



# ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

[www.rafregt.org.uk](http://www.rafregt.org.uk)

## ESSEX & NORTH EAST LONDON BRANCH NEWSLETTER October 2008

Dear Members and Friends,

With the deepest regret we begin this newsletter by advising you of the sad passing of Frank North GM.

Frank was taken into hospital having suffered a stroke and died two days later. Frank originally joined the Comrades in 1994. Frank inspired and encouraged us all over many years and loved being part of our get-togethers and Sunday lunches. Without doubt, Frank will be missed by everyone who knew him.

### **WE WILL REMEMBER HIM**

#### **The Funeral of Frank North G.M.**

All Saints' Church Walton on Naze was full for the Service of thanksgiving for the life of Frank North GM. Our Branch of The RAF Regiment Association was represented by four members, namely Frank Xavier, Dave Connor, Denise Speight and I; other former servicemen were present as was someone from The Guild of Gallantry of which Frank was a member.

The coffin, draped with the Union Flag and with Frank's medals on top had been in the church from the previous evening and was surrounded by the male relatives. The local RAFA Standard, situated adjacent to the church, was at half mast. Family members greeted you on entry to the church. This was indeed a family affair, carried out with the greatest respect and love for Frank. The family floral tribute contained 27 red and white roses - one rose for each member of the family and, following the service, was returned to the church.

The Service was conducted by Frank's son in law, a clergyman and as well as the traditional Service there was an appreciation of Frank's life in pictures some of which reflected his time with the Royal Air Force and with the Association.

Following the Service there was the Committal at the local Crematorium and we returned from there to the church hall for light refreshments.

Frank would have appreciated the care, time and effort that had gone into the occasion.

**Tom Craig**

Daily Telegraph

## Frank North

### Medical orderly who crawled through barbed wire and a canal to rescue a soldier from a minefield.

Frank North, who has died aged 93, was awarded the George Medal for rescuing a soldier from a minefield in Kent.

On August 27 1943 North, a corporal, was serving as a medical orderly with No 2806 Squadron of the RAF Regiment at an airfield on Romney Marsh when a call for help was received from the Army. A platoon of soldiers on a route march had strayed into a defensive minefield and been blown up.

With another orderly and an ambulance driver, he rushed to the scene. The three men, carrying a stretcher, had to make their way through barbed wire defences, wade across the Hythe canal in water up to their chests and then enter the minefield, where they found four soldiers who had been blown up and another seriously injured.

The injured man was lying on the edge of a large crater. North administered morphine and helped to bring the casualty back across the canal and into an ambulance, which he then followed to the hospital, where the soldier later died. The Army recommended North and his two comrades for the George Medal.



Frank North was awarded the George Medal for rescuing a soldier from a minefield

An only child, Frank Robert North was born at Plaistow, Essex, on November 9 1914. He won a scholarship to the local grammar school before training to be an accountant.

When it became clear that war was inevitable, North decided to serve in a life-saving role, partly driven by his religious beliefs and partly by his admiration for the stretcher-bearers of the First World War.

He joined an Essex branch of the British Red Cross and, when the London Blitz began, he volunteered for night work at Queen Mary's Hospital in the East End. As the Battle of Britain reached its climax he joined the RAF as a medical orderly.

North served on various RAF airfields in England before being sent to No 2806 Squadron, then in tented accommodation at RAF Lympne.

North remained with the squadron, which became an armoured car unit, throughout the war, serving with it in France, Holland and Germany.

In Normandy he performed another, but unrecognised, act of gallantry when he went into a German minefield to rescue and tend to a French farmer whose tractor had hit a mine.

During the dash through Holland and Germany to secure advanced landing grounds and airfields, North established his own first aid post and, seeing a doctor only rarely, regularly found himself treating the sick. At the end of the war, his unit had passed through Luneburg and was based in Schleswig-Holstein.

North was released from the RAF in June 1946 and returned to his old firm as an accountant. He finally retired when he was 70. He derived much enjoyment from painting and studying history, and he found great comfort in membership of the church.

Frank North, who died on August 7, married his wife Grace in 1943. She predeceased him, and he is survived by their three daughters.

