



# ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

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## The Best of the Best

**The Best Fighters in the RAF  
Operate on the Ground**

**The Royal Air Force Regiment.  
Ground-based specialists,  
protecting RAF assets from  
enemy attack.**

**NEWSLETTER NO: 235  
JANUARY 2009**

# THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

## NUMBER 235 JANUARY 2009

Dear Readers.

Valerie and I would like to thank all those members and friends who sent Christmas cards to us, wishing all our members and us well for Christmas and the New Year. I'm always amazed and touched with all the cards that we have received. Not only from our relations and our 'civilian' friends but also from members and from good friends of the Birmingham Branch, sending good wishes to Valerie and I and to all members of the Branch, not only for Christmas but for the New Year too, my thanks to all of you.

### BRANCH BIRTHDAYS

A Happy birthday to the following Birmingham Branch members whose birthdays are in January and we hope that they have many more of them. Some members have not fully completed their Application Forms so if I have missed anyone out, give me a call and I'll put it right. I have also put these birthday greetings onto the Birmingham News page of the RAF Regiment Association Website. If anyone does not wish to be included in these birthday greetings, please let me know.

- 2<sup>nd</sup> January** **Dinah Shave** of Birmingham, West Midlands
- 3<sup>rd</sup> January** **Robert Shepherd** of Ballymena, County Antrim
- 4<sup>th</sup> January** **Robert Watkins** of Nuneaton, Warwickshire
- 5<sup>th</sup> January** **Samuel Hadley** of Dudley, West Midlands
- 6<sup>th</sup> January** **Godfrey Coates** of Birmingham, West Midlands
- 9<sup>th</sup> January** **John Lawton** of Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire
- 14<sup>th</sup> January** **Chris Baxter** of Daventry, Northamptonshire
- 14<sup>th</sup> January** **Samuel Owen** of Crewe, Cheshire
- 24<sup>th</sup> January** **James Bayliss** of Coleshill, West Midlands
- 28<sup>th</sup> January** **Thomas Swann** of Stanford Le Hope, Essex

And a Happy Birthday to me too for my birthday is on 14<sup>th</sup> January too when, as you receive these newsletters, I shall be 25 oops,

sorry, 75 years old. Three-quarters of a Century – is that old? No of course it isn't.

### BRANCH SUBSCRIPTIONS

Please remember that your Branch Subscriptions are due on 1<sup>st</sup> February and also, please remember that your total subscription will be £15.00 that is £10.00 Association Subscription and £5.00 Branch Subscription. Please make your cheques out to The Birmingham Branch, Association of the RAF Regiment and send them to **THE BRANCH TREASURER** Tom Magee and **NOT** to me.

### NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

I have a list of members of other branches and others, who have asked to receive Birmingham Branch newsletters. The subscription for this service is £7.00 per year. So would those other branch members and others who have asked to be put onto the Circulation List for Birmingham Branch newsletters and wish to continue receiving the newsletters, please send a cheque for £7.00 as above, to **THE BRANCH TREASURER** Tom Magee and **NOT** to me.

Would all of you please pay your Subscriptions **immediately** as having to chase up late payers is a time consuming job and adds to my workload and to the workload of the Branch Treasurer and my sincere thanks to those members who have already paid up.

## NEXT MONTH'S MEETING WILL BE BRANCH AGM

### Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> February 2009

The Branch AGM will be held next month and as is usual in the Birmingham Branch, only one of the three Executive offices will be voted for. For many years now, to ensure continuity in the Branch, the Branch Chairman, the Branch Secretary and the Branch Treasurer are elected for three years, one each year, in that order. The Branch President has been elected for life, or until he wishes to stand down. This year, it will be the turn of the office of Branch Treasurer to be up for election. Tom Magee has said that he is willing to stand again. All the other officers are elected annually and all the Branch officers have indicated that they are willing to stand again this

year. Nominations are requested for all the Branch officers, with the exception of the Branch President, the Branch Chairman and the Branch Secretary. If any other Branch member would like to stand for a Branch office, please let me have your nomination, Proposed and Seconded by two other Branch members, at least two weeks before the AGM that is by 29<sup>th</sup> January 2009.

## **Branch Appeal**

### **Goodies for the Military Ward**

It is most important that we remember the dangers that our young men and women serving on operations are all facing, so please remember the appeal your Branch Committee have set up. With the ever increasing number of casualties being evacuated from the combat zones, we need to encourage continuing donations to the Appeal Fund. With your help, we can continue to provide these small comforts and any other items that the Military Ward staff ask us for.

A major winter offensive against the Taliban in southern Afghanistan has led to scores of casualties among British troops. In eight weeks of fighting, 16 soldiers and marines have been killed and around 60 have been wounded in action fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda gunmen in central Helmand. The vast majority of the casualties are being caused by the increased use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs).

The number of wounded servicemen returning from Helmand has put pressure on Selly Oak Hospital. There are currently 27 wounded soldiers being treated in the hospital but the MoD insists the staff can cope. Selly Oak's "military managed" ward can now accommodate 36 casualties and any increase in that number would result in troops being treated on civilian wards.

The Ministry of Defence' own figures show that the number of injured troops being evacuated from Helmand is now more than double that of last year. In November 2007, 33 injured troops were flown out of Helmand; last month the figure was 79.

We can never get enough goodies for the lads, so in the mean time, your continued support is appreciated. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any other ideas where we could help. All donations will be gratefully acknowledged and will be recorded in the Birmingham Branch newsletters. If anyone would like to contribute financially to this appeal, please send a cheque to

the Branch Treasurer Tom Magee, made out to the Birmingham Branch – Military Ward Appeal.

If any of you would like to contribute items to this appeal, you can either take them directly to Ward S4, Selly Oak Hospital and ask for Major Ian Cheesman, or any of the Military Ward staff; or post them to Major I R Cheesman, OC Patient Support Services, RCDM, Ward S4, Selly Oak Hospital, Raddlebarn Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6JD.

**AIR VICE MARSHAL DONALD POCOCK  
CBE (CG 1973 – 1975)**

**b 5<sup>th</sup> July 1920 – d 30<sup>th</sup> July 2008 RIP**

Your Branch Committee has decided to commemorate Air Vice Marshal Pocock at the National Memorial Arboretum. There is a facility for this in the walkway between the Visitor Centre and the Millennium Chapel. This is paved with red brick pavers upon which the details of those to be commemorated can be carved.

We have already commissioned a number of these pavers commemorating various people and we have commissioned another paver to commemorate AVM Pocock. I will let you all know when it will be dedicated. In addition, we also hope to get all the Branch pavers re-laid so as to be all together in one place.

## **NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT**



### **FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY**

**General:** The following Parish Notices are provided for your information and interest.

#### **DEATH NOTICES:**

**HALLIGAN WILLIAM.** Former RAF Regt Gnr William Halligan died on 28 Nov 08 after a long illness. Member of Catterick Branch of RAF Regt Assoc. The funeral took place at 1330 hrs on Wed 10 Dec 08 at St Anne's Church (RAF Regt Chapel) Catterick Village, followed by committal at Darlington Crematorium at 1445hrs. Both the Church Service and the committal at the Crematorium were open to all those who wished to attend. The service was followed by refreshments at the Angel Hotel. Family flowers only were requested but donations, if desired, can be made towards the upkeep of the RAF Regt

Chapel. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Rose Halligan at 17 Garth Meadow, Catterick Village, DL10 7RT. The Corps extends its sincere sympathy to the Family at this time.

