

# Toft and wartime service

## 1914 - 1918 WAR

### MEMBERS OF THE ARMED SERVICES

HENRY CHARLES SPARKS  
BERT SPARKS (brothers)

ARTHUR SPARKS  
JOSEPH SPARKS (brothers, both wounded)

PAYNE CUSTERSON (wounded)

FRANK CONSTABLE (wounded)

ARCHIE BADCOCK submariner

**Servicemen from Toft suffered no fatalities during the First World War.**

Archie served in the Navy ~~during the First World War~~ as a submariner (ship unknown). By 1918 submarines had developed from very crude beginnings to a standard that remained almost unchanged until the start of World War Two. Those who joined the submarine service saw themselves as an elite force within the Navy. When he returned to his home in High St. Toft villagers remarked on his protruding eyes, attributing this to the low light levels of the submarine!

## 1939 -1945/47 WAR

At the outbreak of war, Toft was still very much a rural community. The majority of men of working age were employed on the local farms and their wives either stayed at home to look after the family, or else did some seasonal agricultural work when required. **When war was declared the government issued a list of essential occupations vital to the war effort that were to be exempt from the fighting forces; as a result a majority of Toft workers would not have been called to serve.**

### Roll of Honour

Three names are on the war memorial tablet in memory of those who died in the Second World War. NORMAN CUSTERSON and ROLAND BRAYSHER were both in the Army and died in Japanese P.O.W. camps. Norman Custerson died of dysentery at Tamarkan on 3<sup>rd</sup>.October 1943 (aged 23) and was buried at Kanchanaburi War Cemetery, Thailand. Roland Braysher died on 1st. December 1943 (aged 34) and was buried at Yokohama War Cemetery, Japan. Both men were taken prisoner by the Japanese in Singapore and then sent to P.O.W. camp, enduring conditions and treatment that resulted in their death. Roland Braysher was from Little Eversden **(his parents were married in Toft and he was christened in St Andrew's. Norman Charles Custerson was a resident of Toft and son of Payne, who fought in the First World War.** The third person named on the memorial is HAROLD PAUL LISTER TEBBIT, a radio officer in the Merchant Navy.

HAROLD PAUL LISTER TEBBIT

Harold, **always known as Paul**, was born to Bernard and May Tebbit on 29<sup>th</sup> September 1924, where Bernard was farming at Orchard Farm, Toft. His elder brother was Kenneth. The family were brought up on the farm and attended the Methodist Chapel. Later Paul joined the Merchant Navy and trained as a Wireless Operator. He was on M.S. ABOSSO, an Elder Dempster Line passenger ship that left Cape Town in October 1942 bound for England when, only three days from port, the ship was torpedoed by a German submarine, the U 575. Of the 400 including crew on board there were 28 survivors. Paul Tebbit was amongst those lost at sea.

## CLIFFORD TEBBIT

Clifford was born at Old Farm, Toft to Edith and Claude Tebbit. In 1940 straight from the Perse School he volunteered to become an engineering cadet and eighteen months later joined the Royal Engineers reaching the rank of captain serving in Burma and working with the Indian Army Works Section. With that country's Independence in 1947 some members of the army were seconded to effect reparations following the turmoil of the war years, the RE being particularly important because of their bridge building, road and construction experience. Clifford was demobbed eventually in 1948, returning to his farming role at Home Farm, Toft.

## Sir DONALD TEBBIT 1920 - 2010

Donald Tebbit served in the RNVR aboard the following vessels during the Second World War: H.M.S. Quorn 1941 a Hunt class destroyer used as escort in the Channel; H.M.S Jason 1942 a Halycon class minesweeper patrolling around Rosyth and Scapa flow; H.M.S. Vanity 1943-44 an Admiralty V class destroyer escorting in the north sea; and **H.M.S. Cockade** 1944-45 a C class destroyer operating in the far- east. From joining-up as an Ordinary Seaman he rose to Full Lieutenant before leaving the Service.

## HENRY ALFRED SPARKS

Henry (**known as Harry**) was born in 1920 in Toft to Bert and Ivy Sparks. He went to school in the village along with his brother John and his sisters Dorothy and Beryl and then on to Comberton National School. Like many children at that time, he left at the age of 14yrs. He then went **into** employment until conscription in 1939 with the Royal Cambridgeshire Regiment. The Cambridgeshires were sent to Singapore in 1941. After Singapore was overwhelmed by the Japanese, Henry spent the rest of the war in a Prisoner of War Camp, forced to work on the Burma/Thailand railway. He survived this ordeal and in August 1945 returned home to Toft. He married and lived at 31, High Street, working for Bernard Tebbit at Orchard Farm. He subsequently moved to work in the coal mines in Staffordshire, eventually returning to live in Brookside, Toft and later to Bourn.

