



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: 233
NOVEMBER 2008**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 233 NOVEMBER 2008

Dear Readers.

Through the hard work of Gordon Diffey who designed the Association Website, I am now responsible for updating the Birmingham Branch pages of the Association Website. With his help, I have put a considerable amount of information onto it. Gordon has been tireless in explaining to me how to update the Birmingham pages and even more diligent in putting right my many mistakes. His help has been invaluable and I am extremely grateful to him.

If you have access to the Internet, have a look at it and let me know what you think. Also, if any of you have any ideas for developing the Birmingham Branch pages of the Association WebSite, for we can have as many pages as we want, so let me know of any ideas too.

At the moment, the Birmingham Branch section of the Association Website has five pages on it headed as follows;

- The Branch Home Page
- Birmingham Branch Committee
- Birmingham Branch News
- Birmingham Branch Roll of Honour
- Birmingham Branch History

The Birmingham Branch Home Page has information about Branch meetings, basic information about current Branch news, basic information about the Branch Standard and basic information about the Branch newsletters and the Formation of the Birmingham Branch.

The Birmingham Branch Committee Page is just that, a page giving all committee members contact details together with photographs of myself and the Branch President Peter Swash. I would like to include a photograph of all committee members so if any Committee Member would like me to include a photograph, if possible, e-mail a suitable one to me, if not, send me a hard copy and I'll scan it into my computer.

The Birmingham Branch News Page has all the current news about the Branch for the month of October, it has that month's Branch Members birthdays, it has news about the Birmingham Branch Commemoration of Air Vice Marshal Donald Pocock at the NMA and it has the latest news of our donations to the Military Ward.

The Branch Roll of Honour Page gives details of all Birmingham Branch Members who have passed on to that great squadron in the sky since 2002. I have included all the details of the deceased in my possession. In some cases though this is limited, particularly pre-2006, so if anyone has more information about any of them that I could add please let me know.

The Birmingham Branch History Page contains four items of historical information about the Birmingham Branch.

Item 1. **A History of the Purchase and Development of the RAF Regiment Memorial Garden.** This item is just a title as there is a link to the complete article that is on the history section of the main Association page. Clicking on this link transfers you straight away to the article.

Item 2. **A History of the Birmingham Branch Standard, that was Purchased in April 1990.** A full history, of how the Branch Standard was purchased and then formally presented, to the Branch by a RAF Catterick Colour Presentation Party on Thursday 14th June 1990. The history includes three photographs. 1st the Standard being collected by Squadron Leader Terry Noyes from the Standard Colour Party Warrant Officer Les Chapman. 2nd Squadron Leader Noyes presenting the Standard to our Standard Bearer Doug Tapsell and 3rd, Birmingham Branch members gathered behind the new Standard.

Item 3. **The Dedication of the Birmingham Branch Standard at Birmingham Cathedral on Sunday 19th May 1991.** This history also includes twelve photographs of the parade afterwards, in a rolling format.

The RAF Regiment Association WebSite was commissioned by the Association Chairman Steven Brereton Martin and the Association Executive Committee and launched in late September 2007 so it was a year old last month. It is a large site with a total of 153 pages and since

September 2003, the number of visitors to the site has increased from 86 in that month, to 3,302 in September 2008. The number of visitors is growing regularly and up to September this year there were a total of 29,212 visitors since the site was launched. As the site is slowly getting ranked on search engines, is likely to be the main site this year for enquiries about many things regarding the RAF Regiment. It's an excellent site so if you haven't seen it yet, give it a go.

BRANCH BIRTHDAYS

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

- 5th November** **Alan Addis** of
Cannock, Staffordshire.
- 8th November** **Jeffrey Johnson** of
Cannock, Staffordshire
- 9th November** **Harry Ravensdale** of
Newcastle under Lyme,
Staffordshire.
- 22nd November** **Peter Swash** of Rowney
Green, Worcestershire.
- 24th November** **Doug Tapsell** of Solihull,
West Midlands.
- 24th November** **Paul Acres** of
Swadlincote, South
Derbyshire.
- 25th November** **Norman Prince** of Wem
Shropshire.
- 26th November** **Brian Stanier** of
Stourbridge, West
Midlands.

Branch Appeal

Goodies for the Military Ward

It is most important that we remember the dangers that our young men and women serving on operations are all facing, so please remember the appeal your Branch Committee have set up. 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. With the ever increasing number of casualties being evacuated from the combat zones, we need to encourage continuing donations to the Appeal Fund. With your help, we can continue to provide these small comforts and any other items that the Military Ward staffs ask us for we can never get enough goodies for the lads. So in the mean time, your continued support is appreciated. Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any other ideas where we could help. All donations will be gratefully acknowledged and will be recorded in the Birmingham Branch newsletters.

Donations to the Ward

This month The Military Ward Appeal Fund has given the following items to the Military Ward. A £330.00 batch of 36 Waterproof wound covers from Limbo Technical Products Ltd. This company has been very supportive and do not charge us for delivery. The covers allow patients to shower without getting their bandaged wounds wet. They are available on prescription from the NHS but the Military Ward staff do not work for the NHS, they work for the MoD. Consequently, orders for these items have to go to the MoD and it takes two or more weeks for the order to be followed through and delivered to the Military Ward. Of course, by that time, the patients needing them have been discharged or transferred to Headley Court for further treatment.

Additionally, this month we have supplied the Military Ward with three DVD Players and games for the lads. This has cost us another £300.00 and as a consequence, these purchases have resulted in the Military Ward Appeal Fund becoming very much depleted. In fact we only have £3.41 left in the Fund so donations are urgently required. We are expecting other donations but if anyone would like to contribute financially to this appeal, please send a cheque to the Branch Treasurer Tom Magee, made out to the Birmingham Branch – Military Ward Appeal.

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

For some time now I have been concerned that we do not read in the media of how many of our young men and women are being casevaced from conflict zones, for we all know that normally, the number of those injured in action, far outweigh the number of those killed in action. The media always publish the details of those killed in action and quite right too but very little is published about those who have been wounded in action. Is this right?

A spokesman for the MoD said that summaries of those injured are published on the MoD website every two weeks and that these regular updates record the severity of the injury suffered and an indication of the cause. Does the following information on the MoD website tie-up with the above statement by the MoD spokesman?

