



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

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BIRMINGHAM BRANCH

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enemy attack.**

**NEWSLETTER NO: 223
JANUARY 2008**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 223 JANUARY 2008

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.

In last month's newsletter I talked about the Military Covenant, and how it is believed by many that the Government is not keeping its commitment to honour it. Now it seems that a senior military officer feels so badly about the Government's lack of commitment to the Military Covenant that, in spite of his long career with the military and a glittering future career in front of him, he has decided to quit the Army in protest.

Now if a senior officer feels so passionate about it, things must be really bad. It doesn't help when many of our troops return from the ferocious fighting in Afghanistan to grotty barracks or married quarters. Due to the shortage of money, the Government reckons that it is going to take twenty years to bring service accommodation up to date. As the fourth richest economy in the world, the Government should have money spilling out of its coffers, so where does it all go? It's wasted that's where it goes. But to return to the Army officer who is quitting in disgust.

Paras' commander quits over breaches of Military Covenant

Jonathan Owen in the Independent 18 Nov 07.

One of the Army's brightest officers, marked by many as a future general, has resigned it emerged yesterday, in protest at the Government's failure to honour the Military Covenant. Lt-Col Stuart Tootal resigned his command of the 3rd Battalion, the Parachute Regiment, citing "appalling" and "shoddy" treatment of troops, particularly regarding issues over levels of pay, lack of training equipment and shortcomings in housing and healthcare.

In a statement issued by the Ministry of Defence last night, Lt-Col Tootal said: "There has been much speculation regarding my decision to leave the Army. While my reasons for doing so are many and varied, they remain a private matter." He went on to pay tribute to the "exceptional" men under his command.

The MoD defended its treatment of soldiers, saying: "We go to great lengths to look after our people on operations," and thanked Lt-Col Tootal for "his loyal service over 20 years".

The 42-year-old, viewed by some senior officers as a controversial figure, who will leave the Army in a few months' time, was awarded the Distinguished Service Order earlier this year for his leadership of 3 Para during a fiercely fought six-month tour of Afghanistan's notorious Helmand province in 2006.

Speaking to The Independent on Sunday, his father, retired RAF Group Captain Patrick Tootal OBE DL, supported his son's decision: "Of course I'm sad that he's gone but I understand his reasons and I respect them." From his home in Kent, the retired officer, who served for 33 years, attacked the Government over its failures to back the armed forces.

"They're beginning to address some equipment issues but it's going to take time. There is no money in the budget and you wonder where the priorities are when you see £32bn, almost what we spend on defence, being spent on shoring up Northern Rock," he said.

"The thing that does worry me is that we're not supporting the war as citizens, what we are supporting is the troops that are doing the Government's bidding. We do not treat our servicemen with the respect that they deserve... when they are injured or wounded and have left the service there's not much follow up except from charities. The Government has got to realise that we are in a long-term war in Afghanistan. We're putting 18-year-olds out there who are fighting pretty much 24 hours a day for virtually six months, and then they're coming back to grotty quarters. How are you going to sustain an Army which is like that?"

He is also critical of the job-sharing role of Des Browne, who acts as Secretary of State for Scotland and Defence: "What message does it send to armed forces when we've got a part-time defence minister? The Government needs to match its rhetoric with the funding that is needed to fight the war in Afghanistan. The fact is there is no extra money to produce the support that is required. When a chap comes back with no legs, a medal is very nice but it doesn't actually solve his housing problems."

Lack of Political Will to Safeguard our Money

There is a total lack of political will to look after our money. Politicians make the wars and our troops have to fight them. But if all governments really took on board the long dead Victorian principle of carefully husbanding the public's money that they steal from us in our taxes, we could fund our troops properly to fight the politician's battles for them, and look after them properly when they return home.

Without careful management of our expenditure, you and I would go bankrupt. Without careful management of expenditure private companies would go bust. But with the Government's Bank (the tax system) from which they withdraw our money to meet their profligate spending, there's no shortage of money for them to waste. For if the funds in this marvellous (for them) Government Bank run short, why they just increase the tax burden to make up the shortfall.

Tax Freedom Day

The Adam Smith Institute has been calculating Tax Freedom Day since 1991 and has figures for it going back to 1963 – when Tax Freedom Day was more than a whole month earlier, falling on 24 April. Tax Freedom Day shows just how long we spend working for the Treasury, rather than ourselves. Overall, the government takes more than 40% of national income.

This means that the average UK resident has to work a full five months of the year solely to pay that tax bill. Last year, that meant working from 1st January to 1st June – just to pay taxes! And the March 2007 budget did nothing to change that. Tax Freedom Day 2007 once again falls on 1st June. For much of the last few years, however, Tax Freedom Day has been coming later and later. In fact, it falls a full week later now than it did

back in 2002. That is an extra week of working for the Chancellor.

At this rate, it will not be long until we spend longer working for the government than we do working for ourselves! With the proper husbanding of public money, there would be enough money to fulfil all the Nation's wants and needs but there's less chance of that these days, than there is of all of us winning the lottery.

However, in order to pressurise the government into properly funding our Armed Forces, a new organisation has been set up – The United Kingdom National Defence Association (UKNDA).

The United Kingdom National Defence Association (UKNDA).

Its President is Winston Churchill and at the moment, its Patrons are Admiral Lord Boyce GCB, Marshal of the RAF Lord Craig GCB, General Lord Guthrie GCB, and the Rt. Hon Lord Owen CH. I say at the moment because other high-profile names are being approached to become Patrons too.

Some three months ago Winston Churchill was approached by Commander. John Muxworthy RN (Rt'd). Together with a group of retired officers – all deeply concerned about the serious under funding of defence, they formed the UK National Defence Association, in the hope of bringing pressure to bear to remedy what has become a critical situation for our Armed Forces. They asked him if he would agree to be their President and since this is a matter about which he feels passionately, he agreed without hesitation.

The sole aim of the UKNDA, a Tri-Service, All-Party organisation, is to create a public head of steam for a proper funding of defence. In an excellent *Newsnight* programme on 6th September 2007, General Sir Jack Deverell twice made the point that there was "*very little pressure from the public*" for increased funding for the Armed Forces. That is precisely what the UKNDA hopes to remedy by becoming a mass-membership organization, tapping a large slice of the 15 million of our fellow-citizens who are serving, or who have served, in H.M. Forces, or have family or friends who have done so.

UKNDA are setting their sights on 3% of GDP. Given that we are fighting two high-intensity conflicts on a peacetime budget, anything less would not meet the case. Twenty-five years ago at the time of the Falklands it was

5.1% of GDP, last year it was down to 2.2%.