## MURIEL PEACH

Muriel was born in Toft in 1915. She spent most of her childhood in the village and for several years her father was the publican at The Black Bull. In 1939 Muriel joined the N.A.A.F.I. (National Army Airforce Institute) the official trading organisation of HM Forces. At first in army camps in England, she was posted in 1945 to Hanover, Germany, then to Gosslar, near the Harz mountains, and then Gottingen. Muriel left the N.A.A.F.I. in 1950 returning to live in Toft.

## FALKLANDS WAR 1982

George Stewart of School Lane, Toft, arriving home on leave from the Falklands conflict in April 1982. He returned to H.M.S. Fearless on which he served after his leave.

## IRAQ WAR 2003 - 2005

Jake was a member of the RAAF, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, and as a Flying Officer attached to the XV (UK) Psyops (Psychological Operations) was posted to Iraq in 2003. Their mission as a 'force multiplier' was to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the local population.

(Researched by Jenny Jacobs and Mary **Coppens**)



**Bert Sparks** (on the right) at Territorial Camp, Ashridge Park 1914



# TOFT 1939-1945

- ////// STILL EXISTS
- JACKLIN OCCUPIER
- MILLERS RD. NAMES of HOUSES + ROADS.
- E: TURNER EVACUEES.
- ⑪ ..... POINTS of WAE INTEREST
- W WT W - WELL / PUMP TANK

③ SEMI-DERELICT LARGE CAR  
HOME-GUARD LOOKOUT  
'BUM GARDENS'

⑤ SITE OF CRASH  
OF USAF FIGHTER  
AIRCRAFT.  
(Field owned by Claude  
TERRIT)

④ BOMBS FELL  
IN MILL DRIFT

⑭ YARD NEAR  
COMBERTON 'ARCH'  
(boundary Tiff/Comberton)  
COAL SUPPLIES  
DELIVERED BY LARGE  
HORSE-DRAWN CART

