



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

www.rafregt.org.uk

BIRMINGHAM BRANCH

**NEW STANDARD
BEARER REQUIRED** Page 2

**GOODIES FOR THE
MILITARY WARD** Page 2

**MAJOR EXPANSION OF
RAF REGIMENT** Page 6

**NATIONAL MEMORIAL
ARBORETUM UPDATE**
Page 12

**NEWS OF THE RAF
REGIMENT** Page 13

**A PICTURE - REGIMENT
IN AFGHANISTAN**

Due to Ill-health, a New Standard Bearer is Required	Page 2
Birmingham Branch Birthdays	Page 2
Branch Appeal – Goodies for the Military Ward	Page 2
Wootton Bassett: A Very British Way of Mourning	Page 2
A Photograph - ex-Servicemen Paying Respect	Page 2
Government Failing our Armed Forces	Page 4
<i>Ministers Must Stop Failing our Soldiers</i>	Page 5
Major Expansion for RAF Regiment	Page 6
Injured Gunner to Swim Channel	Page 7
Citizen Soldiers Remember Last Stand	Page 7
<i>A Photograph of a New Soldier</i>	Page 8
Additional Recognition for Families of KIA	Page 9
Troops Radio Deal “Secures Jobs”	Page 10
Hughie Cooper of Birmingham	Page 11
<i>The Allied High Commission in Germany</i>	Page 11
RAF Regiment Books	Page 11
National Memorial Arboretum Update	Page 12
<i>Duke of Edinburgh Attends Ded. of REME Mem.</i>	Page 12
<i>Future Events at NMA</i>	Page 12
News of the RAF Regiment	Page 13
<i>Death Notices</i>	Page 13
<i>Former Squadron Leader Paul Bessant</i>	Page 13
<i>General Notices</i>	Page 13
<i>RAF Regiment Memorial Project 2009</i>	Page 13
<i>“Operation Telic” – History Capture</i>	Page 13
<i>Formation of 8th FP Wg and a Field Sqdn</i>	Page 14
<i>Commandant General’s Commendations</i>	Page 14
<i>Corps Diary Dates</i>	Page 15
RAF Holmpton Summer Season	Page 15
The Mother of Parliaments	Page 15
Dates for Your Diary	Page 16
Birmingham Branch Committee	Page 16



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: 242
AUGUST 2009**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 242 AUGUST 2009

Dear Readers.

Our Branch Standard Bearer John Docker has due to ill-health, regrettably resigned as our Standard Bearer. He is remaining as a member of the Branch of course. John has faithfully carried out his duties with dedication and enthusiasm ever since he took on the role and we shall miss his valuable services to the Branch.

We hope that he will soon recover his former good health and be able to take up his duties once more. In the meantime, we owe John a vote of thanks for his efforts on our behalf and our best wishes for a full recovery.

That leaves us with a vacancy for our Standard Bearer. Roy Thomas is willing to accept these responsibilities as and when he can but with a demanding and time-consuming job, it will not always be possible for him to do so therefore we need someone else to assist in carrying out the duties of Standard Bearer. Any volunteers?

BRANCH BIRTHDAYS

A very Happy Birthday to the following Birmingham Branch members whose birthdays are this month, may you all have many more of them.

2nd August **Douglas Chamberlin** Kidderminster
 4th August **Derek Bucklow** Derby Derbyshire
 4th August **Geoffrey Fenney** Cardiff S Wales
 9th August **Bob Porter** Walsall West Midlands
 12th August **Tom Rees** Whitchurch Shropshire
 13th Aug **James De Hayes** Loughborough Leic
 16th August **Ray Penny** Birmingham West Mids
 16th Aug **George Weetman** Stoke on Trent Staffs
 19th August **Keith Bryers** Braunton Devon
 23rd August **John Walters** Droitwich Worc
 26th Aug **Dave Gooding** Birmingham West Mids
 29th August **Cyril Richards** Walsall West Mids
 30th August **Ron Sharp** Yoxall Staffs

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 your help, we can continue to provide these small comforts and any other items that the Military Ward staff ask us for. We can never get enough goodies for the lads, so in the mean time, your continued support is appreciated for we need more money. 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 Warrant Officer A (Alan) Wanbon RAF, or post them to him at Patient Support Services, RCDM, Ward S4, Selly Oak Hospital, Raddlebarn Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6JD. Alan can also be contacted on 07795 801276.

THE BRANCH MILITARY WARD APPEAL

We must do all that we can for our wounded lads and I only wish that we could do more. For example, over two hundred of our lads have been wounded in Afghanistan so far this year with more than forty of them seriously wounded. In many cases that means amputations and they all need our help.

For those heroes who have given their lives, the people of Wootton Bassett are acting for all of us when they show their respect to the fallen, for if we lived nearer to Wootton Bassett I know that we would be with them too. The following article about Wootton Bassett was published in the Telegraph on 7th July 2009.

Wootton Bassett: A very British way of mourning

By Cassandra Jardine and Richard Savill



A hearse in Wootton Bassett during the repatriation ceremony of Major Sean Birchall

If Wootton Bassett had had the money to build a proposed by-pass, it would never have found a place in history. Lack of funds to divert traffic has had the unforeseen consequence of turning this otherwise obscure market town in Wiltshire into a national focus for honouring those who have given their lives in the service of their country. Twice this week – on Monday, and again on Friday – townspeople, visitors and the world's media will have gathered to watch a funeral cortege as it passes down the High Street.

The ceremony that has grown up in Wootton Bassett is as simple and moving as the coffins themselves, wrapped only in the Union flag. As the hearses approach, the tenor bell of St Bartholomew's Church begins to toll. Business stops while shoppers and shopkeepers join the crowds lining the pavement.

When the cortege reaches the war memorial, the president of the British Legion says a single word – "Up" – to mark the moment when ex- and serving members of the forces should begin their salute. "Down," he says 60 seconds later, as the hearses move on. "It is a most strange feeling," says Sally Hardy, manager of the Sue Ryder charity shop. "When the bell from the parish church starts to toll and the police stop the traffic, there is just silence. It is a very unusual thing to find in a town. Just about everybody and anybody comes out. It makes me feel there but for the grace of God go my son and daughter."

Dennis Smith, 73, an assistant at butchers K & E J Crump & Sons and a former corporal in the 5th Royal Tank Regiment, also stops serving when the coffins pass. "We all stand outside the shop and take our hats off. They come out of the pubs and stand in silence. It is a very patriotic scene. Everybody shows their appreciation of what the soldiers are doing."

In the last two years, Wootton Bassett has become a very British version of Arlington, the US cemetery where respect is paid to the fallen. No fuss. No flowers or razzmatazz. No tired old formulae of condolence dished out by the PM before the argy-bargy of Prime Minister's Questions begins. Just thousands of people, young and old, standing with lowered eyes and lumps in their throats at the thought of yet more young lives ended in a distant land.

"Sometimes, people have waited three hours to pay their respects," says Mayor Steve

Bucknell. "These poor guys have no more time to give, so the least we can do is give our time."

