



The Kingswood Legionnaires' Newsletter

The Christmas Tale To End All Christmas Tales?

Long-standing, die-hard, stalwart members of this fishing club know only too well that at this time of year we usually round off with some ghostly tale to send shivers down their brittle and crooked spines. This year's tale is a little more poignant than usual and is more in keeping with the theme of this centenary year, commemorating the end of WW1. There were more than 37 million casualties during this terrible and senseless conflict, including a million British and Empire soldiers and over 2 million German troops. However, on December 25th, 1914, stories emerged of an unofficial truce, with some light-hearted banter, some exchanging of gifts and even a friendly game of football, which was played between the barbed wire and trenches of "no man's land" – And so I felt inspired to write this story...

December 25th, 1918, River Somme, France

'Twas a bitterly cold and misty morning, and as the sun peeped over the horizon, it's warming rays of golden light glistened on the crystal clear dew drops, which clung lovingly to every blade of grass. The guns had been silent now for almost 6 weeks and although this brought some very welcome respite for the stragglers of The Fifth Infantry Division, 12th Battalion of The "Glorious" Gloucester Regiment, something just didn't seem quite right. It was just too damn quiet. The division had become scattered after some heavy shelling, leaving a small contingent of 6 soldiers completely adrift from the rest of the main force. All they could do was sit tight and wait for new orders. In command, was Captain Tommy Ruffe, a very level-headed man of Welsh origin who was prone to bursting into song at every opportunity. His right-hand man was Sergeant-Major William Knitesbridge but everyone called him Sergeant Killy. He was a rather rotund, authoritative figure with deep northern roots. As the two men sat poring over a map of the terrain, an excited soldier ran towards them waving various items of fishing tackle. "Sir, sir, there's an old shed just beyond that ridge, quite near the river, and it's full of all types of fishing tackle", he reported. The soldier's name was Private Robert Howler, a corporal by rank and a jolly good fisherman by all

account. Corporal Howler had been scouting the surrounding area, hoping to locate the rest of the unit when he came across his find. This was most interesting as all six soldiers were avid fisherman, having been members of local Gloucestershire fishing clubs before the war broke out. "Sir, why don't we all go fishing?" said Private Billy Crumb, "Yes sir, why don't we?" echoed Private Clifford Purcelhouse. "I'm up for that" said Private Ivan Price" Captain Ruffe pondered for a moment... "Corporal, did you see any sign of our unit?" "No" came the reply. "Did you see any sign of the enemy?" he enquired. "No sir, nothing. It's like everyone has gone home sir. I mean, it's really quiet and peaceful like sir." "Okay men, we've been through hell these last two years and now, after sitting around here for almost 6 weeks with no clue as to what is happening in the world, let's all savour a few precious hours and go down to the river. It is Christmas day after all." Said the Captain. The men walked off and made their way to the ridge. As they peered over the top, there before them was a most beautiful sight to behold. A lush green field, with a sparkling river and a fisherman's hut on the bank. They made their way to the hut and opened the door. Inside, was like an Aladdin's cave with dozens of fishing rods, reels, nets and a host of angling accessories. The men were terribly excited but didn't speak much as they