**LAKE-BULLEN LEONARD MM.**

Former RAF Regt Gnr Leonard George Lake-Bullen MM, born 13 Feb 23, died on 26 Nov 08 aged 85, following a short illness. He was the first RAF Regiment recipient of the Military Medal in May 43. The Citation for the award of the MM, published in the London Gazette on 28 May 43, read: "1459700 Aircraftsman 1<sup>st</sup> Class Leonard George BULLEN, Royal Air Force Regiment. In November 1942, this airman with his flt was on the coastal road proceeding in the direction of Sollum. When the convoy had reached a point at which the road was crowded with transport vehicles, an enemy bomber approached, dropping bombs that caused casualties.

Aircraftsman Bullpen, with great presence of mind and coolness, manned his gun that was mounted on a lorry and successfully shot down the intruder before further damage was done. By his prompt action, Aircraftsman Bullen undoubtedly saved many lives and much material from destruction. In December 1942, he repeated this feat, destroying an enemy aircraft which was making a low-level attack on dispersed aircraft." He was discharged from the RAF on 23 Mar 54 and was a member of Hereford Branch RAF Regt Assoc. Further details will be published in the Centurion Journal. The funeral was held at Hereford Crematorium, Westfaling Street, Hereford HR4 0JE at 14.00 on Tue 9 Dec 08. Following the service, the family was pleased to welcome attendees to The Bay Horse Inn, Kings Acre Road, Hereford HR4 0SD. Family flowers only were requested but donations, if required, may be made to 'Help for Heroes' c/o Mr C Lake-Bullen, 122 Bellemoor Road, Upper Shirley, Southampton SO15 7QY. Letters of condolence may be sent to the family at the same address. He is survived by his sons, Chris and Richard, to whom the Corps extends its sincere sympathy.

**FRISBY HARRY.** Former RAF Regt Cpl Harry (Henry) FRISBY, born 26 Apr 21, died on 30 Sep 08 aged 87. He enlisted on 15 Jul 41 as a Ground Gunner, transferring to the RAF Regt on its formation. He served on 2731 and 2904 Sqn RAF Regt in the European Campaigns in Italy, France and Germany, and also in the Middle East.

He was demobilized on 22 Jul 47. He joined the old RAF Regt Assoc (Kent Branch) in 1992 but transferred to the Bromley Branch in 2003, where he was a regular attendee until ill health prevailed. The funeral took place on 15 Oct 08 and was attended by Bromley Branch members and their Branch Standard was paraded. There was no immediate family.

**THACKER J H.** Retired Regt Sqn Ldr J H THACKER, born 6 Mar 20, died on 30 Oct 08 aged 88 years. He was commissioned on 24 Oct 45 and was promoted to Sqn Ldr on 1 Jul 56. He retired on 28 Jan 61. No further details are known at this time. The funeral has been held, but letters of condolence may be sent to his widow, Mrs Queenie Thacker at 47 Pound Lane, Thorpe St Andrews, Norwich NR7 0UN. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

**WOODFIELD DEREK.** Former RAF Regt Cpl Derek WOODFIELD, born 24 Dec 33, died on 14 Nov 08 aged 75. He enlisted on 3 Apr 52 and served with 16 Sqn, 6 Wg and 194 Sqn RAF Regt before being discharged on 2 Apr 65. His wife pre-deceased him. The funeral was held in Plymouth on 24 Nov 08 and was attended by members of the Plymouth Branch of the RAF Regt Assoc. No further details are known at this time. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

**HUNT NORMAN.** Former Gnd Gnr and Sgt Norman Leslie HUNT, born 24 Feb 22 died on 13 Dec 08, aged 86. He enlisted at RAF Uxbridge on 15 Jun 39 and became a Gnd Gnr. He was a member of the ill-fated British Expeditionary Force and, after evacuation from Dunkirk, was posted to 114 Sqn at RAF Horsham St Faiths. He transferred to the RAF Regt on its formation in 1942 and volunteered for duty on 2810 Sqn RAF Regt in the parachute role.

He was promoted to Sgt and served in SEAC, finally being discharged on 20 Jun 46. He was a founder member of the Norfolk Branch of the Assoc in 1994 and was a staunch supporter of the Branch and the Assoc from then on. He is survived by his wife, Gladys, and their three children. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Hunt at 16 Church Close, Arminghall, Norwich, NR14 8SE.

The funeral was held at 1315 on Fri 2 Jan 09 at Horsham St Faiths Crematorium, north of Norwich. Family flowers only were requested but donations, if desired, may be made payable to the

to the Birmingham Branch RAF Regt Assoc - Military Ward Appeal c/o Nicholas E Potts, Funeral Directors, Angel House, 20 Angel Road, Norwich NR3 3HP. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

#### **EDITOR'S NOTE:**

You may recall that in last November's newsletter, I published the information about Norman Hunt being reunited with a former colleague 63 years after they last met when he met up with former 2810 Parachute Squadron member Alan Barkes, of Lincolnshire. Alan who last saw his friend at a bombed-out Singapore airport in 1945, said: "We had such a brilliant day in Yarmouth and Norman was a wonderful man." They were both in the first parachute-trained RAF Regiment squadron and were due to be dropped on to a Japanese position in Malaysia when the war ended.

#### **AL WAKI PAINTING PRINTS**

Although the Al Waki lithograph prints have been produced, the closure of RAF Honington over the Christmas-New Year period means that delivery cannot now be effected until sometime in the New Year. We apologise to those who were hoping for the prints before Christmas but circumstances beyond our control have prevented it. Those who have ordered Special Edition (signed by CG and Cpl Hayden MC) prints will be notified separately on delivery arrangements, since they have yet to be signed. All prints are signed by the Artist, Stuart Brown. For further details, see the Repeat Notice below.

#### **Al Waki Painting**

On 7 Aug 07, a Patrol of 1 Sq, RAF Regt was engaged in a furious firefight with approximately 50 Iraqi insurgents in the Al Waki Market in Basrah. For some two hours, the two sides fought a pitched battle that left at least 16 insurgents dead. However, a heavy price was paid. With one man already wounded in the initial exchange of fire, LAC Martin Beard, his Sectn's LMG operator, was then shot while providing covering fire for his comrades. His Sectn Comdr, Cpl David Hayden, evacuated him over 200 metres – all the while under fierce enemy fire - to medical aid but, unfortunately, Martin Beard had been wounded fatally.

