

LETTERS to the EDITOR

For this issue of the Newsletter I received several lengthy letters which I considered to be too long to publish in full so I have included extracts from each letter.

The first is from Peter Erwood commenting on the review by Glyn Hale in Newsletter 39 of his book 'A Fury of Guns' and it aims to correct some of the inaccuracies it contained.

The second is from Glyn Hale, regretting the errors in his review and making some additional comments on the contents of Mr. Erwood's letter.

The third is from a member in New Zealand, Marian Griffin.

Letter 1: Extracts from Peter Erwood's letter

I would be grateful if you would allow me to make some observations about the 'review' by Dr. S.S.G. Hale of my book *A Fury of Guns* (Arcturus Press, 1999, ISBN 0 907322 72 7) which appears on page 35 of your Society's Newsletter No. 39, December 2000.

As a former gunner in 233 Battery, the Dover-recruited element of the 75th (Cinque Ports) Heavy Anti-Aircraft Regiment, Royal Artillery (Territorial Army), the regiment which, with detachments from other (mostly Kentish) HAA regiments, was responsible for the heavy AA artillery defence of East Kent during the Battle of Britain, I am concerned, as are the other survivors of it, in preserving the Regiment's memory in a form which, as far as is humanly possible, is based on fact. To that end, I wrote *A Fury of Guns*, in which I endeavoured, however imperfectly, to recount not only the Regiment's day-to-day actions during that battle but to place them in the context of the war as a whole. In the last section of the book I venture to express personal opinions about the battle and its outcome which are not universally held, but about which no-one has so far taken me to task.

One paragraph in Doctor Hale's review bears little relationship to what I

actually wrote in *A Fury of Guns* and seems to be a collection of the good doctor's views on the battle, expressed in his own idiosyncratic style. (*This paragraph continues with several examples, selected by Mr. Erwood, of errors and inaccuracies from the original review.*)

However, the most vital untruth which I have saved until the last is Dr Hale's absolutely unwarrantable assertion in his first paragraph that:

(a). There are to be no more regimental reunions of the 75th HAA Regiment. In fact, our next reunion is planned for Saturday 28th April 2001 at 12 noon at the Dover Working Men's Club, London Road, Dover; and any member of the Dover Society will be welcome to attend it on application (not less than a week in advance, please) to the organiser, John Crocker, 81 Caulfield Road, Shoeburyness, Essex SS3 9LP (01 702 293453).

(b). That six former gunners have died since the last reunion. This again is a complete falsehood. Only one of our number has passed on since our last reunion in May 2000, and this regrettable event took place only just before Christmas, after your Newsletter had already appeared.

Thank you for allowing me to put some records straight.

Yours sincerely, Peter Erwood

Letter 2: Extracts from Doctor Hale's reply

'...the intent of a book review is to persuade people to read the book... I accept with gratitude all corrections. I'm a librarian not an historian. I agree I am not suitable.... I'm particularly pleased that I am wrong about the reunion.'

(Doctor Hale goes on to explain that his source, one of the older members, had told him that six members had died since the last reunion, where 'only a handful had turned up, possibly 20', but said there 'would be no more reunions; it was too depressing'. This and non-response to his letters had given Doctor Hale the impression that there would be no more reunions. Obviously he had misunderstood. Perhaps the member in question meant he personally would not be attending any more reunions.)

He concludes - 'I am happy to be wrong. Mea Culpa. I was wrong.'

On the matter of inaccuracies and errors Doctor Hale writes at length, saying:

'Nothing I wrote is original. A knowledgeable reader would know my sources. An unknowledgeable reader might be tempted to read the books and check the statements and learn something.'

(He goes on to give detailed information about the Battle of Britain, the strategic bombing of Germany, the guns used and the gunners and the pilots. In doing so he answers some of the points made in Peter Erwood's letter, one of the main ones being the use and interpretation of the terms 'barrage' and 'Dover barrage' on which the two writers differ.)

He says 'There was never a shortage of pilots only planes. 3 June was when Dover children were evacuated and Dunkirk came to an end. None of this questions the gallantry of pilots or gunners or what they tried to do and they succeeded in what they did.'

S.S.G.Hale

Editor's note: For readers wishing to know more about the subject, Doctor Hale suggests the following books:

Deighton, Len. *Fighter, the true story of the Battle of Britain*. Knopf 1978

Overy, Richard. *Why the Allies Won*. Cape 1995

Pile, Frederick. *Ack, Ack. Britain's defence against air attack during the Second World War*. Harrap. 1949.

Letter 3: Extracts

Nelson, New Zealand.

Dear Editor

Thank you so much for your interesting letter and the book 'Dover, Collected Memories of a Century'.

I was very sad to know that Budge died at Buckland Hospital on the 19th December. He was a treasured member of the Dover Society and did so much interesting work on my family history in Dover. I was born in Dover at my Grandma's home, 1 Bartholomew Street. She was Mrs Myra Leila Harmer. As a young boy Budge knew the Harmer boys, grandsons of James Harmer.

My mother's family are from Dover and Romney Marsh and my Dad's from Surrey. They met each other at the Wembley Empire Exhibition in 1924, when my Dad was on leave from service in India. They married at the end of the year and had a very happy time in Dover before returning to India. Our 1934 visit to England was cancelled because of an outbreak of smallpox on the ship and in 1939 it was cancelled because of the outbreak of WW2. At the end of the war India was preparing for independence when British citizens would become Indian or Pakistan citizens. If they wanted to retain their British citizenship they would have to go to a dominion because only a limited number could return to the U.K. if they had a sick dependant relative there. Grandma was being cared for by Aunt Elsie, so we came to New Zealand in 1946 and sent food parcels!

Sincerely, Marian L. Griffin