



Paris Branch

## Newsletter

N° 27 - June 2024



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### **Chairman's introduction.**

Welcome to our June newsletter.

As you will be aware this month has been dominated by the 80<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of D-Day. With many ceremonies taking place across the UK and Europe.

In particular here in France the most notable of ceremonies took place at the British memorial centre in Normandy, an event heavily reported in the news. Sadly, I was unable to attend the Normandy commemorations. However, Janet and I did participate in a very moving ceremony in Bennecourt. This was organised by Didier Dumont, one of our committee members and Mayor of the town, assisted by Pierre Quenot, my deputy. The town of Bennecourt was liberated by the Coldstream Guards on August 27, 1944, and is twinned with Coldstream. Guards officers frequently participate in Bennecourt memorial ceremonies. This one was attended by a Major and RSM from the Regiment.

The impending furore of the Olympics means our June lunch will be our last until September, so I hope to see many of you there. Catherine Germaine has kindly offered to prepare the lunch and details, including the menu, can be found below. If you haven't signed up already, please do so.

It remains for me to wish you all a very pleasant summer. If you are going to any of the Olympics events, I hope you enjoy them and wish you luck in getting to them. With more luck we may even win a few medals!

**Richard Neave**

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### **JANET'S JUNE QUIZ**

1. Trooping the Colour is held in London annually on a Saturday in June, on which parade ground?
2. June has two zodiac signs, name both.
3. What in the UK is celebrated on the third Sunday of June?



4. Which animated cartoon character has three triplet nieces named April, May and June?
5. What is June's birthstone.
6. 'Seven Days In Sunny June, by Jamiroqui, is the soundtrack when Andrea and Christian meet at James Holt's party in which 2006 American film?
7. In which year did June Brown first play the role of Dot Cotton, in EastEnders?
8. Which historical novel begins in 1815 and culminates with the 1832 June Rebellion in Paris?
9. The longest day of the year can occur on one of three dates in June, name any of the three.
10. In its own country it is commonly known as the June Fourth Incident; where did this incident happen?
11. In 1968, June Whitfield began her long television partnership with which actor and comedian?
12. Which 1956 film adaptation of a Rodgers and Hammerstein stage musical of the same name features the song 'June Is Bustin' Out All Over'? (Hint : the film revolves around Billy Bigelow).
13. The name June for baby girls in the UK dropped out of the top thousand in 1986, but in which 20<sup>th</sup> century decade did it peak at 39<sup>th</sup>?
14. What takes place near Pilton in the last week of June, each year?
15. What historical event happened on Tuesday, 6<sup>th</sup> June 1944?
16. Can You name the British Officer who was given the order to 'Hold until relieved' and by whom was he to be relieved during Operation Overlord?
17. What were the names of the five beaches?
18. Who was the Chief Meteorologist who gave Eisenhower the weather forecast for the 6<sup>th</sup> June?
19. What was the name of the British Gliders that took the commandos to the two bridges and what were the names of the bridges.
20. What is the name of the town where an American Paratrooper hung from his parachute on the spire of the Church?

Answers on last page

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## EVENTS

The events in and around the 6 June commemoration of the Normandy Landings were too numerous to cover. The following comprise a small selection of those involving the Paris Branch and its members.

## Bayeux



Committee Members were present at the RBL Remembrance Ceremony in the British War Cemetery in Bayeux on the 5th June, and at the British Memorial at Ver sur Mer on the 6th June.

Those of you with a facebook account can see more photos compiled by Caroline Clopet and Didier Dumont by following the link below:  
<https://www.facebook.com/royalbritishlegionparis>

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## Omaha

Our member Noreen Riols was a VIP guest at the Omaha Beach commemorations on 6 June, Charlotte Sullivan of the Holy Trinity Church Maisons-Laffitte Chaplain and Judy Poggi the Snippet English/French journalist accompanied her to Caen by special train. Noreen's grandson joined them at Omaha. Noreen was seen by many on France 2 and BBC news.



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## Bennecourt

Our Chairman and two Standard Bearers were present at the DDay Commemoration at Bennecourt, in the Eure region. The names on the Stele illustrates are to honour the British residents of Bennecourt and Bonnières who participated in the Liberation of France. They were Alan Siddle, Sailor, Mary Siddle, Wren, Edward 'Ted' Butler and Joseph Sigward, SOE and Legion d'Honneur, the latter a former member of the RBL Paris branch.

