



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

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The Best of the Best

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

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

**NEWSLETTER NO: 225
MARCH 2008**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 225 MARCH 2008

Dear Readers.

At this month's Branch Meeting, we co-opted Roy Thomas as Assistant Social Secretary. Roy has been keen to offer his services to the Committee but felt that he was lacking in committee experience. Your Committee felt that with the celebration of the 20th Anniversary of the Birmingham Branch coming up in June, this would be an excellent opportunity for him to gain some experience. With this in mind, Roy has accepted the challenge and will be organizing our 20th Anniversary Celebration Dinner on the nearest Saturday to 16th June. Welcome to the Committee Roy.

Branch Appeal

Don't forget the appeal your Branch Committee wish to make to you all. We would like to send "goodies" to the lads in Selly Oak Hospital. I've spoken to Major Andy Maine on the subject and he told me that that what the lads would like are ordinary things such as crisps, biscuits, sweets, chocolates and quiz books.

Your Branch Committee has agreed to make a donation from Branch funds and at this month's Branch Meeting, we voted to give £200.00 this year, to be given in four blocks of £50.00 each. We would like you all to consider supporting this appeal. If any of you would like to contribute items to this appeal, you can either take them directly to Selly Oak Hospital and ask for Major Andy Maine, or post them in a parcel to Major A Maine RLC, RCDM Ward S4, Selly Oak Hospital, Raddlebarn Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6JD. We would also like to record our appreciation for the help that our local branch of Waitrose Supermarkets is giving to them, for we understand that they supply the families apartments at the hospital with everything needed, from food to cleaning materials. Well done the Waitrose chain.

ASSOCIATION RE-UNION AND AGM

Friday 3rd – Monday 6th October 2008

This year's Reunion and AGM will be held on the weekend Friday 3rd to Monday 6th October at the Grand Burstin Hotel, The Harbour, Folkestone, CT20 1TX, telephone number 0871 220 0048.

The Grand Burstin Hotel that towers over Folkestone's attractive harbour, features live entertainment every evening. This family hotel is renowned as one of UK's top entertainment hotels, so that you can relax, dine in style and be entertained all under one roof. With 481 en-suite rooms, many with sea views it is ideal for holidays, short breaks and weekends away! The hotel is ideally located for either relaxing or exploring the many nearby attractions including the adjacent Rotunda Amusement Park. The hotel offers comfortable accommodation, good traditional food and fabulous nightly entertainment. Hotel facilities include two bars, two restaurants, complimentary car parking and the Pavilion Leisure Club which comprises a heated indoor swimming pool, gym, sauna and solarium. The hotel's Leisure Club with its 12 metre indoor heated pool, sauna and solarium, allows you the chance to relax. There is also a fully equipped gymnasium, with state of the art equipment for those who still want to keep toned up. There is a charge however for using the leisure facilities. There is also a games room and games arcade.



The hotel offers an ideal base from which to take day trips to France as the hotel arranges transport across the channel. So if you fancy a day trip to Normandy, Bruges or Le Touquet, or

you are just stocking up on your duty paid, then the Grand Bustin Hotel is the ideal place to stay. Folkestone, Hythe and Romney Marsh offer lots of exciting places to visit and lots to do, including boat trips, castles to explore, nature walks, art galleries, wild animal parks, racecourses and many more. The Grand Burstin Hotel guests enjoy discounts at several local attractions, just ask at reception for more details.

St GEORGE'S DAY (23RD APRIL)

CHURCH SERVICE AND PARADE

SUNDAY 20TH APRIL 2004 AT 11.00 A.M.

The Royal Society of St George, Birmingham Branch, is pleased to invite our members to their Church Service in celebration of St George's Day. This will take place on Sunday 20th April 2008 at St Paul's Church, St Paul's Square, Birmingham, at 11.00 hours. The Service will be followed by a march past of ex-service personnel and cadets in the Churchyard,

The Service will be attended by the Lord Mayor of Birmingham, Councillor Randal Brew OBE, together with the Lady Mayoress. The Mayor of Solihull, Councillor Gary Allport ACIS would normally attend but he has a previous invitation to the St George's Day Service at St Alphege Church, Solihull and so is unable to attend this year. This year the Mayor of Sandwell Councillor Gurcharan Singh Sidhu and the Chief Constable of the West Midlands Sir Paul Scott-Lee will also be attending. Refreshments will be served inside the church at the completion of the proceedings. It is hoped that we will be able to support this celebration of England's National Day.

ANZAC DAY (25TH APRIL)

CANNOCK CHASE PARADE

SUNDAY 27TH APRIL 2008

Ceremonies have been held around the world every year on Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Day to honour the Australian and New Zealand war dead since the bloody Gallipoli campaign in 1915. The annual ANZAC parade will be held on Sunday 24th April at Cannock Chase War Memorial. Assemble at the Memorial at 10.00 hours (for the parade to start at 10.15 hours) at the War Cemetery, Brocton. The parade will march to the Cemetery where the Service will commence at 10.45 hours. This is the largest service held outside Australia and New Zealand with about 150 Standards from

all over the country normally being paraded. After the Service, everyone is invited to Cannock Royal British Legion where a buffet will be laid on. The ANZAC Parade is held to commemorate the 1916 Gallipoli Campaign where the Australian & New Zealand Army Corps together with British forces, fought in Turkey to gain essential supply routes between the Mediterranean and the Russian Front. Each year attracts an impressive turnout and usually there are about 120 Royal British Legion Standard Bearers on parade, together with other association Standards. All members of ex-service associations are invited to attend and are invited to parade their Standards. Local Air Training Corps cadets help with parking and ushering duties and a Book of Condolences is usually passed around the dignitaries for them to sign. The dignitaries normally include the High Commissioners of New Zealand, Australia, Canada and the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire. Full details from K. Tyler. Telephone number 01543 500677.

COSFORD AIR SHOW

SUNDAY 1ST JUNE 2008

DCAE Cosford Air Show is the Midlands premier air event. The world-famous Royal Air Force Aerobatics Team - The Red Arrows – can be seen at the Show along with aircraft from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Current combat aircraft from the RAF, along with international participants, are also being lined up.