The MoD spokesman also said that “details of injuries are not released to protect the soldiers' families from media intrusion”. Would publishing further details of injuries and wounds be an intrusion? Would we be able to find out personal details of those injured if these details were published? I think not but what do you all think? Read the article and let me know what you think? However, not everyone has access to the internet and we do not see much about casualties in the media, as details of the nature and severity of the wounds are never made public.

I've accessed the MoD site and the information given for up to 21st September 2008 is as follows. **Fatalities**

Killed In Action	2.
Died of Wounds	0.
Others	0.

Casualties – excluding natural causes

Very Seriously Injured or Wounded	5.
Seriously Injured or Wounded	4.
Total	9.

Field Hospital Admissions

Wounded in Action	20.
Disease or Non-Battle Injury	523.
Total	543.

Aeromed Evacuations 279.

The following article published last month on 21st September, by Sean Rayment, Defence Correspondent of the on-line Telegraph, also

questions this situation. After reading this article, I'm puzzled but what do you all think? Let me know.

MoD accused of covering up injuries to troops

Defence chiefs have been accused of covering up the severity of injuries to troops wounded in combat in Afghanistan.

Soldiers, MPs and lawyers representing injured servicemen and women claim the real cost to those fighting on the front line in Helmand province, southern Afghanistan, is being hidden from the public for political reasons. *The Sunday Telegraph* has learnt that every week dozens of soldiers are being injured, some severely, yet details of the nature and severity of the wounds are never made public. While the Ministry of Defence argues that details of injuries are not released to protect the soldiers' families from media intrusion, many within the military believe the policy is designed to keep secret the attrition rate being suffered by the Army in Afghanistan.

The Second Battalion the Parachute Regiment, one of the five infantry units currently based in Helmand has had a particularly grueling tour of duty in which seven members of the battalion have been killed and more than 50 injured. In one of the most horrific incidents, Lance Corporal Thomas Neathway lost both legs and an arm when he was blown up by an improvised explosive device. During his evacuation another soldier, Corporal Jason Barnes, was killed. While tributes were made to Cpl Barnes, no details of LCpl Neathway's injuries were made public by the MoD.

A week earlier, an 18-year old Ranger serving with the Royal Irish Regiment lost both legs in an ambush close to the British base in Musa Qala. As with every incident involving a soldier wounded in Afghanistan since 2006, no details were released. Last month, four British soldiers from the 5th battalion the Royal Regiment of Scotland were injured in a friendly fire incident when a 105mm artillery shell mistakenly landed on British troops. Once again, no details of their injuries were made public.

Although the MoD insists that it is not "covering up" details of soldiers' injuries, the department refused to reveal how many servicemen and women have suffered paralysis or

brain injuries, or been blinded, while serving in southern Afghanistan. In the past it has also consistently refused to release details of the number of amputees. But the ministry relented last week and told *The Sunday Telegraph* that 34 soldiers had one or more limbs or parts of limbs amputated after being wounded while serving in Afghanistan since 2002. The MoD publishes a table of casualty statistics on its website, but no mention is made of the type or severity of the injuries. One senior officer told *The Sunday Telegraph*:

"There is a general policy by the MoD to keep the horror of what's going on in Afghanistan out of the public domain, and that's probably for political reasons. If the real truth were known it would have a huge impact on Army recruiting and the Government would come under severe pressure to withdraw the troops. Injured soldiers do not get enough coverage and many feel let down by and angered by this. The public are only told about those killed in action. Telling the truth would give the public a better understanding of what war is like, because far more soldiers are seriously injured than are killed."

Paul Harrington of MPH solicitors, who has represented soldiers injured in Iraq and Afghanistan, said: "The MoD has a very clear agenda: it does not want pictures of soldiers injured on the battlefield getting into the press because of the negative impact it would have on public opinion." Similar concerns were raised by James Buchan, of Irwin Mitchell solicitors, who added: "The MoD has consistently refused to pass on details of soldiers with brain injuries. Either the MoD doesn't know or doesn't want to know. It is a completely paranoid organisation when it comes to releasing details of casualties."

Patrick Mercer, the Tory MP and former infantry commanding officer, said: "Are the injured the unacceptable face of war? If they are then our young men should not be sent to war. The dead are the dead but the injured will be with us for the rest of their lives. They need to be encouraged and supported - not hidden away."

A spokesman for the MoD dismissed the claims of a cover-up of the severity of casualties in either Afghanistan or Iraq as "nonsense". He said:

"The MoD keeps comprehensive medical records for each operational casualty and summaries are published on the MoD website

every two weeks. These regular updates record the severity of the injury suffered and an indication of the cause. The MoD recognises there is considerable public interest in the number of military personnel who are seriously injured in the course of their duty. This is why we publish our casualty statistics on the MoD's website and regularly facilitate media access to Headley Court and Selly Oak to demonstrate the levels of care we provide to seriously-injured service personnel. But we also have a duty to protect the privacy of our personnel and must ensure we continue to protect our injured from unwelcome intrusion."

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

b 5th July 1920 – d 30th July 2008 RIP

You will all know by now of the death of one of our most distinguished Commandant Generals, Air Vice Marshal Donald Pocock, who was greatly respected within the Corps, as you will have read of his death and his Obituary in these newsletters. As I did, many of you will have come to know him through the RAF Regiment Association and such is the regard in which he was held by the Birmingham Branch, that we discussed the matter at September's Branch Meeting and on your behalf, your Branch Committee have decided to commemorate him at the National Memorial Arboretum. There is a facility for this in the walkway between the Visitor Centre and the Millennium Chapel.

This is paved with red brick pavers upon which the details of those to be commemorated can be carved. We have already commissioned a number of these pavers commemorating various people and we intend to commemorate AVM Pocock with another of these pavers. Of course, I first wrote to his family first for their permission to do so and received a reply from his son Max, thanking us for the suggestion and giving us the required permission. He also asked me to let him know when it was installed as the family may wish to visit the Arboretum. I shall of course do so, particularly as we may wish to have a short dedication service for the laying of the paver. I will keep you all informed. The following letter from Birmingham Branch member Squadron Leader Richard Cox RAF (Rtd) is also relevant, for Richard knew Air Vice Marshall Pocock as he served with him.