sorted through all the gear. "Right, has everyone got what they need?" Enquired the Captain. "We just need some bait sir", said Private Price. "Okay everyone, take 20 minutes and go dig up some worms", said the Captain. Everyone frantically dug at the ground around them with their bayonets and collected as many worms as they could find. There was an eerie, unsettling feeling amongst the men as the air was unusually fresh and a spine-chilling silence hung all around. It was not something they were accustomed to after almost 2 years on the front line. The Captain called for his men to form a line and to follow him down to the river. Next, the men spread out along the bank each finding a suitable spot to settle down and enjoy a few hours quiet fishing. Then, just as the men were getting ready, they heard voices coming from the other side of the river. "Everybody down!" Came the shout from Sergeant Killy. The soldiers each reached for their Lee-Enfield rifles and pointed them in the direction of the far river bank. Then, through the trees came 6 German soldiers. They were laughing and joking and each man was carrying a fishing rod and various bits of tackle. As they got closer to the river, Captain Ruffe shouted, "Stop! Put down your arms." The air was deathly silent for a moment and then a voice rang out. "Hay Tommy, Vee are nut armed, dont shut. Vee have jost com to catch ze vish." Captain Ruffe then stood up and shouted, "Hey, what's your name hun?" "I am Hauptman Fritz Zowercrott ov ze von hundred un turd infantree divizion", came the reply. "Well, why have you come here to fish? We were here first." Shouted Captain Ruffe. "Vell, ve are all bord and tiz Christmas dont yu no Ingleesh?" "Yes of course we know it's Christmas you blithering idiot." Came the reply from Sergeant Killy "Hay Tommy, vye ve nut haz a match ya? Ve challenges yu. Vot yu say Tommy?" Shouted Fritz. The British soldiers gathered in a group and quickly discussed the situation. "Well men, shall we show them what it's all about?" Asked Captain Ruffe. "Yeah, let's do it sir. Let's show the hun how to fish and teach them a lesson." Said Corporal Howler. "Yeah they don't like it up 'em" said Private Crumb. The men agreed to take on Gerry for a three hour match. "Okay Fritz, you're on," shouted Captain Ruffe. Three hours and the team with the most fish win okay?" "Ya oke Ingleesh." Came the reply. "Vell shote now all you names, so ve can wrien zem on ze regord sheet ya?" "Okay!" Shouted Captain Ruffe. "My name is Tommy." Said the Captain. "Ya ve knew zat unt stupid Ingleesh, Votis yu reel name?" Came the reply.

"Hey now steady on. Watch your language Gerry. My name is Captain Tommy Ruffe" "Oke, oke, Tommee Ruff." Said Fritz. "Then we have Sergeant Killy Willy." Said Captain Ruffe. "Killy ze Villy. Oke wot els?" Came the reply. "Then there is Bob Howler." "Bobz Oowler, Okay ya und more?" Shouted Fritz. "Clifford Purcelhouse." "Clifton Pursulhausen, ya... eny moor?" "Yes Billy Crumb and Ivan Price." Shouted Captain Ruffe. "Billy ze crumpet and Ivonna Spright. Okay Tommy ve hav all zis now. So ven yu catch a vish jost shote und I vill wrien down. Ya?" Captain Ruffe agreed and so the time to begin the contest was set for 11am and would then finish at 2pm. Everyone set up their tackle and Captain Ruffe blew his whistle right on the dot of 11am. The contest had only just begun when Hans, the German second in command, shouted over, "Hay Tommy, vot is you bait? "Don't tell 'em Captain" Said Private Price. "It's wazaks", said the Captain. "Vazaks? Oh oke" said Hans who didn't want to ask any more questions for fear of being given another silly answer. It had been 30 minutes into the match when Private Clifford Purcelhouse shouted out "Chub!" "Chubz!" Echoed Fritz as he noted down the English catch. "Roach!" Shouted Private Crumb. "Blimeys you Ingleesh are gud ya?" Shouted Fritz. Over the course of the next 2 hours the English team were catching twice as many as the Germans. Suddenly, the sound of thundering horse hooves could be heard on the English side of the river.

As Captain Ruffe stood up and looked behind him, he saw in the distance, a solitary horseman galloping towards him. The Captain stood in amazement, reached for his rifle and waited for the rider to come within range. As the rider got closer it was clear to see that he was wearing a British army uniform. "Halt! Who goes there?" Shouted the Captain. "It's Private Stephan Jeff sir. I have a message for you from GHQ sir." "You sound like a schizophrenic private. Okay, come on then spit it out boy, can't you see we're rather busy?" Retorted the Captain. "Yes sir, err... the war is over sir", said the young private. "Over? What do you mean over? When did this happen?" Enquired the Captain. "Bout six weeks ago sir", said the private. "Six weeks ago! And you've only told us now?" Shouted the angry Captain. "Yes sir, we've been looking for you for the past six weeks and a civvy spotted you on the river and informed us sir" "My god man this is wonderful news. I'll tell the men. Thank you private. Oh by the way. Will anyone be sending a vehicle to pick us up?" Asked Captain Ruffe. "No sir you're to follow me. It's about two miles walk to the nearest road where you are to wait until