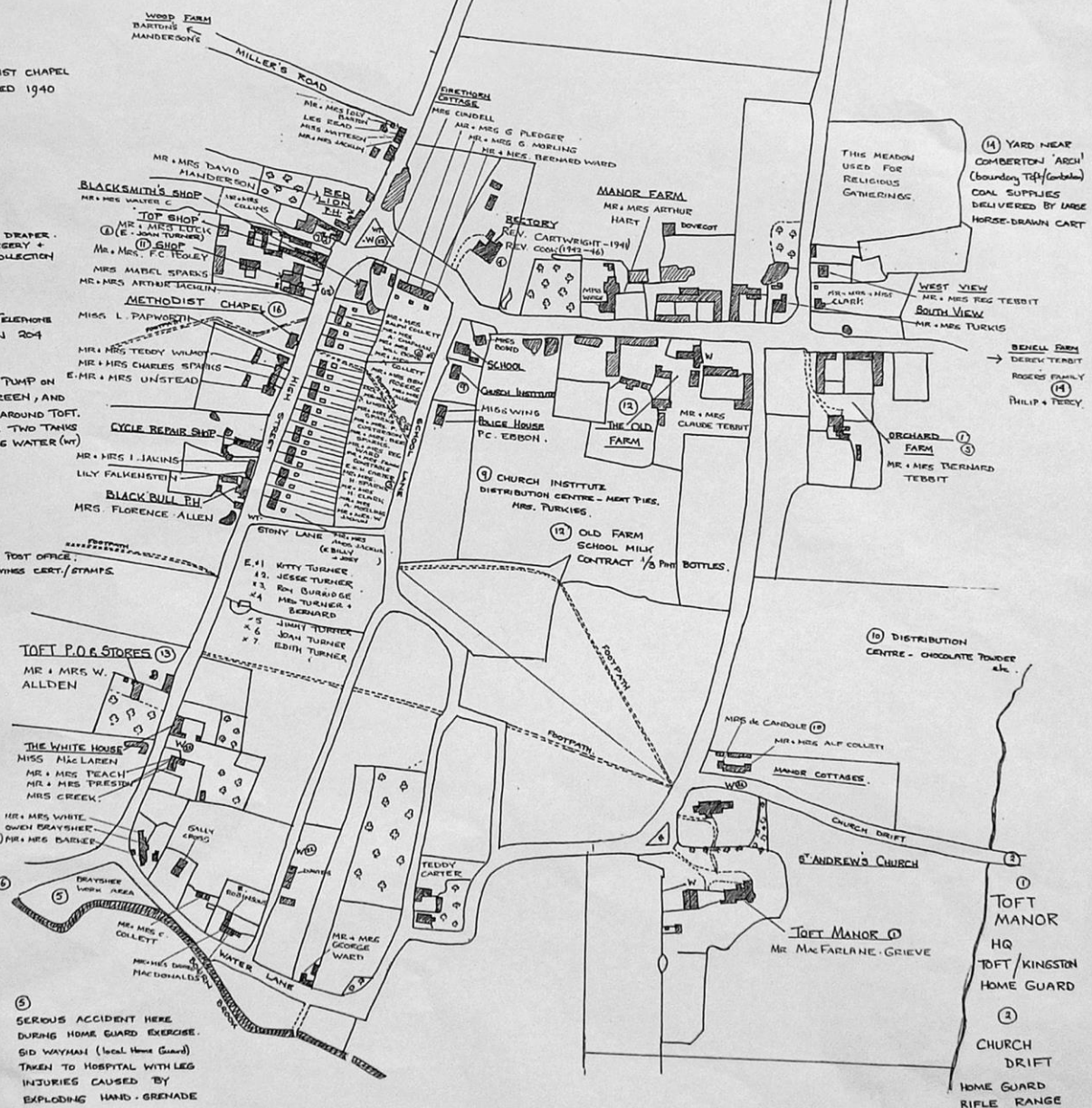
⑫ METHODIST CHAPEL  
EXTENDED 1940

⑪ POOLEY, DRAKER.  
DOCTOR'S SURGERY +  
MEDICINE COLLECTION  
POINT

⑮ PUBLIC TELEPHONE  
COMBERTON 204

⑫ WATER - PUMP ON  
VILLAGE GREEN, AND  
WELLS (W) AROUND TOFT.  
DURING WAR TWO TANKS  
OF DRINKING WATER (WT)

⑬ STORES & POST OFFICE.  
NATIONAL SAVINGS CERT./STAMPS.



⑬ TOFT P.O. & STORES  
MR + MRS W.  
ALDEN

⑮ THE WHITE HOUSE  
MISS MAC LAREN  
MR + MRS TEACH  
MR + MRS PRESHAM  
MRS CREEK

⑮ MR + MRS WHITE  
OWEN BRAYSHER  
⑨ MR + MRS BARBER

⑤ SERIOUS ACCIDENT HERE  
DURING HOME GUARD EXERCISE.  
SID WAYMAN (local Home Guard)  
TAKEN TO HOSPITAL WITH LEG  
INJURIES CAUSED BY  
EXPLODING HAND-GRENADE

⑥ TOFT AND KINGSTON  
RAILWAY SIDINGS. KINGSTON  
BRIDGE.

⑦ KINGSTON SEARCHLIGHT  
BATTERY, CHURCH LANE,  
KINGSTON

⑩ DISTRIBUTION  
CENTRE - CHOCOLATE POWDER  
etc.

⑪ MRS de CANDOLE  
MR + MRS ALF COLLETT

⑪ MANOR COTTAGES

⑪ CHURCH DRIFT

⑪ ST. ANDREW'S CHURCH

⑪ TOFT MANOR  
MR MAC FARLANE - GRIEVE

① TOFT  
MANOR  
HQ  
TOFT/KINGSTON  
HOME GUARD

③ CHURCH  
DRIFT  
HOME GUARD  
RIFLE RANGE





TOFT HOME GUARD 1944 No. 3 Platoon, A Company, 4th Cambridgeshire Battalion – *Semper paratus (Always prepared)*

*back row* L/C Hart, Pte Allen, Pte Hurcombe, Pte Luck, Pte Brightwell, Pte Collett A., **Pte** Curtiss, Pte Collett C