Sqdn Ldr Richard Cox RAF (Rtd)

“My Dear Malcolm. I read with interest and much sadness the Obituary of Donald Pocock for he and I, and a host of others, were all at the Isle of Man Centre together and were thus Founder Members of the RAF Regiment and arrived in the Middle East in early January 1942.

The Obituary does not make it clear that 2932 was not the only squadron formed at Castel Benito for there were four squadrons made up of personnel from Desert Air Force units. In February 1943, they were originally A B C and D. In May 1943, they were renumbered 2930, 2931, 2932 and 2933. We formed and trained as 6 flight - Rifle Squadrons and we had no AA responsibility for the landing ground there, where there was no AA capability apart from Lewis Guns. This remained the position until September 1943 when we received 20 MM cannons prior to moving to northern Syria in early November 1943.

2933 and 2997 and 2918 were all part of Force 686 (“For Seturn”) and we left the Aleppo area in March 1944 and re-equipped and trained as Bofors squadrons. 2933, 2907, 2932 and 2914 went to Italy as 1322 Wing in July 1944 to cover the Foggia airfields. As far as our AA role was concerned, we were stood down in September 1944. 2932 of course went on to Austria and disbanded in March 1946. 2933 and 2907 disbanded in the Naples area in November 1944. 2930 disbanded in January 1944. 2931 disbanded in June 1944 with one flight merging with 2933 to go to Italy. 2914 went on to Greece and Austria and disbanded in March 1946. Yours ever
Richard Cox.

Many thanks for your letter Richard and following on from Richard’s letter, the next article is for the benefit of our younger readers.

No 1 Ground Defence Gunnery School, Ronaldsway, Isle of Man

Like all commercial aerodromes Ronaldsway had been commandeered by the Air Ministry in September, 1939, but it was not until the following March that a function was found for it. Here would be based No. 1 Ground Defence Gunnery School which had been formed the previous December at North Coates on the east coast of England. Personnel from a similar unit in Northern Ireland - the Armament Training School at Aldergrove - would also transfer to Ronaldsway which would then accommodate the only school

of its kind. Its purpose was to train airmen in gunnery for the defence of airfields against air attack. Many of the men would see action when later in the year; the Luftwaffe launched their attacks on fighter stations during the Battle of Britain. At this time the RAF Regiment had not been formed so training was given to non-specialised ground staff by Technical Training Command. The Empress Hotel in Douglas became the unit's Headquarters though all personnel involved in the training were accommodated in Castletown, use being made of the boarding houses along the Promenade and houses within the town itself including Bridge House. The Fort Island (Golf Links) Hotel became the school where instruction was given on the mechanics and operation of Lewis, Browning and Bofors Guns.

Practical experience was gained by firing at drogues towed by aircraft and even by a high speed motor boat in the early months. The whole training was something of a crash course lasting ten days so there was constant movement in and out of Castletown. Officers also took the course accommodation for them being found in the Peveril Hotel, Douglas. 1943 saw the Gunnery School disbanded when it was absorbed by the RAF Regiment which had been formed to take over airfield defences. Most of the personnel moved to Douglas where the Empress Hotel had become the Headquarters of the RAF Regiment training establishment. Ground staff continued to be trained in gunnery for which purpose a large black concrete dome was constructed in the grounds of the Villa Marina near the Broadway entrance. Projected on the inside of the dome were the shapes and paths of aircraft which the gunners tracked with cine-guns. The school moved from Ronaldsway in 1943 when it became part of the RAF Regiment School.

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY

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

DEATH NOTICES:

ABBOTT Norman. Former Regt FS Norman (Bud) ABBOTT, born 28 Oct 27 died peacefully on 3 Oct 08, aged 80, following a short illness. The father of the current CG, he enlisted in 1949 and served on 66 (Rifle) Sqn and 4001 AC Flt (both in Aden) and on 74 (LAA) Sqn (Geilenkirchen), 63 (LAA) Sqn (Tengah), 66 (LAA) Sqn (Catterick) and on 26 (LAA/Field) Sqn (Gütersloh) – when he was injured in a terrorist bomb attack while serving in Londonderry in Mar 73. He also served on GDT Flts at RAF Cranwell, Finningly, Stanbridge, Laarbruch, West Raynham, Kinloss, St Athan, Benson and High Wycombe. The funeral was held at St Edmunds Church, RAF Honington, on Thu 16 Oct at 1200hr. He was pre-deceased by his wife, ‘Margret’, in Aug 2004. No flowers were requested but donations, if required, should be sent to the Priscilla Bacon Support Group’ or ‘McMillan Cancer Support’, care of Alcock Family Funeral Directors, Falcon House, 96A City Rd, Norwich, NR1 2HG. The Corps extends its sincere condolences to the family.

ARMITAGE Eric. Former RAF Armoured Car Company Airman, Eric ARMITAGE died peacefully on 3 Oct 08. He served on 2 ACC from 1942 – 46 and was an active member of the RAF AC Assoc. No further details are known at this stage and funeral arrangements should be published shortly.

CLAKE William. Former RAF Regt Gnr William CLARKE, born in Belfast, NI, in 1920, died in Canada on 16 Sep 08, aged 88. He was a WWII veteran who served in the UK and Africa, before emigrating to Canada, where he became a teacher in Oshawa, Ontario, and a member of the Ontario Regt, in which he achieved the rank of Major and was the second-in-command.

In later years, he was a Regional Councillor for the Clarke township and Chairman of the St Johns ambulance, in which he achieved the level of a Comdr of St John. He was also a member of the Canadian Chapter of the RAF Regt Assoc. A memorial service was held in Oshawa on 26 Sep. He is survived by his wife, Mary, to whom the Corps extends its sincere condolences.

OLIVER Kingsley. RAF Regt Historian, Gp Capt (Retd) Kingsley M Oliver, born 12 Dec 28, died peacefully on 5 Oct 08 aged 79, following a short illness. Kingsley, who was a member of the Birmingham Branch, was commissioned on 13 Jul 47 and was then trained

at the RMA Sandhurst from Jan 48-Jul 49. He then joined 61 (Rifle) Sqn (at Fassberg) before moving to the Light Anti-Aircraft Gunnery School (LAAGS) at Watchet in Sep 49.

