



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

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BIRMINGHAM BRANCH

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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: 232
OCTOBER 2008**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 232 OCTOBER 2008

Dear Readers.

Branch Appeal

Goodies for the Military Ward

It is most important that remember the dangers that our young men and women serving on operations are all facing, so please remember the appeal your Branch Committee have set up. We are now regularly sending “goodies” to the lads in Selly Oak Hospital.

Through Roy Thomas and Ralph Dean we have regular contact every month with the military ward nursing staff. At each visit they are asked for their next request so we have a continuing need for regular donations.

The Branch President Peter Swash came up with a novel idea. He read in the press that burns victims are being nursed back to health by playing Nintendo Wii computer games and has suggested that we buy some for the Military Ward. Apparently American doctors have discovered that playing the games on Nintendo Wii helps patients to stretch skin grafts used to patch up damaged areas of the body.

Moving and stretching the skin is vital to keep the grafts as pliable as the skin around them. Patients normally undergo daily rehabilitation exercises but the process can be painful. Now researchers have found playing on a Wii video game does the job just as well but also takes the patient’s minds off their discomfort.

One of the most effective games, doctors have discovered, is Guitar Hero 3. The intricate movements involved in playing the game are particularly good for helping patients with burns to their hands, arms and shoulders produce fine, coordinated movement again.

But providing these consoles and games will not be cheap for each Nintendo Wii console costs about £200.00 and then each game costs about £70.00 but we had hoped to reduce these prices by contacting stores for discounts for a good cause. However, as I have received the following e-mail from Major Ian Cheesman, Officer Commanding, Patient Support Services, Royal Centre for Defence Medicine at Selly Oak Hospital, we have had to put that idea on hold and continue to provide the normal goodies.

“Malcolm. Thanks for your e-mail and continued support to the military patients here at Selly Oak. Regarding the Nintendo Wii idea; we are already in the process of acquiring this equipment for the patients as the Physio's here also believe it will be a very useful aid to recovery. I have funding in place to secure these assets, but as other funding requirements come up I will make contact and discuss the possibility of your help.

As you may already know, Selly Oak hospital is moving in 18 months time to a new build at QE, so we need to be careful about what projects we undertake here as it would be daft to spend money on projects which are not transferable. There will, I suspect be a number of requirements as we move to the new hospital and any help at this point will be gratefully received.

We can never get enough goodies in the mean time so your continued support is appreciated. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any other ideas where you could help. Regards Ian”.

I replied as follows. Ian. Many thanks for your reply, we will continue to supply the normal goodies and continue to raise further funds for future requirements. I am aware of the impending move to the New Hospital and I have no doubt that there will be many items required when you have settled in. If you do need anything in particular, now or after the move, please let me know. Regards. Malcolm.

So with the ever increasing number of casualties being evacuated from the combat zones, we need to encourage continuing donations to the Appeal Fund to provide these small comforts and any other items that the Military Ward staffs ask us for. All donations will be gratefully acknowledged and will be recorded in the Birmingham Branch newsletters. If anyone would like to contribute financially to this appeal, please send a cheque to the Branch Treasurer Tom Magee, made out to the Birmingham Branch – Military Ward Appeal.

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

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. If any non-member of the Birmingham Branch would like to receive our newsletters, please send a cheque for £7.00 as above, to the Branch Treasurer Tom Magee.

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY

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

DEATH NOTICES:

GREATHEAD ARTHUR. Former RAF Regt Cpl Arthur Greathead died on 16 Aug 08, a day short of his 87th birthday, after a short illness. He enlisted as a Gnd Gnr on 5 Jul 40 and served at various postings in the UK. He was then posted to 2951 Sqn RAF Regt upon its formation at Longcross Radar Station. Further postings to radar stations at RAF Pen-Olver, RAF Fairlight and RAF Drytree followed. On 13 Mar 45, he transferred to the Army and was posted to the Royal West African Frontier Force. Later, he transferred into the REME and achieved the rank of SSgt. He was discharged from the Army on 23 May 56. The funeral was held on 27 Aug in Mappleborough Green, Warwickshire. The funeral was held on Wed 27 Sept at 10.45 in the Church of the Holy Ascension, Mappleborough Green, Redditch, Worcestershire followed by the cremation at Redditch Crematorium. The Birmingham Branch was represented by the Branch Standard Bearer John Docker who paraded the Branch Standard, and by the Branch Vice-Chairman Fred Ringham who was accompanied by his wife Edith. The family welcomed everyone to the service and afterwards

for refreshments. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Mary Greathead, 5 Middleton Close, Winyates East, Redditch, Worcestershire, B98 0LX. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

HOOKEER LEN. Former RAF Regt Gnr Cpl Len HOOKER, born 8 Apr 20, died on 4 Sep 08 aged 88. He enlisted in Feb 40, initially as a Gnd Gnr, and was stationed at RAF Kidbrooke. He was assimilated into the RAF Regt on its formation in 1942 and served with 2827 Squadron at Wittering and went into Europe after D-Day. The Sqn was involved in the Ardennes 'Battle of the Bulge' and then moved up through the Low Countries into Germany.

After VE Day, he was employed on mine clearance work and returned to the UK for demobilisation on 8 Apr 46. He was a member of the Kent Branch of the RAF Regt Comrades Assoc and was instrumental in bringing about the formation of the East Kent Branch, becoming its first Chairman at the founding meeting held in May 89. He remained Chairman of the Branch until 2004. He was also the Branch Secretary for several years and was also an active member of the Herne Bay RAFA and British Legion branches. In retirement, he also became a voluntary curator and guide at the Battle of Britain Museum at Hawkinge. The funeral was held at 13.20 on Thurs 18 Sep at Barham Crematorium, Nr. Canterbury, Kent, CT4 6QU. Letters of condolence may be sent to his widow, Mrs. Daphne Hooker, at 78 Sandown Drive, Herne Bay, Kent, CT6 8QJ. The Corps extends its sincere sympathy to the family.

