloonatics”

Above the trenches, wire and muck
 each one became a sitting duck.
 (They didn’t issue beta blockers
 to counteract those German Fokkers!)
 e “social-distanced” to be fair...
 a thousand metres in the air!
 The mask he had to wear, (alas!)
 protected him from mustard gas.
 Great Grandpa too survived that war....
 went back to what he did before
 and tried hard not to count the cost
 of those important years he’d lost

My Mum’s big brother, Uncle Bill,
 was learning landscape gardening skill
 when Adolf Hitler cut up rough.
 As soon as he was old enough
 he took a pause in his career
 became an Air Force Volunteer
 and quickly made it to the top
 - a sergeant gunner/wireless op.



Poetry Corner

His “inconvenient” quarantine
began when he was seventeen.
And like so many of “the few”
with five mates of his bomber crew
May '44, it's sad to say
they're on a list as “KIA”

In that same year, another teen
a great uncle you've never seen
had left his home, his job, his mother
a younger sister, younger brother
to join the war and do his bit
to put a speedy end to it.
Churchill piped up: “If you're bored
we've hatched a plan called “Overlord”
We'll sort those Nazis come what may
on June the Sixth....Decision Day!”
That dawn, his teenage pals and he
were on “Gold” Beach in Normandy.
Wounded twice, he saw the quack,
who patched him up and sent him back
to muck and bullets, bully beef,
field conditions, horror, grief.

Before he'd reached the age of twenty
this young guy had witnessed plenty.
He did come home.....eventually,
with traces of PTSD
but his “gap year” had lasted three!

My uncle Robin's generation
had no choice but serve the nation....
postpone their higher education...
endure “suspended animation”
in their promising careers
for the best part of two years.





Poetry Corner



Their “furlough scheme” in place of job?
 “All found*” and weekly, thirty bob!
 (clothes, accommodation, grub,
 no luxuries like fags or pub!)
 Those conscripts needed to be thrifty.
 Thirty bob? That’s one-pound-fifty!
 And though to some extent deprived
 they “did their bit” and most survived
 to carry on, resume careers
 they’d put on hold for two whole years.

This family history diatribe....
 your ancestors whom I describe
 (without whom there would be no you!)
 were characters who copped it too.
 Their “normal” never was the same
 they didn’t seek someone to blame
 despite lost weeks or months (or longer!)
 they did survive, emerged much stronger.

Would they have seen this Covid through?
 Of course they would have.....so will you!