He was then posted to 19 (LAA) Sqn (Guetersloh, Jun 51), returning to the LAAGS in Jul 52. He was then posted to the RAF Regt (Malaya) at Changi in Feb 55 before moving within the force to 91 Sqn at RAF Kai Tak in Hongkong. He moved to the RAF Regt Depot, Catterick in 1958 before being posted to the Aden Protectorate Levies (APL) on promotion to Sqn Ldr that year. In 1961 he was posted to the RAFC Cranwell as Snr Regt Instructor (SRI) and then moved to HQ FEAF in Changi in 1965.

He returned to the UK in Jan 66 to go to RAF Staff College at Andover and, on completion of the course, moved to HQ Fighter Command at RAF Bentley Priory. In 1968, he became GD1 in the Directorate of Gnd def at MOD UK in the rank of Wg Cdr. He then went to the JS Staff College Course at Latimer before assuming command of 33 Wg RAF Regt at Catterick in May 70, where he coordinated the RAF Regt response (48 Sqn Tigercat) to the threatened Guatemalan invasion of British Honduras (now Belize) in Jan 72.

He was promoted to the rank of Gp Capt on 1 Jul 72, when he assumed the appt of Snr Gnd Def Staff Offr (SGDSO), HQ Support Comd at RAF Upavon. He then became the Comd Regt Offr at HQ RAF Germany in Jun 72 before becoming the Comdt at RAF Catterick in Nov 74.

In Dec 77, he moved to become Dep Dir Gnd Def (DDGD) in the Regt Directorate in MOD before retiring, at his own request, in Dec 78. He then went to work for the British Aircraft Corporation Guided Weapons Division on the Imperial Iranian AF Rapier Project in Tehran, before the downfall of the Shah curtailed the mission. He returned to the UK as BAC’s Project Manager for Overseas Rapier Contracts.

In 1980, he then became the Clerk to the Worshipful Company of Saddlers, one of the ancient Livery Companies of the City of London, before finally retiring in 1994. He published the Corps’ ‘Short History of the RAF Regt’ in Feb 70, ‘Through Adversity’ - the definitive history of the Corps from 1942-92 – in 1997 and ‘The RAF Regt at War’ in 2002, the latter being privately funded by him. He was the unofficial RAF Regt Historian for most of the last

38 years and most deferred to his deep and passionate knowledge of the Corps history.

There was a private family funeral on Thu 30 Oct 08, but a Service of Thanksgiving for his Life and Work was held in the City of London, mid-afternoon that day. He is survived by his wife Audrey, to whom the Corps extends its sincere sympathy. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs A Oliver at 8 Chiltern Gardens, Bromley, Kent BR2 0PT.

GENERAL NOTICES:

Appointments

AVM Graham Stacey

Air Cdre G E Stacey is to be promoted AVM and is to assume the appointment as Senior British Military Advisor to US Central Command (CENTCOM) at Tampa, Florida, on 18 Mar 09.

Gp Capt N Bray. Gp Capt Bray is to assume the appointment of RAF FP Force Comdr and Stn Comdr RAF Honington on 19 Dec 08.

Gp Capt R La Forte. Gp Capt La Forte is to undertake the Higher Command and Staff Course at Shrivenham in Jan 09.

Mailing of Parcels to Operational Theatres

The British public and the RAF Regt Assoc have been very generous in sending out parcels to personnel on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, in the last year, no less than 146,000 sacks of mail has been sent and the BFPO has become swamped with such items, all of which have to be scanned and checked to make sure they are suitable for air mailing (and do not contravene any Theatre or international laws).

The net result is that personal mail from serving personnel families is being delayed significantly and, significantly, valuable logistics resources are being used which expose our forces to additional journeys and higher risks.

Consequently, you are asked NOT to send parcels to **other than specified people**, particularly in the period leading up to Christmas when the families needs must take priority. In place of such parcels, donations may be made direct to Forces' charities, such as UK4U Thanks!, the RAF Benevolent Fund, the British Legion, Poppyscotland, SSAFA and Help4Heroes or, indeed, the RAF Regt Fund.

HRH Prince Harry - Appointment as Honorary Air Commandant of RAF Honington

HM The Queen has graciously approved the appointment of HRH Prince Harry as Honorary Air Commandant (HACmdt) of RAF

Honington. Note that the title is not Honorary Air Commodore, since he is a serving officer, like his elder brother, HRH Prince William, who has also been appointed HACmdt of RAF Coningsby.

The chosen title confers no rank, thus allowing the Prince to use his current serving rank during visits, should he wish to do so. This is a signal honour for the Station and yet more evidence of Honington's relevance, operational focus and profile. More details will be published in due course.

RAF Regt Association Membership.

The Constitutional objective of the Association shall be to maintain and promote *esprit de corps* and comradeship amongst all RAF Regiment personnel, both past and present, in order to promote the good name, reputation and traditions of the Corps. All who wore the 'Flash' are entitled to join.

For more information and an application form, contact the Assoc Membership Sec, Frank Xavier at: FXavier@TBGLearning.com.

Commemorative Brochure RAF Fairford

To commemorate the presentation of The Queen's Colour for the Royal Air Force Regiment at RAF Fairford on 11 July 2008, the Regimental Secretary has a limited number of copies of a specially produced 8-page souvenir brochure - adapted from the colour pages of the latest Centurion Journal - together with the RIAT '90th Anniversary of the Royal Air Force' programme.

The latter may be particularly appreciated if your own was spoilt in 'the great flood' afterwards. Both items are free of charge, but will incur a P&P charge of 70p plus an invited donation to the RAF Regiment Museum Refurbishment Fund. I regret that only one set per addressee can be sent for now and the offer is subject to availability. When the '90th Anniversary' programme stock is exhausted, only the Souvenir brochure will be sent. Please allow 2-3 weeks for mailing; it's a busy time of year!!

If you are interested, please send a suitable cheque made payable to the RAF Regiment (RAF Regiment Museum) to M R Hooker, RAF Regiment Secretary, RAF Honington, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, IP31 1EE.

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.

