

OUR
OLDEST
BRANCH
MEMBER
MARY
WATKINS
HAS DIED
AGED 103

See story on page 2



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It is with great sadness that
we report the death of
Branch Member
Mary Watkins
1920 - 2024
May she rest in peace

Mary Watkins RIP

Mary was born in Chelsea in 1920. She missed out on a scholarship aged 13 after her family moved to Margate. She worked as a bookkeeper when she left school, but her life changed when, with the outbreak of war, she volunteered for the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS).

Due to her love of solving puzzles and crosswords, Mary was selected for special duties with Military Intelligence (MI18) at Scotland Yard in London. She was told her work would be top secret and she would never be able to talk about it, nor would there be any formal recognition for what she did. As a result, as a member of the ATS, she started work on a punch card system of coded letters and numbers, which came from the German code device, the Enigma Machine.

Her jobs mainly entailed recording German and Russian call signs from intercepted and decoded Enigma messages. The only details she knew about them were from where they came and where they were going. Mary recalls seeing names of personnel, locations and theatres of war as well as military and technical details but her role prohibited her from reading the messages or asking questions about them. She was promoted to sergeant and went to work in Harpenden, Hertfordshire and then in Leicestershire. Afterwards, Mary returned to Bletchley Park, working day and night shifts on 24 hour duties supporting the team that finally cracked the Enigma Code.

She married her first husband Max and hoped she would be posted to the Middle East. However, when she became pregnant, she had to leave the ATS but found a job in a printing office. Her daughter Vivien was born while Max was in Saigon. Mary and her parents moved back to Chelsea until they were bombed out and rehoused. Max returned home and was posted to Germany. However, the couple had grown apart and they later divorced. She married Tony Watkins and they had a daughter Bobby and son Anthony.

Mary later trained as a teacher, becoming a deputy head in a Surrey school before retiring aged 61. Having signed the Official Secrets Act, Mary never talked about her wartime work and her family only found out about it much later.

Mary had received a lapel badge in recognition of her intelligence work at Bletchley Park during the war. Mary is reported as saying at the time:

“This made me happy as I realised that those brave men who served in the Arctic convoys didn’t get a medal but they too only received a lapel badge. My lapel badge made me feel honoured and perfectly happy,”

In late 2023 Mary’s family made enquiries and found that she had never received medals for her wartime service. Subsequently, early in 2024 Mary’s daughter Bobby Codwallader was able to report that:

“We were thrilled when we got the call to say she was entitled to these medals.

“She is delighted with these medals now, especially having been told when she was 19 and about to sign the Official Secrets Act, that she would never get any recognition, receive any thanks or be able to tell anyone what she did. She is still very reluctant to talk about her work. We are all so proud of her.”

At the time of her death on 27 March 2024 Mary was being cared for at Brendoncare, Care Home, Dorset Avenue East Grinstead, she was 103 years old.

May she rest in peace

BRANCH STANDARD BEARER, ON PARADE FOR D DAY 80

The official RBL D-Day 80 commemoration was held at the National Memorial Arboretum on Thursday 6th June 2024. The event was centred around the Royal Navy memorial and was attended by hundreds of visitors, including a number of D-Day veterans. His Majesty The King was represented by Their Royal Highnesses The Duke and Duchess Of Edinburgh. The event was compared by Leslie Sharp, the actress.

The service featured poignant stories from veterans of the Normandy Campaign, which served as a catalyst in the Second World War that led to the eventual liberation of Western Europe.

A video of the full service is available on YouTube at:

[D-Day 80 Remembrance Service \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Am_vemVrwRU&t=1659s)

In addition to the Union Flag (carried by the new RBL National Standard Bearer – Beth Slade), RBL standards on parade included the National Youth standard, the RBL Women’s Section National standard, the RBL Scotland National standard, 11 County/Region standards and that of the NMA Branch – the only Branch standard selected.

The NMA Branch is part of National Branches District (NBD), as are we in “Y” Services, in the RBL hierarchy. NBD is part of South East Region (a link that is steeped in history and tradition) and it is that lineage that led to me being specially invited to carry the NMA Branch standard at the event.

The road to becoming the RBL National Standard Bearer begins when Branch SBs compete in their annual County/District SB competitions. I compete in the NBD competition and, up to now, have always come second to Beth Slade from the NMA Branch. As in previous years, she went through to SE Regionals – which she won - and then carried on to the National SB competition at National Conference in May. This year she beat all other Regional competitors and was appointed RBL National Standard Bearer.

Dave Lawrence

Editor’s note. Beth Slade has kindly agreed to parade the Union Flag at the Y Services Memorial at the NMA during our commemorative service on 20 July 2024.

