



Newsletter

N° 15 - May 2023



Paris Branch



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Chairman's message

Chairman's introduction - May 2023 .

Hello everyone.

Welcome to May. Spring is here, but so is the rain. However, it's nice to see that the temperatures are slowly rising.

I am sure everyone watched in amazement the coronation of King Charles III. Some of you may have been privileged to have been in London to watch parts of the ceremony.

I was delighted to have been invited by our Ambassador to attend at the Embassy to watch the coronation on wide screen with foods and champagne to drink along with my first Pimm's drink this year. Thank you, Mena, and to Ben and all the staff who put on a great day.

This month we also celebrate our Mark's 80th Birthday. I am sure like me you will have sent him greetings and congratulations.

Just a reminder don't forget to contact me if you wish to attend this month's lunch on Thursday 25th. Also, to sign up if you can for the coronation dinner dance on 1st June.

Finally, I hope to see some of you in Normandy for the Remembrance services on the 5th and 6th June.

Richard Neave.

JANET'S MAY QUIZ



1. In May 1707 the Act of Union joined which two kingdoms together
2. On 1st May 1851, Queen Victoria opened what in London?
5. In 1994 which 3 times World Formula 1 champion was killed in the San Marino Grand Prix?
6. In 1969 this iconic British ocean liner set off on its maiden voyage to New York. What was it called?
7. In 1960 the Anne Frank House museum opened in which European city?
2. Workers of the United Kingdom went on general strike in May of which year?
7. In May 1821, who died in exile on the island of St. Helena?
8. In the nursery rhyme 'Nuts in May', on what sort of a morning are the nuts gathered?
9. Roger Bannister was the first man to run the mile in under 4 minutes in May of which year?
10. The Mayflower left England for the Virginia Colony with which other ship on the 15th August 1620?

Answers on last page

The Coronation - A view from the Crowd.

Richard has done me the honour of mentioning my eightieth birthday in his introduction - an occasion which failed to eclipse the Coronation but which went off very well.

A propos both these events, amongst the numerous friends who came over from the UK for the rather splendid celebration my children had organised for my 80th at the Chateau de Janvry is an old friend, Caroline. She is a rather intrepid lass who tends to do odd things and turn up in obscure locations in distant countries and, when she gets back to her home in that town on the frontier of Yorkshire and Durham which I have always loved, Barnard Castle, resumes her other rather strenuous occupations. She has long worked as a teacher in the local prison, not an easy billet, and is now teaching English to this year's input of recruits to

the Royal Gurkha Rifles regiment.

This in itself is a subject worthy of more attention but, for the moment, it seems appropriate to mention her last sudden decision to do something unusual ; She and a friend decided at the last minute to go down to London to see the Coronation. Hardy souls, and determined to get a good place, in the afternoon of the 5th they set up camp by the Victoria memorial and laid out their sleeping bags on the pavement, as did numerous others of similar dauntless character .

As they were settling down for the night who should appear from the palace gates but the King and the Prince of Wales. They both walked over to those intrepid souls preparing to spend a long and cold night, shook hands with many within reach, including Caroline and her friend, thanked everyone for coming and expressed a hope that they would have as comfortable night as possible and William stayed to chat for a while.

Caroline says, "What impressed us most was the way in which both the King and the Prince took the time to continue the conversation and expressed a real interest in our lives which went beyond the formality one would expect."

Here are her snaps of the occasion (one of Caroline wearing a neighbour's knitted hat!):



MY

The Marque

I knew Jacques Chatel de Brancion for several of the last years of his long and active life - he died, aged 101 in 2012 and was already well into his nineties when I met him and drifted into the habit of dropping in for an occasional chat at his small chateau on the Normandy side of the river Epte, once the frontier between English Normandy and France. Our occasional



conversations were for me a source of information on certain aspects of wartime and pre-war France. In his extraordinary career he had been one of the very first helicopter pilots (one of the few who survived in a profession where short-lividness was practically guaranteed) and the only person I have ever met who had

flown an autogiro - a gyroplane - on one, unique, occasion demonstrating that an autogiro could take off from a submarine. He had met Lindbergh, knew Hitler's personal pilot and as an industrialist he operated a company making explosives. Where, I once asked him, had he been at the outbreak of WWII? Was he a pilot then? Yes, at the outbreak of the war he commanded a surveillance squadron of hydroplanes in North Africa. Taking my courage in both hands I raised a subject to be approached with caution by any Briton when discussing the war with French ex-servicemen of a certain age: "Were you there at Mers el Kebir?" I ventured. A somewhat ironic smile: "I dined with a British officer the day before he participated in the sinking of the French fleet."