After the ceremony a Mass was said in the local church, the highlight here being the Vicars dog who lay throughout at the foot of the altar.

Finally there was an exhibition of DDay items and a Vin d'Honneur.



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Before moving on to lighter subjects, it occurs to me to be fitting to conclude this account of commemorative events with a sonnet written by an uncle of mine whom I never met. A glider pilot, he was killed in the period which Churchill described as “the end of the beginning” whereas the D-Day landings might be considered the beginning of the end. His work concerns, not so much the violence and death of combat but that inevitable accessory to it, the sadness of parting and the fear that it may be for ever

### *Parting*

*Old as the grave and dead, yet weeps my heart,  
Dull pain through every waking day,  
In silence suffering my lonely way  
The agony I know each time we part;  
Soft as the touch of gentle whispering rain  
Relentless as the motion of the sea,  
And stern as God this sorrow is to me,*

*This fevered agony and never-ending pain  
 Each time I watch you go through tear-dimmed eyes  
 That bravely try to smile and hide my grief,  
 This dreadful sadness holds me in its grasp  
 And such same sorrow on your dear face lies;  
 Yet joy shines through the tears in this belief  
 That we are each for each until the last*

James S Roberts



## CORRESPONDENCE

Our member Laurence David-Grant, who is also treasurer to the Maison des Anciens Combattants de la 2<sup>o</sup>DB, writes to say she would like to find descendants of British women who were interned, as was her mother, in Besançon and Vittel between 1940 et 1944.

On 10 September this year the town of Vittel will celebrate its liberation by the 2<sup>o</sup> Division Blindée of General Leclerc who visited the camp as recalled in a book by the General's aide de camp.

Laurence suggests that descendants of those British women internees will welcome the opportunity to attend this 80th celebration and, if you know anyone related or connected to these internees, please let her know at [davidgrant@free.fr](mailto:davidgrant@free.fr)

Go to our website: <http://www.rblfrance.org/stories/david-grant.htm> to find Laurence's account of her mother's experience in the stalag.

 <p><b>Don't forget to book in for this month's lunch.</b></p> <p><b>Thursday 20 June</b>  <b>1215 for 1230</b>  <b>Only €18 - Pay on the day</b>  <b>(in cash please)</b></p> <p>Contact Richard at 06 45 10 47 70  or  <a href="mailto:richard.neave05@gmail.com">richard.neave05@gmail.com</a></p> <p><i>Reserve early to be sure of a place.</i></p>	 <p><b>LUNCH MENU Thursday 20 June</b></p> <p><i>Aperitif</i></p> <p><b>STARTER-</b>  <i>Mimosa eggs on a bed of salad</i></p> <p><b>MAIN COURSE-</b>  <i>Gratin de brandade, tomato topping served with a green vegetable</i></p> <p><b>DESSERT-</b>  <i>Cheese followed by fruit tart</i></p> <p><i>Wine served with the meal</i>  <i>Coffee or tea</i></p>
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## ROMANIA. An account of a long-ago trip

Not many people went to Romania for their holidays in the 1970s but I had met this Romanian/ German chap in Turkey who mentioned in passing that he could provide a useful address. His aunt, Dodo. Never having been behind the Iron Curtain myself, this sounded interesting.

When I announced that Isabel and I were going to Romania for a holiday Michel Verdier said, “Maybe you could look for a locust for me”. This requires a little explanation. Michel was a remarkable entomologist specialising in acridology, the study of locust and grasshopper species. He was particularly concerned with *Locusta migratoria*, an inoffensive looking but dodgy insect character capable of producing huge swarms which regularly lay waste to swathes of North Africa and the Middle East. Michel had about 30 cages filled with these insects in the basement of the Paris university where he taught. The difference between the insects in the various cages was that the inhabitants came from different countries and regions ranging from Poland in the north to Australia in the south. What interested Michel was differences in behaviour corresponding to the



latitude of the location where the strains had originated, this is related to the photoperiod (the length of daylight) in whatever location the insect lives. I'll spare you the details, but I cannot resist the temptation to digress and mention a few of the curious aspects of this locust.

Hence, for those interested in the biology of these remarkable creatures I am adding a footnote to this tale but, aware that it is something of a minority interest, will not inflict it upon you all.

To get back to my conversation with my biologist friend, Michel: He continued:

“*Migratoria*” were reported in the early 1900s in the Danube Delta but have never been found there since. If you can find a couple, I'll have a cage waiting. Do you think you could have a look?”

