



# THE BLACK CATS



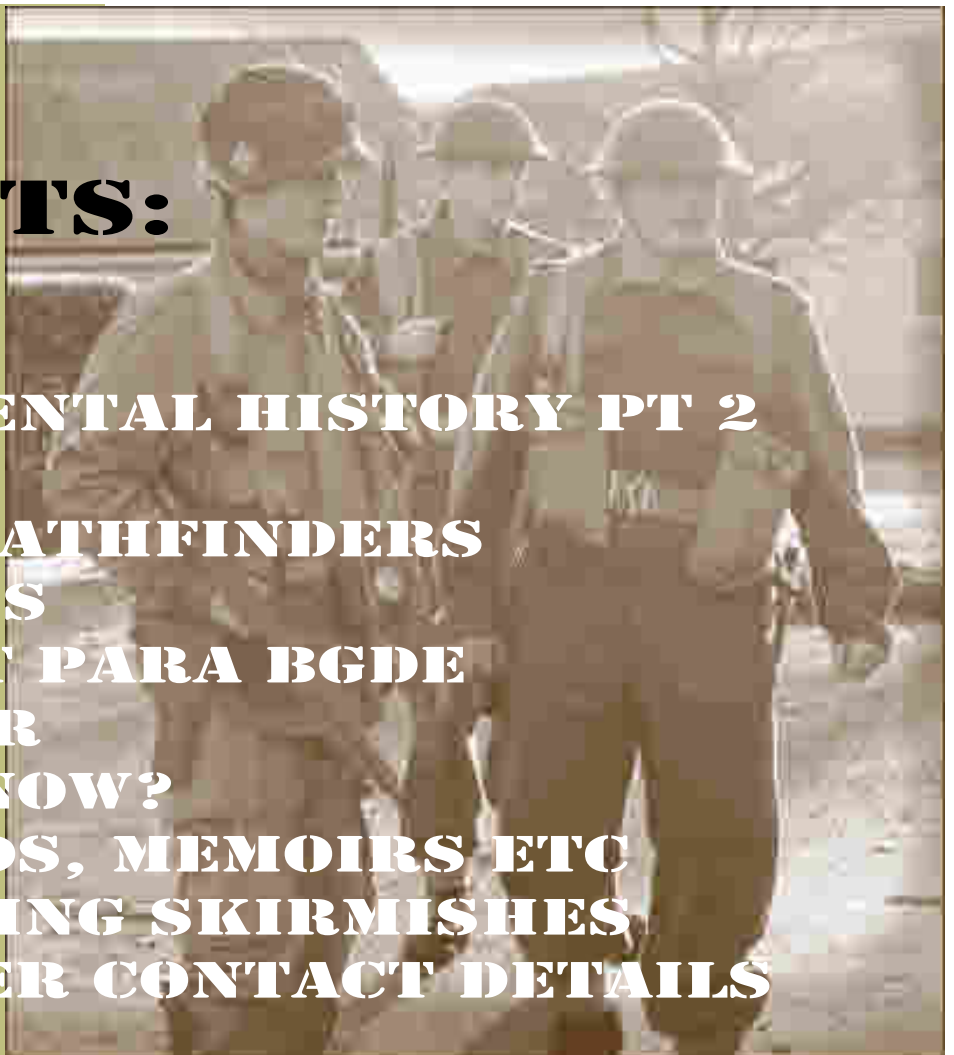
Newsletter of WARGroup,  
comprising re-enactors of  
1st Batt., London Irish Rifles  
US 101st Airborne Div. &  
1st Polish Para Brigade  
[www.WARGroup.net](http://www.WARGroup.net)



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# LONDON IRISH RIFLES

## REGIMENTAL HISTORY PT 2

In September 1939, with war imminent, call up papers went out to the men of both battalions of the London Irish as they did to all those in the Territorial Army. The first along with the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> battalions of the Royal Fusiliers formed the 1<sup>st</sup> London Infantry Brigade, part of the 1<sup>st</sup> London Infantry Division.

Their first duty after war was declared was to support L Division of the metropolitan police in case of air raids, something they did for 2 months before being sent to Ashdown Forest to build defensive trenches and strong points.

2<sup>nd</sup> battalion found themselves camped on Wimbledon Common.



When the Nazi Blitzkrieg sent the allied forces into a rapid retreat, the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn were deployed to Kent, (between Faversham & Whitstable), to defend 40 miles of its coastline against possible invasion. B Company were stationed at Manston aerodrome as it was thought to be a prime target for enemy parachutists.