There will be non-stop entertainment on the ground with hundreds of exhibits, colourful stalls and trade stands, military demonstrations and road shows – plus food, craft fair, bands, children's entertainment and much more. All of this makes the air show an attractive day out for all ages and interests from aviation enthusiasts to families seeking a fun day out.

The RAF Museum's full facilities, including the new National Cold War Exhibition, will be open which further enhances the breadth of entertainment and interest provided by the Air Show. The RAF Museum Cosford is served by a regular train service to a station alongside the RAF base and combined rail and admission tickets can be purchased from Arriva Trains Wales. There is also ample free car parking available on the airfield on the day.

The DCAE Cosford Air Show is authorised by the Air Force Board Standing Committee and all net proceeds are distributed to

the Royal Air Force Benevolent Fund, the Royal Air Forces Association and to local charities supported by DCAE Cosford.

On Thursday 31st January, some of you may have seen on television, the funeral of a RAF World War Two hero, Squadron Leader “Jimmie” James and may have noticed that his burial party was drawn from the RAF Regiment. Although “Jimmie”, during that war, served with the Royal Air Force, after the war he served as a RAF Regiment officer at RAF Honington.

Great escaper dies

He was one of the real-life Great Escape heroes – and on 31st January RAF Honington honoured Jimmy James MC at a military funeral. Squadron Leader Bertram 'Jimmy' James, who was awarded the Military Cross for his part in the great escape from Stalag Luft III in 1944, was buried in Ludlow, Shropshire, yesterday, with personnel from RAF Honington acting as pall bearers and ushers at the service. A funeral service, held at St Peter's Catholic Church in Ludlow, Shropshire, and led by Father Jim Robinson, included participation from service personnel stationed across the UK. The pallbearer party of RAF Regiment Gunners came from RAF Honington in Suffolk, while the route lining party were from the Defence College of Aeronautical Engineering in Cosford.

Fittingly, Squadron Leader James, known as 'Jimmy', left the church for the very last time to the theme tune of the Great Escape before being laid to rest in Ludlow's cemetery. His link to No 9 Squadron was re-affirmed by a four ship GR4 Tornado 'Missing Man' formation flypast, the poignant aerial manoeuvre to symbolise the loss of a comrade. During World War Two, Squadron Leader James served as a pilot in 9 Squadron, flying Wellington bombers out of RAF Honington.

A good friend of 'Jimmy', Howard Tuck, who accompanied him on many visits back to Germany and Poland, said: "Quite simply, Jimmy was a legend. In years to come when we think about the war years, we will reflect on men like Jimmy and their deeds. He was very much part of the RAF family and loved nothing more than sharing a beer and a few laughs in the bar."

Jimmy, who died recently aged 92, joined the RAF after seeing an advertisement for aircrew while he was working in Vancouver, Canada. On completing his flying training in April 1940, he

was posted to No 9 Squadron operating Wellington Bombers from RAF Honington in Suffolk. On the night of 5 June 1940, his Wellington was hit by anti-aircraft fire 20 kilometres south of Rotterdam. Following capture and interrogation at the hands of the Luftwaffe and with a number of brave escape attempts thwarted, in April 1942, he ended up in the new 'model' Prisoner of War (PoW) camp, Stalag Luft III, near Zagan in Poland,. It was to become the most notorious PoW camp of WWII and the setting for an escape attempt, later named the 'Great Escape'.

He wasted no time digging the first RAF escape tunnel of the war. Squadron Leader James was in charge of getting rid of the earth dug from escape tunnels. At the centre of the planning team, Jimmy entered the tunnel via hut 104 in March 1944 with his escape partner, a young Greek Spitfire pilot. Battling the bitterly cold weather, their best chance was to get a train to Prague but they were recaptured in the booking hall at Hirschberg. Again, Jimmy's escape attempt was in vain. 76 of his comrades made it through the tunnel, much to the fury of Hitler who demanded that all Allied Officers were to be shot upon recapture. Only three prisoners were successful and made it home. 50 of the 76 escapees were shot by the Gestapo. The film “The Great Escape” was based on the escape attempt.

The brutal murder of the prisoners sent shock waves across the PoW world. Although Jimmy was incredibly lucky not to have been chosen for execution, he endured some horrific treatment at the hands of his captors in the subsequent months but always maintained that his contribution to the war effort was his 'refusal to accept incarceration'. Squadron Leader James was eventually sent to the Sachsenhausen concentration camp, from which he tunnelled his way out, only to be caught 14 days later. He was then moved around several concentration camps before being liberated in May 1945. By the end of WWII, Jimmy had made 13 tunnel escapes. Following the end of the war, Jimmy was awarded the Military Cross, Mentioned in Dispatches and took a regular commission in the RAF, transferring into the RAF Regiment in 1953, and served at RAF Honington.

He served with the RAF until 1958 when he joined the diplomatic service and continued with them until 1975. Keen to keep the memory

of his comrades alive, he gave talks around the country on his experiences and was also President of 'Project 104'. This charitable venture was established to build a replica of hut 104 as a memorial to all the Allied Service personnel who lost their lives and to act as an education centre for the small museum built at the site; the project remains ongoing. He died on 18th January at the age of 92. Jimmy's wife of 61 years, Mrs Madge James, was at the service. Summing up her life with him she said: "We were married for 61 years and he was the finest, most gentle man anybody could know. For everyone else he was Squadron Leader Jimmy James the Great Escaper, but for me he was simply my Jimmy - **we will never see a man like him again.**"

BRANCH SUBSCRIPTIONS

Association subscriptions are £10.00 and Branch Subscriptions are £5.00 making a total of £15.00. Please remember that your Branch Subscriptions were due on 1st February so if you have not yet paid – **YOU ARE LATE** - this year, your total subscription is £15.00 that is £10.00 Association Subscription and £5.00 Branch Subscription. Please make your cheques out now 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 have been organising lunchtime socials at the Windermere Club for some time now but unfortunately, due to Edith's ill-health, for the time being they are unable to continue organising these popular events. Until someone else steps forward to take

on this role, the Monday Social Lunches are suspended.