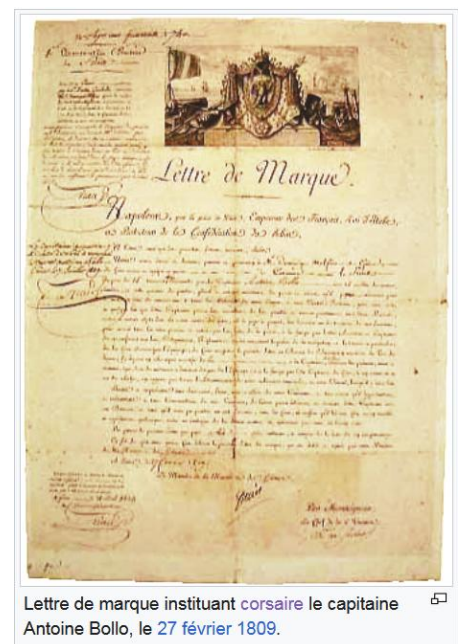
I used to call on Chatel de Brancion once or twice a month and usually found him ensconced in the same old armchair in a corner of the immense chateau kitchen. One day, however, he wasn't there. His daughter led me to another room where he was installed in another armchair. On the wall just over his head an immense flag was attached. In the centre was an eagle with a swastika in its claws and two crossed marshal's batons. I stared at it open-



mouthed. "I see you're looking at the marque." said Chatel de Brancion. I looked at him in some confusion. I had no idea what he was talking about and, my name being Mark, that served to add to my perplexity. "What?" I said. "That's the Admiral's marque", he explained. He went on to recount that at the end of the war he had led a group of resistants to take over the German Naval headquarters at the Hôtel de la Marine on the Place de la Concorde on the rue de Rivoli in Paris. In the naval office there, he found a flag in a drawer. He

kept it and, on inspection it turned out to be the personal ensign, the marque, of the German Grand Admiral von Denitz. "Good lord" I thought and I must admit that my first reaction was to wonder what the thing would go for on e-bay. Thrusting aside that unworthy thought I picked up on another detail: "Mark?" I said, "What do you mean Mark?" "Marque", he said, with "que" at the end. The symbol of an officer's authority. "Goes back to the days of the corsairs." he added.

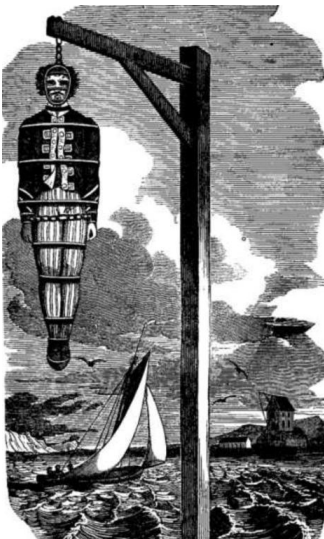
This intriguing connection between modern day admirals (and indeed flag officers) and old-style pirating led me to look into the question of what a "marque" had to do with pirates. For a start there were several words I had so far considered simply synonyms for "pirate": Corsair, filibuster, freebooter, privateer, buccaneer. "Buccaneer" I knew, came from the French word "boucan" - jerky - dried meat, it was a reference to the diet of ships' crews, especially in the Carribean. But the others...



Lettre de marque instituant corsaire le capitaine Antoine Bollo, le 27 février 1809.

The others turned out to be in two distinct categories. Pirates, filibusters or freebooters engaged in unauthorised, usually mercenary attacks and were against international law. This contrasts with corsairs or privateers who were granted a sort of licence as combatants, the "*lettre de marque*" or "*lettre de course*", a document which legitimised their actions under international law and theoretically gave the carriers the status of prisoner of war in case of capture.

This difference - between corsairs and pirates was, for centuries of considerable importance for those practicing this dubious profession. If you were captured in combat and could produce a "*lettre de marque*" you were merely locked up for the duration, if by the British, probably in one of the "hulks" - rotting old ships used as prisons. (in passing it is interesting to note that our government is reverting to this practice as a solution to the current illegal immigrant problem...). On the other hand, if you had no "*lettre de marque*" they just strung you up on the spot.



The importance of this distinction is illustrated by the fate of Captain Kidd: The accompanying engraving shows him hanging in a gibbet over the Thames, the result of confusion as to whether he took prizes legally under a letter of marque, or illegally as a pirate.

If Drake is the prototype of the corsair for the English, Surcouf is the name most associated with that custom in France. Destined by his parents for the priesthood, Surcouf did a sort of about-turn and went off to pursue a different calling. He captured at least 40 ships in his subsequent career in Napoleon's wars and retired with a fortune.