Within the week the situation in France had declined to such an extent that the men of the London Irish found themselves being moved yet again. The chaos of Dunkirk saw 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion being sent to man the piers at Ramsgate and Margate to help with the growing numbers of casualties that arrived daily. They requested to be sent over to the battle zone to aid in the defence of the beleaguered French port only to have it turned down. As time passed though they were asked by the navy to man the anti-aircraft Bren guns on the relief ships and escort vessels, replacing their own men that had become casualties. Captain R.A.O'Brien of D Company wrote in his memoirs;

“The Royal navy asked would the London Irish man the guns on the ships?”

“The answer needs no telling. Volunteers were called for, and every man was a volunteer.”

They set out onboard four ships; The Queen of Thanet, The Royal Sovereign, The Duchess of Fife and the Portsdown.

Those who didn't sail, became stretcher-bearers, picking their way through the body littered decks of many ships freshly docked, including the French ship Oriel on June 2<sup>nd</sup> 1940. The Oriel was one of the last ships to return successfully from Dunkirk.

The French military applauded the Battalion for their efforts in saving so many of their men and for burying many more with full military honours. ROB

# ON PARADE

## Rifle Inspection: The Lee- enfield, No's 3 and 4



The Short Magazine Lee-Enfield rifle, or SMLE (pronounced “smelly” by the soldiers) and the No. 4 Lee-Enfield rifles were the mainstay of rifle brigades’ weapons throughout the late 1800’s and 1st half of the 20th century.



In fact, Lee-Enfield rifles continued in British army use until the end of the 20th century, and even now there are a few on the weapons listing for the army.

The No. 1 SMLE was the primary rifle used by all British armed forces in the Boer war and in WW1, and was still being produced by the Birmingham Small Arms Factory in Small Heath in WW2- however, following the Great War it was felt that the SMLE should be replaced with a more modern rifle reflecting modern manufacturing techniques, hence gradual development occurred. These were principally:

- Aperture rearsights
- Stronger bayonet attachment
- Heavier barrel
- Shorter spike bayonet

How can you tell the difference between a SMLE (ie a No. 1 Mark III), often called a “smelly” by the troops, and a No. 4 Lee-Enfield rifle?

Well, the SMLE has bed backsights, and is full-stocked- all the way to the muzzle. Also, the rifle maker and markings are on the RGHT of the action body, whilst they are on the LEFT on a No. 4.

In addition, a number of variants were made, from the No.5 “jungle” version which had a shorter barrel and hence shorter range due to lower muzzle velocity, but designed for easier manoevrability in a jungle environment, to the sniper versions of both the SMLE (see below a No1 Mk3 version) and the No. 4.

More to come in future issues.....DJ



# US 101ST AIRBORNE

## PATHFINDERS LEAD THE WAY!

Following significant, and some would say avoidable losses in the first large scale U.S. Airborne Operation of World War 2 by men of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, it was decided to establish a new unit to find, mark and secure drop zones for future Airborne operations based on British research and trials. Thus, the *Pathfinders* were born.

The Pathfinder School was established in February 1944 at North Witham in the United Kingdom following successful trials of the newly developed system during the Allied invasion of Sicily in

1943 by men originally recruited from the 505<sup>th</sup> Regiment, U.S. 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

Dropping into the target area approximately 30 minutes ahead of the Main Force, Pathfinders marked the Drop Zone using a Radio Beacon known as 'Eureka'. This transmitter was assembled on the ground and picked up by the lead C47 in each flight and which led the pilot directly to the Drop Zone. Pathfinder teams lived and trained with their assigned C47 crew for several weeks prior to operations.

On the 'Eagle' Airborne exercise in May 1944 in England, 6 out of 7 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Pathfinder Teams successfully marked the Drop Zone.

As well as radio beacons, Pathfinders used Lights, Marking Panels and Smoke using colour coding according to the objective and unit involved.