#### **1- 58 - 26 SQNs RAF REGT REUNION AT RAF LAARBRUCH - 2009**

The RAF Regt Museum is in the process of loaning a Rapier FSB1(M) missile system to

the RAF Laarbruch Museum in Weeze, Nord Rhein Westfalia, Germany. It is planned to hold a formal unveiling of the exhibit sometime in the Spring/early Summer of 2009 and it is hoped to use the event to stage a reunion for those who served at RAF Laarbruch on the Regt Sqns or GDT during the period 1953-1999. The Museum website may be found at: <<http://www.laarbruch-museum.net>>. Details of any such reunion, including suggested accommodation, will be issued at a later date. If anyone is interested on helping run, or to take on the coordination of the reunion attendees, please contact the RAF Regt Sec.

#### **Corps Annual Formation Dinner 2009**

The 2009 Corps Annual Formation Dinner will be held in the Offrs' Mess at RAF Honington on Fri 6 Feb 09. A FP Centre Study Day for serving members will precede it. A Calling Note has been issued to serving officers but copies are available from Flt James Griffiths (FP HQ J7) or the Regt Sec. As in previous years, up to 30 retired officers are invited to participate and those who have applied so far should have received confirmatory letters/Emails. The list has now closed but there are a few places left, which should be reserved on a first-come-first served basis - with the Regt Sec (ideally by Email) as soon as possible and no later than 9 Jan 09. Former CGs qualify automatically for a place. The cost will be £40pp, plus a modest accommodation charge (subject to availability).

#### **RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Annual Reception 2009**

The 2009 Annual Reception will take place at RAF Honington on Fri 29 May 09. On present plans, the day will commence with a Trainee Gunner Graduation Parade, followed by a buffet lunch in the Offrs Mess. In the afternoon, some training and/or capability displays will be staged, together with a visit to the Regt Museum. A Calling Note will be issued in the Spring. Pre-registration is not required at this stage.

#### **RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club - Annual Dinner 2009**

The 2009 Officers' Annual Dinner will take place at the Def CBRN Centre, Winterbourne Gunner, on Fri 30 Oct 09. A Calling Note will be issued in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Qtr of 2009.

#### **CORPS DIARY DATES:**

(Updated - not exhaustive - contributions welcome).

6 Feb 09 - Officers' Corps Formation Dinner - RAF Honington.

18-19 Apr 09 – RAF Armd Car Assoc – Spring Reunion (Derby)

10 May 09 – Annual RAF Regt Chapel Commemoration – Catterick Village

29 May 09 – RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Reception – RAF Honington

(27) Jun 09 (TBC) - RAF Regt Memorial Commemoration - NMA Alrewas (Veterans Week). Date to be confirmed.

2-4 Oct 09 – RAF Regt Assoc AGM and Reunion – venue TBD.

30 Oct 09 - RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Annual Dinner – Def CBRN Centre, Winterbourne Gunner

#### **FROM THE BRANCH SECRETARY**

You may recall that on page 5 in last November's newsletter, I published a letter from Squadron Leader Richard Cox RAF (Rtd) and information about No 1 Ground Defence Gunnery School, Ronaldsway, Isle of Man, where he trained. Well I have received a further letter from Richard giving me additional information about the School.

#### **Squadron Leader Richard Cox RAF (Rtd)**

My Dear Malcolm. A brief footnote to the piece in the newsletter about the Gunnery School at Ronaldsway. There were no Bofors Guns in sight when I was there. We were involved with two weapons – Lewis Guns (drum fed) and Vickers Medium Machine Guns (belt fed). The latter involved a far from mobile mounting which weighed (I think) somewhere about 80 pounds. It was the very devil to move from place to place.

The Vickers was of exceptional interest to me because my father – Lieutenant C V Cox – served with the Mobile Machine Gun Corps in the First World War. Unfortunately, his cap badge (two crossed Vickers Guns) was stolen with a number of other items, in a burglary some years ago. According to the Mobile Machine Gun Corps Roll which I saw in a Grantham church in the early 1980s, his unit commander was Captain, later of course, Lieutenant General Guy Browning of Arnhem renown.

I did fire a Vickers Gun in anger - once – when I was attached to the Transvaal Scottish in September 1942, while they were in the line held in the Western Desert after the Battle of Alam Halfa and before the second Battle of Alamein.

As regards the hotel billets in Douglas, the Sefton hotel on the Esplanade was used by to billet officers on the original OCTU course – July – November 1941 - as well as various boarding houses nearby. Yours Richard.

**P.S.** Ronaldsway was south of Douglas and Farley – where there was an Air Gunners School to the north of the island. It sounds as though facilities were shared later on after I had left for the Middle East.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The Transvaal Scottish Regiment was a South African regiment formed in 1902 after the end of the Second Anglo-Boer War, from Scottish units that had fought in the war and chose to demobilise and remain in the colony.

**The Battle of Alam el Halfa** took place between 30<sup>th</sup> August and 5<sup>th</sup> September 1942 south of El Alamein during the Western Desert Campaign of World War II. Panzer Army Africa, a German-Italian force commanded by Erwin Rommel ("the Desert Fox"), attempted an envelopment of the British Eighth Army, commanded by Bernard Montgomery. The success of the battle was a turning point in the campaign in the Western Desert. From that time onwards, the British troops had an assurance of ultimate success which heightened their morale,

**The Second Battle of El Alamein** marked a major turning point in the Western Desert Campaign of World War II. The battle lasted from 23 October to 5 November 1942. The First Battle of El Alamein had stalled the Axis advance. Thereafter, Lieutenant-General Bernard Montgomery took command of the British Eighth Army from General Claude Auchinleck in August 1942. Success in the battle turned the tide in the North African Campaign. Allied victory at El Alamein ended Axis hopes of occupying Egypt, controlling access to the Suez Canal, and gaining access to the Middle Eastern oil fields. The defeat at El Alamein marked the end of Axis expansion in Africa.

#### **RAF Honington welcomes injured personnel for rehab**

It was during a routine operation in the Karmat Ali district of Basra City, southern Iraq, on August 7, 2007, that Cpl Stu Hefti found himself confronted with a situation that all servicemen train for - but hope they will never encounter. He and fellow Gunners from 1 Squadron RAF Regiment, based at RAF Honington, were on foot patrol when they came

under small arms fire. LAC Martin Beard was killed and Cpl Hefiti was among the injured. He could have lost his leg or, were it not for the bravery of his comrades who rushed him from the battlefield while still under fire, bled to death thousands of miles from home. As it was, he suffered serious muscle and ligament damage which severely restricted his movement. He has spent the last 18 months at the rehabilitation unit at RAF Honington, near Bury St Edmunds, working tirelessly to get himself back on his feet and ready for a return to action. Work includes low impact exercise, such as running in a swimming pool, and weights training to help restore fitness.

“When you first find yourself under fire you go into training mode,” he said. “All that goes through your head is what you have to do to face the task at hand. My first thought when the bullet hit was 'oh my God I've been shot' and then I thought 'oh my God I'm still alive. There was blood everywhere and it's fair to say that if the same thing had happened years ago I would have died. If it wasn't for the medical help I got and my comrades who dragged me to safety, I wouldn't be here.” Fatalities attract the headlines but for every man who dies there are many more who suffer career threatening and life changing injuries. “In one sense I feel lucky because I'm still here,” Cpl Herti said. “My wife was pregnant at the time and I kept thinking that I might never get to see my baby. But now I feel frustrated. The rest of the squadron are out in Afghanistan at the moment and I just want to be out there with them doing my bit.”