Contrasting with Surcouf's world-wide ravages were the local operations carried out from the Cotentin peninsula which a glance at the map reveals as an obvious observation post from which the French could look out for richly laden British ships on their way back from the orient. It would appear that this made it a very good base from which to attack without having to go very far. Some time ago I was told that local ships could, when a potential prey was spotted, take out a sort of temporary letter of marque for a specific attack. It must have been like nipping down to the town hall to take out a weekend fishing license.

Privateering, or the "*course*", was eventually abolished in 1856 by the Declaration of Paris. However, the United States did not sign up and, according to the U.S. Constitution, Congress retained the right to "declare war, grant "letters of marque and reprisal". Some time ago I came upon a reference (which I am now unable to trace) to what was held to be the last usage of such a document, issued by the US to a balloonist employed in the



surveillance of coastal waters in, if I recall, the American civil war.

My occasional chats with the remarkable Chatel de Brancion often led to this sort of reflection, one idea leading to another. They were rewarding discussions - at least for me. I am happy to have been able to include here, with many thanks to Brigitte and her son Vincent, the photo of the marque of Admiral von Denitz which initiated this reflection and the photo of an early gyroplane.

Mark Yates



**The Coronation - a celebration to remember.
The RBL Paris branch offers an event
to make it even more memorable.
Don't miss it.**

**A Dinner-dance with 21 piece Jazz 'Big Band' & singer
Four course meal.**

Thursday 1st June 2023 -
Ronde Gabriel - Ecole Militaire - Paris 7°
Arrive at 19h00, Aperitif 19h15, Seated for 20h00,
Carriages at Midnight



**Ticket Price €95
You still have time to book**

Cheques to the order of ADVB. Send to RBL, 28 rue des Acacias, 75017 Paris
or by bank transfer to the ADVB account:
IBAN FR76 3007 6020 4222 3814 0020 011 BIC NORDFRPP

Please confirm, with names of participants by email to tim.kc3RBL@gmail.com

THE WEDDING GOWN THAT MADE HISTORY



Lilly Friedman doesn't remember the last name of the woman who designed and sewed the wedding gown she wore when she walked down the aisle over 60 years ago. But the grandmother of seven does recall that when she first told her fiancé Ludwig that she had always dreamed of being married in a white gown he realized he had his work cut out for him.

For the tall, lanky 21 year old who had survived hunger, disease and torture this was a different kind of challenge. How was he ever going to find a dress like that in the Bergen Belsen Displaced Person's camp where they were already grateful for the few clothes they had on their backs?

Fate intervened in the guise of a former German pilot who walked into the food distribution center where Ludwig worked, eager to trade his worthless parachute. In exchange for two pounds of coffee beans and a couple of packs of cigarette Lilly would have her silken wedding gown.

For two weeks Miriam the seamstress worked under the curious eyes of her fellow DPs, carefully fashioning the six parachute panels into a simple, long sleeved gown with a rolled collar and a fitted waist that tied in the back with a bow. When the dress was completed she sewed the leftover material into a matching shirt for the groom.

A white wedding gown may have seemed frivolous in the surreal environment of the camps, but for Lilly, and certainly for her fellow detainees too, the dress symbolized the innocent, normal lives they had led before the world descended into madness.

Lilly and her siblings were raised in a Torah observant home in the small town of Zarica, Czechoslovakia where her father was a teacher, respected and well liked by the young yeshiva students he taught in nearby Irsheva. He and his two sons were marked for extermination immediately upon arriving at Auschwitz. For Lilly and her sisters it was only their first stop on a long journey of persecution, which included Plashof, Neustadt, Gross Rosen and finally Bergen Belsen.

Four hundred people marched 15 miles in the snow to the town of Celle on January 27, 1946 to attend Lilly and Ludwig's wedding. The town synagogue, damaged and desecrated, had been lovingly renovated by the DPs with the meager materials available to them. When Sefer Torah arrived from England they converted an old Kitchen cabinet into a makeshift Aron Kodesh. "My sisters and I lost everything – our parents, our two brothers, our homes". The most important thing was to build a new home. Six months later, Lilly's sister Ilona wore

the dress when she married Max Traeger. After that came cousin Rosie. How many brides wore Lilly's dress? "I stopped counting after 17". With the camps experiencing the highest marriage rate in the world, Lilly's gown was in great demand. In 1948 when President Harry Truman finally permitted the 100,000 Jews who had been languishing in the DP camps since the end of the war to emigrate, the gown accompanied Lilly across the ocean to America. Unable to part with her dress, it lay at the bottom of her bedroom cupboard for the next 50 years. Lilly said "not even good enough for a garage sale, I was happy when it found a good home".

