

NOTES FROM THE FRONTLINE

Our round-up of this month's military history news

THE *CATCH-22* LOOK

A North American aircraft has been repainted to represent the plane once flown by Joseph Heller.

The paintwork has transformed the B-25J Mitchell to exactly match 43-4064, a plane that served with the 488th Bomb Squadron of the 340th Bomb Group, 12th Air Force, United States Army Air Force, at the end of WWII.

Heller relied heavily on his time spent serving as a bombardier in the 488th Bomb Squadron in Corsica for the inspiration for his famous satirical novel *Catch-22*. The writer in fact flew several different planes assigned to the

340th Bomb Group, among them 43-4064.

This historically accurate repainting was completed by a conservation team at IWM Duxford over a period of six weeks. Care was taken to make sure it is identical to the original 43-4064 – all the lines and colour changes were taken from original photographs of the aircraft during WWII. It will be exhibited in the newly renovated American Air Museum at IWM Duxford when it reopens to the public in the spring of next year. For more details, visit www.iwm.org.uk/duxford



Wilfred Owen's training camp



Volunteers have been helping uncover a former military camp in Surrey where war poet Wilfred Owen trained for service in World War I.

Owen arrived at the camp in June 1916 to train for combat in France. While he was there, he penned a sonnet that was later reworked into his famous poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.

Owen died a week before the end of the war, aged 25.

The site, near Godalming in Surrey, was active during both world wars: it was known as Witley North Camp during WWI and Algonquin Camp during WWII. However, it was almost completely lost until Surrey County Council's archaeological unit initiated the project to exca-

vate the area for the first time and document the findings.

The project is backed by a £30,000 grant from the Government's community covenant scheme. The scheme aims to strengthen ties and mutual understanding between members of the armed forces and civilians in the wider communities in which they live.

So far the project has uncovered many contemporary artefacts, including mess tins, dummy bullets used for training, and a harmonica. These finds, along with documents from the archives, will be collected together to form an exhibition and booklet for the wider public to learn more about the history of this military site.

Follow the team's progress on their Facebook page at www.facebook.com/diggingsurreypast



Ascension Island bicentenary

To commemorate its bicentenary year, the British Overseas Territory of Ascension Island is hosting celebrations all summer, culminating in a weekend of special events on 22-25 October.

In 1815, a small British naval garrison named HMS *Ascension* was established on an uninhabited volcanic island in the South Atlantic Ocean, between the coasts of West Africa and Brazil. It was a precaution after Napoleon was imprisoned on Saint Helena to the south-east. In October of that year, the captains of HMS *Zenobia* and HMS *Peruvian* had landed to claim the island as British territory.



During WWII, the island was an important naval and air station, providing anti-submarine warfare bases during the Battle of the Atlantic. It was also used during the Falklands War. Today, Ascension Island has a temporary population of around 800 people, and an MoD and a USAF base.

British Base Commander Mark Taylor said, 'Those of us who live on Ascension today must pay tribute to all our military forebears, who worked in extreme conditions from 1815 onwards to establish a fresh water-supply, sanitation, military fortifications, housing, and healthcare in this isolated and remote environment. Ascension continues to have great strategic importance, and those of us who serve here today have a key role to play as a staging post for British interests – both military and diplomatic – in the South Atlantic.'



NEWS IN BRIEF Defending Dover



The only working example of a British 3-inch anti-aircraft gun from WWI has been restored and installed at Dover Castle. This marks the centenary of the first successful hit on a Zeppelin by an identical anti-aircraft gun, controlled from Dover Castle's Fire Command Post.

On 21 December 1914, Dover was the target of the first bombing attack on Britain by a German aeroplane. The threat of this type of aerial warfare led to the development of anti-aircraft defences, such as the 3-inch gun.

Now an anti-aircraft emplacement, including a Fire Command Post and Port War Signal Station, has been painstakingly recreated thanks to a Heritage Lottery Fund grant. By restoring some of these features, visitors will be better able to appreciate the crucial part the castle played in the defence of Britain during WWI.

Stamp duty



The Royal Mail is to create a Special Stamp honouring Sir Nicholas Winton, who rescued hundreds of children from Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia, after an online petition calling for him to receive the accolade reached over 100,000 signatures. On the eve of WWII, Winton organised eight trains to take 669 unaccompanied children away to safety in Britain. He also helped find them foster families. He died earlier this year, aged 106.

A spokeswoman for Royal Mail had said, 'It is clear that Sir Nicholas Winton is a worthy candidate'. The campaign was launched by Justin Cohen and Richard Ferrer from *Jewish News*, in conjunction with the Holocaust Education Trust, and backed by Sir Mick Davis, who chaired the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission. The stamp will be issued in 2016 as part of a commemorative set.

SCRAPBOOKS FROM THE HOME FRONT

Scrapbooks made by a family during WWI are being made available for public viewing after staff at Edinburgh Council's Capital Collections library tracked down the original owners' son.

The two books were made by the Thomson family, who lived at Glengyle Terrace in Edinburgh. Most of the letters are addressed to Thomas Davidson Thomson, who was just three years old when the war broke out. The researchers believe his parents were collecting the material on his behalf, to document the times he was living through when just a little boy.

The first scrapbook contains newspaper articles relating the news of the 'impending European War', illustrations of Allied military in their different uniforms, and newspaper cuttings of the British and Belgian Royal Families, as well as propaganda cartoons and advertisements.

The second scrapbook is less colourful, and has

fewer scraps, tokens, and illustrations, but shows the impact of war on the home front.

There are items related to rationing and official notices to conserve resources. There are also letters of thanks for small donations given to charitable causes. Finally, there is news of peace and the surrender of the German fleet. On the last page, pressed like real flowers, are two handmade red-silk poppies.

Library officer Clare Padgett and John Temple from the digital volunteer team conducted a thorough investigation through records, ship's passenger lists, and online search engines, managing to find Thomson's son, Dave Thomson, who now lives in the Netherlands. Thomson has allowed the scrapbooks to be included in the Capital Collections so that his family's history is available to the public.

The scrapbooks can be viewed at the website www.capitalcollections.org.uk



Mightier than the sword

The pen used by US General Douglas MacArthur during the Japanese surrender ceremony that ended WWII has been displayed in Chester Town Hall to coincide with the 70th anniversary of the signing.

The pen was used on 2 September 1945, on board the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay, and then was given by MacArthur to Lieutenant General Arthur Percival, a former forces commander, Japanese prisoner-of-war, and witness to the signing on board the ship. He, in turn, donated it to the Cheshire Regiment before his death in 1966.

The pen will be shown as part of the year-long 'Chester Unlocked' programme that celebrates the city's diverse heritage. After its loan to the Town Hall, the pen will return to the Cheshire Military Museum, where it will go back on display to the public. For more information about the museum, visit www.cheshiremilitarymuseum.co.uk

GOT A STORY?
Let us know!



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