someone comes to collect you sir.” Replied the Private. “Get your things sir and we’ll get the hell out of here.” Said the Private. Captain Ruffe called the men to attention and asked them all to gather round. “Men, as you may have heard, the war is finally over and we can all return home.” He said. “Permission to speak sir!” Asked Private Purcelhouse. “Very well Private. What is it man?” Enquired the Captain. “While you were talking to the messenger sir, we unanimously agreed to finish the contest with Gerry sir.” “Are you all sure?” Asked the Captain, tentatively. “Yes sir!” Came the reply in unison. “Well that suits me fine... so let’s get back to it then. You’re dismissed Private Jeff... off you go” Said Captain Ruffe with a wry smile. “Hay Ingleesh... Tommy, waz ol de firkin noize over dere? Ar yu vishin or vot? Shouted Fritz. The Germans had obviously not heard any part of the conversation between the messenger and soldiers as they were too busy passing banter between themselves and laughing. They hadn’t even noticed the arrival of the messenger, such was their preoccupation with the contest. “Yes keep calm old boy and carry on. We’re just discussing tactics” Shouted Captain Ruffe. “Ah discuzzing de tactiks. Yu cunnink Ingleesh. Tis no vonder yu catchin zo many vish ya?” Replied Fritz. All the soldiers carried on fishing right up until 2pm, when Captain Ruffe blew the final whistle.

There could be no doubt about the outcome. The British soldiers had won convincingly with 27 fish between them to the German’s total of just 11 fish. “Vell lukz liken yu vin Ingleesh.” Shouted Fritz. “Ya, vell dun Tommee.” Came a chorus of reluctant admission from the other German soldiers. “You can all go home now. The war is over Gerry.” Shouted Sergeant Killy. “Vot yu sayink Killy ze Villy? Ze vor ist ova?” Replied Hans. “Yes mate it’s time to go home now.” Confirmed the sergeant. “So, oo vun zis crazy vor zen Ingleesh?” Enquired Fritz. “We did!” Came the reply from all the British contingent. “Oh shizen. So yu vin der vish match and yu vind ze vor. Ah yu Ingleesh yu so very gud luk ya?” Shouted Fritz. “Yu no somzink Tommy? Ve vill always beet yu at ze futzbol ya?” Laughed Hans. “Ah one day Gerry. We’ll even beat you at football. You wait and see if we don’t” Shouted Private Billy Crumb. The German soldiers burst into uncontrollable laughter at Private Crumb’s remark and began walking away from the river bank in the direction from where they had come. “Wait!” Shouted Captain Ruffe. “Fritz. There’s a bridge about half a mile upstream. Walk towards it and we’ll meet

you there. At least we can shake hands now that the war is over. And we did all enjoy the fishing. Don’t you agree?” “Ah yez Tommy. Ze vish catch voz gud for uz. Ve all luv to go to vish... juz liken yu men too me zinks. Ya?” Said Fritz. “Yes, you’re dead right there Fritz old boy. See you at the bridgehead then.” Replied the Captain. The German soldiers changed course and began walking towards the bridge, which was just in sight through the dense woodland. The British soldiers decided to first return all the fishing tackle they had “borrowed”, from the shed, which was a few hundred yards away. Once all the tackle had been returned and carefully placed back just as the soldiers had found it, they began walking towards the bridge to meet the Germans. About 20 minutes later they arrived at the bridge but there was nobody there. “They’ve chickened out.” Said Private Howler. “They probably think it’s a trick.” Said Private Price. “Well, we were armed.” Said Private Purcehouse. “Yes, well that’s quite possibly the reason why then.” Said Private Crumb. “No I don’t think it is.” Said Captain Ruffe. “Perhaps they had a real tough job getting through that dense undergrowth.” He added. “Come on men, let’s walk towards them and surprise them. Save them struggling through this rough terrain.” The Captain and his band of loyal soldiers began to cut their way through the undergrowth, towards the direction, from where the Germans were headed. After about 10 minutes of clambering through the heavily wooded area, they came to a clearing.