On Monday, crowds waited in the rain to honour Lt Col Rupert Thorneloe, 39, and Trooper Joshua Hammond, 19. On Friday, the deaths of 18-year-old Private Robert Laws (2nd Battalion of the Mercian Regiment), and Lance Corporal David "Duke" Dennis, 29 (Light Dragoons), will be marked in this simple and dignified fashion. Alongside them will be the body of a Welsh Guardsman who was killed in an explosion on Sunday and, probably, the Royal Engineer who died in a helicopter crash on Monday.

Daniel Wignall, 15, who is doing work experience with a dentist, was among those present on Monday. "I will probably remember it for the rest of my life," he says. His friend William Dixon, also 15 and doing work experience in a music shop, adds: "When the body of the trooper went past yesterday I thought to myself that he is only four years older than me. It seems so young to die."

There's a timelessness to the proceedings which belies their brief history. Until April 2007, the bodies of the fallen were repatriated to RAF Brize Norton in Oxfordshire, to be taken from there to the John Radcliffe Hospital in Oxford where they are examined by a coroner before being released to the families. When renovations began at Brize Norton, RAF Lyneham took over the melancholy role. From Brize Norton the route does not pass through a town centre, but five miles east of Lyneham, on its way to the M4, the B3102 passes through Wootton Bassett.

Lining the High Street began as an accident. "The first cortege coincided with the monthly meeting of the Royal British Legion," says Maurice Baker, president of the local branch. "The mayor and a few of us stopped what we were doing to pay our respects. One of the Legion said we must do this every time and, bit by bit, others joined in." There have been more than 70 repatriation ceremonies and the numbers marking the bodies returning home have swollen. In June 2008, when Corporal Sarah Bryant was among the dead, more than 5,000 paid their respects.

British Legionnaires from far afield are joined by wounded and invalided Service people who wish to pay tribute to those yet more unlucky than themselves. On the pavement, they stand shoulder to shoulder with relatives of soldiers who

have made the same sad final journey, and those whose loved ones are still serving. "They tell us that seeing our respect gives a tremendous boost to the troops serving in Afghanistan," says Baker. "They know we are thinking of them." General Sir Richard Dannatt, the head of the Army who was present on Monday, was "absolutely humbled" by the sight of the silent crowd and the police who gave up their spare time to keep order. "Some people say it is a pointless war," says Allison Bucknell, a Conservative councillor. "But this is about respect for people who have lost their lives."

Many who cannot be there send messages. "Please tell the people of Wootton Bassett," reads one sent this week by a man from Cheshire, "that each one who stands to honour the fallen has a thousand more of us standing unseen at their shoulder." Sanjay Soni, 42, the Kenyan-born postmaster, who came to Britain 23 years ago, says: "As a community it pulls us all together. Every time I step out to pay my respect I feel very emotional." In the course of the two years since the first few bowed their heads, the silent show of respect has spread.

Many now wait at the gates outside RAF Lyneham, or near the police station at Gable Cross where the Wiltshire force hands over to Thames Valley. On motorway footbridges and in lay-bys along the route, people wait to mark the passing of the cortege. "Thank You Wootton Bassett", say 14,518 people who have joined a Facebook group to show their gratitude, among them many bereaved families.

Yet the tradition might never have started had it not been for a 14-year-old girl. A decade ago, when Army cadet Jay Cunningham had to lay her Armistice Day wreath at a papier-mâché cenotaph in Wootton Bassett, she complained. "She thought that wasn't good enough," says Mayor Bucknell, "so we held a competition, raised £30,000, and in 2002 built a permanent war memorial."

The bronze memorial shows the world held in four hands. With its universal message, it has provided a focus, a stopping point, without which the moment's silence might never have evolved. In recognition of the comfort it has brought to so many, an ex-serviceman from Newcastle has started a petition to rename the route through Wootton Bassett "Highway of Heroes", following a Canadian example. There is

talk, too, of the town being awarded a George Cross, like the one given to Malta for bravery during the Second World War. "We don't want it," says the Mayor. "We don't do what we do for the glory of it, and we don't want our High Street renamed." Nor is there enthusiasm for attempts to formalise and militarise this simple, spontaneous show of respect. Berets but no medals is the rule, but the street has become dotted with regimental standards. "Unfortunately, we now get 12 to 18 of them," says Maurice Baker. "We can't stop people bringing them, but the townspeople don't want it. On Monday there was a band and music, too. We want to keep this as it has been for the last two years. It's about individuals paying homage to the fallen."

While the locals battle to keep the original spirit unsullied, this newest of British traditions is already in danger. At the end of 2012, RAF Lyneham is due to close, whereupon repatriations should revert to Brize Norton. "We shall be very sad when we can't any longer give our moral support to the lads," says Baker. Should that happen, another town may have to take over Wootton Bassett's dignified way of honouring in the dead. But maybe, by then, these sad repatriations will have ceased.

The above article leads me into the next one that was published last month in the Telegraph on 13th July. Whatever anyone thinks of this article depends on who can be believed – senior military officers or politicians. Given my opinion of politicians you will all know whom I prefer to believe and if as I do believe, we are not equipping our troops properly or indeed, providing enough troops to carry out the job properly, then this Government is utterly failing our Armed Forces who are widely and quite properly, regarded as superb.

This situation cannot continue for even the finest Armed Forces in the world risk failure if they are not properly equipped and supported and if they continue to be short of equipment and troops on the ground, it will probably mean failure in the end. I believe that even the Government is losing its enthusiasm for this interventionist war and is looking for a way out for why otherwise would they not fully support it?

In an interview with Sky News broadcast on 12th July during a state visit to Ghana, US President Barack Obama acknowledged the rising

death toll in Afghanistan, but said the "mission" was vital to US and European security. If we are to believe that it is so vital to US and European security, why is then that the rest of Europe is not playing as big a role in Afghanistan as is Britain?

Britain is the second biggest contributor of troops to Nato's Afghan mission after the US. If it is as equally important to bigger countries such as Germany and France, why are these European countries and others, not sending as many troops, or even more than we are, to Afghanistan? Do they have doubts about why we are there?

We still refuse to face up to the fundamental issues in Afghanistan. Why are we there? The government repeats ad nauseam that we deny safe haven to the Taliban, who might otherwise be training terrorists to kill in Britain. But our homegrown terrorists learn their trade in the UK or (in a few cases) in Pakistan. The MoD has advanced no convincing rationale for this war, and no exit strategy. That's why - despite widespread support for our fighting men and women - there is scant public backing for a war that has gone on longer than WW2 and shows no sign of ending, except in tears.

Ministers must stop failing our soldiers in Afghanistan

Tony Blair promised the Armed Forces 'everything they need' but the Government never understood the true nature of the mission in Afghanistan

There can be no greater abdication of the duty of government than to send a nation's troops into battle insufficiently equipped to fulfill the strategic goals set for them by politicians. As the death toll mounts in southern Afghanistan, there is a widening gulf between ministerial assurances that the Army is properly resourced and the consistent claims by senior officers that this is untrue. What is the country to believe?

In 2006, when the British commitment to Helmand, the most troublesome of the Afghan provinces, was made, Tony Blair promised the Armed Forces "everything they need" to confront and overcome the Taliban. However, the Government never understood the true nature of this mission. John Reid, then Defence Secretary, said he would be pleased if it could be completed without a shot being fired. He has subsequently tried to clarify these comments and contends that they are regularly taken out of context. While that may be so, they nevertheless betrayed an attitude

of mind that permeated the whole Government at the time, especially the Treasury.