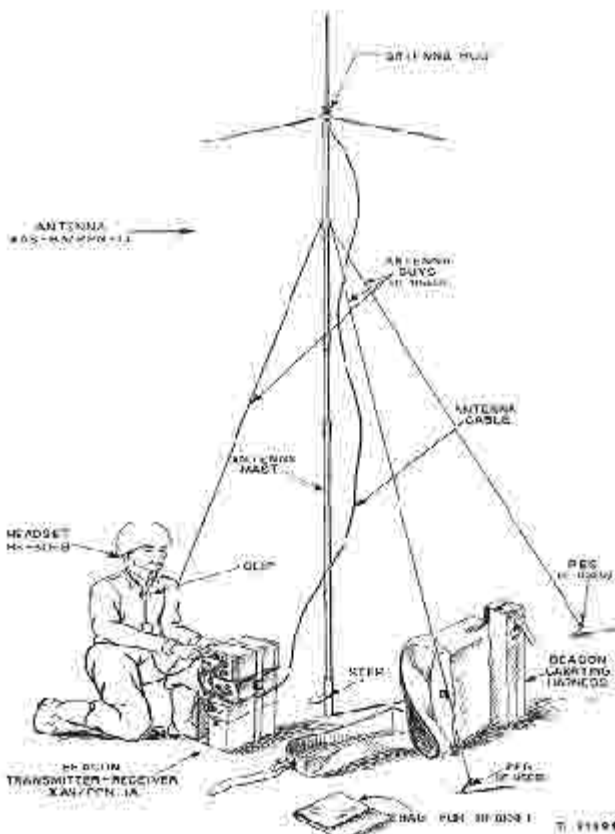


Figure 1. Beacon Transmitter-Receiver AN/PPS-1A set up for operation.

'Holophane' lamps were laid out in a T-shape, with 5 lamps forming the upright of the 'T', and the Drop Zone indicated by the Horizontal three lamps. In addition, the first lamp of the upright was operated to flash the colour coded Morse Identifier of the Drop Zone, e.g.; 'C' for Charlie. The upright of the 'T' indicated the direction of flight.

A Pathfinder Team consisted of Two Officers, Two 'Eureka' Operators and Two assistants, One 'Holophane' Lamp Section Commander with Seven men, and Four to Six men for operational security.

The benefit of Drop Zone marking was obvious and was used to great effect on D-Day. In fact, most of the mis-drops were caused by the actions of inexperienced transports pilots reacting to heavy enemy fire.

Pathfinders continued to be used throughout World War 2. In fact, a small contingent of Pathfinders successfully dropped into Bastogne to mark the target for Airborne Re-Supply drops when the weather finally cleared.

After the conflict, the Pathfinder School was moved to Fort Benning, Georgia where it is at the forefront of U.S. Special Forces Operations. MB

# DISPATCHES

## WW1 training weekend

There was a great turn out for the WW1 training at Duncannon Fort on the weekend of 31<sup>st</sup> Jan-1<sup>st</sup> Feb, with nearly 20 recruits taking part from across the whole island. Graham gave a comprehensive talk-through regarding the equipment and webbing used by Western Front soldiers. We were all put through a rigorous (!) parade drill session, and despite the



poor weather we emerged with extremely bright spirits! We also covered weapons drill, and the differences between WW1 and WW2 drills were discussed. Several WARGroup members present joined the Great War Society and are looking forward to the coming WW1 events. This event was another example of spreading the word regarding the “joy of re-enacting” (Think we have that spelt correctly!!) and there was definitely demand for more WW1 sessions. ROB/DJ



## Cork Brothers of Charity event

December 2008- A fantastic day out was had by all who attended this worthwhile charity event. The carers and residents put on a superb display and had decked out the hall with 40's memorabilia which with the entertainment and music was a truly wartime experience! The group set up an excellent display tent and conducted a weapons firing display which went down very well with both residents and relatives who attended for the day. Many of the carers and residents were dressed for the event and after dinner we were treated to a good old fashioned 40's knee's up, complete with tuition and a decent bread and butter pudding (“bleedin’ topper my son”!). A very well done to everyone who contributed to this successful day. ROB/DJ

# 1ST POLISH PARA BGDE

Polish 1st Independent Paratrooper Brigade (1. Samodzielna Brygada Spadochronowa) was created in September 1941 in Scotland as a part of Polish armed forces Directly subordinate to Polish Government in Exile. It's exclusive mission was to drop into occupied Poland in order to help liberate country hence the brigade's motto „By the shortest way”.

The unit was created and commanded by Col. Stanisław Sosabowski (promoted in June 1944 to promoted to Brigadier General

6th June 1944 Brigade became the part of 1st Allied Airborne Army and under high pressure from British HQ instead of being dropped directly into Poland could be sent into action at any part of the Western front.