It was a field full of large craters from previous heavy shelling by British field artillery and all around the edges of each crater were wild poppies lightly swaying in the breeze. The soldiers walked further until they came to the very spot where the Germans had been fishing. As they looked around they could see a very large mound of soil about 30 yards back from the bank, and they all set off to investigate. As they got closer they could that the mound of earth was in fact the bank of a very large bomb crater. There in the centre of the crater lay the bodies of 6 German soldiers. The British soldiers looked on intently but no one spoke. Everyone just stared at the decaying bodies. All the soldiers sensed they had been witness to a most unnerving event but to be sure someone had to go into the crater and check the dead soldiers for any identity. Sergeant Killy walked slowly forward and stepped sideways into the crater, carefully inching his way down to the bottom. He came to the first dead German soldier and pulled the dog tag from his neck. On it, were stamped the words, Fritz Zowercrot, Hauptman, 103 Infantry Division.

Jason Digs Deep For A Haul On The Crane

New kid, Jason Pitman got his head down for some serious roach fishing during the Crane match, which was held on October 14th. 12 +1 anglers turned up for this event and were greeted by a pacey river after some recent rain. The +1 was Eddy Davis who turned up after the draw had taken place, taking the last available peg, which was at the end the bay on the straight. A sure flyer by any stretch of the



imagination! The longest walks went to myself and Alan Maggs, who had previously scored very well from these 'end' pegs. Alan and I battled it out on the feeder, hoping to snag a bream but it wasn't to be. Alan did however manage a nice perch weighing close to 2lb in his total weight of 7-15-0 for second place. I was a pound behind for third but out on top was Jason who landed some quality roach on caster and hemp from the first field. Specimen hunter Paul Pitt was a little shell-shocked after latching onto a huge perch weighing 3lb-6oz. A new club record!

The Inglorious Gloucester

After last year's struggle on the Gloucester Canal, due to the cold weather. We reckoned if we brought the event forward by a month it would be a different story. Well it certainly was that... with weights even lower than before. This inter-club event with Golden Valley was held on October 21st and attracted an audience of 16 anglers. I say 'audience' because most of us just sat there watching a paralysed float for 5 hours. Top henchman on the day was Golden Valley's John Vesey with 9-1-0 followed by our own Jason Pitman with 7-15-8 and Shay Gillman third with 2-14-0. Everyone else had less than 2lb and 3 DNWs were registered. Next year, we're on the Pilot stretch. Can't be any worse... Can it?

Whitehouse Poppy Match

Fifteen anglers turned out to support this event. Steve Dawson won as usual and the two-way swinger, John Treasure, came second with just over 20lb. Bob Hole and myself both collected section wins. The water level on both lakes is well down. The picture opposite shows 3 Kingswood Legionnaires hugging centre stage.



Poppy Appeal Open Raises Over £2K

This annual fund-raiser was well attended, with around 80 anglers putting in an appearance. The river had come up during the night and so we faced a very pacey and coloured flow. Brian and I were drawn in the trees section, which as expected, was very hard going. We did however, walk away with some nice raffle prizes each. (I won't mention the bacon rolls ☺). I believe the event raised over 2K for the Poppy Appeal, so well done to everyone who took part and especially the organisers.

A walk in the park for Alan (Free parking too!)



This invitation match, held at Monkton Park, Chippenham, on November 25th attracted a turnout of 14 members. There might have been more if we had bothered to invite anybody. The river was gin clear

and with very little flow, bites were hard to come by. Alan Maggs however worked his magic and temped a few nice skimmers to the net, finishing 6oz clear of nearest rivals, Jason Pitman (There he goes again) and Steve Jefferies (Posing with chub) who both tied on 3-4.0 for joint second. After a long-running saga over the LA's car parking charges, the car parking turned out to be free.

Calendars!!! Colourful, cheerful, packed with information, and a snip at just £3 each.

Next Match (Change of venue)

This event was switched from Stowford Farm to Farleigh Wood due to concerns about the river conditions and pegging.

Next, next match...

Our January match is on the Crane on January 13th. You all know the drill...

Well, all that remains is for me to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and hopefully I'll see you all next year. **All for now river warriors!**