Given the ambitious scope of this mission and its inherent dangers, there were never enough troops to take and hold ground in Helmand in order to allow the Afghan Army and police to move in and subjugate the Taliban. Nor were there sufficient helicopters to transport troops swiftly and safely around the region without having to travel in convoys susceptible to increasingly murderous roadside bomb attacks. And if the troops were to spend more time on the ground as part of the "hearts and minds" campaign among the local population, too little thought was given to how to protect them by acquiring armoured vehicles able to withstand the bombs now being deployed.

Since these shortcomings have been apparent for a long time, for the Government then to order Operation Panther's Claw ahead of the August 20 presidential elections in Afghanistan, bordered on the reckless, though the American "surge" does mean more helicopters are now available to all Nato participants.

It is not sufficient for ministers to say that the Helmand mission is necessary to protect this country from Islamist terrorists by stopping al-Qaeda once again finding a base in Afghanistan. We accept the strategic importance of this operation, as do most members of the Armed Forces. But government ministers must not deliberately confuse criticism of the mission itself with the way it is being conducted. Even at the height of this nation's greatest peril between 1940 and 1943, Winston Churchill and his Cabinet still had to defend their conduct of the war in Parliament. No one questioned the strategy of defeating Nazi Germany; but it was perfectly valid to criticise the tactics if they meant disproportionate or unnecessary casualties.

The evidence that the Government has asked our soldiers to do too much without proper support is overwhelming. General Sir Richard Dannatt, the head of The Army, asked for an additional 2,000 troops more than a month ago to back up the offensive. On what grounds were they refused other than cost? Accusations of "playing politics" leveled at General Dannatt by Labour MPs and unnamed ministers are a disgrace. The Government should be listening to and acting upon what he is saying not seeking to traduce him. Why, furthermore, has Gordon

Brown not prevailed more forcefully upon other Nato countries, notably Britain's EU partners, whose interests are also served by the defeat of the Taliban, to share more of the burden?

As well as a failure to back up the Helmand mission militarily, the Government is making a poor job of it politically, too. Last week, Bob Ainsworth, the Defence Secretary (the fourth in three years), set out the long-term goals of the operation in a speech at Chatham House. With respect to that august institution, this was not the proper forum for such a statement. What is needed is a debate in Parliament this week, before MPs leave for their summer recess. It should be opened by the Prime Minister who needs to answer the criticisms while making a coherent and cogent case for a military commitment that is likely to last years and cost many lives.

Parliament is where public concerns must be aired and discussed. There are defence questions in the Commons today, but no time has been set aside for a full discussion before MPs leave Westminster next Tuesday. By the time they return in October, the fiercest fighting will have taken place. If the Government will not offer a debate, then the Conservatives should insist that time is found for one.

We accept the national interest case for this operation; but popular support will be lost unless the Government can make a better fist than it has so far of explaining why so many young men are being killed thousands of miles from home. These are matters for which Mr. Brown is directly and personally accountable; and it is a responsibility he cannot shirk. It is not the case, either, that questioning the prosecution of the war is a betrayal of the troops who are fighting it.

As the good people of Wootton Bassett show with tragic frequency, this country holds its combatants in great esteem. But does the Government? As things stand, the Prime Minister himself creates the impression that he fails to grasp what is happening in Helmand or how it could be put right. We will not easily forgive him or his administration for letting our Armed Forces down.

When did a Government Minister last show his face in Wootton Bassett? Not one of them so far and I think it is far too late now, as for them to do so now they would probably be booed

off the street. And when was the last time that a Government Minister showed his face at RAF Lyneham to honour the repatriation of those brave lads who have given their all? I don't recall that anyone has but I would love to be proved wrong.

MAJOR EXPANSION FOR RAF REGIMENT

The Royal Air Force Regiment, which provides essential protection to Armed Forces personnel and air assets in Afghanistan, is to be expanded, Armed Forces Minister Bill Rammell announced on Thursday 9 July 2009. The expansion of the Regiment will take place later this year with the formation of a new Field Squadron and Force Protection Wing Headquarters. The new Field Squadron will be based at either RAF Leuchars in Fife or RAF Shawbury in Shropshire and a study is currently underway to determine which of the two stations is most suitable to host the new squadron when it is formed in October 2009.

The location of the Force Protection Wing Headquarters will also be decided shortly. The new unit is expected to be deployed to Afghanistan, as part of Operation HERRICK, in April 2011. Recruitment and training for the additional 184 personnel needed has already begun. The move will bring the total number of Field Squadrons and Headquarters to ten, increasing the time that regiment gunners are able to spend at home in between overseas tours.

The expansion has been made possible by the RAF Regiment's improved recruitment and retention performance. Commanders believe the excellent job carried out by RAF Regiment personnel in Iraq during Operation TELIC helped showcase its unique and crucial role, and raised its profile in the public eye.

The RAF Regiment's role is to protect deployed air bases, keeping personnel, equipment and infrastructure, and particularly aircraft approaching and leaving bases, safe from ground-based threats. In Afghanistan, the Regiment protects airfields at Kandahar, Bastion and Kabul, while in Iraq it has recently completed six years safeguarding the airfield at Basra International Airport. Armed Forces Minister, Bill Rammell MP, said:

"The RAF Regiment provides essential protection to our air assets and Armed Forces serving on operations in Afghanistan. They are specialists in their role, and their work is vital in

enabling air operations to continue despite hostile action. It is fantastic news that we are now in a position to be able to expand the RAF Regiment, ensuring the force structure is sufficient to sustain the expected high operational tempo without placing excessive demands on existing personnel."

Group Captain Nick Bray, RAF Regiment Force Commander and Station Commander of RAF Honington, added: "These measures are a welcome enhancement to our capability, and are a recognition of the crucial role played by the RAF Regiment on operations. I fully expect today's news to have a positive effect on morale and retention, and I hope it persuades more young men to consider the benefits of a career with us."

The core elements of the RAF Regiment are RAF Force Protection (FP) Wing HQs and RAF Regiment Field Squadrons whose purpose is to protect deployed air bases. RAF FP Wing HQs provide FP planning, reconnaissance, mission analysis and subsequent command and control of FP for national and multi-national forces at deployed air operating bases.

RAF Regiment Field Squadrons are ground close-combat units which address ground threats to air assets and allow air operations to continue despite adversary action. Increasing the number of FP Wing HQs and Field Squadrons will improve the RAF Regiment's unit (operational) harmony situation. These guidelines are to ensure sufficient resources to sustain the expected operational tempo without placing excessive demands on force elements or individual Service personnel. The RAF aims to ensure that all units keep within their harmony guidelines wherever possible but the scale and nature of our current commitments can mean that some units, such as the RAF Regiment, breach these guidelines at times.

Three members of the RAF Regiment have died in during operations in Afghanistan since 2006 and one member of the Regiment was killed in Iraq during the six year operation there.

The following article was published in the Thetford and Brandon Times on 16th July 2009. You just can't keep a good rock down can you.