UKNDA has been established as a company limited by guarantee, rather than as a charity because, as a charity, it could not campaign for a change in Government policy, which is precisely what they are in business to do. They need funds to generate mass-membership, and vice-versa -- only in that way can they hope to bring meaningful pressure to bear on Government & political parties of every colour to do the right thing by our Armed Forces.

General Lord Guthrie, Lord Craig and Admiral Lord Boyce have all consented to serve as Patrons of UKNDA, thereby completing a triumvirate of ex-Chiefs of Defence Staff, one from each of the Services. In addition, Lord Owen a former Labour Foreign Secretary, has signaled his strong support for UKNDA & his willingness to serve as a Patron, thus giving a strategic/foreign policy view of Defence policy.

To complete the list of Patrons, they are setting their sights on Lt-Gen Sir Robert Fry KBE (late Commandant-General Royal Marines) and Mrs. Sara Jones (widow of Lt-Col H. Jones VC) to represent Service Widows & Families.

Meanwhile they are busy recruiting Vice-Presidents - Political, as well as Military and are approaching defence enthusiasts from each of the three main parties in both the Lords and Commons, as well as from the trade union movement.

They have only just started but, so far, they have secured positive responses from Bruce George MP (Labour Party and a former Chairman of the Defence Select Committee). Edward Leigh MP (Conservative Party and Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee). Sir Nicholas Bonsor (Conservative Party and a former Chairman of the Commons Defence Select Committee). The Hon. Nicholas Soames (a former Armed Forces Minister). And Brenda Dean (a former Chairman of the Armed Forces Pay Review Board & currently Chairman of the Lords Defence Study Group).

Should you wish to join the UKNDA visit their website (<http://www.uknda.org>) and sign up on-line! Alternatively cheques, made out to 'UKNDA' may be sent to: UKNDA Ltd., PO Box 819, Portsmouth, Hants. PO1 9FF.

Annual membership is available at £12, life membership at £100. In the event that you are willing to become more actively involved, that of course would be hugely appreciated. The

UKNDA are most anxious to make this a mass-membership organization – only that way can they have 'clout' with Government & political parties generally!

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY

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

Death Notices:

MEADOWS. Fred. Former RAF Regt WO. Known as 'Grazing'. Born 12 Mar 15 and died 7 Dec 07, aged 92, in Clacton, Essex. Errand boy at Boots the Chemist before enlisting in 1935. Joined the RAF Regt in 1942 and served in Amman, Jordan, with 21 LAA Sqn for five years and with the Queen's Flight. Was the SWO at the RAF Regt Depot Catterick in 1957. Retired in 1965 and joined the Post Office. Funeral was held at Weeley, nr Clacton, on 14 Dec 07. Survived by his son, Peter, to whom we offer the Corps' sincere condolences. No other details known at this time.

Black Eagle Monument Unveiling - 6 Dec 07.

In commemoration of the 25th Anniversary of Falklands Conflict in 1982, an impressive replica of the Black Eagle Monument that overlooked the Resident Rapier Sqn's (RRS) camp on Canopus Hill at RAF Stanley was unveiled at RAF Honington by the Corps' HAC, Air Chf Mshl Sir Richard Johns on Thu 6 Dec 07.

Former 63 Sqn RAF Regt personnel who were awarded the South Atlantic Medal 82 by Sir Richard in Dec 82 attended, as did those who served subsequently on the RRS between 1982-2006. Despite the poor weather, it was a good day for all and we are immensely grateful to Sir Richard for taking the time to officiate at the unveiling. Electronic copies of the group photos are available from the Regt Sec to those who attended. A report will be published in the next Centurion.

New Queen's Colour for RAF Regiment - 11 Jul 08

You will be pleased to know that the new Queen's Colour for the RAF Regt will be presented, along with a new Queen's Colour for

the RAF, at the Royal International Air Tattoo (RIAT) at Fairford on 11 Jul 08. This will, during the RAF's 90th Anniversary Year, be a major PR event for the RAF and, combined with significant media coverage, give the Corps unprecedented publicity in the public domain. The CG is the RAF Proj Off and the Stn Comdr RAF Honington, Gp Capt La Forte, will be the Parade Comdr. We anticipate that 2 RAF Regt Sqns will be on parade. Clearly, this will be the major Corps event for 2008. The outline will be published in the Spring Centurion journal, but detailed information will be published at a later date through the CPN system and other means, including the RAF Regt Assoc magazine, The Flash. No further information is available at this time, but at least I now know what will be in the centre pages of Centurion in August!

Charitable Status for RAF Regiment fund

To reflect the fact that the RAF Regt Fund has achieved Charity status, the RAF Regt Fund Application Form has been updated to include a Gift Aid Certificate, which will enable the Fund to reclaim 28% of the subscription from the Taxman (1600+ members x £2.80 = £4,500+ per year!).

The forms are available electronically now, but I cannot mass-mail them with this message. Branch Secretaries please contact me in the New Year (after 10 Jan please) for an e-copy, and encourage new members to use the new Form (RAFRF Form App v2008-1.0). Please don't use the previous form (2007-2) anymore.

Airfield Construction Branch/RAF Regt 50th Anniversary in Akrotiri Celebrations – 2008:

The ACB Assoc is celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the arrival in Cyprus of 5001 Sqn Airfield Construction and the RAD Regt sqns, on 10 Sep 08. The main function will be in conjunction with the 2008 Wings Appeal Garden Party at the residence of CBF Cyprus, AVM and Mrs R Lacey. It will be a joint function with Apollo Branch Pafos.

Any RAF Regt people interested in joining the ACB Assoc event would be more than welcome; they are also offering a trip down 'Memory Lane' around RAF Akrotiri, for a small donation to Wings Appeal. Contact the ACB Assoc by filling in the Visit to Akrotiri form on their website www.rafacyprus.co.uk or contact Gordon Boam at gordonb@cytanet.com.cy. Tel 0035 7253 22905.