That home was the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington DC. When Lilly's niece, a volunteer, told museum officials about her aunt's dress they immediately recognized its historical significance and displayed the gown in a specially designed showcase, guaranteed to preserve it for 500 years.

But Lilly Friedman's dress had one more journey to make. Bergen Belsen, the museum, opened its doors on October 28th 2007. The German government invited Lilly and her sisters to be their guests for the grand opening. They initially declined, but finally travelled to Hanover the following year with their children, their grandchildren and extended families to view the extraordinary exhibit created for the wedding dress made from a parachute.



Lilly's family, who were all familiar with the stories about the wedding in Celle, were eager to visit the synagogue. They found the building had been completely renovated and modernized. But when they pulled aside the handsome curtain they were astounded to find that the Aron Kodesh, made from a kitchen cabinet had remained untouched as a testament to the profound faith of the survivors. As Lilly stood on the bimah once again she beckoned to her granddaughter, Jackie, to stand beside her where she was once a kallah. "It was an emotional trip – we cried a lot".

Two weeks later, the woman who had once stood trembling before the selective eyes of the infamous Dr. Josef Mengele returned home and witnessed the marriage of her granddaughter.


The three Lax sisters, Lilly, Ilona and Eva, who survived Auschwitz, a forced labour camp and a death march and Bergen Belsen, have remained close and live within walking distance of each other in Brooklyn. As teenagers, they had managed to outwit a monstrous killing machine. However they went on to marry, have children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren and were ultimately honoured by the country that had earmarked them for extinction.

As young brides, they stood underneath the chuppah and recited the blessings that their ancestors had been saying for thousands of years. In doing so they chose to honour the legacy of those who had perished by choosing life.

It is now 78 years since the Second World War in Europe ended. Six million Jews, 20 million Russians, 10 million Christians and 1,900 Catholic priests were murdered, massacred, raped, burned, starved and humiliated while the German and Russian peoples looked away!

Now more than ever, with the resurgence of cynical claims that the Holocaust is a myth, it is imperative to enshrine accounts like this one to ensure there is never again such a disaster.



 <p>Don't forget to book in for this month's lunch.</p> <p>Thursday 25 May 12h15 for 12h30 Only €23 - Pay on the day (in cash please)</p> <p>Contact Richard at 06 45 10 47 70 or richard.neave05@gmail.com</p> <p><i>Reserve early to be sure of a place. (Cancellations up to 48h before)</i></p>	 <p><i>LUNCH MENU Thursday- 25th May</i></p> <p><i>Aperitif</i></p> <p><i>STARTER-</i> <i>Onion tart</i></p> <p><i>MAIN COURSE-</i> <i>Shrimp <u>Tagliatelle</u></i></p> <p><i>DESSERT-</i> <i>Fruit tart and ice cream</i></p> <p><i>Wine served with the meal</i> <i>Coffee or tea</i></p>
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More from our archives: Capt. Edward Zeff



This month from our archives I wish to introduce you to the late Captain Edward Zeff. MBE. Croix de Guerre. Edward was born into a British Jewish family at 22 Hanover Crescent, Briton on 23rd April 1904. He was educated at the York place Elementary Schools. Later he came to Paris around 1922 to join his older brother and to develop the family tailoring business. He returned to England with his French wife after the fall of France in 1940 and joined the Royal Signals Regiment where it wasn't long before he was requested to join the Special Operations Executive. (SOE) because he could speak fluent French and had lived and worked in Paris. He agreed to join and completed his

training to take on the very dangerous task of becoming a radio operator.

In operation DELAY 11 Peter Churchill an SOE agent was requested to land four SOE agents on the French Riviera by submarine. On the 26th February 1942 Churchill flew from Bristol to Gibraltar with two radio operators, Isidore Newman "Julien" for the URCHIN network and Edward Zeff "Matthieu" who was to be the radio operator for the SPRUCE network. They were joined by Marcel Clech "Bastien", radio operator for the AUTOGIRO network, and Victor Gerson "Rene", an SOE agent on a special mission to organise the VIC Escape Line. They all travelled by submarine P42 "Unbroken" to Antibes where on the night of 21 April 1942 Churchill took Newman and Zeff and their radios to the shore by canoe, and led them to their contact Dr Ellie Lévy. Churchill then returned to the submarine and dropped off Clech and Gerson by canoe at Pointe d'Agay near Fréjus before returning to the UK.



