



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: 246
DECEMBER 2009**

THE BIRMINGHAM BRANCH NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 245 DECEMBER 2009

Dear Readers.

Goodies for Our Injured Boys

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. With your help, we can continue to provide these small comforts and any other items that members of the military staff ask us for. We can never get enough goodies for the lads, so in the mean time, your continued support is appreciated for we need more money as we only have £18.40 remaining.

If any of you would like to contribute items or cash directly for this appeal, you must contact Warrant Officer "Stoney" (Alan) Wanbon RAF, NCO I/C Patient Support Services, or post them to him at RCDM, Selly Oak Hospital, Raddlebarn Road, Selly Oak, Birmingham, B29 6JD. "Stoney" can also be contacted on 07795 801276. If cash, please make your cheques out to RCDM - PSS.

You may have noticed that I've changed the title of our Appeal from Military Ward to Our Injured Boys, it was by official request as apparently there isn't a Military Ward, it, is a NHS ward staffed by military personnel. No matter, the Appeal remains the same and is for the same good cause so as I have said on many occasions, "dig deep and die happy. And that is just what Birmingham Branch member and his wife have done. Jim Davies and his wife Sheila have done us proud again as the following letter shows.

**JIM DAVIES OF MIDDLEWICH,
CHESHIRE**

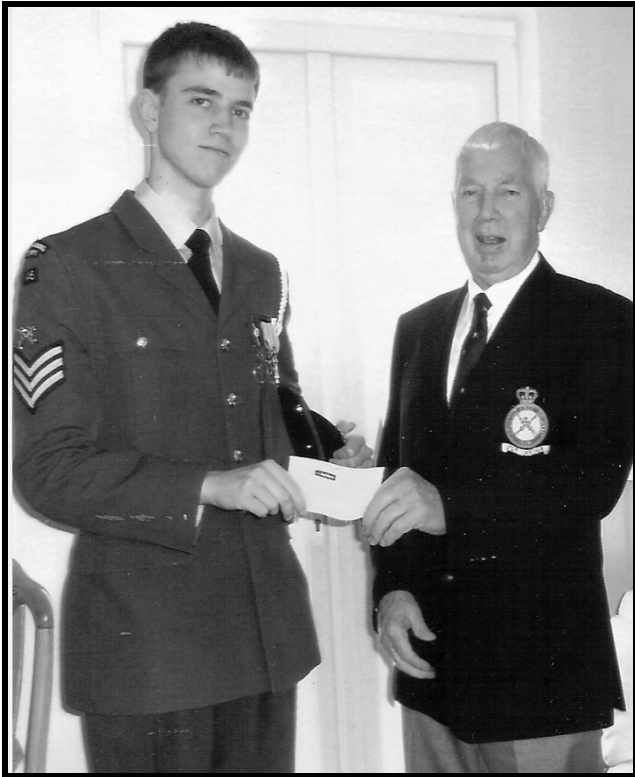
Dear Malcolm. Sheila and I have done another car boot sale but this time we had a little help from my sister and her grandson Steven. On the day the weather started a bit cold but it got warmer later as the sun came out and we had a good day and made £158.00. Also, my sister's grandson Steven raised £214.00 in sponsorship for a Nijmegen march he did. He gave some to his ATC squadron fund and some to the Birmingham Branch Appeal Fund, and Malcolm, if you have room, could you please print this in your next

newsletter. Steven is eighteen and is waiting to go into the RAF.

Last month he was hitting the streets selling Remembrance Day poppies with the other lads on his squadron. His ATC squadron is 146 Northwich ATC Squadron in Cheshire. I enclose a photograph of him handing me a cheque for £157.00. I have promised him that I would ask if you could include the photograph so that he can show your newsletter to his CO Flight Lt Paul Thompson.

We had a box on our table at the car boot sale with a sign on it saying "Please Give a Penny to the Soldiers", it made £5.00, then people on other stalls were sending over bric-a-brac so when the car boot sale closed, we still had a full trailer load. The people attending the car boot sale were so good. In the name of the Birmingham Branch, I have sent Warrant Officer Wanbon a cheque for £315.00 that is £158.00 from the car boot sale and £157.00 from Steven. Take care, Jim, Sheila, Steven and his Gran.