Speaking about his rehabilitation he continued: “The mental side of it was hard. My wife is also in the military and when I returned she was heading out on duty. I found myself sitting at home, watching daytime television and going over everything in my head. But here I have the support to come through that and focus on my recovery. I've been told I've got another six months to go and after that I want to get back out there. I want to be part of it because you really get a sense we can make a difference.”

The Ministry of Defence regional rehabilitation unit at RAF Honington is one of 15 in the UK and Germany. It serves a population of more than 10,000 personnel in the eastern region. It focuses on the assessment and treatment of musculoskeletal injuries and sports injuries and is

staffed by specially trained doctors, physiotherapists and rehabilitation instructors. The most serious injuries - such as amputations and brain injuries - are treated at the MoD's facility at Headley Court, but patients will often use the regional units later in their recovery. Between five and 10% of those using the Honington unit have been injured in frontline action with the remainder hurt during training. Over the last four years, 25,000 patients have been assessed there and 12,000 have been discharged from rehab. The MoD has recently assessed the quality of the rehabilitation on offer and has agreed to invest an extra £1.5m per year to improve the regional units.

A clinical manager who treats injured servicemen yesterday described the current crop of personnel as one of the bravest he has ever seen. Chic Wilkinson, 54, a former football Premier League physiotherapist with Tottenham Hotspur and army major, helps oversee the recovery of patients at RAF Honington's regional rehabilitation unit. He said: “These young soldiers I see have real moral fibre. They know where they are going when they join up - and that's why they join up. And when they have been wounded they still want to return. They're a different generation but they're as good if not better than any generation that's gone before.”

## **Regiment Squadron Leader's Iraq Tribute**

Squadron Leader Mike Leaman paid an emotional visit to the site of an historic battle in Iraq. Mike, from Torquay, went to RAF Habbiniyah, where the remains of 289 British and Commonwealth servicemen and civilians, including women and children, are interred. Two hundred and fifty-seven are graves from the Second World War, when the RAF regiment was involved in a battle against Iraqi rebels. The cemetery is the first Commonwealth War Grave to be renovated in Iraq since the regime change happened. Mike, serving with 5 Force Protection Wing on Operation Telic in Basra, spent Armistice Day at the site. He said: "My grandfather was a supplier here in World War Two, and I never thought I'd visit this place while my grandfather was still alive. You just never know where life will take you. It's amazing"

The RAF Regiment protects the Contingency Operating Base in Basra, with troops helping to protect aircraft from small arms fire

and missile threats. Mike added: "The security of the COB is critical to the success of the overall mission here in Iraq. All other units which are helping to train and mentor the Iraqi Security Forces require a secure base from which to operate."

## **51 Squadron RAF Regiment**

Last month 51 Squadron RAF Regiment delivered, by lorry, a new police station to a village near Basra. The portacabin was reallocated from the Contingency Operating Base (COB) (the main coalition base in Basra) to be used as an outstation for the Iraqi Police Service (IPS). With new investment coming into the area and the village's close proximity to one of the large oil refineries, village elders were looking for added security from the IPS. Mr Qais Joudah, the village school headmaster and councillor, said:

"This will help strengthen the Iraqi-led security in the area for when the foreign troops move out in a few years' time. This cabin will provide a base for the IPS to operate from; due to the refinery being nearby, new building will take place and we'll need policemen to be in the area for good relations with them. We currently have a really good relationship with the IPS and Iraqi Army." The portacabin was delivered by low-loader truck, with convoy protection being provided by members of 51 Squadron RAF Regiment. On arrival, key members of 51 Squadron walked into the village to meet with Mr Joudah who was waiting to take delivery of the structure. The cabin was placed in the south west corner of the village overlooking the main roads in the area. The Air Component Commander, Air Commodore Barmby (who was visiting 51 Squadron RAF Regiment for the day from Al Udeid, Qatar), also came along to view the work of the RAF Regiment first hand. He said:

"This has been the highlight of my tour so far. It's great to see the work I have recently read so much about being carried out first-hand. I'm truly honoured to be here today at this presentation and I hope that you keep up the good local relationships and community work, it's outstanding."

51 Squadron RAF Regiment, normally based at RAF Lossiemouth, Scotland, is tasked with the security of the COB. They regularly visit the out-lying villages on their patrols of the area outside the base. These patrols help deter would-be attackers of the COB and its aircraft

movements in and out of the base. Sergeant Martin Hammonds of 51 Squadron RAF Regiment said:

"We're trying to win consent with the locals. It's part of an ongoing thing. We've had football matches with them and we're always patrolling through and giving things to the school and today we're giving them a portacabin. It's really to get them on side and get some Iraqi police in this area. There's been a few attempted kidnaps and hijacks of patrols passing though and we want to create more of a feel that there is a police presence in the area. We've done a lot of these KLE [Key Leader Engagement] projects and local infrastructure projects, this being one of them; the winning of hearts and minds is key to what we do out here now and I think we're winning and getting that message across."

The General Officer Commanding Multi-National Division (South East), Major General Andy Salmon, also recently saw Iraqi police officers and soldiers working in unison when he walked around areas of Basra City that would have been off-limits to him earlier this year. Highlighting the continuing positive development of cooperation between the Iraqi Army and Police, Major General Salmon saw them manning checkpoints in the area to ensure that the security they won during Operation Charge of the Knights is maintained on the streets. They were also encouraging locals to clear away rubbish as part of a clean-up campaign. The effect of the clean-up campaign was clearly evident with the majority of roads being clear of rubbish, and residential waste either placed in, or alongside, the bins available. The campaign aims to promote the quick and environmentally-safe disposal of rubbish within Basra. Major General Salmon also visited a local school thronged with pupils and walked around the Khora and Hayyanayah districts of the city.

## **Reverend Willie Downie**

The Association Padre the Reverend Willie Downie passed away last November and on 27<sup>th</sup> November, Larkhill's St Machan's Parish Church was packed and overflowing into the church hall for the his funeral. Some 800 mourners heard tributes to his ministry and public life by church and military leaders. The Rev John Arthur, past moderator of the United Reformed Church in Scotland, and group captain Steven Brereton-Martin, chairman of the RAF Regiment

Association, praised his “fearless and wise counsel” and said he would be sorely missed.

The Rev Alistair McKillop, who conducted the thanksgiving service, said he was “a wee man with a big heart” who gave himself wholeheartedly to the community where he was well-known and knew everyone. A Guard of Honour from the Royal British Legion and the Royal Air Force and Naval Associations formed inside and outside the church and later at the South Lanarkshire crematorium service where 200 mourners attended. A piper played at both services, the tune ‘Highland Cathedral’ being a favourite of Mr Downie. Other organisations with which he was connected were represented, including the RAF Regiment and Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) Associations, Rotarians from Carluke, Dumbarton and Falkirk, and members of Bellshill and Blantyre curling clubs.