“Sure,” I said on the principle that it is always good to have an aim, something specific, in mind when you're on holiday. Indeed, the more bizarre the better.

Isabel and I hadn't actually planned to go to the delta but, why not? The wildlife was certainly worth a visit. Back home I talked rather more about the flamingos, the herons, the wild boar, the otters, the sturgeon than the insects. Isabel agreed it might be interesting and said, “How are you going to catch them?”

“What? The sturgeon?”

“No, silly, the locusts.”

“Oh, Ah, Yes... I suppose we'll need a net. A sort of butterfly net.”

“Do you think they sell butterfly nets in Romania?” she said. We already knew that they didn't sell anything more exotic than a cabbage in Romania and had already stocked up with 50 ballpoint pens which, I had been assured, were an excellent substitute for money. “Ah, no, we'd better take a net.”

“You can't get the handle into a suitcase!”

“True - I know what! I had a butterfly net made of cheesecloth when I was a kid. We'll just take some cheesecloth and make a net when we get there. There's sure to be a bit of old wire lying about in a hedge back or somewhere and there's certainly no shortage

of reeds to make a handle.”

“We haven’t got any cheesecloth but I’m going to the Galeries Lafayette tomorrow...” The next day Isabel reported, “They didn’t have any cheesecloth at Lafayette: said they hadn’t had any since the war.” Unsurprising really, the last time I had seen any myself was when I was about five when my mother used to separate the curds from the whey of the sour milk with it. “But I got this.” She held up a length of net



*Cheesecloth doing its real job*

curtain. “Will this do? I got blue because it’s cheaper.”

“Great.” I said. “And the blue will make the net harder to see against the sky.” So the material went into the suitcase.

We went the pretty way, on a boat down the Danube as far as Galata on the frontier. We had wanted to carry on by boat but were firmly informed that they were to be used only by Romanians and that visitors had to take the train. In Bucharest we found Dodo and her husband in a modest flat where we were welcomed with enthusiasm. I suppose we were pretty naive at the time and didn’t realise how exceptional it was for foreigners to stay in a private home in Ceaușescu’s Romania and I’ve often wondered since how they



managed it. It wasn’t a big flat and Dodo and her husband insisted that we got the only bedroom while they slept on the floor. Dodo spoke French but her husband didn’t. He was a nice chap though, and we managed to get a lot over with expressions and gestures. When he saw me eyeing the long row of Karl Marx works which filled a

shelf of the bookcase, he had little trouble getting me to understand that that shelf was there to be seen but not read. We stayed a couple of days in Bucharest, managed to get a car, and headed off to explore, promising Dodo that we’d be back for another day or two at the end of our stay.

Tulcea, we had been told was one of the few places with access to the huge marshy area constituting the Delta, wetter then than now - the Danube was less exploited then, and with virtually none of the tourists who visit it now. Even in Tulcea it wasn’t easy to find a means of going into the delta. Eventually we found that there was a boat, leaving at five in the morning which we could take. This we did and chugged along narrow alleys between the reed beds that were slowly revealed by the dawn which also, happily, reduced the attacks of the plagues of mosquitoes: the delta must be a mosquito’s idea of heaven! Several times, smaller boats crewed by a couple of armed soldiers would shout what must have been the equivalent of “Who goes there?” but quickly identified us as that day’s only authorised incursion. Eventually we drew up on a sort of sandbank. End of the line. Nothing in sight except, in the distance, a couple of watchtowers along the Ukrainian frontier. Half a dozen of the other passengers drifted away down paths through the reeds. Fortunately, two remained hanging around. They looked as if they were waiting for something so, in the absence of any better idea we waited too.

Presently there was the sound of an engine and a tractor and trailer appeared out of





*Something like this but simpler*

nowhere. The driver gestured that we should climb aboard and off we chugged to emerge, some 15 minutes later, into a slightly higher and drier area with two rows of houses as widely separated as the two sides of the Champs Elysees. A young lad approached and indicated

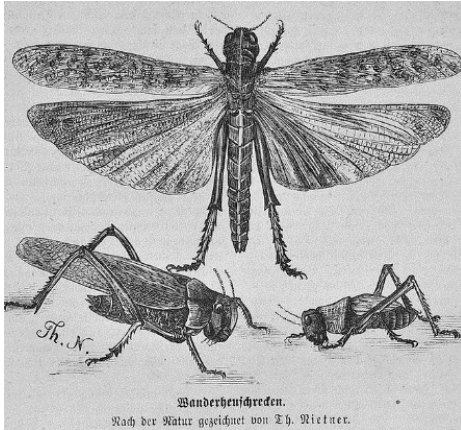
that he spoke a few words of English. We asked the obvious question: “Can anyone rent us a room?”. His answer seemed to mean that just about anyone would be glad to make a few extra lei, so we let him pick one out for us. The lad negotiated a price for us with the lady of the house and we ended up in a quite adequate bedroom.