CORPS DIARY DATES:

(Updated - not exhaustive - contributions welcome).

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

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

17 Jan 09 – RAF Regt Assoc NEC Meeting – RAF Waddington.

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

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

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

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

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

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

FROM THE BRANCH SECRETARY

DEATH NOTICES:

GROUP CAPTAIN KINGSLEY OLIVER MA RAF (Rtd). I regret to inform you of the death of Group Captain Kingsley Oliver who passed away on 5th October 2008. Many of our members will have met Kingsley who, many years ago after his Regiment History "Through Adversity" was published on 1st February 1997, wrote to me and offered to attend a Birmingham Branch meeting to sign member's copies of the book. This was a rare privilege indeed as I believe that we were the only branch to be offered this opportunity and was much appreciated by our members. The book signing session took place at the Nautical Club on Monday evening, 24th February 1997 and many of you took up the opportunity of having a copy of "Through Adversity" personally signed by the author. As Kingsley was about to sign each book, he asked the owner what he would like written in it so each one was signed with a personal touch,

my own treasured copy that I regularly refer to for articles in these newsletters, has the inscription "For Malcolm and Valerie, with all good wishes, Kingsley Oliver, Birmingham 24 Feb 97".

Kingsley was a real gentleman and will be sadly missed by all of us as Hughie Cooper put so well in the following e-mail from him for I could not have put it better myself. Hughie is of course the Birmingham Branch Research Co-ordinator and as such, had a great deal of correspondence with Kingsley and knew him as well as any of us.

HUGHIE COOPER by E-Mail

Hallo there Malcolm. Like you I was very saddened and shocked to hear about Kingsley Oliver. His knowledge of the Corps tradition, history and events together with his enthusiasm and willingness to help others was first class. Every query to him was answered most promptly, generally by return letter or in recent years by e-mails if possible, or when he had researched the particular topic fully. This was in addition to his writings and other pursuits which were many.

He will be sadly missed not only for his knowledge but also for the manner in which he helped others so courteously. He was a real gentleman. Hughie Cooper.

Prince Harry's appointment as Honorary Air Commandant to RAF Honington was one of a number of honorary titles approved by The Queen as part of moves to honour links between the royal family and the RAF. The 24-year-old prince, who is third in line to the throne, was made Honorary Air Commandant at the base, near Bury St Edmunds. Buckingham Palace said in a statement: "The Queen has been pleased to approve new Royal Air Force honorary appointments in recognition of the strong links between the Royal Air Force and the Royal Family." The news was welcomed by community leaders who said the base deserved the honour and recognition, given its numerous tours of duty in the Middle East. Rebecca Hopfensperger, County Councillor for the base, said: "It is really good news. The base really deserves it - they've been involved in active duty on a number of occasions recently and they have lost people. They deserve some kind of honour and this is really good news, both for the base and for the county as a whole."

Base plans to welcome Prince

Gunners at a RAF Honington have told how they are "absolutely delighted" at having

Prince Harry made their Honorary Air Commandant. The 24-year-old prince was appointed to the honorary role at RAF Honington, near Bury St Edmunds, by his grandmother, The Queen, last Thursday. The base's station commander, Group Captain Russ La Forte said how much the base was looking forward to Prince Harry's first visit to RAF Honington and how his Gunners were looking forward to forging "a long and rewarding" relationship with the royal. He said:

"We at RAF Honington are absolutely delighted and enormously privileged to hear that approval has been granted by Her Majesty the Queen, for the station to enjoy the singular honour of a royal affiliation with His Royal Highness Prince Henry of Wales as our Honorary Air Commandant. We hope to welcome Prince Harry to the station soon on his first visit, and look forward to a long and rewarding 'special relationship' thereafter. Indeed, I suspect that Prince Harry will find the operational focus of the Station very close to his heart, given his recent active service in Afghanistan. I am sure that he will pay close interest not only to our activities, but also to our families and friends upon whose support and understanding we rely so heavily. The establishment of this relationship is further evidence, were it needed, of the critical contribution that RAF Honington makes to defence in the service of our country, and the profile that it enjoys. This is one of a number of additional relationships with the royal family established for RAF units across the country, and is particularly apposite in the 90th Anniversary year of the RAF's creation as the world's first independent air arm."

KANDAHAR AIR FIELD, AFGHANISTAN
Published on 2nd October by Tom Blackwell in
Canwest News Service

For six days in a row, sometimes twice a day, the sirens blared and the Cockney-accented voice echoed through Kandahar Air Field: "Rocket attack, rocket attack, rocket attack." The main NATO base in southern Afghanistan has been subjected to an unusual spate of the Taliban's haphazard barrages recently, resulting in a handful of casualties, and a rare order one night for the camp's thousands of residents to all don their body armour. But the British officer in charge of

guarding the base says the attacks remain little more than a minor irritant. Meanwhile, new-found co-operation from neighbouring Afghans is helping the British go after the Taliban teams that launch the antiquated weapons, Air Commodore Andy Fryer of the Royal Air Force said.

"They're trying to disrupt our operations and frighten us," he said, a smashed rocket - mounted and framed - propped against his desk. But they're doing neither . . . It has no significant effect on us whatsoever." The attacks have long been a tradition of life at the airfield, with one forcing a Canadian stage show to be halted for an hour in May. Based on an outdated Soviet-era design, the 107-millimetre missiles land throughout the huge facility, which has a 30-kilometre-long perimeter, though hardly ever do any significant damage. Blast walls surround most buildings and tents, and many of the crude weapons fail to explode on impact, Air Commodore Fryer said. Previous reports suggest insurgents prop them against rocks, attach a timer, then scurry away long before they take off.

Though two of the recent sirens were false alarms, the base recorded six attacks in September - most with two rockets each - almost all in the last week. Each time, soldiers and civilian workers, including about 1,800 Canadians, crowded into bunkers, where the mood tends to be more festive than frightened. Tuesday saw no attacks, but then Wednesday night the "voice" announced the threat level had risen to "dress cat. three," meaning everyone was supposed to put on his or her flak jacket and helmet. About a dozen parachute flares lit up the desert sky west of the airfield. Soldiers from Air Commodore Fryer's RAF Regiment - a sort of air force infantry unit that specializes in guarding airfields - had received a tip about rocket activity and went in search. "Sometimes that means the safest thing to do is keep the camp in shelter," he said.