Corps Diary Dates: (Updated - not exhaustive - contributions welcome)

- 01 Feb – B'ham Branch Commemoration of 66th Ann of Reg.t at Memorial Garden NMA Fri 1st Feb.
- 08 Feb 08 - Officers' Formation Dinner - RAF Honington
- 05 Apr – B'ham Branch Commemoration of 7th Ann of Dedication of Memorial in Memorial Garden at NMA Sat 5 Apr.
- 08 Apr - Presentation of new 63 Sqn RAF Regt Standard (details to be announced).
- 13-14 Apr 08 - RAF Armoured Car Companies Assoc Spring Reunion - Derby.
- 09 May 08 - GBAD Sqns' Standards Laying Up - Bury St Edmunds (Provisional date - to be confirmed)
- 11 May 08 - Annual Commemoration of the RAF Regt Chapel - Catterick.
- 16 May 08 - RAF Regt Offrs' Dinner Club's Annual Reception - RAF Museum, London.
- 01 Jun 08 - Centurion journal No25 - Contributions Due Date.
- 28 Jun 08 - RAF Regt Memorial Re-Dedication - NMA Alrewas (Veterans Week)
- 19-21 Sep 08 - WOs & SNCOs Assoc Reunion
- 25-27 Sep 08 RAF Regt-USAF SF Exchange Reunion Weekend – Berkshire
- 07 Nov 08 - RAF Regt Offrs' Dinner Club's Annual Dinner - The Guest Speaker will be Col Bob Stewart of Cheshire Regt, Bosnia and now TV fame. The venue - Midland Hotel in Derby - is excellent and it promises to be a super evening

FROM THE BRANCH SECRETARY

In last December's newsletter, I published the following information from the RAF Regiment Secretary about Group Captain Russ La Forte who is currently serving as Station Commander, RAF Honington.

Appointment of ADC to HM The Queen.

The Queen has graciously appointed Gp Capt Russ La Forte, RAF FP Force Cdr and Stn Cdr, RAF Honington, as an Aide-de-Camp. His full title is now: Gp Capt R La Forte MBE ADC MA BA RAF.

This additional information was published on 17th December in his father's local newspaper, the Oxford Mail.

Airman to serve the Queen

A Didcot man has been made an aide de camp (ADC) to the Queen. Group Captain Russell La Forte, 47, will represent Her Majesty at parades and ceremonies. His 80-year-old father, Edward La Forte, of Slade Road, said it had come as a surprise when he heard the news, but he said he was very proud. He added: "Russell is into absolutely everything and always has been. It's not bad for someone who left school at 18. He always wanted to go to the RAF."



Group Captain La Forte, who has four children, is one of 11 ADCs from the RAF, and will meet the Queen in the new year to be formally appointed. Educated at Manor Primary School, in Didcot, and Wallingford Grammar School, Group Captain La Forte joined the

RAF after spending a number of years in the Didcot Air Training Corps. John Nelson, a former commanding officer of the Didcot ATC, said: "I think it's absolutely wonderful. It's lovely to see the cadets go on and go so far."

Currently based at RAF Honington, in Suffolk, Group Captain La Forte has served in a number of countries, including Germany, Russia, Bosnia, Afghanistan, Georgia and Northern Iraq. He was recently awarded an MBE for leading a mountain rescue team which saved three climbers.

New Sniper Rifle

Snipers in the RAF Regiment are to get a new rifle that will give them lethal precision at even greater distances under a new contract announced last month. The British firm Accuracy International, based in Portsmouth, Hampshire, will supply 580 rifles with day telescopic sights for snipers across the services (RAF Regiment, Royal Marines and Army) which will fire a larger calibre bullet than the existing weapon.

The new rifle is being supplied as part of a broader Sniper System Improvement Programme to give UK snipers more power, precision and stealth than ever before. All-weather, new advanced day and night sights will mean snipers can operate round the clock in difficult conditions and laser technology will allow distant targets to be accurately located. The rifle is due to be ready for operational use next Spring. Other elements

of the Sniper System Improvement Programme include night sights, spotting 'scopes, laser range finders and tripods, and will be sourced from a variety of suppliers, taking the total procurement value to more than £11 million.

Forty-eight hours with the Gunners in Afghanistan.

By Squadron Leader Clare Sharp

Kandahar Airfield in southern Afghanistan is vast in scale and permanently buzzing with activity from the thousands of multi-national personnel, land and air assets based there. Providing force protection for the airfield, which is situated in the heart of one of Afghanistan's most restive provinces, is a major challenge and the responsibility of Wing commander Mark Wheeler, OC of 7 Force Protection Wing.

The task of patrolling the ground defence area, which covers several hundred square kilometres around the base, falls to 15 Squadron, a RAF Regiment unit, which is described by Wing Commander Wheeler as "Kandahar's hardest working section". And after spending forty-eight hours with A Flight, it is fair to say that they are strong contenders for such a title. A Flight's two-day shift on "Patrol 1" starts with an early morning briefing. The brief covers the two separate patrols planned for that day, and is delivered by the NCOs and flight commanders using a tried and tested format. Every eventuality is covered in great depth – "actions on" drills are reiterated, convoy composition and routes are explained and a detailed intelligence brief describes the locations to be visited, associated threats and the key personalities likely to be encountered.

Understanding

Everyone from the flight commander to the most junior Gunner is expected to have a clear understanding of the objectives for the day. Once the brief is completed, there are a few minutes of frenetic activity as the vehicles undergo last-minute checks and kit loading before A Flight leaves for its first patrol of the day – a civil/military co-operation – CIMIC – patrol to the nearby village of Mandi Sar. As soon as the vehicles leave the relative safety of the base, the patrol is already working hard. Taking to the highways of Kandahar is not without risk and the threat of vehicle-borne explosive devices and suicide bombers is taken seriously.

The Gunners in the lead and rear vehicles are constantly assessing the situation and monitoring every approaching vehicle and pedestrian. Most of the local population are now used to seeing the convoys in the area, although some vehicles are slow to yield to the oncoming vehicle of A Flight. “Top cover” Gunners on the weapons mounted vehicles = WMIKs – often have just seconds to assess whether or not an oncoming vehicle is a suspect vehicle, or merely a half-asleep driver who has failed to heed the warnings to pull off the road. Just seconds to make a decision for the young RAF Regiment Gunners, but absolutely no margin for error – the consequences of a mistake would be disastrous either way.

This time it is an incident-free transit to the village, where the convoy dismounts and prepares for the patrol. The aim of the patrol is to meet the village elders and teachers, as A Flight has brought a number of gifts for the school donated by a group of Dutch civilians. As A Flight makes its way through the village, word soon gets around that the Gunners have arrived and the local children form an unofficial welcoming party. It is essential, however, that the Gunners locate the village elder prior to handing out gifts; to do so without his knowledge would be considered poor etiquette in these parts. While Flight Lieutenant Mark Boden and his NCOs make inquiries to find the elder, the junior Gunners are left with the unenviable task of dealing with the swarms of inquisitive children.