We wandered around for a while and towards evening our hostess made eating gestures and said the only word I ever understood from her: “borscht?”. That, I knew meant cabbage soup – in Russian. It turned out that the lad who had been helping us (which he continued to do for a couple of days) wasn’t translating from Romanian but from Russian. It was a long time later that I learned that, at least twice, large numbers of refugee Russians had settled in the delta, the last arrival being during the Russian civil war when a lot of White Russians took up residence to escape the victorious Reds back home.

We enthusiastically accepted the suggestion of borscht: it was appalling! It wasn’t made from cabbage at all but was full of small fish each of which was stuffed with needle-like bones. The meaning of the word in this watery environment must have adapted to fit circumstances – fish being commoner than cabbage. We made what we could of it and eventually retired to our quarters where I spent most of the night swatting mosquitoes.

The next day I thought it was about time to construct the butterfly net and Isabel brought out the roll of net curtain she had purchased – quite a lot actually – along with a needle and thread which she had thoughtfully packed. I discovered a length of old wire from a fence to make the frame, wandered off to the nearest reedbed to pick out a promising handle. There was only one thing missing – scissors to cut the material into an appropriate shape. Our landlady was already at the door of the house watching these manoeuvres with understandable curiosity, so I approached her and pointed to the cloth and made cutting gestures with two fingers. Understanding entered her eyes and in no time, she produced the scissors I had been asking for. She followed me down the garden to watch us and just as I was about to hack into the material, she let out a scream of horror which stopped me in my tracks. She jabbered a few words and gestured that I mustn’t continue. She galloped into the house and came back a few seconds later waving at us with an armful of cheesecloth. Once again, her gestures conveyed accurately that she wanted to effect an exchange. That was fine by me, so I handed over the blue material and, clutching it to her breast, she retired to her kitchen. Well, we went about our task and a suitable cheesecloth net constructed we spent a whole day catching many species of hopping insects but, unfortunately not *Locusta migratoria*. Well, things don’t always work out as one would wish.

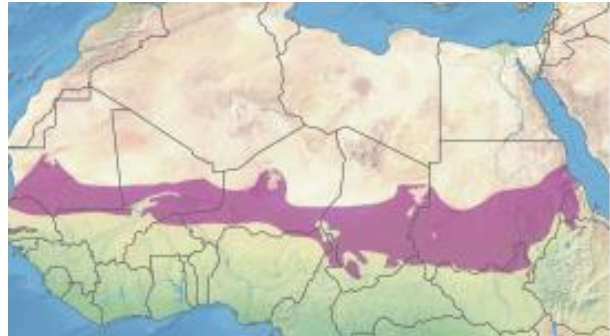
However, as we left the village a couple of days later, we glanced back to see the house we had stayed in. It boasted, splendidly flapping from its windows, the only Galerie Lafayette curtains in the entire Danube Delta.



Footnote: The biology of *locusta migratoria*.

First of all, this locust exists in two forms, *solitaria* and *gregaria*. The usual form is the solitary one, a greenish creature with the males smaller in size. It hangs about a lot especially in the Sahel, a band of territory south of the Sahara, is widely distributed, and tends to live a solitary existence. When, however, there is rain, the river rises and as floodwaters reduce the land area available, they are forced into groups in high lying areas. Adapting to a communal existence (hence *gregaria*), *The Sahel* the next generation of locusts differs

from its parents. They are brown in colour, the males are more of a match in size with the females and their behaviour changes. They become communal creatures and stick together - which means they quickly run out of food. So they all fly away, usually north-eastwards looking for food, still hanging together, and, when they find an area with vegetation – often food crops, – settle in and gobble it up. The females lay a lot of egg pods and off they go again. After a bit the egg pods hatch out and, as each pod can contain up to around 100 eggs, the size of the resulting swarm can be – well, enormous. The new locusts, having exhausted whatever food has grown since the departure of the parent swarm, do as did their parents and the hugely engorged mass of insects moves off to wreak havoc and repeat the operation. When weather conditions intervene – typically when a swarm confronts the Arabian desert, the insects starve and their numbers fall. When their density is low enough the next generation of locusts goes back to the solitary green form and each hops off to live on its own.