In responding to the rocket launchers, his team uses precision weapons designed to avoid civilian casualties, said the officer. Although they came in quick succession, September's six attacks are still close to the long-term average of about five a month, Fryer said. He would not say where the rockets are made, but the supply seems ample, despite attempts to cut it off. U.S. soldiers found and destroyed a cache of 1,800 near the base in 2003.

Women in the Front Line

I understand that military chiefs are looking very carefully at proposals to allow women to fight in the Army's front line. Women already occupy combat roles on ships and in planes, and female soldiers in the artillery may find themselves nearer the front line than the infantry, but women are not allowed to drive tanks, serve in the front line infantry – which includes the RAF Regiment - on submarines or as divers. For combat effectiveness reasons women do not serve in roles where they may be required to engage the enemy deliberately face to face in combat, often at the point of a bayonet; these roles are within the Royal Marines (General Service), the Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps, Infantry and RAF Regiment. Currently, there are 16,500 women serving in the armed forces, only 8% of the total, though the number of potential posts open to women has improved from 47% to 70% in the last two years. The Chief of the Defence Staff Admiral Sir Michael Boyce has said the forces could move with the times as long as it did not damage their ability to fight. He said: "We are the best in the world at what we are invited to do and, whatever changes we make, we want at the end of it to be able to carry on doing as well as we do now. Women of course are already in the front line; they fight in our ships, they are flying our aeroplanes and they are in 70% of the army. There is sometimes a misconception that they aren't already in the front line - they very much are."

So the Army is carrying out an assessment of the suitability of women for close combat fighting and a panel of experts will submit a report, "A Study of Combat Effectiveness and Gender", to ministers next year and Defence Minister Geoff Hoon has indicated his willingness to allow women to serve on the front line. He has challenged opponents to come up with a good reason why they should not be allowed to do so.

Opponents believe a high number of female front line casualties would be bad for Army morale and unacceptable to the public but a change was signalled last year when the government announced combat trials and mixed regiments for women. Sir Michael has taken over from the former Chief of the Defence Staff Sir Charles Guthrie.

Sir Charles warned that Britain may never be ready to accept women soldiers in front-line combat fighting roles when he retired from the

post. He used his final day as the UK's most senior military officer to issue his strongest warning yet about the effects of allowing women to serve in the infantry and the Royal Armoured Corps. While he acknowledged the bravery of individual women he questioned the effect their presence would have on units to operate effectively in war situations and said "We have got the greatest armed forces in the world. I am not going to muck about with that. We want to be quite careful not to hazard what we have got."

Airport improvements a positive sign for Basra

On 25th September 2005, the Mod said that RAF Regiment Gunners from 5 Force Protection Wing, normally based at RAF Lossiemouth in Scotland, are helping to drive forward vital improvements to Basra International Airport. The airport, gateway to Iraq's second city, is seeing steady improvements thanks to local people working closely with the RAF Regiment personnel, many of whom have previously completed operational tours at the base. The improvements at Basra Airport are building on similar progress seen at the port of Umm Qasr in recent months. The port is gradually growing into a thriving area of commerce as it fulfils its role as Iraq's only deepwater quay facility. In addition, earlier this month, Major General Andy Salmon, the UK's most senior military representative in southern Iraq, gave an upbeat assessment of the progress he believes is being made across the region, in particular the work of the Iraqi Security Forces in ridding the city of rogue militias as well as the increase in foreign investment.

Sergeant Darren Bailey, 38, one of the RAF Regiment personnel helping to deliver improvements at the airport, is on his third tour of Basra. He has seen how the pace of change is accelerating: "I've been coming here since 2003 and it's great to see the ordinary Basrawis taking control. They are now beginning to see real improvements in their quality of life," he said. Sgt Bailey is providing the technical expertise with local people providing the labour in an arrangement that is now commonplace across much of the country: "We work very well together, although they are a lot happier about having their photo taken than I am!"

As the security situation continues to improve, work to develop the appearance of Basra

International Airport and the facilities around it is well under way. Recently the work has included building projects such as the construction of fuel storage areas to meet international standards, and the erecting of retaining walls, supporting the return of the airfield to civil operations. As Force Protection specialists, RAF Regiment personnel also work with their military colleagues to provide a safe operating environment for both the civil and military flights into and out of the airport.

Always vigilant

Published in the Aberdeen Press and Journal on 1st October

A Moray-based RAF squadron has been assigned the all-important task of protecting the airspace around the British Army's main base next to Basra Airport. About 135 soldiers from 51 Squadron, RAF Regiment, from RAF Lossiemouth, are responsible for defending aircraft flying in from the north and taking off to the south. It's their job to protect against small-arms fire, surface-to-air missiles and rocket attacks on the base itself. They also carry out patrols in their armoured vehicles and on foot in the towns and villages surrounding the camp.

For much of the time, troops depend on Snatch Land Rovers with machineguns, grenade launchers and an array of imposing weaponry mounted on top to get around. The vehicles have come in for criticism in recent years after a number of deaths led to questions about their vulnerability under attack. Army troops operating out of Basra have largely abandoned the Snatch Land Rover in favour of the more heavily-armoured Bulldog and Mastiff vehicles. Sergeant John Ross, of 51 Squadron, insisted the Snatch remained the best vehicle for their job.

"Ask any of the guys here and they'll tell you they would rather be in one of these," he said. "They might not be as heavily armoured as the Bulldogs but they are much faster and more nimble out in the open, they give the boys inside a much better idea of what is going on around them and they're not so imposing to the public. If we can, we prefer to be in something a bit lighter so we can get out and speak to people on the ground."

Like all of the vehicles in the Squadron's fleet, the Snatch Land Rovers are bristling with the most up-to-date weaponry and sophisticated communications devices available, and troops carry so much kit around with them that their

body packs weigh about 100lb, no small burden in temperatures as high as 57C. Sergeant Ross said it angered him to hear reports that the British armed forces were poorly equipped.

"There's a lot of rubbish written back home about us being badly kitted out," he said. "I've been doing this job for 18 years and I've never been so well kitted out in my life." Like all of the servicemen and women at the Basra base, he has noticed a marked change in the atmosphere in Iraq on this tour. "When I left last April we were being rocketed several times every day. Now weeks go by between attacks."