I'm sure that someone will come forward but until then, as of now, there will be no further social lunchtimes organised. Watch this space and I'm sure we'll have some good news soon. In the meantime, we all hope that Edith's problem will soon be resolved. Our thanks to Fred and Edith for all their hard work and enthusiasm.

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY

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

Death Notices:

BOND Thomas. Former Gnd and RAF Regt Gnr, Thomas Bond of Birmingham, born 8 Apr 21, died on 7 Jan 08 aged 86. He enlisted in May 41 and joined 729 Gnd Def Flt, 5 Gp, at RAF Waddington. He transferred to RAF Regt on its formation in 1942 and the Flt was renumbered 2729 Sqn RAF Regt. Served on 2729 Sqn throughout WWII. He participated in Op OVERLORD and landed in Normandy in mid-Jun 44. He was discharged on 8 Jul 46.

He was pre-deceased by wife, Mariette, whom he met during his wartime service in Belgium and married at War's end. The funeral service was held on 22 Jan 08 in the Chapel at Woodlands Cemetery, Birmingham, followed by the interment at the cemetery.

The Birmingham Branch Standard Bearer and several other members of the Branch attended. The Corps offers its sincere condolences to the surviving family members.

JAMES Bertram Arthur (Jimmy), MC Former RAF GD and RAF Regt offr, born 17 Apr 15 and died 18 Jan 08, aged 92. Commissioned 1 May 39. Aircrew flt Lt of IX Sqn RAF operating from RAF Honington, he was shot down south of Rotterdam on 5 Jun 40 and parachuted to safety.

Captured and eventually transferred to Stalag Luft III prison camp near Sagan in Poland, he was No39 in the infamous Great Escape that resulted in 50 of the 76 escapers being shot by the Gestapo. He transferred to the RAF Regt after the War and retired, as a Sqn Ldr, on 11 Jun 58. The military funeral was held at St Peter's RC Church,

Henley Road, Ludlow, at 14.00 on Thu 31 Jan 08. Dress for serving personnel was No1HD with medals and black armbands. Family flowers only were requested but donations in lieu may be made to The Hut 104 Project (Stalag Luft III) or the Medical Missionaries of Mary, via the Funeral Directors, Graham Heiron, The Wheelwrights Shop, Bromfield, Ludlow, SY8 2JR (Tel 01584 856273). The Corps offers its sincere condolences to his wife, Madge, and the family.

HOUGHTON. Former RAF Regt Sgt, Vic Houghton, born 6 Sep 32, died on 15 Feb 08 aged 75. Joined 2605 (County of Warwick) Sqn RAuxAF Regt initially in Apr 50, but enlisted in the regular RAF in Nov that year. Served with 22 (LAA) Sqn RAF Regt (51-53) before demobilising from RAF Sutton Coldfield in Nov 53, to rejoin 2605 Sqn RAuxAF Regt. He re-joined the regular RAF in Sep 55 and served on nine RAF Regt sqns (Nos 48, 16, 34, 26, 48, 1, 63, 26, 15) and at RAF Yatesbury, CGDS St Athan, and RAF Locking from where he retired. The funeral was held on 25 Feb at 1200 hrs in St Johns Church, Church Street, Highbridge, Somerset (junction of Church Street A38 and Burnham Road).

Family flowers only but donations, if required, may be made to St Margaret's Hospice and sent to the Funeral Directors, R Millard & Son at 6 Springfield Road, Highbridge, TA9 3AH. His wife, Gill, to whom the Corps extends its sincere condolences, survives him.

GRAY. Former RAF Regt SAC signaller, Stuart Gray was born 30 Jul 35 and died on 16 Feb 08, aged 72. Enlisted Sep 52 and served on 60 (Fd) Sqn RAF Regt at RAF Guetersloh, Gatow and Wunsdorf. Demobilised in Sep 55.

Funeral took place at 1415 on Mon 25 Feb 08 at St Mary's Church, Battle, Kent. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Sally Gray at 38 Norman Close, Battle, Kent, TN33 0BD. Family flowers only but donations, if required, may be made to Cancer Research UK, c/o Jempson & Co. (Funeral Directors), 38 High Street, Battle, TN3 0EE. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to Mrs Gray and the family.

BARWOOD. Former RAF Regt SAC, Duane (Baz) Barwood died as a result of enemy action at the Basrah Contingency Operating Base (COB) in Iraq on 29 Feb 08. He remustered to the MT Trade following a medical downgrading and achieved the rank of Sgt. A highly regarded SNCO, he was detached from RAF Brize Norton

to the COB for an operational tour. Served on 37 Sqn RAF Regt among others. No further details are known at this time. Details of the funeral cannot be predicted until repatriation to the UK has been achieved, but they will be published in a future CPN. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

GENERAL NOTICES:

RAF Regt Fund Membership

The Fund membership stands at around 1500, which is significantly less than the number of both Serving and Retired members. The Fund is established to support the preservation of the good name, history and traditions of the Corps, and also to support members' activities. The Fund Committee's mission in 2008 is to have every member recruit another member. Please help YOUR FUND to achieve its aims for the Corps.

If you are not a member already, why not contact your unit representative (if still serving) or the RAF Regt Fund Sec (Flt Lt Andy Gaskell) or the RAF Regiment Secretary at Honington for a membership form. Membership brings with it the annual subscription for the 6-monthly Centurion journal, rated as one of the best Regimental journals in the British Services.

Centurion Journal - Issue 24 (Spring 2008)

The publication of the next Centurion journal is being delayed to enable coverage of a number of Corps and Jt Service events. It is intended to issue the journal by the end-Mar 08.

Project 104 - The Great Escape Hut

Readers may recall that The Great Escape from Stalag Luft III, at Sagan in Poland, took place on the night of 24 Mar 44. Seventy-six POWs made it outside through a 111 metre tunnel called 'Harry', some 10 metres deep. After the escape was uncovered and the alarm was raised, four prisoners were caught by the tunnel outlet.