GENERAL NOTICES:

Presentation

RAF Regt Commemorative Painting - 'THE BATTLE OF AL WAKI - 2007'

You will no doubt be aware of the ferocious fire fight involving No1 Squadron RAF Regiment and Iraqi militant forces in Al Waki Market, Basra, in July 2007. Sadly, LAC Martin Beard was Killed in Action, but the Corps acquitted itself magnificently despite overwhelming odds. The action was, of course, recognized subsequently by the award of a Military Cross to Corporal David Hayden and a Mention in Despatches to Senior Aircraftman Ben Wharton. The Commandant General has agreed that this notable engagement should be commemorated and recorded for future

generations of the Corps. We have duly approached Mr Stuart Brown, an outstanding artist who specializes in military subjects and is best known for his Special Forces subjects. He has also undertaken commissions for the Jordanian Royal Family. His high quality, dynamic style promises us a truly impressive piece of fine art of which we can all be proud. Indeed, even the preliminary sketches provided by Mr Brown are quite superb. The total cost for the oil painting and some 600 limited-edition prints, will be around £7,750; the prints will of course provide a subsequent source of revenue for the RAF Regiment Fund. To secure the sum required to commission the piece, I ask you, on behalf of the Commandant General, to consider making personal or unit/branch contributions. Cheques may be made payable to 'RAF Regiment Fund', and sent to: *Al Waki Painting, c/o The RAF Regiment Secretary, RAF Honington, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP31 1EE*. It is intended that the painting will be unveiled sometime in Sep/Oct 08 and that the prints will be available in good time for Christmas! We have an opportunity to acquire a fitting and dynamic commemoration, of outstanding quality, that will pay tribute not only to this specific engagement, but to all the members of our Corps who continue to serve their country so magnificently and with such regularity on operations. Donations to date have been fairly slow; we do hope that you will feel able to support this exciting and worthwhile project.

Letters to Operationally Deployed Units in Iraq and Afghanistan

Many subscribers and Assoc members have requested the mailing address of the RAF Regt Sqns deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan, so that letters and 'goody bags' can be sent. Correspondence may be sent to: -

For Iraq: Res RAF Regt Fd Sqn, Basra COB, OP TELIC, BFPO 641 –

For Afghanistan: Res RAF Regt Fd Sqn, Kandahar Air Station, OP HERRICK, BFPO 772. Items may also be sent to the Regt staffs on the Force Protection Wing HQs (FP Wg HQ), at the same addresses.

Thanksgiving Service to Commemorate SACs Livingstone and Thompson of 3 Sqn RAF Regt

A Service of Thanksgiving will be held on Tue 25 Nov 08 at Peterborough Cathedral between 1430-1530, to commemorate the lives of SAC Gnrns Livingstone and Thompson of 3 Sqn

RAF Regt and 504 Sqn RAux AF respectively, who were Killed in Action in Afghanistan on 13 Apr 08. Further details will be announced shortly. Maximum Corps attendance will be encouraged.

British Services' Makalu Expedition 2008 - Presentation

Following the success of the recent British Services' Makalu Expedition which put three Servicemen on the summit of the World's fifth highest mountain, there was a presentation to mark the Expedition on Tue 9 Sep 08 at the Royal Geographical Society, 1 Kensington Gore, London. The Expedition was led by Wg Cdr David Tait, RAF Regt and Flt Lt Rupert Capleton of the RAF Regt also took part. Tickets were available at £10 and all proceeds will go to Help for Heroes.

Membership of the RAF Regt Fund

While these Corps Parish notices (CPNs) go directly to over 800 people (53,000 have been sent since its inception), some 25% are not registered members of the RAF Regt Fund. While membership of the Fund is not a prerequisite - as yet - for CPN subscription, please do consider joining and supporting YOUR Regimental Fund and enhance its ability to support its men. For membership details and an application form, please contact the Fund's Membership Secretary through the RAF Regt Secretary.

'Rocks in Hard Place'

The trials and tribulations of II Sqn RAF Regt on operations in Iraq are being covered in a rolling video via the following Internet links. It is all part of the on-going and coordinated recruitment drive for the Corps which has proved very effective and manning balance within a relatively short time is predicted, something that our sister Army regiments can only dream of.

<<http://www.rafcareers.com/frontline>>

<http://www.youtube.com/view_play_list?p=428440ECE5FE84D0>

James Hangar Dedication Ceremony

RAF Honington's E-Hangar, used for all the Trainee Gunner Graduation and Squadron Homecoming/Medal Presentation Parades, was renamed and dedicated as the Jimmy James Hangar, to commemorate the late Sqn Ldr Jimmy James MC, of Great Escape fame. Post war, he was a Sqn Ldr in the RAF Regt before retirement in 1958. Baroness Harris of Richmond, a long-

term friend of the Corps, conducted the ceremony. The event was televised on ITV (Anglia Region) and the video clip may be viewed at: http://www.itvlocal.com/anglia/news/?player=ANG_News_15&void=233792

Responses to Letters etc

The volume of hard-copy mail to the Regt Sec has increased significantly of late and he is well behind in responding to letters. Additionally, some writers fail to include their names and addresses or contact details (or they are illegible), which makes for some difficulty in replying! If possible, please use Email wherever possible. Please note that we do not hold personal details in the RAF Regt Museum Archives.

CORPS DIARY DATES:

(Updated - not exhaustive - contributions welcome)

31 Oct 08 - RAF Regt Offrs' Dinner Club's Annual Dinner – The 2008 Annual Dinner of the RAF Regt Offrs Dinner Club will be held, as advertised previously, at the RAF Club, London, on Fri 31 Oct 08, from 19.00. The Guest of Honour will be AM Stuart Peach, Chief of Defence Intelligence and Commander Joint Operations (designate). It will be preceded by the Club's AGM at 16.00. Members wishing to attend should register their names with the Dinner Club Sec. Cost will be in the region of £35-40pp.

06 Nov 08 - Garden of Remembrance - Westminster Abbey

09 Nov 08 - Remembrance Sunday - Cenotaph, London and nationwide.

25 Nov 08 – Thanksgiving Service – 3 Sqn RAF Regt KIA – Peterborough Cathedral

15 Dec 08 - Centurion Journal No26 - Contributions Due Date.

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

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

28 Jun 09 - RAF Regt Memorial Commemoration - NMA Alrewas (Veterans Week).

From the Branch Secretary

DEATH NOTICES:

GREATHEAD ARTHUR. I regret to inform you of the death of Arthur Greathead who passed away on Saturday 16th August - a day before his eighty-seventh birthday, after a short illness as he was born on 17th August 1921. Arthur enlisted as a Ground Gunner on 5th July 1940 and served at various postings in the UK. In

1943 upon its formation at Longcross Radar Station, he was posted to 2951 Squadron, RAF Regiment. Further postings to radar stations at RAF Pen-Olver, RAF Fairlight and RAF Drytree followed and he was promoted to Corporal. On 13th March 1945, he transferred to the Army and was posted to The Royal West African Frontier Force. Later, he transferred into the Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers and achieved the rank of Staff Sergeant. He was discharged from REME on 23rd May 1946. He was awarded the Defence Medal. Arthur went to night school to study to become an electrician and eventually went to work for the National Health Service at Selly Oak Hospital, and was responsible for a team of electricians that covered the biggest group of hospitals in the country at that time. He remained there until his retirement in 1986. His funeral was held at 11.30 a.m. on Wednesday 27th August at the Church of the Holy Ascension, Mappleborough Green, Warwickshire, B80 7DP, followed by cremation at Redditch Crematorium. The Birmingham Branch Standard Bearer John Docker paraded our Standard and the Branch Vice-President Fred Ringham and his wife Edith were also in attendance.