The RAF Regiment, formed during World War II to defend the Royal Air Force's assets in Britain while the Army was occupied with fighting overseas, has one of the shortest turnaround times between tours in the British Army. Squadrons enjoy only about 10 months at home between deployments, compared to an average rotation of two years for the Army's infantry troops. The RAF Lossiemouth Squadron has found itself in the thick of fighting in Afghanistan in recent years as well as performing its duties in Iraq. Flight Lieutenant Michael McGregor, 31, from Dufftown, was in Iraq in 2003 when the squadron's job was more a war-fighting role. He was there again in 2004 when the Iraqi army was just beginning to get on its feet. Now he is back during his current tour. "It's a different place in that the Iraqi security forces are really coming into their own," he said. "The people haven't changed – 99.9% of the time we get a great reception wherever we go."

My next article was stimulated by a conversation that I had with Colin Clarke, Secretary of the Norfolk Branch during which he told me all about the reunion of two old comrades that had come about through the Norfolk Branch. Well done Colin.

Reunited - Norman Hunt and Alan Barks

The last time Norman Hunt and Alan Barks saw each other they were guarding a bombed-out



airport in Singapore in 1945 which had been occupied by brutal Japanese invaders and as these members of the RAF Regiment went their

separate ways after leaving Kallang at the end of Second World War, they assumed they would never meet again but the years rolled back yesterday as the former 2810 Parachute Squadron, RAF Regiment Sergeants held an emotional reunion in Yarmouth - 63 years after they had last laid eyes on each other.

As soon as Mr Hunt, from Norwich, and Mr Barkes, from Lincolnshire, met at the seafront Carlton Hotel they started to reminisce about the bitter Burma and Far East campaign against the hordes of the Japanese Imperial Army. And as the pair swapped stories they soon mentioned how they had been prepared to parachute from Dakotas at 6,000 ft onto an enemy airfield in Malaya. Their squadron was the first RAF Regiment squadron to be parachute trained and was due to go into action against a Japanese stronghold but the risky operation was called off when the Americans dropped two atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki ending the war. The squadron then went on to secure Kallang airport from the fleeing Japanese and then it put its special training into practice as gunners parachuted into Indonesia to capture some stubborn enemy occupiers. When asked why he had volunteered for the parachute squadron Mr Hunt, 86, said: "I often wondered myself. The first time I looked out of a Dakota I wished I had never volunteered." He remembered how his unit's padre would say he put his faith in whoever packed his parachute every time he went on a training jump.

Before being posted to the Far East Mr Hunt was one of the first servicemen to be evacuated from Dunkirk and after the war he went to work for Colman's in Norwich. Mr Barkes, 87, saw action at the battle of Meiktila, where the Japanese surrounded and were beaten off by a much smaller British force in Burma. He recalled that when 2810 squadron liberated Kallang he saw the Japanese had strung up young girls on lampposts. Mr Barkes said:

"The Far East campaign was vicious and very bloody. The simple fact is I am here today and many others sadly are not. I volunteered for the parachute squadron because it sounded exciting. But I think we were all relieved that we did not have to jump into Malaya as we felt many of us would not have pulled through. Today has been absolutely wonderful and meeting Norman has bought back many memories." After the war

Mr Barkes resumed his career as a baker and then went onto to work for Greene King in Lincolnshire. The pair were reunited by the Norfolk branch of the RAF Regiment Association and Branch Secretary Colin Clarke said it was the first time that the organisation had ever reunited ex-serviceman from such a long time ago. For more details on the RAF Regiment Association's Norfolk branch call Mr Clarke on 01502 585079 or visit www.edp24.co.ukdailylinks.

Mr Hunt and Mr Barkes were keen to hear about the fate of their former colleague from the squadron, Frank Duffy, who was from Thorpe. Anyone with information can call Mr Clarke.

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.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL

ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

Staffordshire's Brereton Royal British Legion has bought three 6-seat electric powered vehicles, or buggies, for the National Memorial Arboretum. Peter MacPherson-Smith, Chairman of Brereton British Legion, and Paul Fisher, Chairman of Brereton and Ravenhill Parish Council, presented the buggies on behalf of Brereton Legion to the Arboretum's Charlie Bagot Jewitt on Saturday 20th September. The buggies have four forward and two rear facing seats. The rear seat on one of the buggies is an optional fold-down seat providing a cargo platform to carry wheelchairs. Each buggy has an additional audible warning safety feature and a rear tow bar for more versatility. The buggies, which cost Brereton British Legion £26,000 from Bradshaw Electric Vehicles of Peterborough, will enable the Arboretum to enhance the visit experience of Armed Forces Veterans and their families and friends, particularly those who may be in need of assistance wishing to take in the whole of the 150 acre site in a day and visit the Far East Prisoners of War Museum, the Shot At Dawn Memorial and Watersmeet, the confluence of the Rivers Trent and Thame beyond the Burton to Tamworth railway viaduct.

Brereton Legion named the buggies "Pip", "Squeak" and "Wilfred", the names given to the

three-medal group of campaign medals issued to many who had served in British and Empire forces and fought in the Great War; "Pip" the 1914 or 1914/15 Star, "Squeak" the British War Medal and "Wilfred" the Allied Victory Medal.

Peter MacPherson-Smith, Chairman of Brereton British Legion, said, "Buying the buggies for the Arboretum brings to a total £78,000 which the Branch has spent in support of the welfare of Armed Forces Veterans and their dependants since 2003 including a mini-bus in 2005 for Galanos House, the Royal British Legion's nursing and retirement home in Southam, Warwickshire." Charlie Bagot Jewitt, Chief Executive Officer of the National Memorial Arboretum, and Maynard Scott, a Friend of the Arboretum and one of the Arboretum's Volunteer Guides, thanked the Brereton British Legion for their magnificent and most generous gift and agreed that the buggies will enable visitors to see far more in one day of the Arboretum and its many memorials within the 150 acre site. During the afternoon Brereton Legion member Andrew Thomson was surprised when he was presented with his UK Armed Forces Veterans Lapel Badge. Andrew served in Royal Marines during the war. After the war he was demobbed and returned to his home town of Aberdeen to immediately enlist in the Gordon Highlanders before transferring to the Royal Artillery. Andrew asked if he was entitled to two bars to his Veterans Lapel Badge for his many tours of duty with his three different regiments.