Injured gunner to swim Channel

A Suffolk-based Gunner will attempt to swim the English Channel next week - months after a roadside bomb in Afghanistan almost

ripped off his left leg. Senior Aircraftman Mike Goody from RAF Honington, near Thetford, will be raising money for Battle Back, a scheme to help injured servicemen. The 24-year-old was injured last year when he was struck by the debris of an explosion whilst on a routine patrol in Kandahar, Afghanistan.

SAC Goody will be part of a team of six injured colleagues, swimming in relay across the Channel. They are scheduled to leave the coast near Dover at midnight on Monday for the 15 hour, 21 mile swim. "My whole family thinks I'm a complete lunatic," said SAC Goody, who still walks on crutches, nine months after nearly losing his life to a Taleban bomb. "We were on a routine patrol in Kandahar province when an improvised explosive device went off in front of us. I found myself on the roadside with half of the engine centimetres from my head," he said.

SAC Goody's leg still needs heavy strapping and bandaging, but would have been far worse if it were not for the work of Battle Back, which works with the Help for Heroes charity in rehabilitating gravely injured servicemen and women. The former champion swimmer from Littlehampton, West Sussex, represented Great Britain in the pool.

"They [Battle Back] have done so much for me it's nice just to give something back. I've been training wherever and whenever I can since I found out about the challenge in April," he said. He has been helped by medics and staff at Headley Court military rehabilitation centre in Surrey. Training has also taken him into the cold, strong currents around Gibraltar, to accustom himself to the chilly waters of the Channel.

Flt Lt Mick Liston, of RAF Honington, said: "Thanks to Battle Back, Mike is to resume his career as a regimental Gunner. Guys like him are a real inspiration. Battle Back ensure that personnel like Mike can get back to normal life as quickly as possible, whereas 30 years ago they would never have been able to."

Citizen Soldiers Remember Last Stand Published in Soldier Magazine by Cliff Caswell

On the front line of Germany, British troops massed by the thousand prepared to counter the mighty Russian steamroller should the Reds decide to attack. Many of the young men were teenagers pulled from the comfort of civvy street to fulfill two years of National Service and experience a short, sharp dose of Army life.

This year marks the passing of half-a-century since the last of the citizen soldier generation was pressed into action in worldwide operations from Palestine to Korea. The era of conscription officially came to an end in late 1960 and Her Majesty's Armed Forces were returned to fully professional status.

But while National Service now only exists in the history books and on reality TV shows such as *Bad Lad's Army*, the issue of whether young people should again serve their country has been a talking point in the media and among politicians.



On the left – a proud new soldier gets to grips with service life during the era of mass conscription.

Most recently Prime Minister Gordon Brown threw his backing behind making Combined Cadet Forces in schools more accessible. Tory leader David Cameron has proposed a citizen service, in which young people would undergo a six-week programme including charity work and physical training as a modern-day equivalent of a term in the Army.

It was an era when the fate of the world hung in the balance, when an unbearable tension existed between the Soviet Union and the West and a third world war seemed inevitable. Some quarters of the press have been more forthright in their call for conscription to be reintroduced.

However, while some argue that a dose of Forces life did them good, others remain unconvinced that the system could work again, particularly as many are now unaware of the nature of the Army.

According to Professor Richard Holmes, a former lecturer at the Royal Military Academy

Sandhurst and an acclaimed military historian, the civilian public is now so distant from life in the Services that they have no understanding of it.

“The concept of conscription is fine if you are fighting a conflict of national survival, such as a world war, but it would not work today,” he added. “In my view, the Armed Forces would not want it re-introduced either because of the money that would have to be spent on training large numbers of recruits. However, I remember growing up in the era of conscription and seeing officers and soldiers in their battle dress all over the place. “What has changed is the visibility – how often do you now see troops when you are out and about? I don’t think that the great British public has any real idea of what a soldier actually does on their behalf. Obviously people want to help through charities such as Help for Heroes, but there is more of an empathy with those who serve their country than a full understanding of what they do.”

The end of National Service certainly marked a significant reduction in the ranks of the Armed Forces and the subsequent visibility of troops in public life. But for the thousands who were forced to give up two years of their teenage lives to military service, there are bittersweet memories of their time in uniform. Many remain convinced that the experience helped them in their later civilian lives – and that young people today would benefit from a similar scheme – although they admit that the training and separation from loved ones had proved hard to bear. When I came to the end of my time in the Army I was pleased to leave, but after leaving I felt very glad I had been in,” said Jim Sidnell, who served with the King’s Royal Rifle Corps in North Africa and Germany from 1954-56. “At the age of 18 I had not long left school and after being called I really missed the parties where you could meet girls.

I also remember vividly being on guard duty one Christmas and wondering what my family was doing back home.” Fellow soldier Ron Oliver believed that the National Service experience had served him well, and that the current generation could benefit from undergoing the same military training. “Before I went in I am ashamed to say that I was a naughty boy and I could have gone down for 18 months in prison after I found myself in trouble,” he said.

“But when I came up for sentence, the court was aware that I was about to go into the

Army, and allowed me to go forward to do my basic training and serve in the ranks – what happened did me a great favour and I'm extremely grateful for it."

The system, however, was far less appealing for boxer Tony Kain, who was conscripted in one of the final National Service intakes during 1959 and went on to serve in Germany. "I managed to get myself tremendously fit and was always participating in sport," he said. "I also made some really good mates. But to me the whole thing was semi-slavery and I hated doing it. As for my views on whether conscription would work today if it was brought back, I think it would be disastrous. What we need instead is full employment and decent wages." Whatever the feelings about the system at the time and disagreements over whether it could ever be introduced to the modern generation, National Servicemen were certainly held in very high regard by senior officers for their vital contribution on operations. Field Marshal Lord Bramall, a former Chief of the Defence Staff, summed up the feelings.

"We might have a fully volunteer Army now on our operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, but the National Servicemen served during a crucial time in the Cold War – I would never have a word said against them," he concluded.

FROM THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE

Wednesday 1st July 2009

Additional Recognition for the Families of Service Personnel who die on Operations

The Secretary of State for Defence informed the House on 10th June 2008 of plans to introduce a new national form of recognition for the families of those Armed Forces personnel who die on operations or as a result of terrorist activity whilst on duty. These plans were based on the recommendations of the military Chiefs of Staff. The Secretary of State said that the recognition would be in the form of an emblem for wear and a memorial scroll similar in concept to those that were issued to the families of those who died in the two World Wars and in Korea in the early 1950s.

Much detailed work has been undertaken since that announcement. We had hoped to provide more details before now but there were sensitive and complex issues involved which required much time to work through. I am

pleased to be able to announce further details of this recognition to the House today. These details, recommended by the Chiefs of Staff, have been welcomed by MOD Ministers, endorsed by the cross-Government Committee on Honours and Awards and approved by Her Majesty The Queen. In particular, I am delighted to inform the House that Her Majesty has asked that the emblem should be known as the Elizabeth Cross.

