

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

NEWSLETTER

Veterans' Group

March / April 2026



Wishing you all a happy Eastertide

It's been a challenging few weeks living here in Starston. The road in the next village was closed because of a burst water main meaning a two-mile detour to get to the other side. The closure was still in place when Starston Bridge was closed for nine days for repairs (after a car crashed into it last November), meaning we either had to make the same two-mile detour or alternatively a two-mile detour into Harleston to go north to Norwich. Every main road into Harleston is either currently guarded by lights or closed. My satnav had a meltdown on the way home last week and told me to go down Bunn's Lane – a dead end with a gate across it. She is currently in therapy, and we are navigating by the stars!

This month's story relates to the Comet Line, the escape route for allied soldiers and airmen across occupied France and over the Pyrenees into Spain, operated by the French and Belgian resistance between 1941 & 1944.



Highways gave up on the signage – apparently diverting motorists towards another road closure!

GOOD HOPE - A poem by Benjamin Zephaniah

I believe

There is enough food
On this planet
For everyone.

I believe

That it is possible
For all people
To live in peace.

I believe

We can live
Without guns,
I believe everyone
is important.

I believe

There are good Christians
And good Muslims,
Good Jews
And good not sures.
I believe
There is good in everyone.
I believe in people.

If I did not believe

I would stop writing.

I know

Every day
Children cry for water,
And every day
Racists attack.
Still every day
Children play
With no care for colour.

So I believe **there is hope**

And I hope
That there are many believers
Believing
There is hope,
That is what I hope
And this is what I believe.
I believe in you,
Believe me.

A poem for our times, or for all times, perhaps?



Could this be in Norfolk too?

Armed Forces Week

Armed Forces week runs from Monday 22nd June with Armed Forces Day marked on Saturday 27th June. It is a national moment to recognise and say thank you to everyone who serves or has served and their families and an opportunity for communities across the UK to come together in gratitude, celebration and support.

We shall be having a Poppy Appeal stall outside the Mariner's Galley in Rushall on Tuesday 23 June with some 'Supporting Your Armed Forces' badges (once gone, they are gone!) and the 2026 dated pins available (more of these will be available later in the year). Remaining stock will be available in the Galley for the rest of the week but we will keep some aside for Bun, Cuppa and Chat on 25 June. Please support this event, and if you can help on the stall on the Tuesday, please let Rosemary know.

The Comet Line

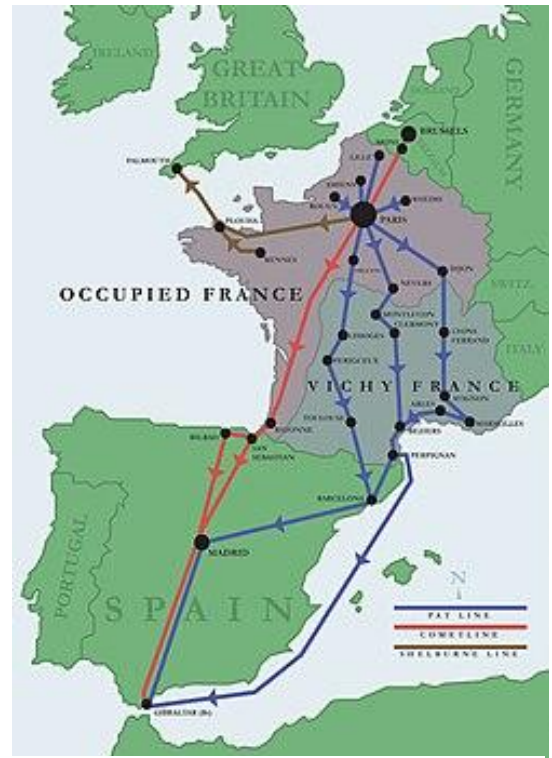
By 1941, with the RAF increasingly taking the fight against Germany into Europe with both bombing raids and fighter sorties, a growing number of aircraft were shot down over Nazi-occupied countries such as Belgium, France and the Netherlands. This number rapidly grew when the USA joined the War at the end of that year. Many airmen were killed, or captured and imprisoned as POWs, but others evaded capture and were sheltered by local people who help them to try to return to Britain. As resistance to the Nazis grew in occupied Europe, several networks developed to help allied airmen and soldiers evade capture and escape to a neutral country so they could return to Britain and return to action.

The largest of these networks was the Comet Line, established in 1941 in Belgium by Andrée de Jongh, aged 24, who was its first leader, and two others. The de Greef family, including Elvire de Greef (known as Tante Go, or Auntie Go), who lived near the Spanish border, became a key element of the network to smuggle the evaders through occupied France, over the Pyrenees into neutral Spain, and then onwards to British-controlled Gibraltar. The other two main networks, the Pat Line and the Shelburne Line, used different routes. The evaders, or 'packages' as they were known, were assembled in Brussels, fed, clothed and given false papers, then escorted by a network of volunteers (known as 'helpers') to safety in Spain.