## **VJ Day Lunch**

Sixteen members and friends celebrated our branch VJ Day lunch.

Frank Xavier read the Commemoration followed by a moment of silence in memory of our four members who had sadly passed away since our last get-together.

On a lighter note, "happy birthday" was sung to Bert Monks and George Stout who were both celebrating their 85<sup>th</sup> birthday.

£20 (part of our raffle proceeds) was given to Tom Craig who volunteered to send it off to the "Beer for the Boys" campaign highlighted in our last newsletter.

It was agreed at the lunch to arrange a **party evening** - this will take place on 6 March 2009. Limited tickets will be made available soon. We hope you will support this worthwhile event.

## **Banner Memorial Service - St Paul's Cathedral**

Frank Xavier and Denise Speight attended the Banner Memorial Service at St Paul's Cathedral on 10 September. This item will be covered in our next newsletter.

## **Battle of Britain Service of Thanksgiving**

On a very warm, bright sunny September Sunday morning, Dave Connor and Denise Speight attended a Battle of Britain Service of Thanksgiving held at St Andrew's Church, Hornchurch. Several squadrons of the Air Training Corp marched through the streets prior to the service which was attended by local Members of Parliament, the Mayor, Councillors and other dignitaries. The Vicar began the service with a blessing and prayers in the cemetery where there is a Memorial Plaque and several war graves. Following the service the ATC once again marched through the streets. A warm welcome was extended to everyone to visit the Squadron HQ.

This is an annual event to which everyone is invited. We do hope that in future more branch members will be able to attend.

## **Congratulations**

We are delighted to share the wonderful news with you that Louisa and Dave Connor recently became Great, Great, Grandparents. Their Great Granddaughter has named her new baby daughter Bella Rose. Our best wishes to all the family.

## Good Wishes

We send good wishes to Anthony Xavier who began his JROC (Junior Regiment Officer Course) at Honington at the beginning of October. We look forward to hearing all about how Anthony is getting on from his parents, Gladys and Frank, at our Christmas lunch - be sure to turn up.



## AGM Reunion Weekend - Folkestone

We arrived at the Grand Burstin Hotel Folkestone in good time. The hotel is situated adjacent to the harbour and consequently most had a sea view from their rooms. The meeting and greeting of old friends which preceded the issue of room keys was a tradition we had got well used to over the years. Essex and North East London had one of the biggest groups so naturally we made our presence known and one of our members met up with a serving pal last seen 40 years ago! In the evening, meeting and greeting continued along with eating, drinking and finding out where in the hotel was the best entertainment.

On Saturday at 9.30 we set off by coach for the Battle of Britain Memorial situated outside Folkestone. Fortunately the weather was fine as it is exposed to the elements. The Memorial was officially opened in July 1993. It is in the shape of a giant three bladed propeller carved into the ground with the statue of a lone airman sitting on the propeller boss. Carved on the boss are the Squadron badges of the RAF units which took part in the battle.

Two circular concrete areas site a full scale model of a Supermarine Spitfire in markings of 72 Squadron and a Hawker Hurricane in the markings of 56 Squadron.

A Memorial Wall displays the details of those who perished. It was sobering, looking at all these names, to reflect on the mayhem in the skies on these critical days and the sacrifice, on our behalf, these young men made.

The parade itself was impressive and the ceremony conducted by our Padre, Willie Downie, moving. The Queen's Colour of the RAF Regiment and the Colour Party were present as were members of 34 Squadron RAF Regiment. A creditable number of Standards were paraded from our own Branches and also from local RAFA, Air Cadet and the British Legion groups

On return to the hotel the ladies were taken by coach on a shopping trip to Dover while the rest of us prepared for the AGM. During the AGM we were introduced to a historian Dr Nigel Warwick who is writing a book on the Armoured Car Companies / Squadrons and he was hoping to speak to those of us who had any knowledge of them. Following this we had a visual and verbal presentation by members of 34 Squadron RAF Regiment on their recent deployments. The preparation, training and hard work entailed made us all feel very proud of the job our lads are doing.