After the presentation of the buggies Brereton Legion members and their guests went in convoy in "Pip", "Squeak" and "Wilfred" to the Armed Forces Memorial and the furthest reaches of the Arboretum; the Far East Prisoners of War Museum and Memorials, the Allied Special Forces Association Memorials, the Shot at Dawn Memorial and the river confluence where the River Thames empties into the River Trent.

Bikers Pay Tribute At Forces Memorial

Thousands of bikers from across the country roared into the Midlands to pay tribute to fallen soldiers at a special ceremony. An estimated 2,500 riders made their way to the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, near Lichfield, on Saturday to honour British forces who have lost their lives in conflict. It was the first event of its kind in Britain. The ride was organised by the Harley Owners' Group and saw

bikers from as far as Scotland meeting at the Moto Services at junction 10 of the M42 near Tamworth, before setting off along the A38 to the service. Bagpipers performed before the five-minute service, which ended with a bugler sounding the Last Post. Wreaths were then laid at the arboretum's statues. Mark Darwin, of the Nene Valley Harley Owners' Group, said the service is set to become an annual event. He said: "We had counted around 1,400 bikers at the registration point in the service station but police told us there were nearer 2,500. This is far more than we anticipated, we originally said we would be happy with around 200, and because of this success we hope to make this an annual thing. There were Harley Davidson chapels from Scotland, Essex, all over the UK. But there were many other bikers too."

He added: "Our director Martin Dickinson visited the arboretum last year for a service and was struck by the number of people who were at the service. Then this idea came about that we should show our support for the service men and women who have lost their lives at war. They don't get this sort of recognition in this country. In America they hold events like this one and it is supported by hundreds of thousands of people. But this event went brilliantly and we are confident that next year's event will be an even bigger success."

It was a glorious sight to see so many people attending the remembrance service, which comes exactly one month before Remembrance Day. Many of the bikers that took part have connections to war; many were once on active service or have children who are currently on duty, and quite a few were taking part for more emotional reasons to remember lost loved ones. Hopefully, this event will be an annual commemoration that will attract more and more visitors to the National Memorial Arboretum.

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.

Future Events at the NMA

I'm sorry about the limited information about future events at the NMA. I get most of my information about these events from the NMA website but either the NMA Events Page isn't kept up to date or there aren't any other military events booked for the rest of this year or for 2009. **So what I have got – you have got.**

2009

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

Spring Reunion Friday 17th to Monday 20th April 2009

A booking has been confirmed by Jim Scott for 200 people at Warner's Littlecote House Hotel for Friday April 17th to Monday morning 20th April. A booking Form is in the process of being drawn up in the Regiment colours etc. It will be mailed direct to all members as soon as it is completed. Regretfully, owing to the lateness of our bid ALL single rooms have been booked. The current brochure price is £274.00 pp but Jim has obtained a reduction to £209.00 pp for Ambassador Rooms as per the previous arrangements. Bookings will be taken on a first come first served basis as he needs to FILL the bid, so members should make their booking as soon as possible, and return the tear off strip to Jim so that he is informed, and can arrange seating to suit where possible.

FROM DOUG TAPSELL OF SOLIHULL

Hello Malcolm. I should like to say what a real privilege it was to be asked to stand-in as the Birmingham Branch Standard Bearer at the Folkestone Reunion Weekend. To be the Branch Standard Bearer again after all these years was great. My wife June and I were also very impressed with the area chosen for the service and parade. We lingered on there for a moment or two after crowd dispersed as it was such a peaceful place, looking out over the sea towards France. Our thanks to everyone involved for such a great weekend. Yours. Doug.

On behalf of the Birmingham Branch, Roy Thomas and Ralph Dean attended at the funeral of retired Flight Sergeant "Bud" Abbott and Roy has sent me the following report.

The Funeral of Flt Sgt Norman (Bud) Abbott

Thursday the 16th October 2008 at St Edmunds Church, RAF Honington

How does one start a report on a funeral which although in many ways was a sad occasion the actual day was a happy reunion for so many people whose lives had in some way had been touched, by this man affectionately known to many as 'Bud' or Flight Sergeant Abbot (when the time was right). The weather was fine and clear although a bit breezy as the mourners gathered from about 11.15 hours in the car park of St Edmunds church. Four Branch Standards were raised in readiness; Norfolk, Suffolk, Bromley and Birmingham which were kept under the watchful eye of the SWO, with our Chairman Group Captain Brereton Martin RAF (Rtd) and Wing Commander Martin Hooker RAF (Rtd) looking on. As the family arrived including of course his son our present Commandant General, they acknowledged the Standards presence. Being military-run funeral timing was important and the hearse arriving early was asked to go up the road until 12 pm 'the official start'. From then on as they say 'it went like clockwork'. The pallbearers were made up of SACs, Corporals and Sergeants who were on courses at Honington and were as smart as any display team I have seen. The service itself was officiated by the camp Padre with the grandchildren (teenagers) doing the readings, the Commandant General and his sister herself recently retired from the Army gave excellent eulogies on their fathers life, as a military person and as a very private and proud family man. They also thanked the congregation for their attendance. The service included two familiar hymns of "Amazing Grace" and "Onward Christian Soldiers" with the congregation of 70 plus doing them justice, also we had the usual Last Post with the Standard Bearers drill going well even with restricted space near the door area of the church. The main prayer other than the Lord's Prayer was our very own The Prayer of the RAF Regiment. After the service and as we formed up outside, it was decided that it would be fitting for the standards to 'stand down' allowing for the family, close friends and comrades to say a more private farewell at the local crematorium.

The remainder of us retired to the Sergeants Mess for a drink while waiting for the funeral party to return, where we shared in a finger buffet and of course those all important memories.

Norman (Budd) Abbot R.I.P
28th Oct 1927 to the 3rd Oct 2008

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.

STOP PRESS. Another £30.00 from Norfolk Branch. See next month’s newsletter.

Malcolm

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



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

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