Jim, our very grateful thanks to you and your team and I'm delighted to print the photograph below as you can see. Any chance Steven is joining the RAF Regiment?



He's a fine looking young man Jim and you, Sheila and his Gran must be very proud of him. What is Gran's name by the way?

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The International Four Day Marches Nijmegen (or Vierdaagse) is the largest marching event in the world. It is organised every year in Nijmegen in mid-July as a means of promoting sport and exercise. Participants walk 30, 40 or 50 kilometres daily, and, on completion, receive a royally approved medal (the Vierdaagsekrus). The participants are mostly civilians, but there are also a few thousand military participants.

It is an annual walk that has taken place since 1909, being based at Nijmegen since 1916. Depending on age group and category, walkers have to walk 30, 40 or 50 kilometres each day for four days. Originally a military event with a few civilians, it now is a mainly civilian event. Numbers have risen in recent years, with over 40,000 taking part - including about 5,000 military.

It is now the world's largest walking event. Due to crowds on the route, since 2004, the organisers have limited the number of participants. Those who complete the march receive the 'Vierdaagse Cross', an official Dutch decoration that can be worn on a Dutch uniform. Many participants take part every year, including several that have taken part in 50, and even 60

different annual marches. The first day of walking is always the 3rd Tuesday in July.

Each day of the marches is named after the biggest town it goes through. Tuesday is the day of Elst, Wednesday the day of Wijchen, Thursday the day of Groesbeek and Friday the day of Cuijk. The routes always stay the same unless there is a specific need to change, as it did in 2007 when the walkers went through the Waalkade on the Wednesday, for the first time since the original route got too crowded and walkers had to wait for over an hour at some times.

2006 was the first year to be cancelled in 90 years (apart from WWII). After the first day's march there were thousands of drop-outs and two deaths because of extreme heat.

On the Friday, as participants near the finish, the public awards the walkers with Gladioli. A symbol of force and victory stemming from Roman times where gladiators were showered with Gladioli, the Nijmegen walkers are similarly 'showered' in flowers on their arrival. The entry into the city and towards the finish, the St. Annastreet, is for that reason called Via Gladiola during the Nijmegen Marches.

CGs Team Commendation

As a result of the article about our Commandant General's "Team Commendation" in last month's newsletter, my brother James and his wife Jean who live in Lincoln, sent off a cheque to "Stoney" Wanbon for £20.00 in the name of the Birmingham Branch. This award is already proving its worth as the above and the following two articles demonstrate.

John Casley is a "Friend Member" of our Branch and recently sent me an open cheque for fifty pounds and enclosed the following letter to me. Many thanks for this generous donation John, I have made out the cheque to RCDM – PSS (Royal Centre for Defence Medicine – Patient Support Services) and sent the cheque to "Stoney" Wanbon at Selly Oak Hospital to be put to whatever use for our injured lads that he feels is appropriate.

John Casley of Plymouth

Dear Malcolm. On reading your newsletter I would like to thank you for the birthday wishes, even though it makes me feel that much older. Although we have no relations in the Royal Air Force my wife and I retain our interest in memory of our son. I have read the newsletter through and we have decided that we

should be concerned for those of today. We have decided therefore to give a small donation to a charity of your choice. We send our sincere wishes to your Committee for whom we have great respect for the work that you do. Yours sincerely. Mr and Mrs J Casley.

Peterbrook Flower Club

On the evening of 11th November I was invited to attend one of Valerie's flower clubs, Peterbrook Flower Club, to talk to the ladies about our fundraising efforts for the our injured lads and lassies. The event had a particular meaning on that evening as it was of course Remembrance Day. I was also there to receive another cheque from them for £200.00 for our Appeal Fund.

I used our award of the Commandant General's Team Commendation and Warrant Officer "Stoney" Wanbon's article in the Autumn edition of "Centurion" as the basis of my talk and to emphasise to the ladies, that it was due to their efforts, and others like them, that had enabled the Birmingham Branch to receive this prestigious award.