From the Branch Standard Bearer

Dear Malcolm. Wednesday 27th August was a sad day for the Birmingham Branch as we said farewell to Arthur Greathead, a valued member of the Branch who did sterling work in the early days of the Branch in assisting with the computerised production of the newsletter address labels. The funeral took place at 11.45 a.m. at the Church of the Holy Ascension, Mappleborough Green, Redditch. The family asked me to parade the Standard at the church rather than at the crematorium. Our Branch was also represented by the Vice-Chairman Fred Ringham, accompanied by his wife Edith.

The church choir formed a Guard of Honour on either side of the entrance and then led the way to the altar followed by the vicar and then I led the cortege into the church at the slow march. After the opening prayer, we sang the first hymn, "Jesus Lover of my soul". The vicar then read a eulogy on Arthur's life and what a life he had lived. He was a life-long Aston Villa addict. He was a founder member of the RAF Regiment. On his discharge, he went to college and qualified as an electrician and then spent most of his working life working for the National Health

Service and carrying out various DIY jobs in between. The vicar had us in stitches telling us all about the things he got up to. He never threw anything away saying that "it might come in handy sometime". He was always taking things to pieces to see how they worked – and they worked again after he had put them back together. Unlike me, for if I took something apart, I always had something left over and they never worked again.

After more prayers, we sang the final hymn "The Day Thou Gavest Lord is Ended". This was followed by the Committal Prayer, after which, I dipped the Standard for the Legion Prayer. I then led the cortege out of the church to the hearse and remained at the carry position until the funeral procession left the church to travel to Redditch Crematorium. It was a lovely service in an idyllic setting and I hoped that Arthur would have been proud of us. I went back to the church hall for a cup of tea but was unable to stay for the refreshments. I'll see you at the September meeting. Per Ardua. John.

Our thanks to you John, Fred and Edith for so well representing our Branch. In the very early days of the Branch, Valerie and I used to write out all the addresses on the newsletter envelopes but as the membership got bigger, it became almost impossible to carry on doing this by hand. As in those days, I didn't know very much about computing, Arthur came to the rescue and until I got to grips with the technique needed, Arthur printed out all the addresses for me. I also well remember Arthur stripping down my first computer printer that seemed to be almost as old as me and it sometimes gave me a problem. But you're quite right; it always worked afterwards and worked better too. We shall miss him.

RAF Wittering parade

Members of 3 Squadron Royal Air Force Regiment celebrated their return home from a six-month tour in Afghanistan with a parade on Tuesday, 2nd September. Since leaving RAF Wittering in February, the regiment has endured a difficult tour protecting Kandahar Airport. Two of their men, Senior Aircraftman Graham Livingstone, 23, and Senior Aircraftman Graham Thompson, 51, were killed in an explosion on April 13. A memorial service will be held in Peterborough Cathedral on Tuesday, 25th November. Earlier this year, they were banned from wearing their uniforms in public over fears they would suffer abuse. But this time the

servicemen of 3 Squadron, RAF Regiment, were cheered when they paraded proudly through Stamford, Lincolnshire in desert combats, back from a six-month tour in Afghanistan. A spokesman for RAF Wittering said: "We had no concerns about allowing the airmen to wear uniforms for today's parade. It's good to see so many people showing their support." The unit set off in desert uniforms from Bath Row at 9.30 a.m., taking in All Saints Street, Red Lion Square, St John's Street, St Mary's Street and St Mary's Hill before finishing at the town hall in front of a balcony of civic leaders. The salute was taken by Station Commander Group Captain Paul Higgins and a Harrier from No IV (AC) Squadron from nearby RAF Cottesmore performed a fly-past at 10 a.m. over the Town Hall during the salute. Crowds lined the streets and cheers and church bells rang out as the 160 men and women of 3 Squadron RAF Regiment marched through the town. Twenty-four of them and their families were invited to a reception in the town hall before returning to their base for a medal presentation ceremony. Squadron Leader Tony Walsh said: "It was poignant for them. I know the guys were very proud to do it, especially as it was the last thing they did before they went for their much needed leave."

Honington heroes welcomed home

On 2nd September Gunners who have spent the past six months in the searing Iraqi heat were welcomed back to Suffolk and praised for their work. The 140-strong 2 Squadron RAF Regiment, based at Honington, near Bury St Edmunds, flew back into the UK on Sunday morning via RAF Mildenhall. Yesterday, at a special medal ceremony, the squadron was praised by the base commander at RAF Honington for their efforts during the tour. Despite the scorching heat around Basra and the occasional indirect fire they encountered from Iraqi insurgents, every member of the squadron made it back safely.

And while many people in Suffolk have been complaining about the weather, for Flight Sergeant Roger Hopper the rain and grey skies back home were nothing short of "beautiful". The 40-year-old told how despite undertaking four tours to Iraq - the first was in the first Gulf War in 1991 - being away from his wife and two

daughters had not become easier. He did, however, appreciate them all the more when he returned home, he said. Explaining the purpose of the regiment's tour, Flt Sgt Hopper, said: "We were there to make sure our aircraft did not get shot out of the sky. All the stuff we did was off-base." He said he was proud to be treated as a "father figure" by some of the younger gunners: "Some of them went out as boys and have come back as men." He told how much had changed in and around Basra since he was last sent to Iraq. He said previously the Basra airbase would come under attack on a daily basis. Now, he said, it was attacked once a month. SAC Michael Roberson, 20, from Brandon had never been on a tour before and said the main shock for him was the heat. "It is really hard being in the heat with all the kit you have to carry. You just have to get on with because that is what all your mates are doing." SAC Roberson, who joined the regiment two years ago, said he expected to be sent to Afghanistan next which, he said, would be "a completely different challenge". Members of the regiment were praised by RAF Honington's commander, Group Captain Russ La Forte, who presented service medals to those who had not been to Iraq before.

It is a great pity that we were not given advance notice of the following event in Birmingham town centre for we could have publicised the event throughout the Midlands, perhaps this can be arranged for future RAF Regiment Presentation Team road shows.

