

## Minutes of the BMS meeting of 6 June 2019.

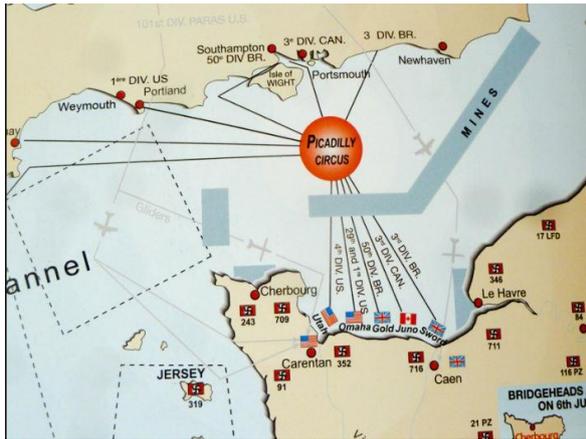
1. President welcomed all members and three guests J. Somner, L. Evans and J. Hickman.
2. Apologies received: M. Atkinson, A. Bostock, J. Carver, M. Harrison, C. Mellor-Hill, M. Platt, P. Wilson and R. Painter.
3. Stats: In attendance 23, Meal 9, Drink 5 and ONS 1.
4. No new members.
5. Matters arising from previous meeting, Library requests and Research questions – John Scott – Medal Index Cards WWI post 1916 show the service date for Officer and Civilian recipients.
6. Functions/Visits - Mick Atkinson's talk at Fusiliers Museum Warwick 2pm Saturday 29.6.19 [Titled 'The Prince of Bentheim und Steinfurt'] and also 'Armed forces Day' at Warwick 29.6.19 – Secretary has e-mailed the flyers for these.
7. Committee points – Minconvention – 19 confirmed, a further three attendees from this evening's meeting and 3 or 4 anticipated via the Cheadle OMRS meeting in April 2019. We have 5 raffle prizes. Your 2019-2020 programme is being finalised.
8. Tonight's topic '75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day' by Roger Bragger.
9. Next meeting 4.7.2019 – 'Recent Acquisitions and Short Talks'.

### '75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day' by Roger Bragger:

President Roger Bragger introduced his subject with a short explanation of the phrase 'D-Day' - the 'D' represented the date of the invasion with subsequent dates being described as 'D'- day plus 1 and so on. Roger's talk would be focussed on glider and airborne activities after 12 Midnight on 6.6.1944.

Planning for the invasion of Europe [Codenamed 'Overlord'] had started at the Washington Conference with Roosevelt and Churchill –they had proposed a UK based invasion force with a possible date of May 1944.

Subdivisions of the main operation 'Overlord' were entitled 'Tonga' [The name of the British 6<sup>th</sup> Airborne activities 6-7<sup>th</sup> June, 1944] with further subdivisions [of 'Tonga'] being 'Mallard' and 'Deadstick'. The latter mission was the capture of two vital road bridges near Caen – 'Pegasus' bridge being the River Orne crossing and the other the canal bridge at Benouville.



Above left: D-Day landing beaches. Above right: proximity of landed gliders at Pegasus Bridge.

The Germans had successfully used airborne troops in ‘Blitzkrieg’ as part of the invasion of Belgium in 1940. Allied experience of glider borne troops was limited to the invasion of Sicily starting in July, 1943 but some problems had arisen – namely that gliders were slower so an easier target, that there had been navigation issues with night flights and they were only lightly armed.

Roger showed pictures of the landing site near ‘Pegasus’ bridge [see above]. The bridges were significant for access to Normandy and communications.