A huge manhunt began and only three of the POWs managed to avoid the traps and chases, and the Nazis caught the remaining 73. It was the biggest escape ever from the Sagan camp and, in pursuance of Hitler's personal order - *Sagan Befehl* - 50 of the escapees were executed summarily.

Following a Staff Ride to, among other camps, Stalag Luft III in 2006, a number of RAF personnel from RAF High Wycombe and other stations devised the plan of building a replica of Hut 104, the hut from which the entrance to Great Escape tunnel, 'Harry', was concealed to act as a

further memorial to all those who were POW's at Stalag Luft III and as a major feature for the small, under-funded museum there.

It will be built - hopefully in the autumn of 2008 - at the site of the Great Escape Museum at Sagan. Although over £30,000 has been raised, some £18,000 is still needed. If you would like to contribute to Project 104, donations (made payable to SFAS RAF High Wycombe - with 'Project 104' written on reverse) may be sent to the RAF Regt Secretary who will forward them on to the project Team.

Fund Database Corruption

The RAF Regt Fund Database was corrupted in the New Year and the addresses of all those who advised their changes of address since mid-Dec 07 - 16 Jan 08 may have been lost. The Regt Sec would be grateful if anyone who advised a change would re-email their new address as a double-check. Any inconvenience is regretted.

RAF Regt Fund Subscriptions.

The Direct Debits for the Subscription Year 2007-8 were actioned in mid-Sep 07. Unfortunately, the banks for a variety of reasons rejected over 200 Direct Debits. This has left the RAF Regt Fund with a considerable shortfall on its expected income. Letters and Emails have been issued to all appropriate subscribers and it would be appreciated if those concerned would respond promptly by completing and sending a new application form. Since the new Direct Debits will not now be submitted until Sep 08, a cheque for the forthcoming subscription year will be required.

Service of Thanksgiving: 1 Sqn RAF Regt - 4 Mar 08.

You will be aware that on 1 Sqn's last tour to Basrah, they lost four men Killed in Action: A/Cpl Caulwell, SACs Dunsmore and McFerran, and LAC Beard. It is intended to hold a Service of Thanksgiving for them on Tue 4 Mar 08 at 1100 hrs at St Mary's Church, Bury St Edmunds Suffolk. The Service will be an opportunity for the men of the Sqn to join with the families of our fallen comrades to remember, honour and celebrate their lives and their service with the RAF Regt.

Many of you will have a 1 Sqn connection, have been involved in some way in Op TELIC 9 - 10 or may simply wish to join them; you would all be most welcome, with wives or partners as desired. Dress for serving members will be non-ceremonial day dress, ie No 1 RAF HD without

medals. For civilian members, suit or blazer and Regimental tie, again without medals. There are no ticketing requirements but the Sqn will need some idea of numbers. If you wish to attend please advise 1 Sqn by contacting Plt Off Tom Campbell on 01359 237701 (or if he is unavailable then the Sqn Ord Rm on 01359 237769). RAF Regt Assoc members planning to attend are asked to coordinate their attendance through their respective Branch Secretaries to avoid overloading the system with individual calls.

II Sqn RAF Regt Reunion - 26 Apr 08

Annual reunion at 1930 on Sat 26 Apr 08 in the Constitutional Club, Colerne village. For details, please contact Chris Fiddes on 01761 472587 or Steve Coupe on 01522 788043.

GBAD Sqns Standard Laying-Up - 9 May 08

The outline-planned Church Service for the laying-up of the existing GBAD sqns' Standards at Bury St Edmunds on 9 May is cancelled. The future of the Sqns' numberplates has yet to be resolved with the possible run-on of some sqns in the field role post-GBAD. However, a suitable marking of the demise of the Corps' GBAD capability is still under consideration for a later date.

Bosnia & Herzegovina Commemoration - 22 MAY 08

An official Commemorative Service to mark the withdrawal of UK Forces from Bosnia and Herzegovina will take place at the Armed Forces Memorial, Staffordshire, on Thursday 22 May 2008, and 1000 tickets are available to attend the event. The Service will give thanks to those who served in Bosnia and Herzegovina, marking the outstanding contribution made by UK Forces in bringing stability, security and peace to the country. Tickets are available for the Commemorative Service for veterans of the conflict, and the families and friends of those who lost their lives. An application form can be downloaded from www.veterans-info.uk/bosnia_app.doc or by calling the free ticket line on 0800 169 2277, and each application will receive two tickets.

63 Sqn RAF Regt Standard Presentation

The new Standard presentation for 63 Sqn, planned provisionally for Spring 2008, is deferred to a later date (tbd).

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!

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 Paphos.

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.

Operation BANNER (Northern Ireland) Commemoration - 10 SEP 08

It is proposed to hold a Commemorative Service to mark the end of the Forces' commitment to Operation BANNER in St Paul's Cathedral on Wed 10 Sep 08. Confirmation and further details are awaited.

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.

New Regt History Book - 'Constant Vigilance'.

A new Corps history - 'Constant Vigilance - The RAF Regt in the Burma Campaign' by Dr Nigel Warwick, has been published with a cover price of £25.0. However, the RAF Regt Fund can supply a copy for £20 + P&P. The book has been critically reviewed and is undoubtedly a 'good read' and a 'must' for every Corpsman's bookshelf. The RAF Regt Shop has copies for sale NOW. It is also available on-line at Amazon.com at a competitive price (but more than the Shop with P&P) and the Fund will benefit from all sales, irrespective of where bought.

Regimental Cufflinks:

A new range of quality Silver-Gilt Cufflinks is now available. Made by Collins & Sons, the Crown Jewellers, they are in Sterling Silver Gilt (ie hard gold-plated). They have a chain link fitting with an engravable oval disc. The Special Introductory Price is £47.50 a pair, plus £4.50 P&P& Ins (Special Delivery) within the UK/BFPO. Overseas/Rest of World P&P&Ins will be £8.50. All profits will go to the RAF Regt Museum Refurbishment Fund. A 9ct Gold version will also be available on Special Order (POA, between £240 and £420 depending on fitting). Those requiring further details and an order form should contact the Regt Sec.