A chance to discover 'little known' RAF regiment

Young men looking for a thrilling new career in the armed services were invited to attend a tough challenge in Birmingham on Saturday 30th and Sunday 31st August, for the RAF Regiment Presentation Team was the city over that weekend. They were looking for men aged between 18 and 24 to join their ranks. The RAF has 4,500 vacancies to fill this year, with 600 of these being in the RAF Regiment. As we all know, the RAF Regiment is a specialist infantry unit which protects the RAF, its aircraft and bases. It is a tough force trained to the peak of physical fitness and endurance, they parachute into enemy territory, secure airfields and are amongst the first forces into battle.

But research has shown that general awareness of their existence and role is low, which is why the RAF Regiment Presentation Team is touring the UK showcasing its work. The event in Victoria Square gave young men a feel for life in the regiment. Wannabe recruits were able to tackle a military climbing wall, test their nerve and shooting skills on a Close Combat Trainer and challenge RAF Regiment Gunners to physical fitness drills. There was also the chance to see real life videos of RAF Regiment Gunners working on the frontline in Afghanistan and Iraq, and chat to the team about their experiences.

To tempt people along, there was a free prize draw for all 16 to 24 year old males who attend to win a Nintendo Wii with games and accessories. The road show was on both days between 8.30am and 5pm. For reasons of combat effectiveness, the RAF Regiment is only open to men. For more information, visit <www.rafcareers.com/regiment>.

Squad swapped their guns for paintbrushes

RAF Regiment personnel recently swapped front-line duties in Iraq to dig in and help some veterans. Members of the RAF Regiment's 2 Force Protection Wing returned from operations guarding an airfield in Iraq. However, before enjoying some well-deserved leave, they volunteered to do a bit of gardening – renovating the grounds of a care home for disabled veterans. They spent three days cleaning the paved area of the Royal Star and Garter Charity's home in Richmond, Surrey, refurbishing brass commemorative plaques and rubbing down the numerous benches before repainting them.

"The Royal Star and Garter Home captured the imagination for the men since the veterans are mostly World War Two veterans" said Flight Lieutenant Ed Geuter, of the Force Protection Wing. "The project was important to us all; having just returned from a demanding tour in Iraq and this was ably demonstrated by the teamwork and effort of the Gunners involved".

Dinner bell rings in a new care home

Following on from the above article is the news that the new Star and Garter Home in Solihull opened on Thursday 28th August when the Mayor of Solihull, Councilor David Bell and his wife Sally, were given a tour of the home by the Charity's chief executive Lynne McDougall and they then had lunch, the first meal served in

the dining room. Representatives of the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine at Selly Oak Hospital and the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre at Headley Court, Surrey were also present on the day. The Chairman of the Royal Star and Garter Homes' Board of Governors, Vice Admiral Sir John Dunt, asked the Mayor, who is a Vice-President of the Charity during his term of office, to convey his thanks to the Council for its support after the idea of building a home in Solihull was first mooted. "We are very conscious of all the other local organisations and individuals who are being supportive" he added. The home, which overlooks Tudor Grange Park, provides nursing and therapeutic care to elderly ex-service personnel and their spouses and widows and has now welcomed its first residents. It provides long and short break care for 60 elderly disabled residents who are all ex-Service people or the widows, spouses and partners of ex-Service men and women. This includes a dedicated dementia care wing with 15 rooms for residents who require this specialist care.

DIAMOND CONGRATULATIONS

Our congratulations go to Ken and Edie Langley of Ashmore, Salisbury, Wiltshire where on 14th August, they celebrated their Diamond Wedding Anniversary. Ken and Edie met when he was in the Regiment and was stationed in Kent where he met Edie who was doing her bit in the Land Army. They were married in Postling Church Kent on 14th August 1948 and after they were married, he brought his new wife back to his home in Ashmore where they have lived ever since. Over the years they have both been pillars of the local community where Ken was the local gamekeeper. Ken started the village cricket team and during bad winters, drove the village snow plough and with his love of gardening, was always a prize winner at the local horticultural shows. Edie has always been proactive in raising money for the village and still runs the village whist drives. She spearheaded the fund raising for the village hall and goes carol singing with other villagers every Christmas, collecting for Save the Children Fund. These are just a few of the village activities they have been involved in. They have a son, daughter and two grandchildren.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

Staff and supporters of the Armed Forces Memorial at the NMA are celebrating after the Memorial was voted the UK's favourite Lottery-funded heritage project, beating hundreds of organisations from across the UK. Honouring the men and women of the UK Armed Forces, the Memorial won the prestigious title of Best Heritage Project and a £2,000 cash prize at this year's star-studded National Lottery Awards, broadcast live on BBC 1 on Saturday 30 August.

Staff and volunteers from the Armed Forces Memorial mingled with celebrity guests, including boxing star Ricky 'The Hitman' Hatton, TV and radio presenter Gethin Jones, Amanda Mealing (Connie in *Holby City*), Emma Barton (Honey Mitchell in *EastEnders*), and pop rock band McFly at the awards ceremony.

A record number of public votes were cast in this year's annual National Lottery Awards and the Armed Forces Memorial received an incredible show of public support throughout all stages of the competition. The Memorial has benefited enormously from Lottery funding and winning this Award will help to further commemorate the brave service men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country. It will also help to acknowledge the suffering of the families and loved ones left behind, including those affected by current conflicts.

Accepting the award from TV presenter Anne Robinson, Vice Admiral Sir John Dunt, Chairman of the Armed Forces Memorial Trust, says: "We are all utterly delighted that the new Armed Forces Memorial has won this Award. The Memorial has benefited enormously from Lottery funding and allowed us to build a truly inspirational Memorial to all members of our Armed Forces who have been killed on duty or terrorism since the Second World War. He continued: "We have received tremendous support throughout all stages of the competition and on behalf of The Armed Forces Memorial; I would like to thank everyone who voted for us."

The following e-mail to me from Sir Henry Every Bt, NMA Consultant Special Projects says it all.

THANKS to your votes.....We WON !!

The Lottery trophy and a £2,000 cash prize were collected by Sir John Dunt, Chairman of The Armed Forces Memorial Trust and

Architect Liam O'Connor, at the glittering televised event in London on Saturday. The *real* prize is of course the huge amount of publicity generated for the Arboretum, which will help us enormously in our future fundraising and keep our visitors coming in. If you missed the show, or want to see it again, you can watch at www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer - the Heritage Award comes in the middle of the second part of the National Lottery Draw and Big 7 show. A BIG Thanks for your votes... but particularly for your SUPPORT. Henry.