Mark Yates

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*Have you an interest, a hobby, a memory to share? Why not write something about it – and send it to [mfyates@gmail.com](mailto:mfyates@gmail.com) for possible publication.*

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## A Word in your Ear...

### Guarantee – Warranty

This week, taking advantage of the fact that we have a largely bilingual readership we'd like to mention the way in which a group of French words beginning with "g" pass into English as "w".

Examples are: Guillaume = William, gardien = warden, garde = Ward, garderobe = wardrobe, guerre = war, guerrier = warrior, garenne = warren, gage = wage and last but not least, garantie = warranty *and* guarantee

The most interesting is perhaps the latter, "garantie" which seems to have become English with the usual change giving us "warranty". In this form it seems to have emigrated to the US where American usage installed it but, in the meantime English reimported "garantie" from France as "guarantee" with no change in the "g" this time. So we ended up with both words, an opportunity which the legal profession has eagerly grasped to create hair-splitting but, for them, lucrative differences

It may not have escaped your notice that all these have some reference to war or

guardianship. Even "warren" (the network of tunnels created by rabbits) and its French equivalent "garenne" were areas preserved for hunting so there is a relationship with the same concept. And "What about William?" I hear you say: Well, all I can suggest is that the best known William in history was, of course, William the Conqueror.



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## The Last Laugh:

This one is based on a real dialogue with a neighbour who was, as I witnessed one day, so affected by cramp that she was physically sick.



### Marmite Reaches France

**Mark:** Are you still getting those awful attacks of cramp?

**Helene:** Yes. I'm afraid I often get them. I had one last night after the party. I shouldn't have had that glass of champagne. White wine seems to bring it on. I should stick to red.

**Mark:** I get cramps myself sometimes, usually in the middle of the night so, a few weeks ago, I looked it up on the internet.

**Helene:** Did you? I suppose they went on about massage and exercises like for most things.

**Mark:** True, but I came across a funny one. It said Marmite stopped cramp.

**Helene:** Marmite? What's that?

**Mark:** Well. You can't get it easily in France but a lot of people like it in the UK. It's a sort of brown paste and most people spread it on bread.

**Helene:** Brown? On bread? Sounds like Nutella.

**Mark:** No, it's more meaty. Nutella's more chocolaty. Anyway, I tried it for my cramp. I had an attack in the middle of the night, hobbled to the kitchen and took a teaspoonful of Marmite. Five minutes later it was gone.

**Helene:** Huh. Coincidence. A one-off event doesn't prove anything.

**Mark:** No, but I've tried it several times since and it works every time, so I thought about you. Look. I've brought you a jar I got in London last week.

**Helene:** Really, that was nice of you. Can I try it now?

**Mark:** You might as well. You don't have to have cramp to eat Marmite. Some people consider it a delicacy – but don't take a whole spoonful – just put some on a piece of bread and try that.

**Helene:** OK. Here we go....

... Good Lord! I'm sorry but you can keep it Mark! Frankly, I much prefer the cramp.

Mark Yates

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### *Janet's June Quiz: Answers:*

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. Horse Guards Parade   | three!)  |
| 2. Gemini (until June 20) and<br>Cancer (from June 21 onwards) | 6. The Devil Wears<br>Prada                                |
| 3. Father's Day  | 7. 1985  |
| 4. Daisy Duck  | 8. Les Miserables  |
| 5. Pearl or Alexandrite or<br>moonstone (it seems to have      | 9. 20 <sup>th</sup> , 21 <sup>st</sup> or 22 <sup>nd</sup> |





10. Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China (1989)
11. Terry Scott
12. Carousel
13. 1920s (1925)
14. Glastonbury Festival
15. Normandy Beach Landings
16. Major John Howard and Lord Lovat
17. Utah, Omaha (American Beach Heads) Gold, Sword and Juno (British, Canadian and some Free French Commandos headed by Philippe Kieffer)
18. Group Captain James Stagg
19. Horsa, Pegasus and Horsa Bridges
20. Sainte Mère-Église

***Comments & contributions to [mfyates@gmail.com](mailto:mfyates@gmail.com)  
Back numbers: [rblfrance.org/](http://rblfrance.org/) then "Paris Branch Newsletters"***