Wille was a man of many parts as the following Obituary shows. He was a peacemaker in the Northern Ireland troubles and he was certainly a peacemaker in the Association, for on many occasions, his calming words resolved many possible conflicts. He will indeed be sadly missed.

## **Rev Willie Downie was Peacemaker**

**Tribute paid to former Carluke minister  
Published by George Downie in the Lanark  
Gazette on 25<sup>th</sup> November 2008**

A former Carluke clergyman and prominent Rotarian has died aged 76. The Rev William Downie was minister of the EU Congregational Church from 1983 to 1997 and presided over its 150th anniversary celebrations in 1996. While at Carluke he was chaplain at Law Hospital, Roadmeetings Hospital, High Mill Primary School, Victoria Park School, Carluke High School and Woodhurst Nursing Home.

He was a stalwart of the local Rotary Club, where he was a member of council and chaired the vocational committee for a number of years. As unofficial chaplain, he said grace at all 26 of the club's annual sportsman's dinners and was a big supporter of the High School debating competition. He also instigated the creation of the Probus Club.

A native of Larkhall, William studied at Glasgow University and the Congregational Union College, Edinburgh, where he received his

Diploma in Theology and later added a BA degree from the Open University. In 1967, he was inducted to the EU Congregational Church in Falkirk, linked with Avonbridge. There he was instrumental in creating the first union between major denominations when Grahamston United Church was formed from Church of Scotland, Congregational and Methodist churches.

His eight years there were followed by another eight years at Dumbarton Congregational Church until he returned to his native Lanarkshire at Carluke EU Congregational Church. William remained there for 14 years until 1997 when he retired to Larkhall, where he continued to conduct services and take funerals and weddings until shortly before his death on November 18. In addition to his pastoral work, he was widely involved at local and national level in education, health and the military.

He was UK chaplain for the RAF Regiment Association and for the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) Association. For 18 years, he was social questions secretary of the Scottish Congregational Churches, work which took him to Ulster in the quest to bridge the religious divide and bring peace to the Province. William also strove for better treatment of the elderly as chairman of the Scottish Pensioners' Forum and Age Concern's Spiritual Care Committee. He represented Scotland on the UK Samaritans Council, helped found Falkirk Citizens Advice Bureau, and was vice-chairman of Argyll and Clyde Health Council.

A keen sportsman, he represented his RAF Regiment unit at boxing and judo and later played curling at Hamilton. He was part of a Rotary curling team which toured Canada in 2000 and his membership of Rotary reflected his charges — Falkirk, Dumbarton (president) and Carluke. He is survived by his wife Sarah (Cissie), four sons and nine grandchildren.

## **RAF Regiment helps handicapped Iraqi boy**

A disabled boy from a village near Basra, Iraq, has had his mobility enhanced after members of 51 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment delivered a donated wheelchair to him this week. 51 Squadron RAF Regiment are based at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, and the wheelchair was donated by local company 'All Mobility Highlands' from Elgin, Morayshire, to spread goodwill. It was gifted by the RAF Regiment to

allow a disabled child to have a better quality of life. Until now, Rashash Muslim Al Hemdani, aged 12, had relied on family members to carry him from one place to another within the village.

The boy's condition had not been diagnosed by a doctor due to the lack of medical facilities in the area, but what was known was that he was not able to walk or take care of himself, and he had a limited ability to communicate with others. The gifted wheelchair vastly improved the boy's quality of life: "It will make our lives easier and he will be a happier boy," said his mother.

The child was first seen a few days ago on the street of his village, Al Khora, while the squadron was carrying out Key Leader Engagement in the area, which involves the RAF Regiment personnel liaising with local leaders and sheiks. Squadron Leader James Lennie, Officer Commanding 51 Squadron RAF Regiment, said: "Today was basically people helping other people. From a military perspective this helps us build stronger relationships with locals and their leaders." Flight Lieutenant John Rees, Deputy Squadron Commander for 51 Squadron RAF Regiment, added: "This is a great opportunity to improve the life of a young Iraqi through the goodwill of the people of Elgin. It is comforting for squadron personnel to know that the job we do is well supported by the public back home."

The scene in the village was extremely positive with many of the adults and children gathering around while the child's wheelchair was adjusted to fit him by Captain Jeff Johnson, US Army, in a truly multi-national mission. Jeff, a US Army National Guardsman, who is serving as a Public Affairs Officer within the Media Cell at HQ Multi-National Division (South East), is an Occupational Therapist back in the USA and regularly fits patients to wheelchairs after disease or trauma.

Jeff jumped at the chance to help out and not only fitted Rashash to the chair but also wrote the story up for the US Army media chain. Jeff said: "I enjoyed having the opportunity to assist another with the skills I have from my civilian occupation back home in Nevada." Sheik Quassim of Al Khora village said: "For helping to improve the lives of this child and his family, I thank you."

## **NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE**

Those of you that have visited the NMA may have also visited the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove situated adjacent to the pillbox by the banks of the River Tame. Former SAS soldiers are appealing for the funds to erect a statue in memory of their fallen comrades. They want to place it in the Special Forces Memorial Grove. It would depict a Fijian and stand for all Special Forces soldiers who have lost their lives in combat. The soldier was called Laba and was killed in 1972 at the Battle of Mirbat in the Middle East. He was mentioned in dispatches and some of his former comrades have campaigned for him to be posthumously awarded with the Victoria Cross. As a result of the heroism of Special Forces, Lord Ashcroft, who wrote the following article, has decided to sponsor the Battle of Mirbat Memorial, to be situated in the Allied Special Forces Memorial Grove at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire.

### **Special Forces Heroes: A unique type of valour, a rare kind of courage** **Published in the Mail Online on 22<sup>nd</sup> November by Lord Ashcroft**

There are, I have always believed, two types of valour: spur-of-the-moment bravery and what I call cold courage, which involves planning. I've nothing but admiration for those decorated for impulsive bravery: a serviceman who, in the heat of battle, risks his life to save a wounded comrade. Many such men have rightly been awarded the Victoria Cross, Britain's top military bravery medal. But my new book, *Special Forces Heroes*, deals with those awarded medals for acts of premeditated courage.

It takes a special kind of valour to go undercover behind enemy lines or to be part of a small, elite unit on a hit-and-run mission against a far larger force. If it goes wrong, he knows that, at best, he might be captured and kept as a prisoner of war for months, even years. At worst, he might be seized, tortured, mutilated and killed. Not everyone mentioned in my book was a member of the Special Forces, but the two accounts I've chosen here do relate to the SAS.

The first - the Battle of Mirbat in Oman in 1972, which saw a handful of SAS men fight off 250 heavily armed, rebel fighters - is not well-known, but is considered by a growing number of military historians to be the regiment's finest hour. The second involves what must surely be the most celebrated moment in the

regiment's history - the storming of the Iranian Embassy in 1980.