Christmas Festivities

Christmas festivities at the National Memorial Arboretum start with the hugely popular Reindeer Parade on 7th December. Santa will be there every weekend throughout December and on 19th December the arboretum is hosting an open air traditional Christmas concert. There will be a brunch-time guided walk on 1st January to walk off those Christmas excesses.

Armed Forces Memorial Routine Maintenance

The Armed Forces Memorial underwent routine maintenance from 18th to 30th August. To avoid any risk of injury to visitors, the Memorial was completely closed to the public during this time. The Memorial commemorates more than 16,000 service men and women who have been killed on duty or as a result of terrorism since the end of the Second World War. It is a place where families and friends come throughout the year to mourn, remember and celebrate their loved ones, and is a poignant reminder to all of the continuing cost of democracy and freedom. Charlie Bagot Jewitt, chief executive of the National Memorial Arboretum, said: "Just like the first major service of a new motor car, a period of closure was been planned and was necessary one year after the Memorial's completion. We fully recognised the special significance of the Memorial to many people and the stonemasons and gardeners aimed to complete the maintenance work as quickly as possible. However the Arboretum's 150 acres and numerous other memorials and gardens of remembrance remained fully open during this period. Until the creation of the Armed Forces Memorial, there was no national memorial for those who have lost their lives from 1948 onwards. Names will be added to the Memorial in future years, and there are empty panels with space for an additional 15,000 names. The names of those killed in 2007 have been engraved on the

Memorial, and names will continue to be added on a yearly basis. The Memorial, designed by architect Liam O'Connor, includes three elements: the first being a large six metre high earth mound, 100 metres wide at its base reducing to just over 50 metres wide at the top; the second, a 43 metre diameter stone structure, comprising two curved walls and two straight walls standing on top of the mound; and, the third, evocative bronze sculptures which stand in front of the walls. The Memorial recognises the enduring sacrifice of those left behind. Two poignant bronze sculptures bear silent witness to the personal cost of armed conflict. Their sculptor, Ian Rank-Broadley, is best known for the effigy of HM The Queen, as seen on coinage since 1998. The Memorial will play a valuable role in helping those who have lost loved ones come to terms with their loss, and learn to understand and manage their grief as they pass through different stages of their lives.

Future Events at the NMA

Saturday, 8th November 2008

Remembrance event for 49 Inkerman Battery Royal Artillery. Service on Armed Forces Memorial. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Sunday 9th November 2008

Remembrance Sunday / Day Service. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Royal Signals Corps Memorial within the NMA on the afternoon of Remembrance Sunday 2008, to mark the end of the TA 100 events. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

Tuesday, 11th November 2008

Remembrance event for Armistice Day at the Armed Forces Memorial. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

2009

Tuesday, 27th January, 2009. Remembrance event - Holocaust Memorial Day. More focus on education. For further information contact NMA - Tel: 01283 792 333.

In my newsletter Number 153 of February 2002, I published an article entitled "Afghanistan and the Great Game". With all that is going on in Afghanistan and our increasing involvement there which seems that it will stretch into the far distant future, for the benefit of our newer members and

readers, I think it is worthwhile reprinting it in this issue. Younger readers may appreciate it too for sadly; British history does not seem to be something that is taught these days.

AFGHANISTAN AND “THE GREAT GAME”

The wars between Great Britain and Afghanistan began as a result of the tensions between Great Britain and Russia and the British efforts in the area to stop the Russian Empire expanding south-east into what was regarded as a British zone of influence (Editor’s Update Note: nothing changes does it. Do our present leaders read British history I wonder)? The resulting intrigues became known as the “Great Game”, because of the involvement in the area of British and Russian secret agents. “The Great Game”, immortalised in Rudyard Kipling’s book “Kim”, began in the second half of the 19th Century, when it seemed that the Russian Bear and the British Lion were destined to meet head on.

Rudyard Kipling 1865-1936 is my favourite author. Anyone who has not yet read his books and likes reading about India and Central Asia is in for a real treat. Such was Kipling’s fame at the height of his career, that when he was seriously ill with pneumonia in the early months of 1899, had he died then, he would have gone out in a blaze of glory.

Then, it seemed as if the whole world was holding its breath as it waited for his doctor’s bulletins. In the street outside the hotel in which he lay, tanbark was spread to lessen the noise of passing traffic and crowds knelt on the pavement to pray for his recovery.

Kipling recovered and ironically, when he did die thirty-seven years later, his death went almost unnoticed, because the public’s interest at the time, was focused on another deathbed, that of the King-Emperor George V. He died a few days after Kipling, whose ashes were interned in Poet’s corner at Westminster Abbey.

For over a hundred years, Russia had been expanding east and south at a rate it has been calculated, of sometimes, fifty-fiver miles a day. As the 19th Century drew on, the Russians advanced steadily towards the frontiers of India. By 1850, the gap between the British and Russian

Empires had narrowed to not much more than 1,000 miles, whereas it had been 4,000 miles in the early 18th Century. The process seemed inexorable but Great Britain was determined to stop it before India was threatened. With every passing year, the British and Russians became more interested in the territory that separated them. The buffer states running in a crescent around northern India, i.e., Persia (now Iran) Afghanistan and Tibet, the most vital of these states was Afghanistan on the wild North-West Frontier. The rivalry between the British and Russian Empires, whimsically entitled “The Great Game” in the British press, ranged from Europe to the Far East. On the borders of India – which Russia never really intended to invade – the “Game” led Britain into military adventures in both Afghanistan and Tibet – involvement that was largely unnecessary and occasionally disastrous? “The Great Game” would have been played to very different rules in the North-West Frontier had been a flat plain inhabited by docile people but the frontier between India and Afghanistan, ran along some of the highest mountains in the world. Perfect terrain for guerilla warfare and the inhabitants, renowned for their pride and ferocity, exploited their tactical advantages to the full. Between 1850 and 1900, the British sent out no less than forty expeditions to subdue uprisings. Russia took full advantage of this weak spot in India’s armour and did all she could to encourage frontier uprisings, hoping ultimately to set the whole of India ablaze with rebellion.

Thoughtful British officials in India were aware that India, with its population of three-hundred million and with an area as large as Europe, could not be held by force alone. What the British feared was that Russia might establish her influence in the area and use it as a base to stir up rebellions among the mountain tribesmen of the North-West Frontier. These races, mostly Muslim, provided a large part of the manpower in the Indian Army. If Russia could successfully manipulate the rulers of Afghanistan and Persia, or the Sultan of Turkey – then the religious leader of the Muslim World – India, the “Jewel in the Crown” of the British Empire might become ungovernable, as her Muslim troops joined a Russian-inspired holy war against the ruling British infidels.