A video of the event is available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Am_vemVrwRU&t=1659s

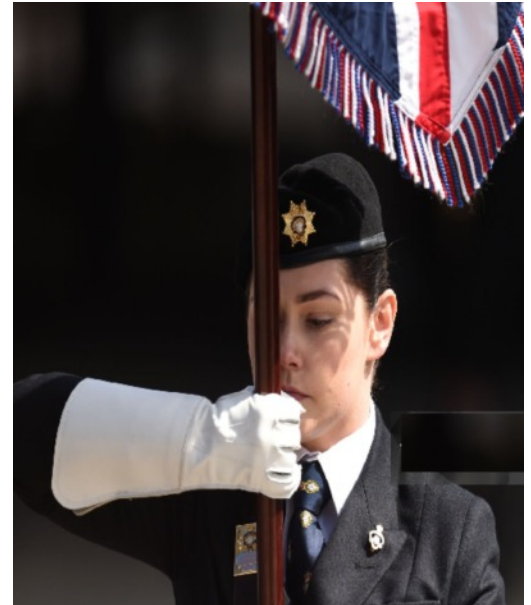


*** A Final Reminder ***

Summer Gathering 2024

Our Branch Annual Commemoration Summer Gathering (SG24) will take place in the "Y" Services Garden at the National Memorial Arboretum, Staffs, on Saturday 20th July commencing promptly at 1030 hrs (The NMA site opens at 10:00hrs). The short service will be followed by a walk around the arboretum and lunch (own expense) in the NMA Cafe.

The service for SG24 will be conducted by the Branch Padre, The Revd. John Bird (known by many as 'The Rockin' Rev). It will include a 'March-in' of Standards, an Act of Remembrance and the laying of wreaths for "Y" Service personnel killed in service since WW2.



All members are cordially invited to attend. If you are able to make it, please remember to pre-book your car parking for £4 on the NMA website. Parking on the day will cost £6.

To assist in the organisation (printing the order of service) if you do plan to attend, grateful you let Branch Secretary Chris Lowish know by email please:
yservices.secretary@rbl.community

Recommended dress: Blazer
or Lounge suit or the
equivalent for ladies. Medals
to be worn and berets optional.

Chairman's message

Dear Members,

*Our Branch Summer Gathering (SG24) which includes a memorial service at the Y Services memorial and garden at the NMA (details on page 4) is now just a few weeks away. Since the Y Services memorial and garden plot was refurbished and with the help of the Friends of the Y Services Memorial Fund (FOYSM) the site has become a haven of peace and quiet, a shaded corner to sit and reflect. It would be great to see as many members as possible turn up on the day to both remember those we have lost and to renew old acquaintances. We recorded some interesting numbers during the month. Our various recruiting efforts are continuing to yield results. During June we recruited 6 new members. Easyfundraising which raised £12.05 in June (adding to our grand total of **£2909.48** is now supported by 129 members (30% of our total membership). Also during the month, Vice Chairman Dennis Weir clocked up **5 marathons!** (see page 8).*

Finally a thank you to our Branch Standard Bearer, Dave Lawrence, who volunteered to parade the NMA Standard at the recent national D Day 80 celebrations at the NMA.

Jim McDermott, Branch hairman

BRANCH MEMBERSHIP
WE CURRENTLY HAVE
443 MEMBERS

IF YOU KNOW OF ANY 'Y' SERVICE
TYPES
WHO ARE NOT MEMBERS
PLEASE POINT THEM IN OUR
DIRECTION

**A Warm Y Services Branch
welcome to new members joining
us in June 2024**

**Debs ALDERTON
Keith BARBER
Mark HARBIN
Bruce NORQUAY
Miffy SMITH
Laurence TOPHAM**

Editor's Note: Contributions to the Branch Newsletter are always welcome on topics members think will be of general interest. We aim to provide uplifting stories as well as Branch news and attempt not to duplicate material sent from RBL HQ. Copy should be sent by email to the editor at:

jim.mcdermott77@ntlworld.com Text to be unformatted in MS Word. Photos, cartoons or pictures should be submitted separately please, as JPEGs.



New Newsletter editor Needed - Apply Here!

A further reminder that the current newsletter editor is stepping down at the November 2024 AGM leaving the post vacant.

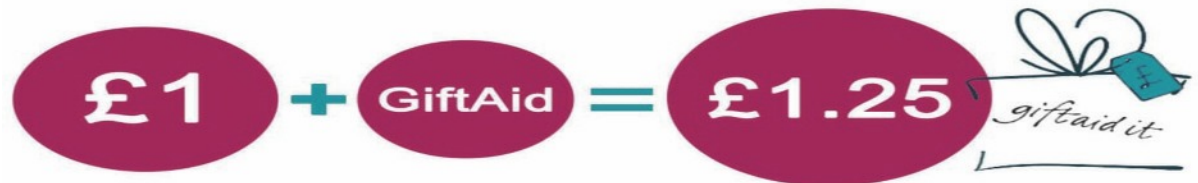
The Branch newsletter is read by a large percentage of our membership with many opening the document within seconds of it being transmitted. So, someone is needed please, to step forward and to produce 'a newsletter'.