There is a fine balance to be struck in the villages, which requires the Squadron to build a rapport with the locals, but also to make clear its authority as a force protection patrol. Sergeant “Angel” St Hilaire said:-

“When we first arrived out here I wasn’t sure how the junior Gunners would cope with interacting with the locals in the villages, but they have adapted really well. It’s important that we are friendly with the locals, but we must also have their respect and the lads manage to strike a really good balance”. After much negotiating and discussion in the village it appears that the elders are not around having left for Kandahar City some hours earlier. So it’s back to the vehicles, pursued by hordes of now very excited children, with arrangements made to come back and distribute the gifts another day. Corporal “Triv” Trivett said:- “It’s quite common for CIMICs not to go to plan, but the main thing is that we’ve got a time

and date to come back again, so it should work next time. I find this kind of CIMIC really worthwhile because we are giving something to the kids in the village. It’s quite hard to influence the mindset of the older people out here but, but if we can help the younger generation with their educational requirements we can really make a difference to their attitude towards us”.

Patrol

On leaving the village, A Flight heads out for the second tasking of the day – a seven-hour vehicle patrol which covers a variety of terrain in the local area on roads, dirt tracks, along the dried out wadis and through the foothills surrounding the airfield. The temperature is now more than thirty degrees and it’s a bone-shaking, tiring experience as the WMIKs and Land-Rovers pick their way through the dust.

After a long, dusty and hot day on the roads, A Flight finally recovers to Kandahar Airfield. The day is not over yet though, as there are vehicles to unload and weapons and kit to clean before the Gunners finally head back for some food and rest, hopeful that they will not get called out for a reactive patrol tasking during the night. The next morning starts bright and early with another brief for the patrols planned for that day. The first tasking is a visit to a village north east of the airfield called Marghan Kaicha. A Flight heads out, away from the main highways and across the featureless moonscape desert until it reaches the large mud hut settlement. Previous experience in this village suggests that the locals may be less than friendly but the main objective for this patrol is “key leadership engagement”, or in other words, to have a meeting with the village elders. It aims to give the villagers confidence that the force protection patrols are discouraging insurgents away from the area, reducing the likelihood of late-night village visits from the Taliban to deliver “night letters” threatening kidnappings and violence. While half the patrol heads into one of the mud brick buildings for which turns out to be a lengthy meeting with the elders, the rest of the Flight is left to keep a watchful eye on events outside and to engage with the rest of the villagers. There is a school in the village, but it has no teachers; there seem to be children everywhere, although this does not faze the members of A Flight, many of whom take the opportunity to develop the Pashtu speaking skills during their detachment. SAC John Williamson said:- “I quite enjoy the footsies around the

village, it's good to talk to the people and see what their lives are like. A lot of the time I'm with the bass so I get a chance to have a cup of tea with the senior elder and hear what he has to say. It's really interesting". SAC John Reeves agrees adding:- "It is good to interact with the villagers during the daytime patrols, although the kids can be a bit of a nightmare in some of the villages".

After a couple of hours fending off over exuberant children and providing basic first aid and medical care for some of the villagers, A Flight is finally able to regroup and return to the airfield for lunch.

Night operation

A Flight has already been out on patrol for more than six hours in temperatures in excess of 35 degrees, but their day is not over yet. After a short break the Gunners are briefing again, this time for a night operation with the rest of the Squadron and a company of Ghurkas. The aim is to deploy by helicopter to an area north of the airfield as a show of force.

The Gunners are finally airborne in a RAF Chinook, complete with heavy bergens containing communications kit and other essential items. And then of course, there are the weapons to be carried. SAC James Doolan is carrying a light machine gun, plus several hundred rounds of ammunition, which he admits is "quite hard work to carry around. It's a physically demanding job out here".

The Chinook touches down and the members of A Flight double into position through the dust storm created by the rotors' down wash. Once communications and routes have been checked, they head off on foot over rough terrain across wadis, through the fields and the villages. Later, it's a short transit back to base and the inevitable hour of cleaning weapons and kit before the Gunners finally get some sleep, twenty long hours after their day began.

In forty-eight hours, A Flight has been out on four patrols, covering hundreds of kilometres by vehicle, helicopter and on foot. Operated in the brutal daytime heat as well as at night and carried out tasks varying from giving basic first aid to children in the villages, to conducting a night insertion.

The role of the Gunners on A Flight is varied and challenging. "The troops consistently perform magnificently and have risen to the challenges of our task in Afghanistan" said

Squadron Leader Neal Rawsthorne, the Squadron Commander.

FROM THE ASSOCIATION SECRETARY

Dear all. Number 10 Downing Street has approved a petition that was launched requesting a new public holiday falling on the Monday after Remembrance Sunday in November each year.

To be known as the National Remembrance Holiday, its purpose is threefold:

1. To emphasise the remembrance of those servicemen and women who have given, and continue to give, their lives for Britain.
2. To remind people of the importance of protecting our Nation and what it stands for.
3. To break that 3 month period between the August Public Holiday and Christmas when there are currently no long weekends, especially as the UK has fewer public holidays than most European Countries.

If you are in agreement, please sign up to the petition - it only takes a few moments - and it would be great if you were minded to forward the link to other people as well.

<http://petitions.pm.gov.uk/remembermonday/>

Please distribute this far and wide amongst friends families and branches and urge people to sign up. Best Wishes. Bill Espie

THE WAR MEMORIALS TRUST

One of our members Brian Thornalley, has written to me asking me to publicise the work of the War Memorials Trust of which he is a member. The Trust is a properly constituted Charity (No. 1062255) whose Patron is HRH The Duchess of Cornwall. The War Memorials Trust works for the protection and conservation of war memorials within the UK to ensure these monuments remain part of our communities forever. War memorials commemorate our shared past, an important part of our national culture. The War Memorials Trust seeks to co-operate with other organisations, at both national and local level, to better safeguard the future of war memorials in both their social and historical context. It is an independent Registered Charity and as such is entirely dependent on voluntary income.

There's a memorial in nearly every village in the country, many of them quite beautiful but some crumbling, some even vandalised, and they range from a simple cross on a plinth to buildings such as a community hall. Membership of the Trust is £20.00 per year (£30.00 for two at the same address) or an economic £100.00 for a Life

Membership. So you don't have to live very long to save on the annual fee. There are four seasonal editions of the "Bulletin". Membership can be obtained by contacting them at the following address and paying by cheque or credit/debit card. The War Memorial Trust, 4 Lower Belgrave Street, London, SW1W 0LA.