Unfortunately, there was no way of preventing the Russians advancing southwards. In quick succession, between 1860 and 1865, they took Turkestan, Tchimint and finally, Tashkent, thus moving uncomfortably close to the borders of Afghanistan. This then is the background to the earlier British involvement in Afghanistan and it brings me to the reason for this article, for in the Birmingham Post of Saturday 15th December 2001, the following article was published.

Britain's shame at the feet of the Afghans

A look at the British land-grab attempts in Afghanistan launched in 1839, by Don Gross.

The instructions to Lord Auckland, Governor General of India, were clear and emphatic. He was;

“to interfere decidedly in the affairs of Afghanistan and take all measures that may appear desirable to counteract Russian advances in that quarter”.

These words came from a secret committee of the Court of Directors of the East India Company, meeting in London. Britain was concerned at the time over persistent rumours that Russia, an imperialist rival, might use Afghanistan as a springboard to threaten territory in Britain's “sphere of influence”. Britain, finding India its most enriching possession, was in no mood to share it. Like Brezhnev's Government in 1979, Queen Victoria's Government thought it prudent to turn Afghanistan into a “friendly” state, thus blocking the passage of an unwelcome force.

In 1939, without further consultation with London, Lord Auckland sent an army of 16,000 troops under General John Keane, to take over eastern Afghanistan and to install a puppet ruler there. Sir William McNaughten was to act as a senior political administrator. The military objective was Kabul, hundreds of twisting, tortuous miles north and west across nightmarish terrain. 12,000 Indian porters and servants, plus 33,000 pack camels accompanied the army.

It took four months of struggle against the fierce Afghan tribes, the cruel maze of mountains and the oven-hot deserts to reach Kabul and capture it. Dost Mohammed was unseated and a rival chief Shah Suja, a British collaborator, known for putting out the eyes of his opponents was given the throne. He has accompanied the British forces with a 6,000 strong army of his

own. After the situation appeared stabilised, General Keane went back to India with a sizable portion of his troops. This turned out to be an unwise move. The garrison left behind could have been described as a holiday camp. The 12,000 porters and domestics outnumbered the British and Indian troops. Some officers had as many as forty servants but they should have been worrying about how vulnerable they all were. The 6,000 warriors belong to Shah Suja, were likely to be unreliable in a confrontation with other Afghans. Moreover, when Shah Suja moved his considerable harem and retainers into the Kabul palace, the British, feeling overcrowded, inexplicably moved out of the city, to a virtually unfortifiable encampment on a large open field.

The Revolt in 1841

The crisis came in 1841, when the Tories back home won the General election. They decided that Empire administration costs were getting out of hand, it was time to economise. The first to be cut back in Kabul was the bribe subsidy. This was money paid to the hill tribes to keep them from raiding British supply trains in the mountains. Then Sir William McNaughten sent another brigade back to India. Worst of all, he had to raise taxes on the incomes of local people. The fuse of revolt was lit.

On the night of 2nd November 1841, the long delayed explosion shattered the colony's complacency. Shouting, armed Afghans attacked the British Residence in Kabul, killing several officials. They rushed through the streets, shouting for the population to join them. News of the uprising travelled across the mountains with the help of fire beacons. The British hastily mobilised their troops. The decisive battle was fought at nearby Bemarn Ridge, overlooking the city. The British were decimated, mainly because they disregarded one of their own rules of battle; never rely on only one field-piece. Their single cannon overheated and became unworkable. After this debacle, MacNaughton negotiated for peace. He agreed to the restoration of Dost Mohammed as ruler. He acquiesced to the demand for the British to leave the country but asked for a promise of safe conduct through the mountain passes, the Afghan victor Akbar Khan Mohammed seemed satisfied but he never intended to provide safe passage.

The Murder of MacNaughton

Then came a curious turn of events. MacNaughton put out secret feelers among rival chiefs for a possible surrender under more liberal terms but word of this got back to Akbar. He decided that two could play this game. He sent a message to MacNaughton offering him a revised plan, which would allow the British to stay on with a reduced garrison. He invited MacNaughton to consult with him the next day outside the city walls. In spite of being warned by an aide that this might be a trap, MacNaughton insisted on going. The following day accompanied by his aides, he met Akbar and the other chiefs on a “floor” of Persian rugs laid out on the snow. MacNaughton no doubt felt honoured. They bowed to him. There was an exchange of gifts. Then Akbar whipped out a pistol from under his robe and shot MacNaughton dead. His beheaded body soon decorated the Kabul gates. The British had no alternative but to struggle back to India in the depths of winter. On the killingly cold morning of 6th January 1942, the remnants gathered.

The Retreat

There were 4,500 troops, ill-equipped and badly clothed, plus 12,000 disorganised, frightened followers, including some wives and children. It was the start of a hellish journey that few were to survive. Their first obstacle was the freezing Kabul River which had to be forded, since the only bridge had been blown up in the fighting. After this icy baptism, they found the snow-covered road lined with jeering Afghans who pelted them with stones and those who had guns fired at the procession. As the wounded fell, the Afghans attacked them with knives, not to kill them outright but to hack off their hands and feet.

The retreating force made only six miles that day and lost fifty lives. Several dozen more died of exposure during the night. The army was virtually leaderless. It was in the charge of the aging General Elphinstone, no longer physically, or mentally up to him Herculean task. The paralysing cold numbed the senses to the point of befuddling the mind. People just simply staggered on. They needed to walk another one hundred ice and snow encrusted miles to reach the next British garrison at Jalalabad but between them and Jalalabad, loomed the great squeeze of the Khurd Kabul Pass, a five-mile long rock-strewn funnel, beneath towering cliffs. Waiting for them, perched on the heights, were the forces

of Akbar Mohammed. This five-mile long corridor of slaughter cost the British and their followers, approximately 3,000 lives. What was left of the army and their camp followers, faced yet another trial of their fading strength, the Tank Gorge. This rock-lined “meat grinder” was only fifty yards long and only twelve feet wide but what was left of the army had to push through this well-defended passageway.