The Elizabeth Cross is made of hallmarked silver and is in the form of a cross with laurel wreath passing between the arms. The arms of the cross bear floral symbols representing England (Rose), Scotland (Thistle), Ireland (Shamrock) and Wales (Daffodil). The centre of the Cross bears the crowned Cypher of Her Majesty The Queen. The reverse of the Cross will be engraved with the name of the Service person in whose memory it is granted. A miniature version of the Elizabeth Cross will also be granted. Both will be presented in a black leather style presentation box with the Royal Cypher on the lid and the Royal Coat of Arms on the inner silk lining.

The Memorial Scroll is on parchment style paper, headed with the Royal Coat of Arms and the following words "This Scroll Commemorates ... who gave his/her life for Queen and Country on..." The Scroll will bear the signature of Her Majesty The Queen in the upper left hand corner.

The Elizabeth Cross and Scroll will be granted in national recognition of their loss and sacrifice to the Next of Kin of UK Armed Forces personnel who have died on operations or as a result of an act of terrorism.

Eligible personnel to be remembered in this way are those who were serving with, or former members of, the Regular and Reserve Armed Forces or the Royal Fleet Auxiliary when deployed in direct support of a designated operation. It is important to make the distinction that this is not a posthumous medal for the fallen but national recognition for the family for their loss. The Next of Kin of eligible personnel whose deaths fall into the following categories will be recognised in this way:

- Those who died from whatever cause whilst serving on a medal earning operation. Medal earning operations are those in which deployed personnel received a Campaign Medal, General Service Medal or Operational Service

Medal which demonstrated the risk and rigour involved. Operations where a UN, NATO or other international body or other nations' campaign medal was accepted for wear, in the absence of a UK medal, also qualify.

- Those who died as a result of an act of terrorism where the available evidence suggests that the Service person, whether on or off duty, was targeted because of his or her membership of the UK Armed Forces.
- Those who died on a non-medal earning operational task where death has been caused by the inherent high risk of the task.
- Those who died a subsequent and premature death as a result of an injury or illness attributed to the circumstances outlined above.

In addition to recognising future operational deaths in this way, deaths in the circumstances outlined above that occurred after 1 January 1948, or as a result of service in Palestine since 27 September 1945, will be recognised retrospectively. These dates reflect the fact that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission attributed deaths up to 1 January 1948 to World War II service (with the exception of Palestine).

In addition to recognising future operational deaths in this way, deaths in the circumstances outlined above that occurred after 1 January 1948, or as a result of service in Palestine since 27th September 1945, will be recognised retrospectively. These dates reflect the fact that the Commonwealth War Graves Commission attributed deaths up to 1st January 1948 to World War II service (with the exception of Palestine).

The Next of Kin will receive both the Elizabeth Cross and the Memorial Scroll. For retrospective claims and when the Next of Kin is deceased, their legal successor may apply. Only one Elizabeth Cross is to be granted for each death recognised but an additional Scroll will be available to the following (or their legal successors) where they are not the Next of Kin:

- The parents of the deceased.
- The spouse/partner of the deceased or someone who had a substantive relationship with the deceased.

As a Memorial Scroll was issued at the time to those who died in the Korean War, the

Elizabeth Cross only (and not the new Scroll) will be issued in remembrance of those who died during that war. As with all forms of recognition, there will be those who fall outside the qualifying criteria. There is a risk involved in much of what the Armed Forces does routinely. Some members of the Armed Forces sadly die, for example, in training incidents or in road accidents in the United Kingdom. While any death is a tragic loss to the family concerned and to the Armed Forces, the Chiefs of Staff recommended this new recognition for the special circumstances of operational duty. In addition they considered that the terrible circumstances where an individual was targeted by terrorists because of their membership of the Armed Forces should be similarly recognised. The first Elizabeth Crosses and Memorial Scrolls will be granted from one month today on 1st August 2009. From today, families of those who died in qualifying circumstances are invited to apply for the Elizabeth Cross and Scroll to the MOD Medal Office, who will administer the scheme. It is simply not possible to contact the families of all those who may be eligible going back over 50 years as address details held for Next of Kin are likely to be out of date.

Full details of how to apply, including an application form, can be found via the MOD <www.mod.uk/defenceinternet/defencefor/veterans/medals/> while those without access to the internet may call 0800 085 3600 and ask for details to be sent to them.

For new qualifying deaths after 1st August 2009, it is intended that, in most cases, the Next of Kin will be offered the opportunity for the Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll to be presented privately and in an appropriate way at the time of the funeral if they so wish.

For retrospective cases, Next of Kin who are resident in the UK will be offered the opportunity to receive the Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll at a formal presentation ceremony in the region where they live. Such presentations may be made by a Lord Lieutenant or a senior military representative. It is likely to be some months before these events are arranged as locations will very much depend on the number of recipients living in a particular region and we cannot establish this until applications are received.

If they prefer, families may choose to receive the Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll

by recorded delivery. Next of Kin living overseas will normally receive the Cross and Scroll in this way. We owe a great debt of gratitude to the men and women who serve in our Armed Forces and who have done so in the past. That debt extends to the families who support them and who bear the burden whilst loved ones are deployed away from home. I am delighted that the families of those who sadly die in the circumstances that I have described are now to receive some tangible evidence of the nation's gratitude in the form of the Elizabeth Cross and Memorial Scroll.

Troops radio deal 'secures jobs'

Two defence contracts worth £231m to upgrade a military communication system have been awarded to General Dynamics UK in Oakdale, south Wales, safeguarding hundreds of hi-tech jobs. All three armed services use the communication system involved. The first contract, worth £119m aims to update and refresh the system's capabilities over its lifetime to reflect advances in technology. The second contract, valued at £112m, aims to provide longer term technical support for the Bowman system, including repair, servicing and the provision of spares.

Around 12,500 British Army vehicles are kitted out with the digital communications system, which pinpoints the user's location as well providing secure radio links. The system is being rolled out to Royal Navy ships, the Royal Marines, the RAF Regiment and specialist Army signals units.

Hughie Cooper of Birmingham

THE ALLIED HIGH COMMISSION in GERMANY

After the breakdown of the Allied Control Council in 1948 which had military governors, the above was set up by the USA, UK and France to oversee the redevelopment of Western Germany. Initially Military Governors acted on behalf of the Allies but with the creation of the Federal Republic of Germany (Western Germany) the military governors were replaced by the three Western Allies by High Commissioners who were civilians.

The last UK Military Governor was General Sir Brian Robertson and its first High Commissioner Sir Ivonne Kirkpatrick.

When the change took place 16 Wing (19 & 20 LAA Squadrons) RAF Regiment

represented the RAF together with Naval and Army units at the changeover on June 24th 1950. This took place in Cologne and Düsseldorf both of which were still badly damaged from the war.

However one memory still retained from this Guard of Honour (without detracting from the importance of the occasion), was when one (or more) of the Guard had loosened the magazine on the rifle so that when it came to present arms it made a louder crack (we had been forbidden to do this), and whilst coming to the 'present arms position' the offending magazine fell out. As can be imagined it made an extremely tinny sound !!!

One could feel a real sense of apprehension at who was to blame but when we realised that it was from our right where the army unit was much relief was felt among our group!!