Regimental Blazer Buttons:

The RAF Regt Museum is proud to offer for sale sets of exceptionally high quality Regimental Blazer Buttons, also made by the G E Collins & Sons Ltd, the Crown Jeweller. The finish of the buttons is known as 'Dead Gilt & Burnished', which means they are gilded in a matt finish and the highlights are then polished by hand to give a bright polished finish; hence there are two differing and subtle contrasts on the button.

A suitably high quality case is also supplied. A 6+8 button set will cost £67.00 plus £4.50 UK Special Delivery P&P&Ins (per set). Overseas (Europe and Rest-of-World) addresses will incur a P&P&Ins charge of £8.50. If you are interested in obtaining a set or just more details

(incl photo and order form), please contact - ideally by Email - the RAF Regt Sec. Two 6+6 sets (£62.50 + £4.50 P&P&Ins) are still available but will not be repeated. The High Street retail value would be at least twice the cost and they are not to be confused with cheaper versions currently available. Latest tranche now in stock!

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

- 05 Apr – B'ham Branch Commemoration of 7th Ann of Dedication of Memorial in Memorial Garden at NMA Sat 5 Apr.
- 11-14 Apr 08 - RAF Armoured Car Companies Assoc Spring Reunion - Derby.
- 26 Apr 08. II Sqn RAF Regt Reunion - Annual reunion at 1930 on Sat 26 Apr 08 in the Constitutional Club, Colerne village. For details, please contact Chris Fiddes on 01761 472587 or Steve Coupe on 01522 788043.
- 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.
- 18 May 08 - RAF Regt Assoc - Annual Service at the Tower of London.
- 22 May 08 - Bosnia-Herzegovina Commemoration - NMA Alrewas.
- 01 Jun 08 - Centurion journal No25 - Contributions Due Date.
- 28 Jun 08 - RAF Regt Memorial Re-Dedication - NMA Alrewas (Veterans Week)
- 11 Jul 08 - Presentation of new RAF Regt Queen's Colour - RIAT, Fairford
- 10 Sep 08 - Op BANNER Commemoration - St Paul's Cathedral, London (Provisional)
- 19-21 Sep 08 - WOs & SNCOs Assoc Reunion
- 25-27 Sep 08 RAF Regt-USAF SF Exchange Reunion Weekend – Berkshire
- 3rd – 6th Oct 08 - RAF Regt Assoc 2008 Reunion and AGM.
- 17-20 Oct 08 - RAF Armoured Car Assoc Autumn Reunion - Derby.
- 31 Oct 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

- 06 Nov 08 - Garden of Remembrance - Westminster Abbey
- 09 Nov 08 - Remembrance Sunday - Cenotaph, London and nationwide.
- 01 Dec 08 - Centurion Journal No26 - Contributions Due Date.
- 6 Feb 09 - Officers' Corps Formation Dinner - RAF Honington

From the Branch Secretary

You will recall the article on page 15 in last month's newsletter about our usual Service on 1st February, to commemorate the Anniversary of the foundation of our Corps on 1st February 1942. On this occasion we were delighted to be joined by members of the RAF Regiment drawn from 1 Force Protection Wing Headquarters, 3 Squadron RAF Regiment and 504 Squadron, RAuxAF Regiment. There was another article on page 8 of that newsletter published by Jonny Muir on 25th January in the Peterborough Evening Telegraph. He also published the following article on Thursday 21st February.

Troops fly out for action in troubled Afghanistan

After months of preparation, 160 men and three women from RAF Wittering are hours away from beginning a seven-month deployment in Afghanistan. Tasked with protecting Kandahar Airport – 10 miles south-east of the country's second largest city – the force are expected to arrive in ice-cold temperatures of –8C. They will spend their first night in Afghanistan under canvas before moving into accommodation on the airfield. Once acclimatised, their job will be to protect the airfield from mortar and rocket attack, while they will also undertake regular patrols outside the airport's perimeter in the ongoing battle for "hearts and minds".

The Evening Telegraph was invited to talk to the men and women as they made final checks at RAF Wittering yesterday prior to flying out to Kandahar. Spirits were high as the force, which includes the 130-strong 3 Squadron RAF Regiment, 15 members of 1 Force Protection Wing and 18 reservists hailing from five different regiments, posed for photographs.

For Wittering resident Errol Robinson, one of five reservists attached to 504 (County of Nottingham) Regiment, it will be the first time he leaves his 14-month old son Tobias Joshua. He

said: "It's hard, but all I can do is come back safely. My wife Nicola is a sergeant in the RAF so she understands how I feel, and I realise how she feels too."

Meanwhile, Gary Thompson is leaving behind his day job as managing director of Nottingham-based Sherwood Ducting Limited to fight the Taliban in Afghanistan. He said: "I have five daughters, three of whom are at university. I want women in Afghanistan to be given the same opportunity that my daughters have had. It means I can come back and say I have played my part in trying to make that happen." Stamford reservist Andy Ham added: "There's an element of frustration because we want to get on with the job. Everybody is up for it."

Jo Craven, from Halifax, in West Yorkshire, was one of three women to be deployed from RAF Wittering for the current tour of duty yesterday. She said: "I am a clerk and my job is to look after any concerns the men might have. I will also help out with female searches if need be. The biggest fear is always losing one of the lads."

The force only arrived back at RAF Wittering earlier this week following two weeks of leave which allowed the men and women to say goodbye to friends and family. Corporal Lee Nickless, a veteran of campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and Northern Ireland, said: "On leave I was able to visit family in Scotland and Manchester. It was just a chance to see people, some who I haven't seen for a long time, before I go out to Afghanistan. Seven months is a long time, but it doesn't bother me now. I'm used to it."

Our thoughts will be with them during their deployment to Afghanistan and we are sure that they will add further lustre to the reputation of the Regiment.