### **BATTLE OF MIRBAT – 19<sup>th</sup> July 1972**

#### **Trooper Sekonaia Takavesi**

##### *Distinguished Conduct Medal*

Oman, a long-standing ally of Britain, is a forgotten war - not least because the SAS's involvement in protecting the country's Sultan from the Communist rebels of the People's Front for the Liberation of the Occupied Arab Gulf (PFLOAG) was top secret. Not even the families of those fighting knew where they were. But by July 1972, the regiment had been training and advising local troops in the small Gulf state for a year. Operation Jaguar, designed to consolidate their positions, establish new ones and disrupt rebels lines of communications and resupply was going well.

Then, at dawn on the morning of July 19, the rebels hit back, with 250 of their elite fighters attacking the small town of Mirbat on the Arabian Sea. They were heavily armed and their aim was to overrun the town and slaughter everyone in their path. In the town's garrison were just nine SAS soldiers, equipped with one 25-pounder field gun from World War II, one mortar, a 0.50mm machine gun and a few general purpose machine guns. When the *adoo* (Arabic for enemy forces) attacked, all the SAS men were in the British Army Training Team (BATT) house, 500 yards from the gun pit containing the 25-pounder.

But when they heard mortar rounds and machine gun fire from an outlying observation point, they moved swiftly. A Fijian trooper called Talaiasi Labalaba ran to the gun pit and, though it normally took a three-man team to operate it, managed to open fire by himself, sighting the gun down the barrel and firing into the advancing rebels at near point-blank range. But when Labalaba was wounded, hit in the chin by a 7.62 mm round from a Kalashnikov rifle, it seemed only a matter of time before first the gun and then the garrison was over-run.

But for the decisive action of his fellow Fijian, Sekonaia Takavesi, it probably would have been. Known as 'Sek' or 'Tak' to his friends, he became - in the words of his Army superiors - 'a legend in his own time within the SAS'. Grabbing his rifle and a few magazines, he sprinted to the gun pit and found his friend badly injured, his jaw smashed, but still continuing to fire the gun.

Realising they needed more support, Takavesi left the gun pit, running to a nearby building to persuade an Omani gunner, Walid Khamis, to join them. Now there were three: Labalaba and Khamis operating the 25-pounder, while Takavesi used a self-loading rifle (SLR).

But as enemy fire pounded the gun pit, Khamis slumped backwards. He had been shot in the stomach and was writhing in agony. The two Fijians were on their own again, with Takavesi helping his friend, time and again, to remove the hot shell case, ram in a new one, close the breech and fire. Soon it was Takavesi's turn to take a bullet, which threw him backwards on to the sandbags. He was in great pain and losing a lot of blood, but he remained conscious. Labalaba propped him up and handed him his SLR. Labalaba, who was peering down his rifle sights picking off the advancing enemy, realised he was almost out of ammunition for the 25-pounder.

As he tried to reach a 60mm mortar positioned nearby, he was shot fatally in the neck. In the BATT house, Captain Mike Kealy heard the 25-pounder fall silent and became worried the position had been taken. With a volunteer, Tommy Tobin, a trained medic, the commanding officer dodged bullets and ran to the gun pit, where they witnessed a gruesome scene. The dead body of Labalaba lay face down on the ground, Khamis was lying on his back, bleeding profusely. The only one still able to fire was Takavesi, who, still propped on the sandbags, was also seriously wounded. Every time he fired his SLR, he grimaced with pain as the rifle kicked back into his body. As Tobin turned to get his medical pack, he was shot in the face and fell to the floor mortally wounded. Pete Scholey, a former SAS man and author of *SAS Heroes: Remarkable Soldiers* provides an account of what happened next.

'Tak called to Captain Kealy for more ammunition and the two men began to battle for their lives. An *adoo* popped up at the edge of the gun emplacement, ready to shoot Tak, and Kealy blasted him with his SLR. Another appeared from a ditch close to their position and Kealy cut him down, too. Kealy took out *adoo* gunmen as they slunk round the walls of the fort and Tak concentrated on those coming from the direction of the perimeter wire. The *adoo* were close enough to sling grenades, which were bouncing and exploding close to the walls of the gun pit.

Kealy froze for an instant as a grenade landed inside the bunker right in front of him. Mercifully, it failed to explode.'

Just as the situation appeared hopeless, the two men and their comrades had two strokes of luck. First, the low cloud lifted high enough for two jets from the Sultan of Oman's air force to fly over the scene, strafing the *adoo* with cannon fire and, at one point, dropping a 500lb bomb on the by now retreating rebels. Takavesi, who was later involved in the storming of the Iranian Embassy, would later describe the scream of those jets as 'the best sound I ever heard'.

Kealy was unaware of the second stroke of luck, which resulted from his early radio message to SAS headquarters that Mirbat was under attack. His men, B Squadron, had been due to go home on the very day of the attack. This meant their replacements from G Squadron were at Um al Quarif, just 65km west of Mirbat. G Squadron was ordered into action. Twenty-two men, along with their equipment, were taken by trucks to the airstrip at Salalah.

Once the mist had lifted, they were airlifted in helicopters to the beach on the edge of Mirbat. As Kealy used a lull in the fighting to tend to his men, G Squadron, led by Captain Alastair Morrison - another SAS hero who would go on to play a vital role in the successful storming of a hijacked Lufthansa jet at Mogadishu airport in 1977 - fought its way through the town. The *adoo* were in full retreat, leaving 40 dead and ten wounded. It had been an incredibly close run thing, but thanks to the bravery of men such as Takavesi, Labalaba and Kealy, it proved to be a decisive turning point in the Sultan's battle with the rebels.

The Battle of Mirbat is an extraordinary story and I share the sense of anger among SAS men that the bravery of the soldiers involved has never been properly recognised. As a result, I have sponsored the Battle of Mirbat Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire. The valour of men such as Takavesi, Labalaba (who many believe deserves a posthumous Victoria Cross) and Kealy - three of the great Special Forces heroes - should never be forgotten.

**IRANIAN EMBASSY SIEGE 5<sup>th</sup> May 1980**

**Sgt Peter Winner (SAS)**

*\* Name changed at his request*

Snapper, as he was known to friends, was never awarded a specific gallantry medal, but his role in the storming of the Iranian Embassy in London and his 18-year career with the regiment more than earns him his place here. As he and his team - clad head-to-toe in black - waited nervously in the rear garden of the embassy, the siege had already been going on for five days. But, half an hour earlier, the stakes had been raised significantly when the body of the embassy's press officer, Abbas Lavasani, had been pushed out of the front door. Clearly the time for patient negotiation with the Khuzestan terrorists, still holding 20 people hostage, had come to an end.

Within three minutes of Lavasani's death being confirmed, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had given the go-ahead for the SAS to be used. 'The time has come to use the final option,' she said. Barely 30 minutes later a loud explosion heralded their arrival. 'Go, go, go,' screamed a voice in Winner's earpiece. They were on their way in and he was leading from the front as they smashed down the rear door.

Above them, another team abseiled down to a second floor window, while at the front a third team was blasting their way through the first-floor balcony windows. Between them, the SAS teams had to search and clear more than 50 rooms on six floors - and reach the hostages before they came to harm.