The Afghans could shower it from above, with a “Niagara Falls” of musket balls and they could attack the entrance with their knives. The number of troops who lived through that 50-yard stretch of hell came to 450. That was all that was left of the 4,500 who had set out from Kabul four days earlier. Now facing these frozen, exhausted remains of an army, was the chilling horror of yet another gigantic trench, the two-mile long Jagdalah Pass but by the time they limped into sight of what must have seemed to them like the gate of eternity, they were down to 140 men. The remaining camp followers had either scattered or were dying from the cold and starvation along the way. General Elphinstone was duped into a “peace conference” with Akbar who took him prisoner. His men waited until dark for him to return, then decided to attempt the pass without him. To their consternation, they found the entrance barricaded with felled holly trees, as painfully effective as today’s barbed wire. Under fire, the soldiers panicked in the dark and fired at each other. Eventually reorganised, they hacked their way through the entanglement and plunged on. Only 65 soldiers emerged at the far end.

The Final Massacre

By dawn they found themselves isolated on an icy hill near the village of Gandamek, surrounded by Afghans ready for the massacre. They were asked to surrender but they refused. Almost all were killed except for several wounded who played dead and a Captain Souter, who had decided to die wrapped in the regimental colours. The Afghans mistook this for some kind of special uniform. They decided that he must be important enough to hold for ransom so they spared him.

Severe Blow to British Pride

The loss of so many troops to mountain tribesmen was, of course, a bitter humiliation for the British. With Kabul lost, a campaign was mounted to evacuate the rest of the British troops from garrisons in Afghanistan, and the British

then withdrew from the country entirely. When the news reached Great Britain, there was uproar in the press and Parliament. In the end Lord Auckland was sacked as Governor General of India and a powerful, punitive force was ordered back to Afghanistan to restore Britain's prestige. The expedition led by General George Pollock, sent the bewildered, outgunned Afghans flying in all directions. The army stormed the passes and took easy possession of Kabul. But once they had flown the flag over the city, after freeing the hostages, they ran the flag down and marched out of the country. Later in the century, there were further wars against the Afghans, which the British always made sure that they won but they never returned to stay. And while popular legend held that Dr. Brydon was the only survivor from the horrific retreat from Kabul, some British troops and their wives had been taken hostage by Afghans and were later rescued and released. And a few other survivors turned up over the years. One account, in a history of Afghanistan by former British diplomat Sir Martin Ewans, contends that in the 1920s two elderly women in Kabul were introduced to British diplomats. Astoundingly, they had been on the retreat as babies. Their British parents had apparently been killed, but they had been rescued and brought up by Afghan families. The following poem by Rudyard Kipling, describes the scene at the fording of the Kabul River.

FORD O' KABUL RIVER

By Rudyard Kipling

Kabul town's by Kabul river -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
There I lef' my mate for ever,
Wet an' drippin' by the ford.

Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
Ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
There's the river up and brimmin',
An' there's 'arf a squadron swimmin'
'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

Kabul town's a blasted place -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
'Strewth I sha'n't forget 'is face
Wet an' drippin' by the ford !
Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,

Ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
Keep the crossing-stakes beside you,

An' they will surely guide you
'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

Kabul town is sun and dust -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
I'd ha' sooner drowneded fust
'Stead of 'im beside the ford.

Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
Ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
You can 'ear the 'orses thrashin',
You can 'ear the men a-splashin',
'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

Kabul town was ours to take -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
I'd ha' left it for 'is sake -
'Im that left me by the ford.

Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
Ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
It's none so bloomin' dry there;
Ain't you never comin' nigh there,
'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark ?

Kabul town'll go to hell -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
'Fore I see him 'live an' well -
'Im the best beside the ford.

Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
Ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
Gawd 'elp 'em if they blunder,
For their boots'll pull 'em under,
By the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

Turn your 'orse from Kabul town -
Blow the bugle, draw the sword -
'Im an' 'arf my troop is down,
Down an' drowneded by the ford.

Ford, ford, ford o' Kabul river,
ford o' Kabul river in the dark !
There's the river low an' fallin',
But it ain't no use o' callin'
'Cross the ford o' Kabul river in the dark.

As this marvelous poet, who was known as "The Poet of Empire", wrote in the last verse of another of his poems "The Young British Soldier" that has fourteen verses so it's too long to repeat here.

*"When you're wounded and left
on Afghanistan's plains,
And the women come out
to cut up what remains,
Jest roll to your rifle*

and blow out your brains
An' go to your Gawd like a soldier”.

The area is not a good place to soldier in and those of our lads who are required to do so, deserve our support, for as Ahmed Rashid, the internationally known and respected author of the book **“Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia”**, which is required reading in many universities, was advised when he became a war correspondent, “never get posted to anywhere ending in “stan”. There are seven countries with names ending in “stan”. His own country Pakistan; and Afghanistan – these are located between Iran (Persia) to the west and India to the east – and five others located in a west to east arc, occupying a huge area to the north of the other two countries, these are Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajakistan. These last five were formerly countries under the dictatorship of the now defunct, Union of Socialist Soviet Republics (the USSR). They are now nominally independent countries but they are rapidly becoming dictatorships in their own right. Most of them are currently dangerous countries to find yourself in as they are in a violent state of upheaval and have been for years. And all of them are in the area of Russian expansion that was involved in “The Great Game”.

There were three Anglo-Afghan wars, with the last one starting in 1919 and ending in the same year with an armistice. The Rawalpindi Agreement was then negotiated and took another two years before being agreed and signed in 1921. And if you think that the “Great Game” ended with the Rawalpindi Agreement, then think again for the British were involved in the modern day successor to the “Great Game”.

In the early 1980s, after the Russian invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 which began a nine-year occupation, instead of Foreign Office spies and Russian spies battling it out, we had the SAS helping the mujahideen to battle it out with the Russian’s 40th Army of Occupation. And guess who one of the – now well-known - mujahideen leaders was trained by the SAS? None other than Osama bin Laden that’s who.

The people of Wootton Bassett know how to show their feelings for our heroes as the following article tells us.

A town fit for heroes

Published on 16th September in the Mirror online news by Kate Jackson

One hundred times the people of Wootton Bassett have turned out for the repatriation of our fallen soldiers. For the 100th time, David Cousins straightens his regimental tie and fixes his beret before saluting the passing Union flag-draped coffin. He has vowed to pay his respects to every fallen soldier to come through the streets of his home town. Week after week. Whatever the weather. However "busy" day to day life is... Today is a grim landmark - the 100th hero killed in Iraq or Afghanistan to make their final journey through the Wiltshire market town of Wootton Bassett.



