**‘Lt. Col. Harold Henry Merton DSO’ by Roger Bragger.**

A talk given on 6th August, 2026 at Fairfield Suite, Bromsgrove Holiday Inn.

Chaired by Vice-President Paul Handford., MBE.

Tonight’s meeting focussed on the medals and career of Harold Henry Merton., Royal Artillery, a veteran of both World Wars who achieved a final rank of Lt. Colonel on retirement in 1956. Somewhat surprisingly, this item had remained unsold on the original auction date but was rapidly snapped up by our member!

Merton had been commissioned into the Army as 2nd Lieutenant in the Royal Artillery, on October 27th 1915, He left to serve in the Salonika/Balkans theatre of the War, and by 1918, had risen in rank to Lieutenant and then Captain, He stayed in the Army, was married and went to India (63rd Field Battery RA). His son (Richard Henry Merton – his son’s medals were part of the same auction lot) was born in India in 1933. After his return from India, he was promoted in 1937 to Major and held that rank when he entered WW2 with the British Expeditionary Force in 1940 attached to the 23rd Field Artillery.

In France, the unit became attached to the 51st Highland Division under the Command of Major General Sir Victor Morven Fortune. Their support of the French forces came under attack by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel’s Panzer units around Chartres in early June. The race to withdraw ended with the 51st Div setting up a defensive perimeter around the Coastal town of St. Valery-en-Caux in the Seine-Maritime region of Normandy. This included Major Merton and his batteries.

A courageous attempt was made to hold out to allow Allied shipping to rescue our troops out but with terrible casualties, and virtually no ammunition, Fortune was obliged to surrender on June 12th to Rommel.

**Two photos above**: These show  Rommel with captured with captured British officer and troops at St Valery-en-Caux in June, 1940. [Photo Roger Bragger]

As a POW, Merton was eventually moved with Fortune to OFLAG VII C Laufen Castle, there, they were treated reasonably well. There are photos from their time there including one with Fortune and others posing around a game of Curling. Merton was later imprisoned at Spangenburg Bei Cassel [Oflag IX-A/H a PoW camp for Allied officers].

Merton was *unaware* of his Distinguished Service Order [DSO] award until *after* his release as a POW in 1945 and he had returned to Great Britain. The DSO was for 'recognition of gallant and distinguished services in the field' at Saint Valery-en-Caux 10-12th June, 1940. The award came as a surprise as he had been listed as missing in action/POW in July 1940. Despite extensive research*, no copy of the citation has been found* and this is confirmed by the Head Archivist at the RA HQ at Larkhill & Public Records Office.

Merton stayed in the Army attached to the RA Training Regiment in Oswestry, and retired with the rank of Lt. Col. in 1956.

**Medal group above left:** To Lt. Col. H.H. Merton., RA: [All obverses and described from left to right] top row: British War medal [BWM] and Victory medal [VM]; middle row: 1939-45 Star, DSO and France and Germany Star [not entitled] lower row: India General Service medal 1936-39 ['IGS'] one clasp 'North West Frontier 1936-37'.

**Photo above right**: H.H. Merton RA. [Photos: Roger Bragger].

His medal group should not include the France and Germany Star, a self-awarded medal he clearly thought he was entitled to! And why not, he was one of the last units to surrender to Field Marshall Erwin Rommel on 12th June 1940!

Other emphemera relevant to H.H.Merton were sold with the medals which included his framed Certificate of Commission, DSO Certificate, framed Dress Side Cap, framed RA Metal Insignia, 3 small watercolours in a frame which were painted by a fellow prisoner of War, a letter received by Merton after WW2 from Lieutenant General Sir Brian Horrocks (of Arnhem fame), various other original photos of Merton in POW Camps in Germany, a post War photo of him with Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, another in the company of Montgomery post WW2 whilst Merton was at the Btn training base in Oswestry [**see photo below**] and an aged copy of the large format Book 'The Prisoner's Progress' which included colour photos taken by Merton when he returned to Germany some years later to visit Laufen Castle.

**Photo above**: Left to right Merton, unknown and Montgomery. See text above.

Information provided by Roger Bragger [thank you Roger!]

Edited by Chris Davies BMS Secretary. 22-23.10.2026

Additional secretary's information; The display 'Merton DSO' won the silver medal at this year's medal show in September 2026.

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