'All feelings of doubt and fear had disappeared. The adrenaline was bursting through my bloodstream. Fearsome! My heavy body armour suddenly felt as light as a T-shirt,' recalled Winner in his anonymous autobiography, *Soldier 'T' SAS*. Winner and his team headed to the basement, wrenching ladders that had been put there to block their progress out of the way, hoping they hadn't been booby-trapped. Mercifully, there was no explosion. Tossing a stun grenade into the darkness, they began shooting off locks and clearing rooms.

In one, Winner saw a dark shape crouching in a corner. He fired a burst of 20 rounds from his MP5 machine gun. There was a clang as the crouching figure crumpled and rolled over. It was a dustbin. The cellars were clear. A more real threat, however, awaited his team as they made their way into the embassy's smoke-filled hallway and joined those shepherding the terrified hostages to safety.

'I joined a line, six or seven steps up from the hallway. There were more explosions. The hysterical voices of women swept over us. Then the first hostages were passed down the line; they looked shocked and disorientated, their eyes streaming with CS gas. Suddenly there was a shout from higher up: This one's a terrorist! A dark face ringed by an Afro-style haircut came into view, the body clothed in a green combat jacket. He was punched and kicked as he descended the stairs. He was running afraid. He knew he was close to death. Then I saw it - a Russian fragmentation grenade, the detonator cap protruding from his hand.' Winner raised his machine gun to fire, but then realised the bullets would pass straight through the terrorist, possibly hitting his colleagues. 'Instinctively, I raised the MP5 above my head and in one swift, sharp movement brought the stock down on the back of his neck. I hit him as hard as I could. His head snapped back and for one fleeting second I caught sight of his tortured, hate-filled face.'

He collapsed down the remaining stairs, hitting the carpet in the hallway as a crumpled, sagging heap. The sound of two magazines being emptied into him was deafening. But as he twitched and died, his hand opened and the grenade rolled out. Winner and his colleagues waited for the inevitable explosion. 'I stared at the mechanism for what seemed like an eternity and what I saw flooded the very core of me with relief and elation. The pin was still in the lever. It was all over.'

The SAS's success at the Iranian Embassy was headline news all over the world, helped by it being captured on live TV. Of the 20 hostages in the building when the SAS went in, 19 were rescued and one killed by terrorists. Of the six terrorists, only one, Fowzi Nejad, was left alive. He was jailed for life. After serving 28 years, he was released on parole earlier this year.

**Special Forces Heroes by Michael Ashcroft (Headline, £20) is linked to the four-part Five TV series of the same name. [www.specialforcesheroes.com](http://www.specialforcesheroes.com)**

To order a copy at £18 (P&P free), call 0845 155 0720. All royalties donated to Help For Heroes, supporting servicemen injured in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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Group Captain Kingsley Oliver who passed away last October, was a valued member

of the Birmingham Branch and we hope to commemorate him with a brick paver in the Walkway between the Visitor Centre and the Chapel at the NMA. The following Obituary was published in the Daily Telegraph on Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 2008.

## OBITUARY

### **Group Captain Kingsley Mayne Oliver MA RAF (Rtd)**

**Officer and senior instructor for the RAF  
Regiment who wrote the definitive history of its  
50 years.**

Group Captain Kingsley Oliver, who died aged 79, was one of a select number of RAF officer cadets to be trained at the Royal Military College, Sandhurst for service with the Royal Air Force Regiment; he made a second career with one of London's oldest Livery Companies and gained a distinguished reputation as a military historian and author.

Oliver entered the RAF in January 1948 to train as a pilot but his eyesight did not meet the strict requirements. He elected to join the RAF Regiment and this took him to Sandhurst to complete the two-year officer cadet course. As a junior officer he made a robust impact from the start, earning swift promotion at a time when advancement was slow at junior officer levels.

He saw active service in Malaya and in the Aden Protectorate and was identified with potential for the higher echelons of the service as the RAF set out to develop a new generation of full-career RAF Regiment officers. To this end, he was selected to attend both the RAF Staff College and the Joint Services Staff College, an unusual distinction for an officer of his branch. Later he served at Headquarters Fighter Command and in Cyprus and Germany.

Oliver's strong intellect and interest in the wider aspect of military affairs was revealed in 1966 when he won the Army's Bertrand Stewart Prize Essay Competition, followed by the Royal United Services Institute's Trench-Gascoigne Essay Prize for 1968; the first RAF Regiment Officer to do so in both cases.

In 1969 he wrote *A Brief History of The RAF Regiment*, intended primarily for the internal education of officers and men within the Regiment. Oliver's empathy with people and his logical mind made him a fine instructor at the various training establishments where he served.

He was particularly proud of his time as the Senior RAF Regiment Instructor at the RAF College Cranwell from 1961. He was charged not only with the practical leadership training of all Cranwell flight cadets, but also with the professional training of the first RAF Regiment flight cadets at Cranwell, resulting from the new Air Ministry policy for them to join the mainstream of officer training at the RAF College.

In common with others, Oliver did not relish staff appointments, of which he had his fair share. When he relinquished command of the RAF Regiment Depot, Catterick, where at every opportunity he had indulged his love of field sports, he deplored his move to the Ministry of Defence and retired from the RAF at his own request in 1978.

He endowed the RAF Regiment Annual Essay Prize for Junior Officers, to encourage original and mature thinking on topics of major relevance, so preparing themselves for more senior appointments. Typically unassuming, he insisted that the competition was not to be named after him.

Kingsley Mayne Oliver was born in Durban on December 12, 1928 and educated in South Africa. He entered the University of Natal in 1946, subsequently winning a place to Lincoln College, Oxford to read history. On his arrival in England, he decided to join the RAF instead.

After retiring from the RAF, he first worked for British Aerospace in the UK and Iran until the revolution, but found a second calling when headhunted to become Clerk to The Worshipful Company of Saddlers, in the City. He was ideally suited to this position with one of London's oldest Livery Companies. He researched and wrote his magnum opus of a two-volume history of the Saddlers' Company, embracing some 800 years of Livery and City history, and it was published under the title *Hold Fast, Sit Sure*, the company's motto.

He studied for an MA in Modern History at the University of London and was elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts in 1988. This was followed by the award of an Honorary MA from City University, the Freedom of the City of London, honorary membership of The City and Guilds of London Institute and, finally, on his retirement from his second career, the freedom of The Saddlers' Company. Thereafter he made a

major contribution to RAF history with *Through Adversity*, the first definitive history of the RAF Regiment, commissioned by the Corps to mark its 50th Anniversary in 1992. He followed this with *The RAF Regiment at War 1942 to 1946*.

A successful commander and a modest man of outstanding integrity, Oliver was an exemplar of officer qualities, popular and respected by his officers and men. He was an ADC to The Queen from 1974 to 1977.

Kingsley Oliver died on October 5<sup>th</sup> 2008. His first wife predeceased him and his second marriage ended in divorce. His wife Audrey and a daughter from his first marriage and two sons from his second survive him.