I was also able to tell them that the recently appointed RAF Military Liaison Officer (MLO) at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) based at Selly Oak Hospital in Birmingham, WO Alan "Stoney" Wanbon RAF Regiment, will be coming along next year to talk to them about his responsibilities at Selly Oak Hospital and what his job is all about. But to give you all some idea of his responsibilities, "Stoney" has sent me the article that appeared in "Centurion".

WO Alan "Stoney" Wanbon RAF Regiment, writes about his newly established unique position along with the complex issues that arise.

I consider myself extremely fortunate to be part of a small team called "Patient Support Services" (PSS) within the RCDM. As I enter my 30th year of Service, my newly established post has somewhat "opened my eyes" to the vast and diverse environment we Service personnel share. In the first 10 months of an 18 month tour as the MLO for Air Command, I have never been so utterly impressed with the professionalism and attitude of our glorious military medical organisations. You see, unless you already know, or indeed, play an intimate part of the overall military medical system, you may actually have

no idea of what goes on at Selly Oak and the other medical establishments based around Birmingham and indeed around the globe. Commanded by Brigadier C J R Parker CBE L/RAMC, the RCDM has become the principle UK receiving unit for all casualties returning from overseas.

It works in close conjunction with several other hospitals throughout Birmingham, with patients being admitted to the hospital and ward that best suits their clinical needs. Wherever possible, the RCDM's philosophy is to try to keep military casualties together, usually on one Military Managed Ward (MMW).

This practice is primarily conducted in order to maintain the high standard of esprit de corps and, of course, morale. It should be noted that sometimes clinical needs may override this and, when this is the case, personnel seek to ensure those particular patients and their families/partners still receive the same high level of support as those admitted to the MMW.

The position of MLO is better known as "A fixer"; an experienced individual who is able to interface between the patients, families, Welfare Services and the NHS. Taken from each Service and deployed Brigades the MLO is primarily responsible for ensuring things happen with the word liaison obviously being the key word. I use the famous quote of George Bernard Shaw, **"The greatest problem with communication is the illusion it has already been accomplished"**. Therefore communication for this role is the key.

It's only fair to say that no two working days are the same and often result in missed meals, and little sleep for the MLO. From the start and as a matter of course, I was told, "When you go to your bed, if you can honestly sleep with confidence knowing you have completed your role well, then you have done a good job". Knowing when to stop or slow down also features daily as you can easily find yourself burning the candle at both ends, something I consider to be a natural instinct in a caring environment.

My newly found and unique position was immediately tested when I found myself thrown into the deep end. There was nothing more sobering than back in January on day one, when during initial patient introductions, I quickly learnt not to shake hands with lads with no arms. Although abrupt and to the point, this was just one of many steep learning curves. There is of course

no training package to prepare you for the array of extraordinary experiences to be encountered. Working a rotational eight – day shift pattern, it is essential a short break is taken in order to mentally and physically recover prior to being placed back into the “deep end” in support of my colleagues and patients.

During the time I have been in post I have used lots of alcohol based hand gel and seen a significant number of patients come and go. The job also requires me to be sympathetic and compassionate; yet on occasion I still need to remind the odd individual, regardless of their clinical situation, that he or she is still a member of HM Services. However, there is nothing more gratifying than seeing a patient leave the hospital in good health. It’s only fair to say that not all the patients leave in perfect condition; but that’s where our colleagues at Headley Court are able to shine. On the flip side, I sadly also get involved acting as a Notifying Officer. This additional role, involves informing patients of operational fatalities. I cannot deny it is by far becoming too common and remains a most unpleasant task.

Much of the MLO’s duties are related to the Defence Medical Welfare Services (DMWS). A great bunch of guys and girls made up from the St John & Red Cross organisations. Based within the local area, DMWS are primarily involved in the initial meeting and management of casualties’ families and their continued welfare. I have no hesitation when I say “this small, highly efficient team really earn their pay and deserve a lot more”.

One term I picked up during my time here is “Care for the Carer”; it’s a term I fully support. Nothing can prepare you for what the magnificent medical staffs endure. The professional and highly complex collaboration between the Military medical and NHS staff is second to none. Let’s not forget their true and superlative dedication to their primary role and, probably most important, the fact that the only break they get is leave.