Brian hopes that many of you will join this very worthwhile organisation dedicated to saving these wonderful memorials. The Memorials Trust originated in the mid 1990's out of rising concern about the neglect of, and on occasion vandalism of, war memorials in the United Kingdom. The Founder of the charity, Ian Davidson, initially worked to have a war memorial in Aldershot repaired after vandals had damaged it. In 1996 the charity, then known as Friends of War Memorials, was created with Winston S Churchill accepting the invitation to be President and Douglas R Johnston becoming Secretary and Honorary Treasurer. Countess Mountbatten of Burma kindly consented to become Patron. In May 1997 the organisation became a registered charity, with its Charity Deed including the aim:

"... to educate the public and to foster patriotism and good citizenship by remembering those who have fallen in war by preserving and maintaining war memorials". On 1 July 1998 the Charity held its first Somme Day Ceremony at the Cenotaph on Whitehall. This event continued to be an annual service for the charity, an opportunity for members and Friends to remember those who sacrificed their lives in conflict and so often, lie buried overseas.

War Memorials Trust, then Friends of War Memorials, Small Grants Scheme was created in 1998 following a £5,000 donation from Halifax plc. This scheme enabled the charity to provide small grants to War Memorial projects on a regular basis. WMT widened the scope of its activities through the work of War Memorials Trust Maritime in 1999, campaigning for the protection of naval military vessels, which had sunk, with loss of life during wartime.

In 2000 War Memorials Trust began working with English Heritage. The English Heritage Grant Scheme for War Memorial Repair and Conservation commenced and English Heritage supported the appointment of a full-time Conservation Officer for War Memorials Trust whose role involves administering both the English Heritage Grant Scheme and War

Memorials Trust work. In 2001 further Trustees were appointed and the charity continued to grow.

Articles in the Daily Telegraph in July 2002 saw War Memorials Trust receive a positive fundraising boost as well as increase awareness of the work of the charity. Sadly for all who met him, David Graves, the journalist who wrote the article about the charity died in a diving accident just days after the piece was published. In 2003 his widow, Diana Graves, became a War Memorials Trust Vice President and this year was also the first occasion of the award of the David Graves Memorial Scheme Grant. In 2004 the English Heritage Grant Scheme for War Memorial Repair and Conservation was replaced with a Grants for War Memorials scheme co-funded by English Heritage and The Wolfson Foundation.

A New Name

At the end of 2004 the Trustees of the charity decided upon a new name, War Memorials Trust to replace the Friends of War Memorials. The change came into effect in January 2005. To support the new name the Trustees approved a change of logo which was introduced in 2005. In March 2005 the charity lost its driving force, Director General Sir Donald Thompson, who sadly passed away. A Trust Manager was appointed to lead the charity. At the start of 2006 the charity launched a revised Small Grants Scheme. The changes saw the maximum grant rise from £250 to £1,500 (at 50% eligible costs). The result of the change was a doubling of any previous year's grant spend and offers of over £35,000 towards war memorial conservation projects across the UK were made. 2007 marks the 10th anniversary of the Trust. To mark the occasion the Trust is holding a Service at the Guards Chapel in London on Monday 16th July. In May a commemorative issue of the Bulletin was produced reviewing the first decade's achievements. The charity continues to grow and develop. It is an important heritage and conservation organisation that continues to rely on support from donors and members to continue its work.

Objectives of the Trust

1. To monitor the condition of war memorials and encourage protection and conservation.
2. To provide expert advice to those involved in war memorial projects and to facilitate conservation.
3. To work with relevant organisations to encourage their accepting responsibility for

war memorials and recognising the need to undertake repair and restoration work.

4. To build a greater understanding of war memorial heritage and raise awareness of the issues surrounding war memorial conservation.

BRANCH SUBSCRIPTIONS

My apologies to you all for I got it all wrong in last month's newsletter, when I said that your total subscription was £10.00 - £5.00 for Association Subscriptions and £5.00 for Branch Subscriptions. I must have been drunk when I typed that out for of course, your Association subscriptions are £10.00 and Branch Subscriptions are £5.00 making a total of £15.00. If anyone has already sent a cheque to the Branch Treasurer for £10.00, then I'm sorry, but you'll have to send him another fiver. My thanks to Colin Clarke of Oulton Broad, Lowestoft, for bringing this mistake to my attention.

So please remember that your Branch Subscriptions are due on 1st February and this year, your total subscription is £15.00 that is £10.00 Association Subscription and £5.00 Branch Subscription. Please make your cheques out to The Birmingham Branch, RAF Regiment Association and send them to **THE BRANCH TREASURER** Tom Magee and **NOT** to me and please pay them now.

NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTIONS

I have a list of members of other branches who have asked to receive Birmingham Branch newsletters. The Subscription for this service is now £7.00 per year. So would those other branch members 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. My sincere thanks to those members who have already paid up.

BRANCH SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

Fred and Edith Ringham organise lunchtime socials at 12.00 noon approximately at the Windermere Club. These events are very popular each month as many of our members appreciate the benefits of meeting in the daylight hours. The Windermere Club is located in Wake Green Road, Moseley, Birmingham, at the corner

of Wake Green Road and Windermere Road. It is on several bus routes including the Numbers 1 and 1A bus, which will drop you right outside the Club and should be fairly easy to get to for those of our members who live within the Birmingham conurbation. If you would like to know more about them, give Fred and Edith a call on 01564 824 221 and come along for a good old natter, swing the lamps, have a few drinks and hopefully, get the missus to drive you home.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

The RAF Regiment Memorial Maintenance Team

It's not very often that I pay tribute to the work that the RAF Regiment Memorial Maintenance Team (RAFRMMT) carries out, in looking after the maintenance and development of the RAF Regiment Memorial Garden.

It's a long title that they have for such a small team, for it's not very well known that the Memorial Maintenance Team consists of just three men. Ron Sharp, the Birmingham Branch Chairman, Fred Ringham, the Birmingham Branch Vice-Chairman and Ralph Dean, a Birmingham Branch member.

When the RAF Regiment first took over the RAF Regiment Memorial Garden from the Birmingham Branch, on their behalf, we tried very hard to recruit new members of the Team from other branches, but sadly without success. So it is left to these Birmingham Branch members to carry out the work. Of course, if the Maintenance Team needs assistance then the Birmingham Branch will provide it but in the main, Ron, Fred and Ralph soldier on by themselves. Again of course, ever since the Birmingham Branch decided to set up and completed our project to establish the RAF Regiment Memorial and Garden, we have always carried out this work. So in reality, the situation has not really changed, but if any member of any other branch would like to lend a hand, they will be more than welcome to join the MM Team.

The main duties of the Maintenance Team are to keep the Garden looking neat and tidy, especially before major events at the National Memorial Arboretum, either RAF Regiment events or other events such as last year's Dedication of the new Armed Forces Memorial.