The current format is published monthly but it could be less frequent and set out in a design or format and distributed in a way which suits the new editor.

The current newsletter is distributed using Mailchimp software which is free, easy to install and easy to use.

Anyone interested in taking on the role or for further information, please contact the editor direct by email: jim.mcdermott77@ntlworld.com

GIFT AID



Make your donations go further with Gift Aid

Gift Aid is given by the government on donations to charities at a rate of 25p in the pound, so for every £1 you donate the government will give the charity a further 25p if you are a UK tax payer. This means that a £20 donation will be worth £25.

Most importantly your annual Legion membership subscription counts as a donation. Currently we have just under 50% of our membership signed up to Gift Aid, it would be great if we could increase this percentage. This is yet another easy and painless way of contributing to the Poppy appeal. For full details of how to sign up for Gift Aid go to the link below.

[Gift Aid | Royal British Legion](#)

MONTHLY GET TOGETHERS

Gloucester area get together – Last Thursday of every month.

Location: Wetherspoons (The Regal), Kings Square, Gloucester.

Timings: 1200 hrs onwards

Information: Advertised on the Spec Ops Home & Ex Spec Ops Home Facebook Group. Everybody welcome.

Lincoln area get together – Third Friday of every month.

Location: Lion & Snake, 79 Bailgate, Lincoln. LN1 3AR

Timings: 1430 hrs onwards

Information: Advertised on the Spec Ops Home & Ex Spec Ops Home Facebook Group. Everybody welcome.

Portsmouth area get together – Second Thursday of every month.

Location: The Isambard Kingdon Brunel (JD Wetherspoon pub), 2 Guildhall Walk, Portsmouth.

Timings: 1200 hrs onwards.

Information: Advertised on the Spec Ops Home & Ex Spec Ops Home Facebook Group. Everybody welcome.

York area get together – Second Thursday of every month.

Location: The Punch Bowl (JD Wetherspoons), 5-9 Blossom Street, York. YO24 1AU

Timings: 1130 hrs onwards.

Information: Advertised on the Spec Ops Home & Ex Spec Ops Home Facebook Group. Everybody welcome.

5 Company/ JSSU (R) reunion – Saturday 28th September 2024.

Location: The Hunting Lodge, Barrow upon Soar. Same location as the Spec Op reunion.

Timings: 1400hrs onwards.

Accommodation: The Hunting Lodge has accommodation available and there are plenty of hotels in Loughborough and the surrounding area.

Information: Further information please contact Rob Wright or Sarah Bagshaw on reunionlobo@yahoo.com. Names are required for attendance.

All past members are welcome.

Source: Ellis Page (Thanks Ellis)

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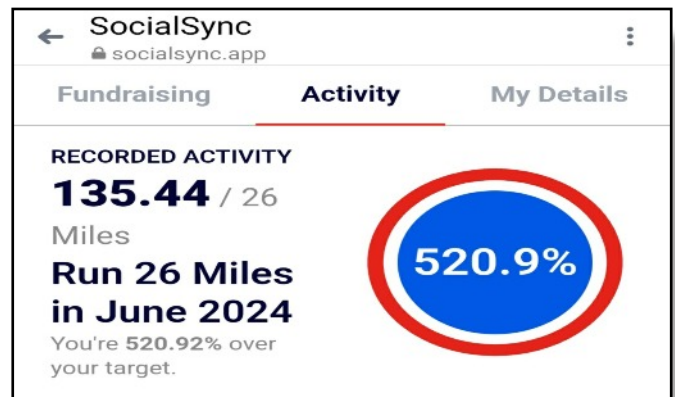
Branch Vice Chairman Dennis Weir completes FIVE Marathons

Dennis Weir, who has been our Poppy Appeal coordinator for more years than he cares to remember, has laid down the gauntlet to future holders of that post by completing the Legion's latest fundraising challenge.

The Legion challenged members to complete a sponsored marathon (26 miles) to raise money for the Poppy Appeal. How quickly (or slowly) this feat was to be accomplished was left to the runner (jogger, walker, stroller). Dennis took up the challenge in June and, in his own words

“At my relatively advanced age I decided that running a marathon might be a little tricky, so instead decided to walk 5 marathons.’ In doing so, I raised £525 for the Poppy Appeal. Sincere thanks for all of you members who sponsored me”.

All those completing the challenge received a medal and a T shirt. Well done Dennis, a great effort.



The Legion's Poppy Appeal is an all year round activity - not just during remembrancetide (October/early November)

Be Remembered. Members occasionally complain that some obituaries are a bit thin on content and do not do justice to a person's life. To ensure you get a good, true and comprehensive write up why not pen your own? That way no detail of your life, and career (that you wish to include) will be missed. As a Branch we offer the opportunity for you to draft your own obituary and lodge it with Branch Secretary Chris Lowish. Send your fine words to Chris by email at yserVICES.secretary@rbl.comminuty. Your document will be confidentially stored for future use. Clearly mark you document 'I am still here' or words to that effect.