Hughie Cooper

RAF Regiment Books

I am often asked for information about books about the RAF Regiment. The following list is of the books that I know of that I am regularly adding to. If anyone knows of any other books about the RAF Regiment, please let me know.

"Khaki and Blue" the early ground defence of the RAF in WW2 by Colonel Ronald Sherbrooke-Walker TD DL. Published in **1952** by The Saint Catherine Press Ltd. Now out of print. No ISBN.

"A Short History of the RAF Regiment" from 1942 to 1970 with a brief account of the approach to the problems of airfield defence in the RAF from 1918 to 1942 by Kingsley M Oliver. Printed by Thanet Printing Works in **1969**. No ISBN Number and now out of print.

"The Battle of the Airfields 1st January 1945" by Norman L Franks. About "Operation Bodenplatte" when the Germans attempted to destroy the advanced Allied Airfields. First published in **1982**. ISBN 1 898697 15 9. Republished by Grub Street in **1994** in an updated version.

"The Edges of War" An RAF Regiment Story by Tim Hillyar. About 2804 Armoured Car Squadron, from landing in France at the end of June 1944, through the fighting in Europe to the British Victory Parade in Berlin on 21st July 1945. Privately published by Tim Hillyar. I have no contact details.

"The Blue and Khaki Hunters" Privately published in a Limited Edition of 500 copies in **1993** by D F Sampson through Newton

Publishers. ISBN 1-872308-34-1. Can be obtained directly from Mr D F Sampson, 17 Shelley Close, Highcliffe on Sea, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4HW. Telephone number 01425 279206.

"Below the Bottom Rung" the RAF Regiment in Palestine by Edward Grocott. Published in **1996** by J and K H Publishing. ISBN 1 900511 57 6.

"Through Adversity" the History of the RAF Regiment 1942 - 1992 by Kingsley M Oliver. Published in **1997** by Forces and Corporate Publishing Ltd. ISBN 0 9529597 0 4.

"In Adversity" Exploits of Gallantry and Awards to the RAF Regiment and its Associated Forces 1921 - 12995 by Nicholas G Tucker. Published in **1997** by Jade Publishing Limited. ISBN 1-900734-08-7.

"The RAF Regiment" History, Colours, uniforms and Equipment of the RAF Regiment. Edited by Stuart Asquith. Published in **2000** by Nexus Special Interests Ltd. Book Number 001772. Foreword by Air Commodore R C Moore, MBE, RAF, Commandant General, RAF Regiment. But now out of print.

"The RAF Regiment at War" 1942 - 1946 by Kingsley M Oliver. Published in **2002** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN 0-85052-852-6.

"On the Road to Mandalay" featuring the life of the author Randle Manwaring focussing particularly on his time with the RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign. Published in **2006** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN 1844154971.

"Constant Vigilance" the RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign by Nigel W M Warwick. Published in **2007** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN: 9781844155002.

"Joint Force Harrier" by Commander Adrian Orchard, with James Barrington. The true story of a Royal Navy Fighter squadron at war. Published in 2008 by Penguin Books and Micael Joseph. ISBN 9780718153991.

If anyone knows of any other books, please let me know.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

On Thursday 9th July 2009, the Duke of Edinburgh today attended the National Memorial Arboretum for the dedication of a new memorial and bridge constructed in honour of the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME), Prince Philip, REME's Colonel in Chief for 40 years, joined veterans and current members of the

Corps for the event hosted by Colonel Commandant Major General Michael Huntley CB.

Established in 1942, REME is responsible for the Army's equipment support, maintaining and repairing all equipment from rifles and radios to missiles, tanks and helicopters. The Corps' regular and reservist officers and soldiers have been described both as the 'craftsmen of the Army' and, by Field Marshal Montgomery, as those responsible for 'keeping the punch in the Army's fist'. The idea for a memorial emanated from the REME Association, the Corps' veterans' organisation. Constructed from Portland Stone, it was designed by sculptor, Alan Micklethwaite, to complement and reflect the main Armed Forces Memorial, upon whose walls the names of many REME soldiers are engraved. Recent REME casualties include the tragic deaths of Corporal Dean Thomas John and Corporal Graeme Stiff, who were killed in southern Afghanistan on 15 March 2009. The men had been on operations to the west of Garmsir in Helmand province, southern Afghanistan, when their vehicle was struck by an explosive device. Brigadier Brian McCall, Director of Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (Army), said: "I hope that this memorial will become a lasting focus for remembrance across the Corps and a special place for all members of the REME family."

Future Events at the NMA Saturday 15th August 2009

Malayan Volunteers Group. A short memorial service to commemorate 64th anniversary of VJ Day will be held at 12.00 noon at the Malayan Volunteers plot. For further information contact Mrs R Fell on 01297 33045 or <dinraf-millbrook@tiscali.co.uk>. Or log onto www.malayanvolunteersgroup.org.uk.

Sunday 23rd August 2009

Royal Naval Patrol Service. A Service of dedication for new memorial with a parade at 11.00 am and a service at 11.30 a.m. For further information contact John Hodge on 0121 308 4596 or email <hodge2tp@btinternet.com>.

Saturday 5th September 2009

Brotherhood of Greek Mainland Veterans 1940/41. An Annual Service of Remembrance at 11.30 a.m. at the Greek plot. For further information contact Frank J Gill, Reunion Organiser on 0151 924 2712.

Saturday 12th September 2009

Northern Ireland Veterans' Association. Annual service of remembrance, with drumhead, followed by parade to Ulster Ash Grove. At 1.30 a.m. a Service in the Leonard Cheshire Amphitheatre Open to all. Standards welcomed but advance notice of participation appreciated. Contact Alan Preston <service2009@nivets.org.uk> or PO Box 9004, Leicester LE21 4BL.

Saturday 26th September 2009

An event to commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the final flights of "Operation Plainfare" the Berlin Airlift. More information is available by visiting www.veterans-uk.info or telephoning 0800 1692277.

Saturday 10th October 2009

The annual Ride to the Wall to remember all the troops that have died on duty since World War II. The Inaugural Ride which took place last October, saw more than 2,500 motorcyclists ride together to the National Memorial Arboretum. Several improvements are planned for this year's event which is on the 10th October 2009. Because of the vast numbers involved, a new assembly point has been chosen - Drayton Manor, Tamworth, Staffs, B78 3TW - about 15 miles from the National Memorial Arboretum.

The Manor has improved parking space and facilities and overnight camping is also available. There will also be an RAF Spitfire flypast following the service. For further information please contact: Martin Dickinson, Founder, Chairman RTTW Organising Committee by email at <martindickinson@aol.com> or by telephone on 07740871983.

Wednesday 11th November

Armistice Day details to be provided.

Warwickshire RAF Lodge

Service of remembrance at 11.00 a.m. in the Masonic Garden. For further information contact Colin Hill (Secretary) on 01905 621350 or hill9456@hotmail.co.uk.