Cutting the grass of such a large area is a major part of their work, particularly when it

comes to getting rid of the grass cuttings. These have to be placed in a one-ton builder's bag, previously placed in the boot of Fred's car otherwise they would never be able to lift it. Fred then has to drive his car – over some very rough ground – for three-quarters of a mile to a dumping area. This at times means three journeys backwards and forwards, to get rid of all the cuttings. As the NMA gardeners do not collect up grass-cuttings when they cut the rest of the NMA grass, grass-cuttings are not a problem for them for they leave them scattered all over the place. But, until the Team protested at this impossible and somewhat idiotic idea, a member of the NMA staff had told them that they would have to take this huge quantity of grass-cuttings home. However, sanity prevailed and a grass-cutting dump was provided.

Another particular responsibility of Ron's as he lives just six miles from the NMA, is that of when required, the raising and lowering of the RAF Ensign and the Union Flag. This can be a particularly important job especially when sadly the flags need to be flown at half-mast.

The Team have been valiantly striving to keep the four corner plots clear of weed and grass growth but it has been and is, an impossible task to successfully complete and maintain for so few people. So after a long discussion with us at one of our Branch Meetings, the Team decided to separate the corner plots from the main area, by installing a physical barrier.

To further that aim, their latest project has been that of ordering, supplying and digging into position, heavy, chemically treated, beams and corner posts. These will delineate the four corner garden plots, for without these beams it will be impossible to keep the grass from the main area growing into the corner plots. Two corner plots have been completed, the other two corner plots have the beams placed in position but they need to be dug in and secured.

When this job is finished, their next job will be stain all this woodwork with a green preservative, not so much as to preserve the wood for as I have said, they have already been chemically pressure treated, but to enhance their appearance. After that, the Team intend to lay a plastic membrane over the soil in the corner plots to prevent future weed growth, and then to refill the corner plots with bark. Altogether this is quite a job for they are not getting any younger, but

when it is completed, their work in the Garden will be so much easier.

Another project will be that of paving the concrete that the Memorial is set in, with decorative stone, instead of having it grey-painted for it will give it a much better appearance and should be virtually maintenance-free. At the moment, to keep this area looking good, Ron regularly repaints it.

Ron is also investigating the possibility of installing some sort of fitting to secure wreaths to the Memorial, for with the perennial winds that blow over the Garden, securing wreaths to the Memorial is always a problem. So as you can see, the RAF Regiment Memorial Maintenance Team has a very busy schedule to keep and they deserve all our thanks.

However, we would like to recruit other Association members to the Team, so if any of our members - particularly younger members - would like to lend a hand by joining the Team, give Ron a call. His telephone number is on the back of these newsletters, and as now Ron has also joined the internet revolution and has an internet address, you can also get him by e-mail at <mgtl@ronsharp.orangehome.co.uk>.

Future Events at the NMA

Sun 27th January 2008

Holocaust Memorial Day Service. The National Memorial Arboretum (NMA) will host a Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) remembrance event in the Chapel. The event will commemorate the 63rd Anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Friday 1st February 2008

The Birmingham Branch will be celebrating the 66th Anniversary of the RAF Regiment on Friday 1st February at 11.30 a.m. with a short Service in the RAF Regiment Memorial Garden. This will give everyone the opportunity to visit the Chapel first if they so wish, to listen to the recorded message. A wreath laying ceremony will follow the Service. Everyone is welcome to join us. For further information contact the Birmingham Branch Secretary on 0121 608 3791.

Saturday 29th March 2008

The Fisgard Association. Re-dedication of the Association's memorial plaque and tree to all ex-Royal Navy Artificer Apprentices. Time:

11.00 am. Venue: Millennium Chapel.
Contact: Mr Des Goodwin - Tel: 02392 472384.

Saturday 5th April 2008

The Birmingham Branch will be celebrating the 7th Anniversary of the Dedication of the RAF Regiment Memorial on Saturday 5th April 2008, at 11.30 a.m. with a short Service in the RAF Regiment Memorial Garden.

This will give everyone the opportunity to visit the Chapel first if they so wish to listen to the recorded message. A wreath laying ceremony will follow the Service. Everyone is welcome to join us. For further information contact the Birmingham Branch Secretary on 0121 608 3791.

Friday 25th April 2008

Anzac Day Service to mark the first landing of Australian and New Zealand troops at Gallipoli in 1915. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday 10th May 2008

Palestine Veterans Association Service. A combined event with Palestine Police and Palestine Veterans Association. To commemorate 60th anniversary of withdrawal from Palestine. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday 17th May 2008

Civil Defence Event to commemorate the 40th anniversary of the stand-down of the Civil Defence Corps and the Auxiliary Fire Service. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

The Eleventh Hussars Old Comrades - dedication of new 11th Hussars Memorial. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday 24th May 2008

Royal Military Police – remembrance event. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01 283 792 333.

Sunday 1st June 2008

Royal Marines Association – Service. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday 7th June 2008

Royal Military Police – remembrance event. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Sunday, 15th June, 2008

RAF Boy Entrants Association. Relatives of deceased members to an act of remembrance in

the Chapel and at the Memorial. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Thursday 27th June 2008

Veterans Awareness Day. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Sunday 29th June 2008

National Service Veterans Day – annual service and parade. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday 5th July 2008

Royal Artillery Association. Remembrance event -Annual Service. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Saturday, 27th September 2008

HMS Bulwark, Albion & Centaur Association Chapel service and on-site dedication ceremony for tree and new plinth. Time: 11.15 am. Venue: Millennium Chapel and on-site at the Royal Naval Review. Contact: Mr. John Truscott - Tel: 02392 431150.

What a sad, sad, sick society

What a sad, sad, sick society we have become. When I read the following article it almost made me feel physically sick. How anyone could behave in such a disgusting way beggars belief. Admiral Boyce was quite right when he said these people should be “named and shamed” for they are not fit to live in a civilised society. Whatever anyone’s view of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, how anyone could treat disabled people in such a terrible manner is deplorable. We have members all over the UK. Does anyone in the Leatherhead area know any of these people? If they do, I hope they tell them what they are – disgusting and unfit to be considered as civilised. And who do they think our troops are fighting for? Men on Mars? They are brave men fighting to keep people like these vermin in safety. In my opinion, if we are serious about fulfilling the Military Covenant, the local council should when required, close the pool to the public and offer it as a private facility to Headley Court.