In the evening we had our Gala Dinner and our guest of honour was Corporal David Hayden who is the first airman to win the Military Cross. The occasion was a firefight at the village of Al-Waki near Basra Iraq. Cpl. Hayden's citation reads: With absolute disregard for his own safety, he repeatedly risked his life to rescue a wounded comrade and extract his men from danger. For his outstanding gallantry, selflessness and personal example in the face of a particularly ferocious attack from a determined enemy, Cpl. Hayden is awarded the Military Cross. Willie Downie had composed a poem commemorating the event and this was formally presented to Cpl. Hayden who was given a standing ovation. Delighted to say Cpl. Hayden has become a member of our Association.

Tom Craig

## **FIELD OF REMEMBRANCE**

Members are asked to please attend this event - we are one of the closest branches and our Association needs to be well represented. Westminster Abbey, 6 November, 10.30am.

## **REMEMBRANCE SUNDAY**

It is important to attend this event if you can. Again, we are one of the closest branches. Tickets are available by sending a stamped addressed envelope to: T Feeley, 9 Laburnum Avenue, Audenshaw, Manchester M34 5SS

Many, many thanks to Tom Craig for his help and assistance with this newsletter.

If you have any items you think may be of interest to other members, please let us know so we may include them in future newsletters.

## **Christmas Lunch**

We will be meeting at our old haunt in Romford for our Christmas lunch. Details on last page.

**We have been asked to advise you of the following three items:**

## RAF Regiment History

All members will wish to know that Dr Nigel Warwick, who wrote *Constant Vigilance; The RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign*, is currently carrying out further research into the history of the RAF Regiment for future books.

Dr Warwick attended the Association Reunion at Folkestone, hoping to meet and interview Association members with knowledge of his areas of research which include:

- a. **RAF Armoured Car Companies/Squadrons in the Middle East 1921-1953.** While much of the research in this area will come to him through the RAF Armoured Cars Association, there may be some members of No 2 (Armoured Car) Sqn RAF Regt who would have personal knowledge which would be of interest to Dr Warwick.
- b. **RAF Regiment in the Mediterranean 1942-1946.** Dr Warwick's focus here is on the Middle East Desert Air Force 1941-1943 (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia), North Africa 1942-1943 (Algeria, Tunisia), Sicily 1943, Italy 1943-1946, Cos 1943, South of France 1944, Greece 1944-1945, Yugoslavia 1944-1946.
- c. **RAF Regiment in the UK.** D-Day and North West Europe and the Occupation of Germany 1944-1946

Dr Warwick can be contacted at [caronige@aapt.net.au](mailto:caronige@aapt.net.au)

There is a questionnaire about this research which can be downloaded from the Association website at [www.rafregt.org.uk](http://www.rafregt.org.uk)

The most valuable source of history is the people who have lived it. Please do all you can to ensure that we can all benefit from this living history before it is lost forever.

## 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.

## Souvenir Brochure

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 Museum) to the Martin Hooker at: RAF Honington, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk IP31 1EE.

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2008

November 6	Field of Remembrance, Westminster Abbey
November 9	Remembrance Sunday, Cenotaph
November 30	Christmas Lunch - 12 noon for 12.30 Liberty Bell, Romford
December 3	Essex Branch Meeting (Buffet)
March 6	<b>Party Night</b> - more information in next newsletter - please keep this date free

### RAFFLE PRIZES ALWAYS WELCOME

#### In the next issue:

**Banner Service and Parade** report by Frank Xavier

**Out Of The Frying Pan And Into The Fire!**

An article on a present day gunner (with kind permission of Air Mail)

#### STOP PRESS:

#### SERVICE OF THANKSGIVING:

#### GP CAP KINGSLEY OLIVER

Gp Capt Kinsley Oliver died on 5 Oct 08 following a short illness. Following a private family funeral in the morning, a Service of Thanksgiving for his Life and Work will be held in the City of London at St Vedast Church, Fosters Lane, EC2V 6H at 15.30 on Thu 30 Oct 08. The nearest London Underground station is St Paul's. Those planning to attend the Service are asked to notify the Regt Sec to enable likely numbers to be assessed. Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Audrey Oliver at 8 Chiltern Gardens, Bromley, Kent BR2 0PT.