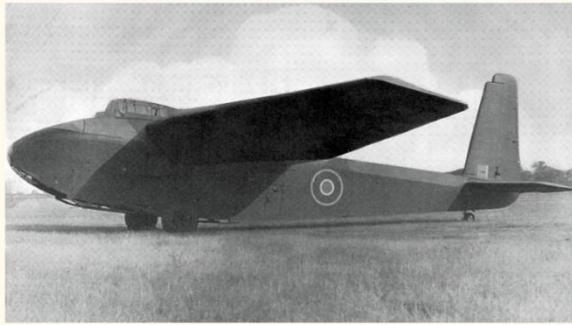
As part of operation ‘Deadstick’, the troops had also been tasked with capture of the ‘Merville’ artillery battery – this German heavy battery had the potential to shell ‘Sword’ beach – but because of dropzone errors, the Merville battery attacking force had been depleted but it nevertheless, despite casualties, had had a successful assault. [NB: This is discussed further in members’ contributions].

Operation Tonga: Plans for this were underway by February, 1944 which involved RAF transport cover, training for formation flying and the methodology to land a brigade of troops. Glider pilots were trained to land close to the target [which would in time be the bridges] – they practised near the River Ex which had an adjacent canal. Scale models were made to demonstrate glider landing paths.



Above: Glider pilots’ skill demonstrated in aerial photograph of packed landing site.

The tow planes were 'Halifax' bombers, 'Albermarles' or 'Dakotas' – The initial waves included pathfinder teams which had to mark the dropzones. Within 30 minutes, the main force followed amongst which were four large Hamilcar gliders and could each hold a light tank eg M22 Locust.



Side view of the imposing General Aircraft GAL49 Hamilcar, the largest Allied glider used in the Second World War.



A General Aircraft GAL49 Hamilcar unloading an M22 Locust light tank.

Above : The Hamilcar Glider.

The Hamilcar glider was a British design – 344 were made – only one now remains at Middle Wallop Airfield Museum of Army Flying. As they were large and slow, not surprisingly, they were vulnerable to anti-aircraft fire.

In summary, Operation 'Mallard' was the operation to reinforce the left flank of the British landing beaches. Operation 'Deadstick' was to take the bridges and Merville battery and Operation 'Tonga' to land troops to the east of Caen. Both bridges were taken with light casualties only.

Roger showed the medal group and photograph of Flight Lieutenant J A ['George'] Sizmur, glider tug pilot. John Arthur ['George'] Seismer No 123466, a pilot in 295 Squadron – was decorated with the Air Force Cross but had did not qualify for the 'Defence' Medal in his WWII medals. Sizmur went on to be a participant in the XIV Olympiad in London representing England in the Lacrosse Demonstration Team.



Above: Flight Lt. J A G Sizmur. AFC and WWII medals.



Above: Photograph of A flight 295 Squadron.

(44) Acting Flight Lieutenant John Arthur George SIZMUR (123466), Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve, No. 298 Squadron. (Total flying hours 730; completed during last 6 months 200). This officer joined his present squadron in October, 1942, and took part in the bombing attack on Distre Power Station. He has also performed excellent work ferrying gliders to North Africa. On one occasion his glider's tow rope broke when over the Bay of Biscay but despite adverse weather, with poor visibility, Flight Lieutenant Sizmur searched at low level until he found the glider, the crew of which were rescued within 10 hours. Another time he made a masterly forced landing when the 2 port engines of his aircraft failed on taking off. Each of his eight flights to Africa, with a glider loaded with equipment, was flown over 1400 miles of sea and occupied nine hours. The route followed was well within enemy fighter range and the combination could not be towed into cloud, while there was only one gun turret on the towing aircraft. All the flights were completed in daylight. Throughout, Flight Lieutenant Sizmur has performed his allotted tasks with cheerfulness and courage, setting a fine example by his devotion to duty.

Above: Citation for Flight Lt Sizmur.

Also shown were the medals of Sizmur's father – G A Sizmur - ISO [Imperial Service Order and Coronation medal QEII. [For further information on the Sizmur medals, please visit [www.rogersstudy.co.uk](http://www.rogersstudy.co.uk)].



Above: G A Sizmur ISO and Coronation Medal QEII.