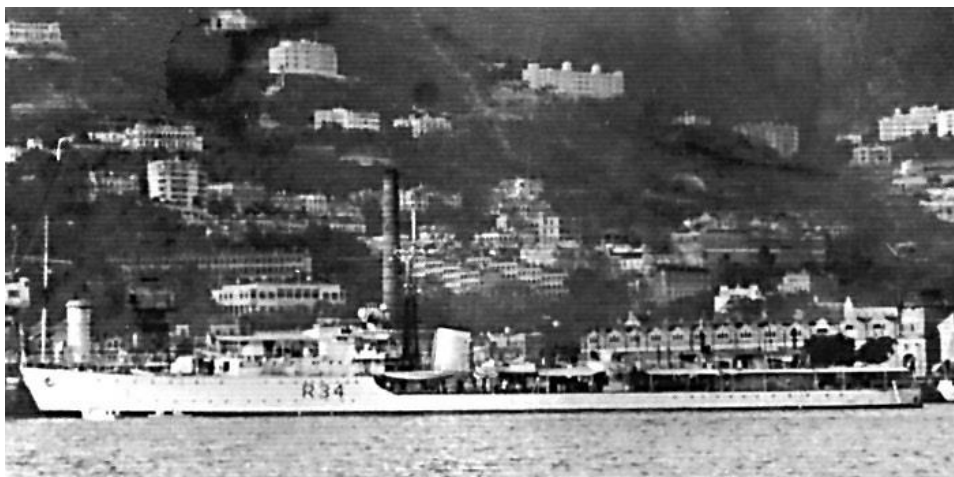
*middle row* L/C Badcock, Pte Collett O, Pte Hagger, Pte Constable, L/C Saunders, Pt Tebbit, Pte Ward, Pt Collett P, Cpl Custance

*seated* Cpl Collett, Sgt Rogers, Major Macfarlane-Grieve, Lt Jakins, Cpt Mathews, L/C Gibson, L/C Tebbit

*front row* Sgt. Rayner, Cpl Farrant, Pte Collin, L/C Jacklin



MS ABBOSSO



HMS Cockade in Hong Kong harbour 1945



Paul Tebbit, Merchant Navy 1941





Derrick Tebbit (Bennell Farm) as RAF trainee



Officer cadet Clifford Tebbit at Home Farm 1946



Archie Badcock 1942

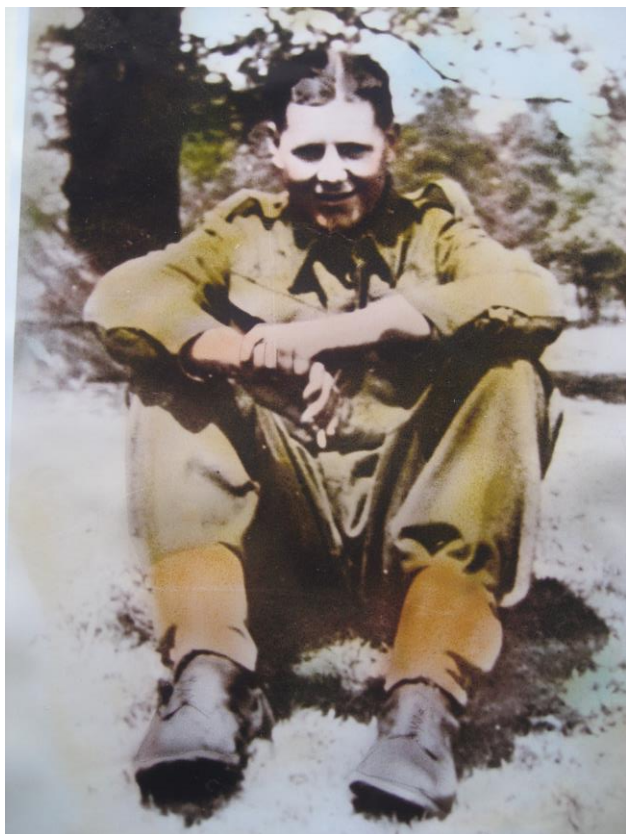


Sir Donald Tebbit





Richard Howard in Pegu, Burma 1945



Harry Sparks 1940s



Muriel Peach at Puckeridge Park 1944



Toft at War exhibition 2005





Medals display



VAD and GI uniforms



Gas masks



THE FALKLANDS WAR 1982



George Stewart of School Lane, Toft on leave from the Falklands serving aboard HMS Fearless



**IRAQ WAR 2003 - 2005**



Jake Tebbit of Orchard Farm, Toft serving as a member of the Royal Auxiliary Air Force in Iraq 2003.