The unit was eventually used during Operation Market Garden in 1944. The Poles were initially landed by glider from the 18th September, whilst due to bad weather over England, the Parachute section of the Brigade was held up, and jumped on the 21st September at Driel on the South bank of the Rhine. The Poles suffered significant casualties during the next few days of fighting, but still were able, by their presence, to cause around 2,500 German troops to be diverted to them for fear of supporting the remnants of 1st Airborne trapped over the lower Rhine in Oosterbeek.

The following day, the Poles were able to produce some make-shift boats and attempted the crossing. With great difficulty and under German fire from the heights of Westerbouwing at the northern bank of the river, the 8th Parachute Company and later additional troops from 3rd

Battalion, managed to cross the Rhine in two attempts. In total about 200 Polish Paratroopers made it across in two days, and were able to cover the subsequent withdrawal of the remnants of the British 1st Airborne Division.

On the 26th of September 1944, the brigade (now including the 1st Battalion and elements of the 3rd Battalion, who were parachuted near to Grave on the 23rd September) was ordered to march in the direction of Nijmegen. The brigade had lost 23% of its fighting strength, amounting to 400 casualties.

In 1945 it was attached to the Polish 1st Armoured Division and undertook occupation duties in Northern Germany until 30th June 1947 when it was disbanded. The majority of its soldiers stayed in exile. ERL



# KIT CORNER

## Rifle mounted grenade launchers



The idea of propelling a grenade further than a man could throw it had obvious merit, and even in WW1 an attachment was designed to fix to the muzzle of British Army rifles which could take a grenade. A blank round was used to propel the grenade and had some success. These devices were also in use in WW2 although mostly used it appears by special ops and commando forces. Unfortunately the force involved in forcing the grenade off the rifle caused some rifles to burst (!) so often the Lee-Enfields were wrapped in brass wire and soldered together to prevent unpleasant surprises! An example is shown above of such a rifle. This is a No 1 Mark III Lee Enfield. This grenade has the mark "No V MK I 1916"



Unfortunately the force involved in forcing the grenade off the rifle caused some rifles to burst (!) so often the Lee-Enfields were wrapped in brass wire and soldered together to prevent unpleasant surprises! An example is shown above of such a rifle. This is a No 1 Mark III Lee Enfield. This grenade has the mark "No V MK I 1916"

Rifle Grenade launchers were also employed in WWII, and were evidently used more by special squads such as commandos for particular purposes. DJ

## Protecting and carrying Lee Enfield Rifles

There were evidently a number of ways of protecting Lee-Enfield rifles in WW1 and WW2- this varied hugely- some simply wrapped the breech and muzzle with any relatively clean piece of cloth and tying it on, ready for quick removal if needed(!). In WW1 some webbing canvas bags were made which were primarily it seems used for transporting the rifles in vehicles and public places- see



below a photo of WW1 soldiers in a train station awaiting transport- some with the cases, some without. Note the butt was still showing in this pattern case. In WW2 a pattern 37 webbing case was made which would take any Lee-Enfield rifle, whether SM-LE, No 4, or sniper version. The pouch held a cleaning kit in its tin, and later carrying attachments from a webbing sling was added for convenience. DJ

# ODDS 'N SODS ETC

## Good-bye-ee

Brother Bertie went away  
To do his bit the other day  
With a smile on his lips  
and his Lieutenant's pips  
upon his shoulder bright and gay  
As the train moved out he said,  
'Remember me to all the birds.'  
Then he wagged his paw  
and went away to war  
Shouting out these pathetic words:

Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,  
Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee,  
Tho' it's hard to part I know,  
I'll be tickled to death to go.  
Don't cry-ee, dont sigh-ee,  
there's a silver lining in the sky-ee,  
Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,  
Nah-poo, toodle-oo, Goodbye-ee.

At the hospital at Kew,  
The convalescents, dressed in blue,  
Had to hear Lady Lee, who had turned 83,  
Sing all the old, old songs she knew.  
Then she made a speech and said,  
"I look on you boys with pride,  
And to thank you all I'm going to kiss each  
one",  
Then they all grabbed a stick and cried,

Goodbye-ee, goodbye-ee,  
Wipe the tear, baby dear, from your eye-ee,  
Tho' it's hard to part I know,  
I'll be tickled to death to go.  
Don't cry-ee, dont sigh-ee,  
there's a silver lining in the sky-ee,  
Bonsoir, old thing, cheer-i-o, chin, chin,  
Nah-poo, toodle-oo, Goodbye-ee.



## SLANG CORNER

**Limey** (US) meaning "Brit", Originally an Australian term for ANY British person- refers to the phrase lime-juicer which in turn was used for the British Sea-farers who were given lemon and lime juice to add to their rum on their voyages to make grog.