It's a milestone the people here hoped not to reach. Only three days ago, they were lined up to honour Ranger Justin James Cupples, killed at

29 in an explosion while on foot patrol in Afghanistan. And they'll return again later this week when another two come home to rest. Just after 1pm, the town bell tolls and two police cars clear the way for the arrival of the latest hearse. An eerie hush descends on Wootton Bassett. Around 100 people - some in uniform - stop their chatter as the black Mercedes carrying the coffin scattered with 12 red roses crawls along the high street. Ahead, the undertaker walks to the War Memorial, removes his black top hat and allows the people to pay silent tribute to George Medal winner Gary O'Donnell, 40, a bomb disposal expert praised for saving thousands of lives. Mums with young children in buggies look on and shopkeepers gaze mournfully from their doorways. In the minute's silence, mum and ex-Army nurse Angelina Peaker, 41, thinks of Gary's wife and four kids - the youngest just nine weeks old. "My husband Richard was in the Royal Logistic Corps, the same as Gary," says Angelina afterwards, wiping away a tear. It touches a nerve even more today. Richard was in the first Iraq war, Bosnia and Northern Ireland. He's done the boring bits and the exciting bits. Thankfully this is the bit he didn't do." Angelina has brought along her two-year-old daughter Chloe. If it hadn't been a school day, she would also have taken her son Tom, nine, and daughter Elly, seven. Tom has his eye on following dad into the military and Angelina says: "Tom likes the glory, he likes the shooting scenes on his computer games. He needs to understand there are two sides. With Elly, I tell her someone's lost their baby. It might be a big baby, but it's someone's baby."

MoD thanks town for its support

An appreciation parade is to be held in Wootton Bassett, in Wiltshire, to thank locals for their support when troops killed in service are brought home. Up to 1,000 residents turn out to pay their respects when funeral corteges of personnel repatriated through RAF Lyneham pass through the town. The airbase is to organise a special parade, on behalf of the Ministry of Defence (MoD), for 12 October. Marching bands and a C130 Hercules flypast are also planned. Town mayor Mike Leighfield said: "I really am honoured that they should consider doing this because we don't do it for any recognition. But to be honoured in this way, words fail me; I think it's absolutely amazing."

From Branch Member Roy Thomas

My father-in-Law was 100 years old on the 14th of September which overshadows our 21st wedding anniversary and my 56th birthday over the same couple of days. He has worked in this country since 1942 - initially working on erecting USA bases in the Cotswolds. He has never been out of work and did not retire until he was 70ish and paid all his taxes and still does. Having been born in 1908, he is historically and technically British having been born before Irish independence but as he is classed as an Irish National, he will not receive a telegram from the Queen or whatever it is called now. The Irish government on the other hand is presenting to him a President's bonus of 2500 euros and a certificate. Plus, thanks to a neighbour, the Michael Collins Society is making him a Life Member as he was a lookout boy/cadet/scout or something at Michael Collins funeral in 1922.

We are having a special mass for him in the parish church where he hopefully will receive a Papal Blessing plus the usual photos in the paper. He receives a good pension from Ireland for nearly 20 years of work there but just a happy birthday letter from UK Works and Pensions for his 36 or so years working for our economy.

Well done your father-in-law Roy, please give him our congratulations.

From Branch Vice-President Dave Gooding

Hi Malcolm. Well as you already know I attended the "Operation Banner" commemoration service at St Paul's Cathedral, London, on Wednesday 10th September. Well what a spectacular day, the service itself was well balanced without too much bible pounding. It was focused on the service and sacrifices many of us experienced in Northern Ireland. The short parade afterwards, ended up in the courtyard of the Guild Hall and on being dismissed, have a guess who I bumped into? Ron Barnbrook, Frank Xavier and the National Chairman Steven Brereton Martin. I believe an impromptu photograph was taken which may emerge in due course. Malcolm I can say this from deep inside me, that when I returned from Northern Ireland something changed in me and since 1980 and my second tour in '81 no one has ever actually said thanks. Well as you know in those days we just came home and went back to sweeping hangers ha! Ha! But on Wednesday our nation

said thank you and I was deeply moved by the whole thing. The reception that followed was a pleasant surprise in as much that there was no expense spared it really was top notch.

Sometimes you need days like that especially me considering the awful year I have had, let alone what I have put my family through. Oh and yes, the day before, my gaffer made me redundant due to lack of trade and a recurring chest injury. Well most things come and go so today I am starting over and I will try to use my recent experience and put on a smile. Per Ardua Dave.

I'm glad it all went off so well for you Dave. It's great when the country shows its appreciation and as the above article about Wootton Bassett shows, it is also great that ordinary people really do appreciate what our Armed Forces do for us all.

BRANCH APPEAL REMINDER

Please remember the appeal your Branch Committee has set up for as we are now regularly sending "goodies" to the lads in the Military Ward at Selly Oak Hospital and we need all the money that we can get. If anyone would like further information or can help in any way, please call me.

One of the ways in which our ladies can help us to increase our fundraising is by approaching their local organisations such as The Women's Institute, The Townswomen's Guild, local clubs such as flower arranging clubs etc. This idea was given to me by Hazel, the wife of our Minute Secretary Ken Bridgwood, who has persuaded her Women's Institute branch to donate to our appeal. Well done Hazel. Well that's all for now, look after yourselves and keep smiling.

Malcolm

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



16

Sunday 1st February 2009 67th Ann RAF Regiment
 Sunday 1st February 2009 Subscriptions Due
 Thursday 12th February 09 Branch Night
 Sunday 1st March 2009 St David's Day
 Thursday 12th March 2009 Branch Night
 Tuesday 17th March 2009 St Patrick's Day
 Sun 15th – Mon 30th Mar 09 Battle For Meiktila
Sunday 5th April 2009 Branch Reded of Mem.I
 Thursday 9th April 2009 Branch Night
 Wednesday 23rd April 2009 St George's Day
 Sunday 26th April 2009 ANZAC Day Serv & Par
 Sunday 10th May 2009 Reded of Regiment Chapel
 Thursday 14th May 2009 Branch Night
 Thursday 11th June 2009 Branch Night
 Sunday 14th June 2009 RAF Cosford Air Show
 Sunday 28th June 2009 RAF Reg.t Service at NMA

Saturday 1st November 2008 Midlands Fest.l of Rem
 Sunday 2nd November 2008 B'ham Poppy Ball
 Sunday 9th November 2008 Rem Sunday
Tuesday 11th November 08 Remembrance Day
 Thursday 13th November 08 Branch Night
 Sat 29th-Sun 30th Nov 2008 Birmingham Int Tattoo
 Sunday 30th November 2008 St Andrew's Day
 Thursday 11th December 08 Branch Night
 Thursday 8th January 2009 Branch Night

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