Andrée de Jongh (Dédée) receiving the George Medal in 1946

Over three years, the Comet Line, comprising around 3000 people, mostly French and Belgian (many of whom were women, including teenage girls), assisted around 800 people, possibly many more, mainly British and American airmen, to evade capture. 700 helpers were arrested by the Germans and 290 were executed or died in prison or concentration camps. Several survivors later received the George Medal or honorary MBEs. It is difficult to know how many of these brave people are still alive, given that some were very young and most were not British nationals, but Henriette Hanotte (codenamed Monique), who died in February 2022 aged 101, Josephine Aguirre (Fifine) who died aged 94 in June 2022, Janine le Greef (Elvire's daughter), who died in October 2023 aged 94, and Andree Dumon (Nadine), who died in January 2025 aged 101, are some who have died within the last few years. All were in their teens when they started to help allied airmen and soldiers.



Escape routes - the Comet Line is in red.



'Monique'

In May 1940, the Hulotte family from Rumes in Belgium assisted two British officers who had been stranded during the BEF's retreat to Dunkirk, helping them to escape over the nearby border into France, and later the family was recruited into the Comet Line. Henriette (now codenamed Monique) crossed the border every day to attend violin lessons in the French town of Bachy, but she also knew all the paths and byways across the fields and ditches, saying, 'For me there was no border, I went backwards and forwards across it every day.' Over the next three years, Monique accompanied about 140 evaders over the border and on to Paris or Lille, where they were handed over to the next helper for the onward journey.

When the evaders arrived at their home, Monique's English-speaking mother checked their pockets, removing anything that could identify them as allied airmen, including clothing labels, and gave them their (forged) French identity papers and work permits. She also coached them in what to do if there was an inspection on the train and how to say their new names, eg Jean Martin, in a French accent. After two or three days, Monique left with her 'package', at 5am, following the railway line across fields, and ditches and over barbed wire to cross into France.

After crossing the border, they travelled by bus, train or bicycle, trying to blend in with the crowds, but always taking extreme caution, so Monique would buy their rail tickets from different ticket windows, so they would not have consecutive numbers, and thus not be suspected of travelling together. She carried a loaf of bread in her bag, so if she

was challenged, she would say she had gone to get bread from the country; 'it was easier to get through as a woman.' In 1944, a young Belgian betrayed her, but she avoided capture at the station in Paris as her train was three hours late.

Later that year, Monique came to Britain, using the Comet Line's own route through to Gibraltar, to be trained as an agent with the Auxiliary Territorial Service Special Forces. A training injury, though, meant that Monique was unable to parachute into occupied Belgium, or witness the liberation of her own village of Rumes in September 1944 by the Americans.

For many years after the war, several of the men who Monique had helped to escape remained in touch with her, including inviting her to their weddings, and in later years she received letters from their children, with some visiting to see the escape route along which Monique had taken their fathers to get to Spain. She received honours from the British and the Americans after the war, but when interviewed on her 100th birthday insisted that she had not done anything out of the ordinary, "It was our natural instinct to help", she said.



Drawing by Jacques Van Butsyle

Bun, Cuppa and Chat News

We were sorry to hear that Peggy broke her hip in a fall but after a short stay in hospital, she is back home at The Mayfields where she will continue to receive good care. Our next Bun, Cuppa and Chat together will be on 23 April and 28 May, 2.30 – 4pm at the Mariner's Galley, Rushall as usual.

Daniel Lewis-Waldron and Terry Pegg will soon be embarking on new stages of their army careers, although they are over 50 years apart in age. Daniel, the grandson of Julia and Ken Deighton (Ken sadly passed away recently), who are keen supporters of Bun, Cuppa and Chat, is starting basic army training later this month, before further 'trade' training with the Royal Military Police. Daniel has been involved with the Dickleburgh Sea Scouts for many years, becoming an Explorer, and has carried the RBL Standard for the Dickleburgh branch at Remembrance Sunday services on several occasions.

Terry enlisted as a boy soldier aged 15 in 1971 and served with the Royal Pioneer Corps (now part of the Royal Logistic Corps) in the UK, Cyprus, Belize, Germany and Northern Ireland. He retired after 25 years' service in 1996, and following the death of his wife, Tracie (and with her blessing before she died) has been accepted as a Chelsea Pensioner. He will be entering the Royal Hospital in Chelsea in June.



Terry receiving his Long Service and Good Conduct Medal, 1989



Daniel at Dickleburgh, 2023

We wish Daniel and Terry well in the new chapters of their lives, and despite the difference in their ages, both are committed to the service of King and country. We are very proud of both and look forward to hearing how they are getting on in their new lives. They are both Bun, Cuppa and Chat members of course and will always be welcome to join us when they are in the area, and we look forward to spotting Terry on TV on parade in the future!