**Yank** (Brit) meaning "US" (aka our wonderful allied cousins from North America, who of course are most definitely NOT overpaid, oversexed, and- actually, perhaps we have it wrong.... :u)

**Kraut** (Allied) meaning "German", from Sauer-kraut, a fermented preserved cabbage

**Piccadilly Commandoes** (Brit) meaning "good time girls" who effectively turned Mayfair and west London into an American Colony (Police Description!)

**Potato Masher** (Allied) meaning German stick grenade

**Pig Sticker** (Allied) meaning a Bayonet

ROB/DJ

# DID YOU KNOW?

This page is dedicated to any interesting or unusual facts regarding the units or actions- feel free to contribute!!



We were all amazed to discover several of our group's surnames echoed in the battalion's casualty list.

One example is that of the unusual surname Janes- the same as our very own Doc. He decided to dig into this more and discovered that they had more in common than their surname- Lance Sergeant Frank Edwin Janes was in fact his great uncle!

Frank Edwin Janes was attached to "F" Co., 2<sup>nd</sup> Batt, LIR, and was awarded the gallantry award Military Medal for bravery under fire in North Africa. His citation is copied below. Sadly he was killed in action along with almost his whole company

during fighting in North Italy near Santerno where the company were ambushed by surprisingly well dug in Germans. Their objective was a farmhouse on a ridge, but sadly they were under heavy fire on their flanks and it appears only he and the last remaining officer made it as far as the wall of the farmhouse before being cut down. He is buried with just over 100 comrades in the military graveyard in Santerno. These facts were gleaned from family questions and the National Archives in UK which is searchable on-line: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/>

This site has information on any British service man or woman who was either killed in action or awarded honours. DJ

3501. WT. 45527/102. COM. 2/M. 0922. W.L. 2020/1284. 1904. 7/42. Wy.L.P. Co. 455. Form/W. 3121/4

Army Form W.3121

38 (Irish) Inf Brigade 6<sup>th</sup> Arm'd Division 5 Corps

Date recommendation passed forward

Received 6 Mar 43 Passed 7 Mar 43 **373**

Schedule No. Unit 2nd Bn. London Irish Rifles

Rank and Army or Personal No. Rfn. 14205933

Brigade 6<sup>th</sup> Arm'd Division 6 Mar 43 7 Mar 43

Corps 9-3-43 11-3-43

Army 15 MAR 1943 17 MAR 1943

Name JANES, Frank Ewin

(Christian names must be stated)

Action for which commended (Date and place of action must be stated)	Recommended by	Honour or Reward	(To be left blank)
<p>Reference Map TUNISIA 1:50,000 Sheet No-34</p> <p>During the battle for the high ground North of BOU ARADA on 26th Feb 1943, an enemy Machine gun was inflicting casualties on F Company. Rfn. Janes moved forward to an exposed position and stayed there under heavy fire in order to direct the fire of a L.M.G. which was engaging the M.G. He stayed in this position for about twenty minutes during which time his steel helmet was struck by an enemy bullet and Rfn. Janes knocked unconscious. When he recovered he continued to direct the fire until the M.G. had been put out of action.</p> <p>Rfn. Janes complete disregard of his own personal safety and his determination to destroy the enemy was a magnificent example to the remainder of his Platoon.</p> <p>Awarded M.M. L.G. 4-3-43</p> <p>5 Mar 43</p>	<p>O.C. 2nd Bn. London Irish Rifles</p> <p><i>Recommended</i> <i>and</i> <i>signed</i> <i>Small</i> Commanding Officer, 6<sup>th</sup> Arm'd Division.</p>	<p>M.M.</p>	<p>12356</p> <p>P.T.O.</p>

Commanding 2nd Bn. London Irish Rifles,  
Lt. Col.  
The Royal Ulster Rifles,  
Comd. 38 (Irish) Inf Bde.

# FORTHCOMING SKIRMISHES



**ST PATRICKS DAY PARADE (WWI)**  
**FAILE NA NDEISE (BURGARY AMBUSH)**  
**DUNCANNON WEEKEND (WWII & MULTI)**  
**INISTIOGE (WWII)**  
**SALUTE (WWII)**  
**FILM WORK:**

**THE LAST WITNESS**  
**JADOTVILLE**

**MAR 09**  
**MAY 09**  
**JUNE 09**  
**JULY 09**  
**AUG 09**

**TBA**  
**TBA**

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ROB/DOC 002