Disabled veterans jeered at swimming pool

**Published in the Daily Telegraph on 23 Nov 07.
By T Harding, L Cockcroft and B Carlin**

Injured soldiers who lost their limbs fighting for their country have been driven from a swimming pool training session by jeering members of the public. The men, injured during

tours in Iraq and Afghanistan, were taking part in a rehabilitation session at a leisure centre, when two women demanded they be removed from the pool. They claimed that the soldiers "hadn't paid" and might scare the children. The incident has sparked widespread condemnation. Admiral Lord Boyce, a former head of the Armed Forces, said last night the women should be "named and shamed. These people are beneath contempt and everything should be done to get their names and publish them in the press," he said. "It is contemptible that people who have given up their limbs for their country should be so abused when they are trying to get fit again."

It comes after calls for the public to do more to welcome home troops back from tours of duty and to recognise the bravery of those fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan. The unpleasant scenes broke out at Leatherhead Leisure Centre in Surrey when the wounded veterans, who are at Headley Court Military Hospital, had to use the 25-metre public pool because the hydro-pool at the defence rehabilitation centre is not big enough for swimming.

The servicemen were about to begin their weekly swimming therapy in closed-off lanes when they were verbally abused by the swimmers.

One woman in her 30s was said to be infuriated by the lane closures saying the soldiers did not deserve to be there when she had paid. It was also reported that others complained that limbless servicemen were scaring children at the centre. The atmosphere was said to be so tense that the soldiers' instructors removed them. Charles Murrin, 79, a Navy veteran who saw the incident, said: "The woman said the men do not deserve to be in there and that she pays to come in the pool and they don't. I spoke to the instructor in the changing room afterwards and he was livid." It is not the first time that Headley Court neighbours have been accused of poor behaviour. There was uproar earlier this year after residents objected to planning permission to convert a home into a six-suite hostel for injured soldiers' families to stay in. The local council later approved the building work.

A Ministry of Defence spokesman said: "We are disappointed that a small number of people objected to the closure of swimming lanes so that patients of Headley Court could use them." The incident comes weeks after the Help For Heroes appeal was launched to raise £5 million to build a full-size pool and gym at the centre.

The Daily Telegraph has learned that Labour will today aim to repair its battered reputation with the Armed Forces by offering all military veterans priority NHS treatment,

The concession, ordered by the Health Secretary, Alan Johnson, will be available to the estimated 4.8 million ex-servicemen and women, sources said last night.

Priority Treatment for Veterans

Veterans will benefit from priority health treatment from a new NHS directive to extend fast-track access for conditions related to their military service, says The Royal British Legion. The Legion also welcomes the launch of community-based pilot schemes to treat veterans with mental health problems. Alan Johnson, the Health Secretary, and Veterans Minister Derek Twigg announced last month that GPs and Primary Care Trusts across England will be instructed to deliver on their existing obligation to provide priority treatment to war pensioners for illnesses or injuries which led to their pension. Priority treatment will also be extended to veterans who are not in receipt of a war pension, but who suspect they have a medical condition related to their Armed Forces service.

Recent research by the Legion indicates that only 11% of war pensioners who are presently entitled to priority treatment of their Service-related condition are actually getting it under the NHS. An IPSOS-Mori poll of war pensioners conducted on behalf of the Legion also found that only 3% were asked by NHS health care providers if they were war pensioners. The announcement is an important breakthrough in the Legion's national campaign to Honour the Covenant, launched in mid-September, which called for the Government to deliver on its obligation of priority treatment for war pensioners.

"We're delighted," said Chris Simpkins, Director General of the Legion. "This is a major gain in our campaign to Honour the Covenant, and welcome news for veterans and pensioners. We'll be working with the NHS to improve awareness of priority treatment among health care providers and veterans and to monitor the impact of this announcement in providing actual delivery in the clinical setting. We'll also be calling upon members of the serving and ex-Service community to hold the Government to this commitment."

He also said: "It is impossible to say with any certainty how many veterans would be affected by this change because there are many, many veterans who require treatment for conditions resulting from their service, but who don't receive a war pension. This is good for them, but it's also good for war pensioners who aren't getting the priority treatment which they're entitled to receive. There are presently 170,000 war pensioners entitled to receive priority NHS treatment. Last month's announcement will extend the arrangements to any of the country's 5 million veterans whose conditions are suspected of being due to service.

CORRESPONDENCE

In last November's newsletter, I published an article about the deplorable attitude of two Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), who made no attempt to rescue a drowning boy and just stood by watching the incident. One of our members Jim Davies of Middlewich, Cheshire, has sent me the following letter about this incident.

JIM DAVIES OF MIDDLEWYCH, CHESHIRE

Dear Malcolm. Your November newsletter story about the death of Jordon Lyon, aged 10, who drowned in a pond on May 3rd, after jumping in to try to help his stepsister Bethany Ganderton aged eight, is all to do with our perverted view of health and safety. Like you Malcolm, I was so angry that I telephoned my son. He is now a teacher but in the late 1970s, he was a policeman in Warrington. We talked about his training for, as a young man, he did not like going to the swimming pool and could not swim. But in the Police Service, as a part of his training, he had to learn to swim and was taught life-saving too. He was told that if he failed to pass this part of his course, he would be failed and would not be able to become a policeman. So what is going on in our country today?

If anyone was passing that lake at the time of the incident where Jordon lost his life, they would have jumped in to save him. Even if it was a cat or dog they would have tried, for surely, it's a human reaction to try to save life. Anyone in their right mind would try. It's a sad reflection on our society when members of the "emergency services" are told not to try to save lives. I noticed that it was the older policeman who dived

in to attempt a rescue. He was obviously a member of the old school.

While I'm on about safety, what about Private Gordon Gentles who sacrificed his life in Basrah, Iraq, due to equipment not being fitted to his vehicle and no one of course was being held responsible in the Ministry of Defence? A roadside bomb killed him, because his Landrover was not fitted with equipment to jam radio signals that could detonate roadside bombs. There's no health and safety for our troops. They do not say, "I'm not taking that Landrover out until it is fit for the job". They just get on with it. I am so proud of the young men and women who serve in our Armed Forces today. They have the training but they do not have the right equipment for the job.

Some time ago we went out to the USA to visit our family. I asked my brother-in-law what he thought of the war in Vietnam. His reply was brief and to the point. Economics, he replied. While we have troops fighting in Vietnam, it keeps people in work. It's sad but true. Who makes the equipment for our troops? Because we hear that the equipment they have are out of date. If they can supply the latest aircraft for Saudi Arabia, why can't they supply the latest equipment to our fighting men and women? Most people my age have the same opinion, we should look after our own but that's me moaning.