Bun, Cuppa and Chat Summer Lunch

Thursday 23 July 2026, 12 for 12.30pm

We will be having a Summer Lunch at the Mariner's Galley on 23 July. Full details, including menus and costs (as usual we hope to subsidise the cost) will follow shortly. Open to our Bun, Cuppa and Chat members, carer/family member and our lovely volunteers.

With the warmer weather, we should be able to use the whole café, giving us a maximum number of 46 for lunch.

Dickleburgh Poppy Cascade

The Poppy Sewing Team is making good progress sewing back the poppies on the Cascade and plans are afoot to have a large wooden horse made to accompany the display. This will be covered with purple knitted or crocheted poppies, to commemorate animals lost in war, so it is likely we will put out a call shortly for knitters and crocheters, near and far, to add to our purple poppy stash. Watch this space!



Norman's Chuckle Corner

- ✚ A man walked into a bar carrying a crocodile and a chicken. He put them down on a stool and said to the bartender. "I'll have a double whisky, please. The crocodile added, "I'd like a single whisky, please. The bartender was amazed. "That's incredible", he gasped, "I've never seen a crocodile that could talk." "He can't", said the man, "The chicken is a ventriloquist."
- ✚ A smart man went into a bar and sat down on a chair. The bartender came over and said, 'What can I get you to drink, Sir?' 'Nothing, thank you,' said the man 'I tried alcohol once and didn't like it, and I've not drunk it since.' The bartender was a little perplexed, but being friendly, he offered the man a cigarette. But the man refused saying, 'I tried smoking once and didn't like it, and I've not smoked since. 'Actually,' said the man. I would not be here except I am waiting for my son.' To which the bartender replied, 'Your only child, I presume?'
- ✚ An overweight woman was advised by her doctor to follow a new regime. 'I want you to eat regularly for two days, then skip a day and repeat the procedure for two weeks. Next time I see you, you will have lost about 5lbs. When the woman returned two weeks later, she had lost 20lbs. The doctor was amazed and asked if she had adhered to the regime? 'Yes' she said, 'but I thought I was going to drop dead on the third day.' 'From hunger?' said the doctor, 'No! from skipping.'
- ✚ Patient: 'Doctor, Doctor, I keep thinking I'm a bell.' Doctor: 'If the feelings persist, give me a ring.'
- ✚ Patient: 'Doctor, Doctor, I have a serious memory problem. I cannot remember a thing.' Doctor: 'How long have you had this problem?' Patient: 'What problem?'
- ✚ A lady went into an exclusive pet shop and asked for a tartan sweater for her dog. The sales assistant suggested bringing the dog in to make sure it would fit properly. 'Oh, I can't do that,' she said, 'The sweater is a surprise.'
- ✚ My friend can only sleep on stacks of old magazines. He's got back issues.
- ✚ A jump-lead walks into a bar. The barman says, "I'll serve you, but don't start anything"

Musings from Nacho, Sugie and Lola

Nacho here. Lola, a new member of the Steer household, has joined this column's editorial team. She is a 7-year-old Toller and, like me, is 'pre-loved', that is, returned to our breeder (and then onward to Master and Missus) because she was no longer able to live with her original family. Lola is lovely and gets on well with Sugie, but I am still trying to teach her some respect for her elders! The Missus has banished the



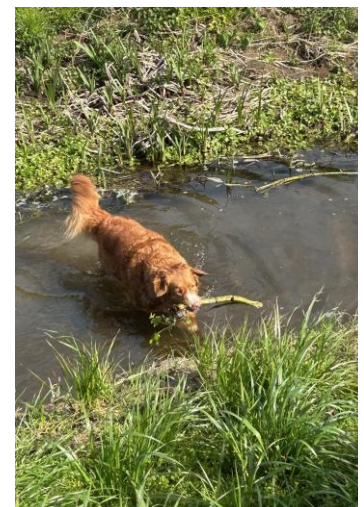
pink Disney lead, harness and poo bag holder that Lola brought with her, muttering, 'I'm not going to be seen with any dog of mine wearing that get-up in the village!'



Lola settling in



Sugie (R) chatting things over with her late 'aunts' Seffy and Phoebe



Glad I'm not wearing the pink harness now, Missus!

The Bun, Cuppa and Chat Group is part of the Benefice of Dickleburgh and the Pulhams,
Rector: The Revd Carl Melville, T. 01379 452029

Organisers: The Revd Norman Steer and Rosemary Steer, T. 01379 854245

Newsletter Editor, Rosemary Steer, email: rosemaryasteer55@gmail.com

Please contact Rosemary if you would like your name removed from the mailing list.