



A SHORT HISTORY OF THE NORMANDY VETERANS ASSOCIATION

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NATIONAL SECRETARY

FOUR VETERANS who had seen the strength and depth of the Dunkirk Veterans Association, initially met in Cleethorpes and through the local press invited any veteran of the Normandy Campaign to attend a meeting. Twenty nine attended this meeting on 8th April 1981 at the Central Hall in Grimsby, these included former members of the Army, Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and the Merchant Navy, all had taken part in the Invasion of Normandy and the subsequent battles which gave liberation to the people of Normandy and freedom from NAZI occupation. The meeting decided a name for the group and the eligibility for membership was to be for those who had taken part in the Campaign on the land, by sea or in the air over Normandy. i.e. H.M. Armed Forces, or those of the allied nations who took an active part. Subsequently it was agreed to include nursing services, ENSA or ancillary bodies who met the stated requirements. Officials were elected and agreement made that meetings were to be held each month. When the constitution was devised, the main point registered was that a revival of the war time spirit of comradeship was to be the by-word. This remains so to this day.

The original team worked hard together and laid strong foundations for the Association which is now a world wide organisation comprising eighty-nine branches and thousands of members. A man of special note is Arthur J. Flodman, who served with the 9th Battalion Durham Light Infantry, he was the public relations officer for the N.V.A. and spent endless time to the task of increasing membership by writing to local newspapers throughout the country. This resulted in a large increase in members and it was found necessary to form other branches nationally. The Association grew and Grimsby became known as the H.Q. Branch.

However, with the number of branches rising to 35, it was decided that things should be put on an official National footing. A meeting was convened in Sloane Square in London with 35 branches in attendance. At the meeting it was agreed to hold the first National Conference in Bristol in October 1985. Officials were elected; Arthur Flodman became the first National Secretary. Arthur had landed on D-Day with his Battalion, the second in Command of this Battalion the 9th Durham Light Infantry was Major John Mogg, who subsequently rose to the rank and title of General Sir John Mogg GCB, CBE, DSO DL. Sir John became the Association's first President and has unfailingly been a tower of strength for the N.V.A.

Regrettably Arthur Flodman died one month after this momentous meeting, and was therefore unable to see the results of his building of the Association. He is still remembered by the original members with much affection and is thought of as the "Architect of the N.V.A." I was honoured to take on the responsibilities of his office as Hon. National Secretary.

The first National Chairman was Vic Britton MBE who sadly died in November last year. Vic was a former SSM with the Royal Engineers, and ex-serviceman par excellence. He was dedicated and worked tirelessly for the association and the veterans, and was respected by all who knew him. Vic was succeeded by Leslie Frost, who has also been responsible for the forming and direction of the 50th Anniversary Festival committee which took on the mammoth task of the administration for this Festival of Commemoration.

The current National President is Colonel Sir Peter Hilton KCVO, MC**, KstJ, JP. H.M. Lord Lieutenant of Derbyshire. The two bars to his M.C. indicates the tenor of our President.

There are now eighty nine branches worldwide, including New Zealand, Canada and two in Australia, many of their members we shall be meeting for the first time this 50th Anniversary year. In the U.K. the N.V.A. have formed eleven regions each with a regional representative, who are required to report to National Council at least three times a year which gives them automatic membership of the Council.

The Association holds an annual commemoration parade and service in Horse Guards. Wreaths are laid at the Whitehall Cenotaph and up to 1,000 Normandy Veterans are on parade each year.

The Benevolent and Welfare Fund was initiated with the striking of the Normandy Campaign Commemorative medal, under the auspices of Award Productions Ltd who to date have been the sole benefactors. The fund is controlled by three elected managers, Reg Spicer, the first National Treasurer leads this team, his demeanour and knowledge is fully appreciated.

The Association's Chaplain is the Reverend Kenneth Ward, BA., L. Th., he was R.N.V.R. and helped clear the way to Normandy in a fishing trawler disguised as a minesweeper. Reverend Ward is also an officer of the Welfare and Benevolent Fund.

The National Standard Bearer is Roland F. Jefferson BEM, who with his two escorts collectively represent the three armed services, all performing their duties with dignity and pride.

Of the twenty-nine veterans attending the inaugural meeting, twelve have died, eight have lapsed membership, leaving nine who are still part of the N.V.A.

There is much to remember and reminisce in this Jubilee year. The Association is very active, working and caring, also aware of the advancing years but trust that many members may have more time to enjoy the camaraderie of this special and unique group of veterans and their supporters.