RAF REGIMENT PENNANTS

Through the contacts that Ralph Dean has made, we have now obtained a small quantity of high quality RAF Regiment Pennants in full colour. These are similar to pennants used by several other organisations such as Rotary and Inner wheel. Our pennants are approximately A4 in size with an additional gold tasseled fringe. In the centre is a large RAF Regiment Badge with maroon and blue stripes in the background the same as those on the RAF Regiment tie. The cost of these pennants is £25.00 each. If anyone would

like to buy one of these pennants, contact the Branch Treasurer Tom Magee.

RAF Regiment Gunners to be sent to Basrah.

RAF Regiment Gunners based at a Scottish air station are to be deployed to Iraq almost a year after returning from operations in Afghanistan. Members of 51 Squadron RAF Regiment returned to Lossiemouth in Moray last September and will be posted to Basra later this year. They were supported in Kandahar by 20 reservists from 2622 (Highland) Squadron.

A number of gunners were given permission to grow beards, which is considered a mark of authority in Afghanistan, for the six-month deployment to Kandahar airfield. The RAF said it was believed to be the first time personnel were allowed to grow beards for an operation. On their return to Lossiemouth, flight commander Kevin O'Brien said the beards had been a talking point amongst Afghan village leaders.

Armed Forces are given pay rise

Members of the armed forces will receive a 2.6% pay rise from April, the defence secretary has announced. Members of the armed forces will receive a 2.6% pay rise from April, the defence secretary has announced. Recommendations from the armed forces pay review body have been accepted in full by the government.

Des Browne told MPs the rise was in line with inflation and the chief of the defence staff welcomed it. The adjustment to military pay, which reflects the conditions faced by the armed forces compared with civilians, known as the "X Factor", rises by 1%. Specialist rates of pay, including flying pay, submarine pay, diving pay and hydrographic, will also increase by 2.6%.

'Outstanding contributions'

Nuclear submarine watch keepers, army vehicle mechanics, Royal Artillery and RAF Regiment Gunners and defence fire fighters will also be offered extra incentives. A new category of specialist pay is being created for bomb disposal experts. Speaking outside the Commons, Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, chief of the defence staff, said: "This pay increase is good news for the armed forces at a time when their dedication, determination and courage continue to be tested. It reflects the outstanding contributions

our people and their families are making to the defence of our nation.

It is also a tangible demonstration of the high regard in which our people are held by the government and the nation." Junior defence minister Derek Twigg said: "This pay award recognises the tremendous contribution all our service personnel continue to make at home and overseas." The pay award is greater than the settlements imposed on public sector workers and Gordon Brown has said he wants to keep awards below 2%.

'Lives on the line'

Downing Street said this pay award was for a different pay round than the controversial settlements imposed on other public sector workers for 2007-08. Prime Minister Gordon Brown's spokesman said: "The government continues to believe there needs to be discipline in relation to public sector pay and we need to set awards in line with the government's inflation target. Decisions have to be taken year by year, sector by sector", he said. He added decisions on pay in relation to public sector workers for this year have not yet been made.

BBC political correspondent Carole Walker said the award was in recognition of the extraordinary work being done by the Armed Forces in Afghanistan in Iraq. "There is also recognition that those with their lives on the line, even with this pay increase, are only going to be earning between £16,000 and £25,000" she said. I think there will be general support for this increase although it is larger than for some in the public sector".

ISAF troops provide Daman District tool for building waterway

15 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment presented a mechanical digger to village elders in Daman District near Kandahar Air Field recently. A Need for the digger became apparent by the troops through discussions with village elders. It will be used to dig a waterway and clear irrigation ditches for crops. " said Flight Sgt. "Taff" Burton. He added, "It is great to be able to provide material help to the people who assist us in securing the area," Kandahar Force Protection unit. The vast majority of the people here just want to live in peace and tend their small

holdings. With our help, the supply of water that provides their livelihood will be increased."

The village's Mullah said, "This will bring much needed assistance and allow our village and families to flourish in years to come." The RAF Regiment continually patrols the area surrounding Kandahar Air Field. Its activities provide a secure ground environment to ensure insurgent activity does not hinder air operations in southern Afghanistan.

British Forces Foil Taliban Plot

British Forces have foiled a sick Taliban plot to shoot down troop carriers and slaughter hundreds. The murderous extremists targeted transport planes that ferry thousands of troops daily into Kandahar airbase in southern Afghanistan. They buried two deadly HN5 guided surface-to-air missiles near the airfield's main approach lane, where RAF Tristars daily soar in and out of the base.

The missiles – MANPADS in military-speak – had been hidden for a Taliban marksman who would attach them to his trigger mechanism and take aim as a Tristar or other coalition transport plane flew overhead. If the Taliban had hit a Tristar they would have instantly killed around 200 British troops – more than trebling the UK death toll of the Afghan campaign since 2001.

A source told us: "If they had pulled this off, it would have brought down the British Government and had all our troops out of Iraq and Afghanistan within the week."

The missiles were found by the gunners of the RAF Regiment's 15 Squadron, whose duty it is to protect an airfield as busy as Gatwick – and home to 10,000 people. After a tip-off, a specialist search team from A Flight made the grim discovery. Fearing a booby trap, US bomb disposal experts were brought in to make the missiles safe then forensic detectives gleaned all possible intelligence from them.

Flight Lieutenant Joe Duhan, 36, of 15 Squadron, who comes from Oswaldtwistle, Lancs, told us: "That's really our biggest fear – one of our aircraft being brought down. And these missiles were ready to go." His commanding officer, Squadron Leader Neil Rawsthorne, 39, from Liverpool, said: "This operation involved all elements of my squadron – and it is a great testament to their teamwork. When you get results like this it is a real boost for morale – but there is no escaping the grim message insurgents are sending."

Wing Commander Ian Duguid, of Kandahar-based RAF 4 Squadron, said his Harrier pilots have also learned to fear such surface-to-air missiles. "That is our biggest threat," he told the Daily Star Sunday. "They are fired at all different types of aircraft – fast air, heavy air and helicopters. They are a big status symbol as they can simply be thrown on the back of a jihadi as he walks around the desert."