After arriving in Lyon Zeff was assigned by Virginia Hall to the SPRUCE network of Georges Duboudin "Alain" which successfully organised drops of weapons and supplies from London for the French Resistance. For his work as a radio operator he was supported by Denis Rake "Justin" and Pierre Le Chêne "Grégoire"

However, SOE headquarters in London became aware that the Germans were close to arresting him and in February 1943 arranged for Zeff and sabotage instructor Bob Sheppard

“Patrice” to be taken across the Pyrenees into Spain. However they were arrested by the Germans having been betrayed by one of the guides.



Zeff was sent successively to Fresnes prison, in a prison in Prague, Mauthausen concentration camp, the Melk where he was condemned to fifty lashes before being hanged. He escaped death through having befriended one of the camp Kommandants. He was returned to Mauthausen, where he was liberated by the Americans in 1945. He had been brutally tortured for over three months but revealed no information to the Nazis. After the war he filed a claim for persecution.

In 1945 he returned to Brighton, but later returned to his business in Paris where he died in 1974.

A plaque in Brighton commemorates his post-war home.

Richard Neave

A Word in your Ear...

Cock and Bull Story

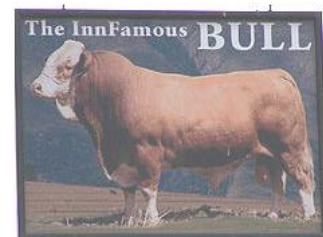
On the High Street in Stony Stratford in Buckinghamshire stand two ancient inns, the Cock, and the Bull.



The two inns were the staging posts for rival coach lines, whose passengers were regarded by the locals as sources of news. Unfortunately, the story goes, travellers were inclined to embroider or invent outlandish stories to entertain themselves and confuse the natives. There was even, it is said in one version, a competition

between the patrons of the two inns as to which could produce the most eye-poppingly ludicrous creation. Hence the idea that a cock and bull story is a concocted tale or a over-elaborate lie. The story is widely believed in Stony Stratford and is a source of civic pride.

However there is also a French expression, "passer du coq à l'âne", literally "to go from the cock to the ass", but figuratively to jump from one subject to another (in older French, to tell a satirical or incoherent story). This is said to have come about through a satirical poem of 1531 by



Clément Marot with the title "*Epistre du Coq en l'Asne*" (the epistle of the cock to the donkey), though the phrase itself is two centuries older. The expression "Coq-à-l'âne" certainly passed into early seventeenth century Scots as "*cockalane*", a satire or a disconnected or rambling story. It has also been suggested that some similar story once existed in English, akin to one of Aesop's fables, in which a cock communicated with a bull rather than a donkey. Or the French phrase may have been borrowed in partial translation with donkey changed to bull.

Take your choice!

Maxine Arnoult

The Last Laugh:



The Misprint

Desk - Hello, Daily News.

Caller - Hello. My name's Fiona Pridey.

Desk - Yes Mrs Pridey. What can I do for you?

Caller - Well you printed an article about me in yesterday's edition of the paper.

Desk - Oh yes. I saw it. You were robbed and we gave an account of the burglary.

Caller - I'm afraid I want to complain.

Desk - Oh dear. Have we spelled your name wrongly?

Caller - No, but there's a misprint in the article. You really must correct the error in tomorrow's edition.

Desk - Hang on a minute. I have a copy here. I'll have a look at it.

Caller - Yes. Read it and you'll see there's a big mistake in the information.

Desk - Let me see... £150 in cash stolen... The burglar broke in at 3 in the morning. Is it that bit?

Caller - No. That's all right.

Desk - ... Three pieces of jewelry taken from the bedroom. The householder was awakened by a noise and phoned the police...

Caller - That's OK. I am the householder and that's what happened.

Desk - ... An attempt to open the safe was unsuccessful... Did they manage to open it?

Caller - That's correct, thank goodness. All my best pieces were in there.

Desk - Well, Mrs Pridey. What's the mistake you want us to correct?

Caller - It's right at the beginning. You see where it says "Local householder Fiona Pridey (30) robbed."

Desk - Yes. Got it.

Caller - Well. I'm not thirty. I'm only twenty nine.

Mark Yates

Janet's May Quiz: Answers

1. *England and Scotland*
2. *The Great Exhibition*
3. *Ayrton Senna*
4. *Queen Elizabeth 2*
5. *Amsterdam*
6. *1926*
7. *Emperor Napoleon*
8. *On a Cold and Frosty Morning*
9. *1954*
10. *Speedwell*



Comments & contributions to mfyates@gmail.com
Back numbers: rblfrance.org/ then "Paris Branch Newsletters"