

In 2014 – Major Bob Filby Marks the 70th Anniversary of D-Day

The wartime role of a British Infantry regiment that embarked from the New Forest to help liberate Nazi-occupied Europe was commemorated at a ceremony at Lymington Quay. A blue plaque marking the departure of the Essex Regiment's 2nd Battalion was unveiled - also known as 'The Pompadours' the regiment sailed from the Lymington River on 3rd June to join the rest of the fleet waiting in Southampton Water for Operation Overlord to begin, which was delayed until 6th June due to poor weather conditions.

Our member, Major Bob Filby (aged 90) who was an Officer with the regiment and awarded the Military Cross – one of the highest wartime honours – performed the unveiling and spoke of his recollections of landing in France with an 800-strong battalion.

He said: "It is very sad that so many of the soldiers who boarded landing craft 70 years ago never came back. By the time we had fought our way through to Germany, we had suffered 1,400 casualties in killed, wounded and prisoners of war. It was a tough time and that was evident from all the graves of our men visited in my recent pilgrimage to Bayeux. I was very lucky to be one of the survivors, but the passing of time has taken its toll on those of us who celebrated victory in 1945 and I am just one of three officers still alive."

Of his visit to Bayeux he writes: "I seem to be living a reincarnation of my Army life as I was in Normandy for the 70th Anniversary of D-Day, thanks to my son, Nigel and his wife, Rosemary, which was an incredible experience. The trip was tinged with sadness as I was asked to lay so many wreaths at WW2 cemeteries, but the locals in the towns and villages that we liberated in 1944, gave me a hero's welcome as I was the only veteran from my battalion who could make the trip, as my two colleagues were not in good health.

Then I was asked to join Field Marshall, The Lord Walker and Lady Walker in unveiling a lovely memorial to The Essex Regiment at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire, which was quite an honour. Following this, I went to The Imperial War Museum at Duxford on 31st August as I had been invited to the Presentation of Colours to The Royal Anglian Regiment. It was a very impressive ceremony and I was presented to HRH The Duke of Gloucester - he did remember me from previous meetings. Once met never forgotten!! I wonder why?

I was at Woolwich Barracks to make a presentation to soldiers who have served in Afghanistan and would just like to say that when I, as an old man, am invited to meet the young soldiers who have served in Afghanistan and other places of conflict, I am so impressed by their sense of duty and readiness to put their lives on the line, because it is their duty to Queen and Country."

Major R.G. Filby received a letter of thanks and recognition from Colonel R. A. Shervington of The Essex Regiment saying, "Having been through what you have, together with your other achievements does indeed make you a Regimental hero – and neither forget it nor be too modest – please!"