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



**FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY
DEATH NOTICES:**

PAUL BESSANT. RAF Regt Sqn Ldr (Retd) Paul Bessant, born 10 Jan 41, died

unexpectedly on 5 May 05 aged 68. He was commissioned on 13 Jul 61, promoted to the rank of sqn ldr on 1 Jan 78 and retired on 10 Jan 91. The funeral took place on 15 May 09. He is survived by his wife, Jenny and son Nick, who may be contacted at Woodbine Cottage, The Green, Christian Malford, Chippenham, Wiltshire SN15 4BQ. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

GENERAL NOTICES:

**RAF REGIMENT MEMORIAL PROJECT
2009**

The RAF Regiment Memorial at the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) was dedicated in April 2001, following some serious fundraising. Naturally, the majority of the funds went towards the manufacture of the magnificent marble Regimental monument stone while the other more peripheral aspects were done as best as the Birmingham Branch could do with regard to the funds then in hand.

Eight years on, while the Memorial stone itself looks as fresh as the day it was unveiled, the walkway leading from the road, which comprises basic paving slabs, is looking rather dowdy and is threatening to detract from the overall effect. It is therefore proposed to replace the current paving slabs with modern block paving, in the style currently adopted by the NMA for the latest memorials there. The proposed upgrade will see the present T-shaped walkway replaced with block paving and provide the opportunity to install - at cost - individual memorial stones with simple wording reflecting an individual's name and unit, or dates, or perhaps units themselves. The form of memorial is proving very popular at the NMA and is considerably cheaper and longer lasting than the current NMA metal memorial plaques, which are very expensive to produce and are showing early signs of decay.

The projected cost of the work will be in the region of £3,800 and it is intended to commission the work in time for the 68th Annual Commemoration Service at the NMA on 26 June 2010. Units, associations and individuals are invited to donate to the fund, to help bring the RAF Regiment's Memorial Garden up-to-date and to preserve the fabric for many years to come.

I intend to advertise the Project - using virtually the same wording - in the next Centurion and would be grateful if you would add your collective weight behind the Project, both from

the viewpoint of encouraging individual donations and, hopefully, Assoc fundraising. Hope for Heroes, while being a very worthy cause, has rather dominated the national charity fundraising for the past 3 years (with good reason) and it's about time that the adage, Charity Begins at Home, be revisited.

I would be grateful if, at your forthcoming Executive Committee meetings and AGMs, you would consider allocating funds towards the Project. The RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club will address the issue at their AGM in Oct 09.

OPERATION TELIC – HISTORY CAPTURE

In this digital age, the recording of history is largely anonymously electronic and there is a great danger that vital information about the Corps will be lost with the passage of time; there are no longer dusty files to trawl through to uncover historical facts and stories. With the end of UK and RAF Regt operations in Iraq under the Op TELIC banner, the Corps is now in the process of capturing a vast amount of information about the operations there since the initial Gulf War 1 in the early 1990s, through Gulf War II in 1997 to the latest 'war on terror' operation from 2002-2009. While the operational data and patrol reports are still in our possession, we will also need to capture the stories and anecdotes from those that served in the Middle East/Iraq from 1992. The collation and storage system is still being developed but it would be helpful if those who were involved would record their experiences etc while memories are relatively fresh. Once we have the required infrastructure in place, the coordinator will call for input.

FORMATION OF THE EIGHTH FP WING HQ AND RAF REGT FIELD SQN

In order to increase the RAF Regt's capability, the Armed Forces Minister, Bill Rammell, announced in the House of Commons, on 9 Jul 09, that he has decided to establish an additional RAF Force Protection (FP) Wg HQ and RAF Regt Field (Fd) Sqn. The units will increase the time that their personnel spend between operational deployments and will bring the RAF Regt's harmony levels more into line with Govt guidelines, and should have a positive effect on the retention of skilled personnel. Recruitment and training are underway to meet the additional 12 personnel required for the FP Wg HQ and the 172 personnel for the RAF Regt Fd Sqn. Both units will be formed from Oct 09.

An ongoing basing study has determined that the optimum basing solution for the new RAF Regt Fd Sqn will be either RAF Shawbury or RAF Leuchars. The basing work for the FP Wg HQ is at an earlier stage and the options have yet to be refined, with the final outcome of the studies are expected by Autumn 2009. More information, including the intended number-plate of the 8th Fd Sqn, will be published when known.

CG's COMMENDATIONS

The need was identified for the CG RAF Regt to be able to recognize the efforts of Corps individuals or teams within the RAF Regt 'family', for example those of the RAF Regt Assoc, who may fall outside of the conventional Service Comdrs' Commendations associated with the New Year's and The Queen's Birthday Honours Awards. As a result, the CG will consider the award of his personal commendations to suitable Corps nominees on an annual basis.

The Award Year will run from 1 Aug to 31 Jul. Submissions for such an award must be completed using the formal CG's Commendation Nomination Form obtainable from the Regtl Sec. Where the award of a Commendation is not viewed as justified, no Commendations will be awarded for that Award Year.

For the current Award Year 2008-9, all nominations for the award of a CG Commendation, must be received by the Regtl Sec no later than 1 Sep 09 if they are to be considered by the Award Committee. Special attention is drawn to those nominating individuals for the need to comply fully with the nomination requirements. Recommendations to the CG by the Award Panel can only be on the basis of the quality of the citation.

CORPS DIARY DATES:

- 9 Sep 09 - RAF Regt Golf Society match v Royal Signals (Mentmore GC)
- 20 Sep 09 - Battle of Britain Sunday - Westminster Abbey and nationwide
- 30 Sep 09 - RAF Regt Golf Society 4-Way Match & AGM (Greatham Valley Golf Club)
- 2-4 Oct 09 - RAF Regt Assoc AGM and Reunion (Coventry)
- 15-16 Oct 09 - RAF Armd Car Assoc Autumn Reunion (Derby) - Note date change.
- 30 Oct 09 - RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Annual Dinner (Def CBRN Centre, Winterbourne Gunner)

8 Nov 09 - Remembrance Day (Cenotaph, London, and Nationwide)
 11 Nov 09 - Armistice Day (Cenotaph, London, Nationwide)
 26 Nov 09 - Presentation of new Standard to 63 Sqn RAF Regt (details not yet known).
 15 Dec 09 - Centurion Journal No28 contributions due.
 5 Feb 10 - Handover-Takeover of CG RAF Regt appointment.
 5 Feb 10 - Officers' Corps Formation Dinner (RAF Honington).
 18-21 May 10 - Regt-USAF Exchange Offrs 'British Invasion III (Washington DC)
 11 Jun 10 - RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Reception (House of Lords) - incl Palace of Westminster Tour.
 26 Jun 10 - RAF Regt Annual Memorial Commemoration (NMA Alrewas).
 27 Jun 10 - National Armed Forces Day (NMA Alrewas and nationwide).

RAF Holmpton Summer Season

Behind the massive 'Blast Doors' & along the 'Tunnel' is a whole world underground

Although still part of the RAF this is your chance to visit this amazing Command Bunker set in 10 foot of solid concrete - extending to 35,000 square feet and nearly 100 feet beneath the Yorkshire Countryside - a whole world underground. RAF Holmpton started life in the 1950's as a radar station and when this closed in 1974, although most people thought the site had closed, things were still going on underground.

Between 1974 and 1984 the site was used for training electronic engineers from the Combined services, and then in 1984, during the later years of the Cold War the whole place was massively refurbished at a cost of many millions, to become the new Emergency War HQ RAF Support Command. The Cold War ended in 1991 and RAF Holmpton then became a training site for the RAF Regiment and the RAF Police, remaining in this use until 1994.