## Future Events at the NMA

I have no information about **future** events at the NMA, for getting the information is almost impossible. You would think wouldn't you, that those responsible for disseminating information about future events would be anxious to involve every publication that could assist in this but no, I have tried time and time again to get information about future events in good time without success.

Oh they will e-mail me with events for the current month but by then, it's too late for I need the info at least a month before, preferably two months. They do not seem to realise that Birmingham Branch newsletters are not published every day or every week, for that is all their information is good for. Many events must be booked up months in advance but information on the NMA website Future Events page is not kept up-to-date. The last item on this page is for an event dated 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009. So where is this information and who is responsible for disseminating it?

Someone must be responsible for booking events at the NMA and this information must be listed somewhere. I have e-mailed several people at the NMA for this information but without success so I have given up. Therefore this column is being suspended until at some future date I may be able to get information about future events in good time for publication in my newsletters.

## RAF REGIMENT BOOKS

Last month on 19<sup>th</sup> December, John Lawton, a Birmingham Branch member of Stoke on Trent, telephoned me with the details of another book about the RAF Regiment, to add to my growing list of RAF Regiment titles. The

book is called, "On the road to Mandalay, by Randle Mainwaring, ISBN 1844154971. It was first published in 2006 and is a hardback book. It can be obtained from Pen and Sword Books at a price that has been reduced from £16.00 to £12.00.

This fascinating book features the life story of Dr Randle Manwaring, focusing particularly on his Regiment's fight to capture Burma towards the end of WW2. As one of the founding officers of the RAF Regiment, the author helped train and set up the Regiment from its inception in 1942. He saw active service with the Regiment in Burma, where the Regiment particularly distinguished itself but suffered heavy losses. Randle was present at the Japanese surrender in Rangoon and took the swords from the Japanese Generals as they surrendered.

The end of the War saw a return to a very different life requiring different skills. Guided by his strong Christian beliefs, Randle established a successful career in the City in insurance broking.

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Are there any more books out there that I have not yet got listed? If you know of any, please let me know and I'll add it or them to the list.

## **MALCOLM'S MOAN**

Have any of you noticed an increase in these automated unwanted so-called "Public Service" telephone calls, all trying to sell you something? The telephone rings and you pick it up, only to hear a recorded voice telling you all about this "public service" sales patter they want you to know about. My only source of satisfaction is, instead of putting the telephone down immediately, I just put the telephone down and let the call finish itself instead. I don't suppose the call costs them any more but I hope it does.

Now, they have this technology for their equipment to call everyone and to repeat their sales blurb to them, but wouldn't it be great if we could have the technology for our telephones to screen out these unwanted calls. What with unwanted door to door salespeople, unwanted door to door religious fanatics who want us all to join their absurd sects, other unwanted telephone sales calls, and unwanted junk mail I think it's all getting too much. I think that it is an invasion of my privacy for I don't invite unwanted telephone

calls into my home or unwanted callers to my door either.

My defence against unwanted telephone sales calls with a real live human being on the other end of the call is to say, oh yes, my wife – brother – son – daughter etc., is very interested I'll just go and get her/him. Then I just put the telephone down and wait until they realise that no-one is going to answer. At least I hope that their telephone bill will be greater. As for junk mails there's a better answer. Just put it all back into the envelope, write on it the address of the company concerned – don't put a stamp on – and put it all back into the post box. There's a little bit of poetic justice in that 'cos I didn't want their junk mail, and they don't want it back either, particularly with an excess postage charge on it too.

## **BRANCH APPEAL REMINDER**

The increasing number of wounded in recent weeks has placed medical facilities in both the UK and Helmand under considerable strain, with one senior medical officer describing the injuries to troops as "bad as you can imagine". Earlier in December, five Royal Marines lost limbs and four were killed in a series of IED and suicide attacks and since October more than 200 injured and sick troops have been airlifted out of Afghanistan.

One of the bloodiest days in the recent campaign took place on 12<sup>th</sup> December when four commandos were killed in two separate attacks, one of which involved a 13-year-old suicide bomber. Patrick Mercer, a former infantry commander and the Tory MP for Newark, said: "Sadly the only casualties the public tends to hear about are the fatalities but there are also the men and women who have had their lives ruined by multiple wounds.

These are worrying times for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), which offers Afghanistan's best hope of restoring the country to a semblance of normality. Despite all the encouraging noises made by Afghanistan's president, Hamid Karzai, when he visited Gordon Brown in Downing Street last month, the harsh reality is that the NATO led operation is running into big-time problems, especially in the unquiet part of the world that is Helmand province.

Put simply and starkly, there are not enough fighting troops on the ground; there is a chronic shortage of helicopters; the Afghan

national army is nowhere near fully operational; and, most worrying of all, there is some confusion within NATO ranks about who should be digging deeper, so it's not going to get any easier for our troops out there.

So please remember the appeal your Branch Committee has set up for we are now regularly sending "goodies" to the lads in the Military Ward at Selly Oak Hospital and we need all the money that we can get. To date - 14th November - we have raised £595.00 from Birmingham Branch members, this, together with £50.00 from Sussex Branch, £50.00 from Kent Branch and a magnificent £335.00 from Norfolk Branch makes a total of £1,030.00. And as of the same date, we have spent £810.00 in donations to the Military Ward. So keep on sending your donation to Tom Magee for the lads need them.

Well that's all for now, look after yourselves and keep smiling.

*Malcolm*

# DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



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<b>Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2009</b>	<b>67<sup>th</sup> Ann RAF Reg.t</b>	Wednesday 23 <sup>rd</sup> April 2009	St George's Day
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> February 2009	Subscriptions Due	Sunday 26 <sup>th</sup> April 2009	ANZAC Day Serv & Par
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> February 09	Branch Night	Sunday 10 <sup>th</sup> May 2009	Reded of Regiment Chapel
Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> March 2009	St David's Day	Thursday 14 <sup>th</sup> May 2009	Branch Night
Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> March 2009	Branch Night	Thursday 11 <sup>th</sup> June 2009	Branch Night
Tuesday 17 <sup>th</sup> March 2009	St Patrick's Day	Sunday 14 <sup>th</sup> June 2009	RAF Cosford Air Show
Sun 15 <sup>th</sup> – Mon 30 <sup>th</sup> Mar 09	Battle For Meiktila	Sunday 28 <sup>th</sup> June 2009	RAF Reg.t Service at NMA
<b>Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> April 2009</b>	<b>Branch Reded Mem.l</b>	Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> July 2009	Branch Night
Thursday 9 <sup>th</sup> April 2009	Branch Night	Sunday 4 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	Merchant Navy Day
		Thursday 8 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	Branch Night
		Wednesday 21 <sup>st</sup> Oct 2009	Battle of Trafalgar Day
		Sunday 1 <sup>st</sup> November 2009	Midlands Fest of Rem.
		Sunday 8 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009	Remembrance Sunday
		Wednesday 11 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009	Remembrance Day
		Thursday 12 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009	Branch Night
		Saturday 14 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009	B'ham Poppy Ball
		Sat 28 <sup>th</sup> -Sun 29 <sup>th</sup> Nov 2009	B'ham Int Tattoo NIA

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