The medals of Roger Bragger's father [Les Bragger] medal were shown which included WWII group and ISM for 49 years service with the GPO. Les Bragger had been present in Normandy on D-day +10 in the Royal Engineers. Roger had claimed his father's medals as it turned out that they had never been claimed.



Left: Photo and Medal Group of Les Bragger.

Next up were the medals and MID ['Mentioned in Dispatches'] certificate of Chief Petty Officer Telegraphist A. Bisely present on a Destroyer on the Normandy Coast 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1944 [vessel's name unknown]. The medals had a Long Service award and the MID certificate was for 'Telegraphic services on D-day'.



Above Left: CPO Bisely MID certificate. Above Right: CPO Bisely WWII group including France and Germany bar, Oak leaf cluster [MID] and Navy Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

A group to Charles Stanley Morgan of the Herefordshire Regiment was shown – he'd joined the regiment in 1939 and was present in Normandy on D-day +7. The Herefordshire Regiment was a light infantry unit who, after landing, realised their support vehicles were some 3 miles away... Morgan progressed eastwards having some involvement in the capture of Admiral Donitz [then the Fuhrer] at the very end of the war.[See medal group picture below].



Above: WWII medals to CS Morgan with Territorial Efficiency Medal on the far right.

Also shown was an impressive group to Major G.C. Muirhead of the Pioneers who had landed in heavy swell 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1944 The Pioneers were tasked to land stores, clear the beaches and supply the paratroopers at the bridges. Major Muirhead had been awarded the MC [Military Cross], MM [Military Medal] and Trio in WWI [with the Camerons].



Above: Major G.C.Muirhead MC, MM Medal Group.

A group was shown to a Normandy casualty Private Alan Roberts KIA 18.7.1944 aged 17yrs. He is buried at Ranville Cemetery.



Above: Montage of items and medals to Private Alan Roberts KIA aged 17 years – from Small Heath, Birmingham.

Military medals [MM's] were shown to two soldiers [14551946 Private AH Nelhams and 5962146 Lance Corporal RN Leigh Royal Warwickshire Regiment] who were both involved in destroying a 'Tiger' tank with a 'Piat' gun – This tank had been blocking the advance of the troops. Leigh had transferred into the SAS in the early part of the war serving in 'A' squadron under Major 'Paddy' Mayne in the North African desert]. Both MM's gazetted 21.12.1944 London Gazette.



Above Left: MM and WWII medals to Private AH Nelhams.

Above centre: Drawing of soldier with Piat anti-tank gun. The weapon used to destroy the Tiger tank.

Above right: MM to Lance Corporal RN Leigh.

A DFM [Distinguished Flying Medal] non-immediate award to Flight Sergeant Frank William Stroud of 44 Squadron was shown. He flew 36 missions between March and August 1944 – His tour of duty started with the Nuremburg raid of March, 1944. He had flown in an attack on Caen 6<sup>th</sup> June, 1944. His DFM was gazetted in November 1944. He'd also been in a Wellington bomber crash where five civilians had been killed in Corley.



Above: DFM to Flight Sgt F. Stroud.

Richard Todd the actor received some discussion – one of our guests had met him – he was cast in several films including ‘The Longest Day’, ‘The Dambusters’ , ‘ Yangtsee Incident’ and , of course, many, many more!.

A clarification was raised on the ‘Merville’ battery action – This position had been successfully taken as part of ‘Deadstick’ as stated earlier. The Paras had moved on from the battery which was then re-occupied by the Germans – The position was re-taken by No 3 Commando who were in turn repulsed by a German counterattack. The Merville battery wasn’t taken by the Allies until August,1944 although it had been put out of action permanently before then by pre D-Day naval and aerial bombardments.

Roger Bragger closed the meeting at 20.40hrs thanking all for their contributions to a very stimulating meeting.

My thanks to Roger Bragger for the permission to use his Powerpoint slides in this summary.

C Davies

BMS Secretary. 21.6.19.