Blackpool to Host National Veterans Day 27th June 2008

Blackpool has been chosen to host the 2008 National Veterans Day event. The announcement was made by Derek Twigg MP, Under Secretary of State for Defence and Minister for Veterans who said "I am pleased to announce that, alongside a huge range of events in other towns and cities across the UK, the town that will hold the main National Veterans Day event in 2008 is Blackpool".

Building upon the successes achieved over three previous years, Blackpool has created the most ambitious and diverse programme of events to date, which will take place over nine days from Saturday 21st – Sunday 29th June 2008. The programme is designed to provide an exciting range of activities appealing to veterans of all ages, as well as their families, friends, members of the Armed Forces and the wider general public. Veterans' Week will begin with military role demonstrations, exhibitions and recruitment opportunities by the Armed Forces, followed by a huge choice of activities throughout the week, building up to National Veterans' Day 2008 and an exciting weekend of entertainment and celebration. Much of the activity is created for and by veterans. Blackpool's Victorian North Pier will be a focal point and meeting place for veterans, their families and friends, providing a centre for entertainment, socialising, information sharing, and contact with welfare services.

Free golf buggies will be provided to transport visitors along the pier, should they require assistance. Notice boards will be erected which will enable individuals to notify others of their presence at the event, and to assist in the creating of personal reunions. An outdoor stage and screen will be sited on the promenade adjacent to the pier, providing a location for badge presentations, speeches and further entertainment.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

Over the next few months, the Arboretum will be transformed as the seasons change. A new comprehensive guide book in full-colour, is now available and on sale from the Visitor Centre for £7.00. It provides suggested walks of varying lengths and descriptions of the major features both plantings and memorials.

An Ilminster-based company has donated five scooters to help people with mobility problems visit a national war memorial. Electric Mobility Euro Ltd presented the scooters to the National Memorial Arboretum, which includes 150 acres of trees and memorials, including the Armed Forces Memorial. The scooters were required urgently to help the arboretum cope with a huge increase in visitors, including many former service people who now suffer a disability.

Electric Mobility Euro marketing manager Steve Perry said: "We had heard that following a big rise in visitor numbers, the arboretum was struggling to get some less mobile visitors around the site. As the leading supplier of mobility scooters in the UK, we decided to step in and make this donation. The scooters will get visitors to the far reaches of the arboretum and right to the top of the new Armed Forces Memorial."

Katie Neilson, arboretum trustee who received the scooters, said: "This is an incredibly generous donation and we are delighted to have these new scooters for the benefit of our visitors. We have designed the entire site to make it accessible to everyone and the new scooters will ensure even more people can enjoy it."

Future Events at the NMA

Saturday 29th March 2008

The Figgard 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.

Tuesday 6th May 2008

Royal Tank Regiment Association, Nottingham Branch. Annual Service of Remembrance at 12.00 noon on-site at the RTR plot. Contact: Mr Brian Rogers (Hon Secretary) - 07740 631426.

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.

Tuesday 20th May 2008

Royal Corps of Signals Dedication of Memorial at 12.00 noon - All Royal Signals Association members are welcome to apply for a ticket and should send their name, address and DOB to: rsa@royalsignals.mod.uk Contact: RSA Admin Officer on 01258 482090 or by email at: rsa@royalsignals.mod.uk RSA website: www.army.mod.uk/royalsignals/rsa

Thursday 22nd May 2008

A commemorative service will be held at the new Armed Forces Memorial, to honour the 55 personnel killed during the Balkan conflict, those who were injured and the many thousands who have served there throughout the 15 year deployment. The service will also reflect upon the contribution made by the British Armed Forces towards a more stable and secure environment within Bosnia-Herzegovina. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01 283 792 333.

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.

Wednesday 4th June 2008

Avro Shackleton Association. Dedication of the Association's memorial at 2.00 pm in the Millennium Chapel, then on-site. Contact: Mr James Box on 01462 453315 or by email: box805@btinternet.com

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.

Sunday 27th July 2008

British Korean Veterans' Association Annual Service of Remembrance. The Volunteer Band of the Lancashire Artillery supplemented by musicians from the Lancashire Regiment in attendance. Details to be confirmed nearer to the date.

Saturday 30th August 2008

The Brotherhood of Veterans of the Greek Campaigns 1939-1945. Annual Service of Remembrance at 11.30 am on site. Contact: Mr Frank Gill - Tel: 0151 924 2712.

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

Below is a letter from the producers of a BBC film, requesting assistance. Please contact them directly (details below) if you are interested in helping.

BBC Film for the Fallen British Servicemen and Women in Iraq and Afghanistan

We at Minnow Films (an independent TV company) are making a documentary film for the BBC to remember every British Serviceman and woman who has died whilst serving their country in Afghanistan and Iraq. This unique film will be three hours long and will be shown on BBC2 on Remembrance Sunday this year (2008).

We are very proud to be making a film of such importance and hope you will welcome our ambition to make a very special and lasting memorial to those who have lost their lives whilst serving their country. With a film of such significance, we feel that it is important that we speak to all those families who have lost a loved one in Afghanistan or Iraq, to tell them more about the project and to hear anything that they feel we should know. If you are a family member or friend of someone who has lost their life and feel able to get in touch, we would love to hear from you.

This would of course be in confidence and there would be no pressure to be involved. It might be that you want to send us a specific photo or tell us about some home-footage which is special to you and that captures the spirit of your loved one particularly well.

We do understand if you don't feel like getting in touch personally. It would be fine for a friend or relative to email/ call on your behalf - whatever is best for you. You can contact us on 0207 749 3176 or 07505 275 842 – or if you would prefer, just drop us a text with your name on and we will call you back.