However I did hear Terry Wogan read out a letter from a Regiment SAC serving in Afghanistan saying that they enjoyed hearing about home on the BBC. He said there were two Regiment squadrons there, I think he said 17 and 26 Field Squadrons, who were responsible for security at Kandahar Airport, which I believe is the biggest in the world. All the best. Moaning Jim Davies.

As I have said above Jim, we can't afford to equip the troops properly 'cos the government throw too much money away.

The New RAF Regiment Association website - www.rafregt.org.uk

If you have access to the Internet and haven't recently visited our Association website, you should do so as soon as possible at www.rafregt.org.uk for it has been significantly updated and improved. The following message from Air Commodore Steven Abbott who is the Commandant General and the President of our Association, is taken from the new website.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

***Air Commodore Steven Abbott CBE MPhil BA
RAF, Commandant General and President RAF
Regiment Association***

I am fortunate that my appointment as Commandant General Royal Air Force Regiment has allowed me to keep in touch with Association colleagues and friends and am delighted to be able to contribute to this splendid new website. I am privileged to hold not only the appointment of Commandant General but also President of the Association. Getting here has been a journey that may be far longer than some of you may appreciate. I have enjoyed 33 years service in the Royal Air Force Regiment, but in addition I was born into our Corps and grew up within it. My father, himself an Association member, served for 33 years, retiring in 1982. I mention this only to assure you that I am determined that, whatever the future holds for the Armed Forces of this country, the Corps will continue to play its distinctive, vital and thankfully well-recognised role in the defence of our airfields and installations just as it did when many of you served. We are a family; and the Association, which owes so much to the determined efforts of my predecessor, Air Commodore Drissell, has a vital part to play in ensuring that such a widely-dispersed family stays in touch. The past is behind us and I ask that all of you play your part in ensuring that we learn from it and make the most of the fine organisation we now have and that you give your full support to its officials. As you might expect there is more. The Corps is currently engaged in bitter combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Our contribution is immense and widely recognised. But, while the award of a Military Cross to Flight Lieutenant Matt Carter is particular recognition of the professionalism and sheer courage we instil in all of our people, the deaths of young Gunners killed in action is a reminder, if it is needed, of the intensity of the operations. Our hearts go out to the families of those killed and – we must never forget - those wounded as well.

At a more mundane, but still important, level the operational pressure and tempo takes its toll of our people, particularly the junior gunners. Inevitably, many leave and recruiting their replacements in modern Britain is a challenge. This is where each of you can play a part by keeping the Corps in the public eye in any way you can, wherever and whenever opportunity presents itself; anything, however small, helps.

For my part I look forward to meeting as many of you as I can during my tenure as Commandant General and your President, and sharing your experiences and memories. I am convinced that if we lose sight of where we came from and the experiences that shaped us, we have no hope of knowing where we are going. Per Ardua.

The Old Association Website

However, I just cannot understand why the old Association of the RAF Regiment website is still on the internet – it used to be headed with the title “*The Association of the RAF Regiment – incorporating the RAF Regiment Association and the RAF Regiment (Comrades) Association*”. It is now headed “***The RAF Regiment Association – incorporating the RAF Regiment Association and the RAF Regiment (Comrades) Association***”. Our new RAF Regiment Association came into existence on 1st April 2006 – that’s nearly two years ago and yet, the non-existent Association of the RAF Regiment still has a confusing website. Why is this? If anyone is seeking to join the RAF Regiment Association and types into a search engine the words, RAF Regiment Association, then the first entry that comes up is the old Association of the RAF Regiment website (although it is now headed The RAF Regiment Association). The second and third entries that come up relate to two branches of the old Association of the RAF Regiment too. It must make it very confusing for anyone wishing to join the RAF Regiment Association, who is not aware that this site is not the official RAF Regiment Association website. Can anyone explain why this confusing situation still exists?

“OUR ALBERT”, MODELMAKER EXTRAORDINAIRE

Many of you may not know that Albert Worton who in spite of a recent illness, is still going strong, made all of our “Branch Silver” models in brass that attract so much interest and admiration at our exhibitions, but later members may not know that in the early days of the Birmingham Branch, Albert made many other models in wood, for the Branch to use as raffle prizes and for us to auction in aid of Branch funds. One of these was a superb wooden model Land Rover in RAF Regiment colours and signage. This model that was about twelve inches long and superbly made was auctioned off and bought by Birmingham Branch member Squadron Leader “Mick” Warren. “Mick” as many of our

longer members know, was the National Secretary of the very first RAF Regiment Association.

I've often thought that "Mick" should be honoured for all his work in getting the first RAF Regiment Association up and running, by making his a Vice-President of our new RAF Regiment Association. Perhaps this could still happen.

However, some time after "Mick" purchased this model, he presented it to Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and in a recent telephone call to "Mick", he told me that if any of our members are ever in North Yorkshire and would like to see this model, look him up and he will take you to see it. Not only that, he will introduce you to the local Mayor too as the model is on display – in a glass case - in Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Town Hall. Well done "Mick".

Well that's all for now, keep smiling and a Happy New Year to you all.

Malcolm B

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



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Monday 21st Jan	2008	Branch Social Lunch	Monday 17 th March	2008	Branch Social Lunch Sat
Friday 1st February	2008	66th Anniv RAF Regt	15 th –Sun 30 th Mar	2008	Battle of Meiktila 1945
Friday 1 st February	2008	Anniv Service at NMA	Saturday 5th April	2008	7th Ann Ded of Mem.1
Friday 1st February	2008	Branch Subs Due	Tuesday 8 th April	2008	Pres New 63 Sqdn Standard
Friday 8 th February	2008	Officers Form.n Dinn	Thursday 10 th April	2008	Branch Night
Thursday 14 th February	2008	Branch AGM	Monday 21 st April	2008	Branch Social Lunch
Monday 18 th February	2008	Branch Social Lunch	Wednesday 23 rd April	2008	St George's Day
Saturday 1 st March	2008	St David's Day	Sunday 27 th April	2008	ANZAC Day Cannock
Thursday 13 th March	2008	Branch Night	Sunday 4 th May	2008	Service at Runnymede
			Thursday 8 th May	2008	Branch Night
			Friday 9 th May	2008	GBAD Stds Laying Up
			Sunday 11 th May	2008	Reded.n RAF Regt Chapel
			Friday 16 th May	2008	Officers Din Club Recep
			Monday 19 th May	2008	Branch Social Lunch
			Sunday 25 th May	2008	Tower of London Parade
			Sunday 1 st June	2008	Cosford Air Show
			Friday 11 th July	2008	New Regt Queen's Colour

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