Then a massive rebuild took place to change it to an Experimental Electronic Warfare Operations Centre which remained fully operational until 2001. In 2003 a new Archive was sited at RAF Holmpton along new training areas, a Computer Centre and an Administration Wing - this also brought about the first public exhibition and this has grown ever since.

Today, although remaining a part of the RAF, you can visit the bunker and experience for yourself the massive Command HQ. Visit the many rooms and offices, operational areas, dormitories, canteen, hospital and plant rooms, together with more rooms than you can imagine - all brought to life with demonstrations, displays, and our award winning RAF Holmpton multi-screen show, with a sound system that most people can only dream about !

All our tours are fully guided. There are some quite long walks and three staircases. The bunker is fully lit and heated and there are WCs, a gift shop and ample free car parking. We are presently unable to admit wheelchairs but ambulant disabled seem to have no problem as the tours are relaxed and there are several opportunities to sit down. We do however ask parents to note that the tours are not suitable for under 5's. If you would like to visit it, it is on the east Yorkshire coast at a place called Withernsea, twenty miles east of Hull and the telephone number is 01964 630208.

The Mother of Parliaments

It gives me no pleasure to say of the downfall of the Mother of Parliaments that I am not surprised, for on a number of occasions, I have written in these pages of my contempt for politicians. Indeed, my favourite explanation for the word politician is that it is not a ten-letter word but a four-letter word. But the current batch of politicians have even exceeded my contempt for them by bringing shame on what was once a world-respected institution, and it will take a great deal of time and effort to put matters right.

Gordon Brown has said that he is "appalled and angered by the expenses revelations" and David Cameron has said that he was furious when he found out how some of his MPs had claimed for swimming pool maintenance, moat cleaning and other ridiculous items. Do they really expect us to believe that they did not know what was going on when they themselves have made claims under the same system and have had to make repayments? That would beggar belief.

And the explanations that MPs have given to excuse their behaviour almost make me puke. The worst one in my view is where MPs have continued to claim for mortgage repayments long after their mortgages have been paid off. I have a very bad memory but I can still remember, as I

have no doubt you can, when my mortgage was paid off for it was a red letter day as far as I was concerned.

Do they expect us to believe that they had forgotten that their mortgage had been paid of? Perhaps they have lived in such an unreal world that they really do believe that we are all idiots. And so many of the current MPs have made "mistakes" over their expense claims that if we were to believe them, then the only other thing to believe would be that they are a bunch of incompetents and shouldn't be trusted as MPs anyway. And another thing, how many of you can suddenly find many hundreds or even many thousands of pounds at the drop of a hat to repay wrongly claimed expenses? Our underpaid MPs can but can you 'cos I can't? So are they underpaid!

Well that's all for now, in spite of the weather keep smiling.

Malcolm

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



16

Saturday 14th Nov 2009 B'ham Poppy Ball
 Sat 28th-Sun 29th Nov 2009 B'ham Int Tattoo NIA
 Monday 30th November 09 St Andrew's Day
 Thursday 10th December 09 Branch Night
 Thursday 14th January 2010 Branch Night
 Monday 1st February 2010 68th Ann RAF Regiment
 Monday 1st February 2010 Branch Service at NMA
 Thursday 11th February 2010 68th Ann RAF Regiment
 Thursday 11th February 2010 **Branch Night and AGM**
 Thursday 11th February 2010 Branch Subs Due
 Monday 1st March 2010 St David's Day
 Thursday 11th March 2010 Branch Night
 Wednesday 17th March 2010 St Patrick's Day
 15th - 30th March 2010 65th Ann Battle of Meiktila
 Monday 5th April 2010 9th Ann Ded of Mem.l
 Thursday 8th April 2010 Branch Night
 Friday 23rd April 2010 St George's Day

Thursday 10th September 09 Branch Night
 Fri 2nd - Mon 5th Oct 2009 Ass.n Autumn Reunion
 Sunday 4th October 2009 Merchant Navy Day
 Thursday 8th October 2009 Branch Night
 Wednesday 21st Oct 2009 Battle of Trafalgar Day
 Sunday 1st November 2009 Midlands Fest of Rem.
 Sunday 8th Nov 2009 Remembrance Sunday
 Wednesday 11th Nov 2009 Remembrance Day
 Thursday 12th Nov 2009 Branch Night

CHAIRMAN

Ron Sharp
 46 Lightwood Road
 Yoxall, Burton on Trent
 Staffordshire DE13 8QE
 Tel No: 01543 472411
 r.sharpe@homecall.co.uk

SECRETARY

Malcolm A Baldwin
 61 Pear Tree Crescent
 Solihull Lodge, Shirley
 Solihull, B90 1LE
 Tel: 0121 608 3791
 Baldwinmalc@blueyonder.co.uk

TREASURER

Tom Magee
 11 Pavilion Avenue
 Smethwick, Warley
 West Midlands, B67 6LA
 Tel: 0121 429 5635 e-mail
 rockape2005@tiscali.co.uk

MINUTE SECRETARY

Ken Bridgwood
 29 Claverdon Drive
 Great Barr
 Birmingham
 West Midlands, B45 5HR
 Tel: 0121 357 4242
 Kenbridgwood@aol.com

BRANCH QUARTERMASTER

Tom Magee
 11 Pavilion Avenue
 Smethwick, Warley
 West Midlands, B67 6LA
 Tel: 0121 429 5635 e-mail
 rockape2005@tiscali.co.uk

WELFARE OFF/STD B

John Docker
 151 Calder Drive
 Walmley
 Sutton Coldfield
 West Midlands
 B76 1GG
 Tel: 0121 351 5580

PRESIDENT

Peter Swash
 'Mdina' Rowney Green Lane
 Rowney Green
 Redditch
 Worcestershire, B48 7QF
 Tel No: 01527 60870
 peter.swash1@btinternet.com

VICE-PRESIDENT AND RBL LIAISON OFFICER

Dave Gooding
 31 Queen Elizabeth Road
 Rubery, Rednal
 Birmingham, B45 0NE
 Tel: 0121 604 4637
 legionaire480@msn.com

RESEARCH CO-ORD/ LINK-UP DATA BASE

Hughie Cooper
 11 Sandringham Close
 Baswich Lane
 Stafford, ST17 0AB
 Tel: 01785 242269
 loz@monarchs.freeserve.co.uk

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICER/SOCIAL SEC

Michael Beard
 21 Abingdon Road
 Bloxwich, Walsall
 West Midlands
 WS3 2SX
 Tel: 01922 491453

FINANCIAL AUDITOR

Trevor Round
 45 Sandfields Road
 Sedgley
 Dudley
 West Midlands
 DY3 3LB
 Tel: 01902 672597

FINANCIAL AUDITOR

Joan Round
 45 Sandfields Road
 Sedgley
 Dudley
 West Midlands
 DY3 3LB
 Tel: 01902 672597

**THIS NEWSLETTER IS PHOTOCOPIED AND BOUND BY KIND
 PERMISSION OF WRAGGE AND CO SOLICITORS**