You can also email us on david@minnowfilms.co.uk (Please note that as of February, due to us moving offices our landline number will change so do get in touch via the mobile.) There is more information about the film on the BBC press link:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/pressoffice/pressreleases/stories/2007/11_november/o8/fallen.shtml

Thanks for taking the time to read this. We look forward to hearing from you. With best wishes, Elodie Gornall, David Brindley & Rachel Noar. Production Team, Minnow Films

Tel: 07505 275 842 or 0207 749 3176
Email: david@minnowfilms.co.uk "

CORRESPONDENCE

On page 12 of January's newsletter, I included an article headed "What a sad, sad, sick society" that was followed by an article headed "Disabled veterans jeered at swimming pool" that was all about injured soldiers who had lost limbs fighting for their country, being driven from a swimming pool training session by jeering members of the public.

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. However, there is some good news in the following letter.

JIM DAVIES OF MIDDLEWYCH, CHESHIRE

Hi, Malcolm. In last January's newsletter you included an article headed "What a sad, sad, sick society. What about the human rights law for injured soldiers? It made my day to think some one is on my wave-length, for it made me think about the prisoner – he was a drug dealer - who refused to leave his prison cell. He said it was against his human rights. He said that while he was in court they would give his comfortable cell away and he didn't want to lose it. We have our human rights law all wrong for the human rights law seems to apply to criminals but not to ordinary people, particularly soldiers who had been fighting for their country.

But now for some good news, in Congleton, Cheshire where I live, Congleton Borough Council has said that all the armed forces that live in the Borough can have the use of all the leisure facilities in the Borough. The news came out just after your story about that young woman complaining about our injured service personal using their pool.

There is also some other good news. Our town has a farmers' market once a month. This Saturday being a nice day, Sheila and I went for a walk and called in at the market. It was good to see so many people there. There was a horse drawn open carriage taking people from the market back to town. To me this is what makes Britain great. OK, the sun was out but it was cold and one stall was giving out hot soup. If only life could be like this all the time, then like us old 'uns

of yesteryear it would be worth fighting for but what are our troops fighting for?

And to finish some sad news, Vic Houghton one of our mates from 22 Squadron is in Hospital with cancer. I spoke to Gill his wife and she told me she has her sons at home this week and his mates from his Branch call to see her and to see Vic. I think Malcolm you may already know. All the best from Upset Jim Davies.

Thanks for your letter Jim and yes, I do know about Vic. He was in all our thoughts and my thanks to you again for the following information about his funeral.

A SERVICE OF FAREWELL AND THANKSGIVING

On Monday 25th February, Ray Penny and his wife Rita, my wife Sheila and I; and Jim Davies went to the funeral of Vic Houghton. Ray and I first met Vic when we were Gunner Drivers on 22 LAA Squadron at Fassburg in Germany 1951-53. Vic was a 22 year man and he loved the Regiment. I do believe he came, out then rejoined.

Vic's funeral took place at the parish church of St John the Evangelist, Highbridge Somerset at 12.00 hrs. His body was received into the church to the music of the band of the Blues & Royals playing the Spitfire Prelude by William Walton. The Congregation was welcomed by the reverend William Downie, Chaplain of the RAF Regiment Association. The opening hymn was All things Bright and Beautiful. The first reading was taken from Wisdom 3:1-5 then there was a pause for reflection as Somerset rhapsody was played by Michael Crowther on the oboe.

Then there was a Gospel Reading from Matthew 5:1-12 given by the Reverend Downie. A few words were then spoken by Ron Barnbrook of the RAF Regiment Association. Then we had the last hymn Eternal Father, Strong to Save, followed by the Lord's Prayer. Vic's coffin left the church to the wartime favourite, "Lily Marlene" sung by the Jive Five after which the Band of the RAF Regiment played the regimental march Holyrood.

At the burial at Highbridge Cemetery, there was a Guard of Honour of twelve RAF Regiment Association members and the Last Post was played by a member of the RAF Regiment Band. Afterwards, we all went to the Farmers

Tavern for lunch. Vic wanted a military send off and Gill did him proud. Rest In Peace Vic.

Ray, Vic and I were all on 22 LAA Squadron at Fassberg in Germany. We were all young Rocks and we travelled some distance together. Ray was with HQ Flight, Vic drove A4 and I drove B4. Then we all lost touch from 1953 until two years ago when we were at Ray and Rita's. We telephoned Vic one night and the next day, we went to see Vic and Gill and they made us very welcome. We had a good natter about the good old days and ever since then we have kept in touch. We have now lost another brother. Jim Davies.

I was so pleased to hear about Congleton Borough Council for this is the kind of attitude all councils ought to adopt, that I have e-mailed Councillor Jean Pearson, who is currently Chairman of Mole Valley Council into which area Leatherhead Leisure Centre in Surrey belongs, with copies of my articles and a copy of an article about Congleton Borough Council's generous offer that I will publish in next month's newsletter, asking her if they could consider the same offer. I was delighted to get the following information taken from a meeting of Mole Valley District Council.

RESOLVED: That the Council offers free use of the soft play area and swimming pool during the public open sessions at the Leatherhead Leisure Centre and free access to the cinema at Dorking Halls to:

- (1) The families of injured service men and women undergoing rehabilitation at Headley Court during their visits to loved ones;
- (2) To the injured service men and women resident at Headley Court who accompany their family on these visits;
- (3) To looked-after children and young people and their accompanying carers and, where appropriate, carer families who reside in Mole Valley.

I have since e-mailed the Chairman of Congleton Borough Council to thank them for their concern. Let us hope that the troops can enjoy their offer in peace.

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING
SATURDAY 19TH JANUARY 2008
MINUTES**

I have only just received the Minutes of the above meeting but due to the lack of space, I will have to publish all the details from these Minutes in next month's newsletter. The following are the main points but in the meantime, if anyone has a query with regard to these Minutes, give me a bell and I'll tell you all about them.

Standard Bearers insured for Association only parades.

New Association membership cards will be sent to branch secretaries soon.

Existing Area structure will be retained.

As above on page two, the Grand Burstin Hotel, Folkestone, was agreed for the Reunion and AGM.

Vote of thanks to Steve Horton who standing down as Membership Secretary, replaced by Frank Zavier of NE London Branch.

Vote of thanks to Kingsley Oliver who is standing down as Editor of "The Flash". Need for a new Editor.

A promotional video is being considered.

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

Malcolm B