In order to ensure we maintain a high standard of service all parties involved in a casualty evacuation, arrival and rehabilitation need to be, “singing off the same song sheet”. To that end, the need and importance of a robust rear party and unit welfare setup is crucial. Units need to be fully conversant with the requirements of Visiting Officers (VO’s) & Notifying Officers (NO’s). In these times of increased operational

tempo, units with deployed personnel can anticipate events by maintaining a pool of trained VO’s & NO’s. In order to appreciate the whole system, just imagine being a casualty yourself and what you expect to be provided for you and your loved ones, and then fill in the gaps! Now that I’ve settled in and only when time permits, I have to put to good use one of my previous roles as organiser and coordinator of Force Development (FD) activities.

Exercises are already underway ensuring the hard working RAF medical staffs get away on some well deserved FD orientated activities. Staff have already enjoyed days out to the Derwent Reservoir area of the Peak District. Taking in some well deserved fresh air and change of environment whilst studying the intricate details of OPERATION CHASTISE 1943 better known as the Dambusters Raids.

The position of RAF MLO can be easily described as “different”. But there is nothing more humbling and gratifying than to be part of a team that makes a real difference. Many thanks to each and every one of you for your continued support. Per Ardua. Stoney

BRANCH BIRTHDAYS

A very Happy Birthday to the following Birmingham Branch members whose birthdays are this month, may you all have many more.

5th Dec **Albert Clarke** Newcastle under Lyme
 10th December **Cyril Turner** Walsall West Mids
 11th December **Colin Smith** Warwick
 15th December **John Bowen** Totten Hampshire
 17th Dec **Rod Hancock** Burton on Trent Staffs
 25th December **Peter Cole** Shifnal Shropshire

3 Squadron RAF Regiment

Preparing for Afghanistan

Stanford Training area near Thetford was the location for the first training exercise by airmen from Cambridgeshire with little or no operational experience. Airmen from 3 Squadron, RAF Regiment, based at RAF Wittering, near Stamford, took part in what is known as a mission rehearsal exercise to prepare them for what they may face during their six-month tour of duty to Camp Bastion in Afghanistan. They also had the chance to train with other nations, including America and Afghan nationals, who they will be working alongside in Afghanistan.

The training area was designed to replicate as closely as possible the situations in which

troops could face in the Middle East. From the call to prayer heard across a busy market place, and a bustling family home, to a network of claustrophobic alleyways with high walls, the areas provide for a complex and realistic way to train troops and test their skills under demanding conditions.

The squadron form part of No 1 Force Protection (FP) Wing, commanded by Wing Commander Mick Smeath. The Wing, 123 personnel strong, which also includes 504 Auxiliary RAF Squadron and the RAF Police, will deploy to Afghanistan on November 27 to take over from No 2 FP Wing (34 Squadron, RAF Regiment).

Colleague's death a stark reminder for Gunner Tim Roberts

The gravity of what he had left behind hit Regiment Gunner Tim Roberts last October when one of the servicemen sent out to replace him in Afghanistan died in a bomb blast. SAC Roberts aged 27 had only been back on leave in England for two days when news of the killing of Marcin Wojtak broke. "His death really hit home. It could have quite easily been one of us," said SAC Roberts. SAC Wojtak had recently arrived in Afghanistan and was part of a group from 34 Squadron RAF Regiment flown out to replace SAC Roberts and his fellow servicemen. He was killed while on vehicle patrol near Camp Bastion, the main British base in Helmand province. Of the 219 British deaths in Afghanistan to that date, his death was the closest to Camp Bastion and has raised concerns about the ability of the Taliban to successfully target coalition troops near their bases.

During his four-month tour of duty with the squadron, SAC Roberts who is also a team medic, was never far from the action. "Part of my job was to hop out of a Chinook helicopter and pick up the wounded servicemen and bring them back. Unfortunately, I was very busy. At times we did have some ground fire aimed at us, but we were travelling so fast it wasn't too bad," added SAC Roberts. I was just proud to be doing the job I had trained for and relieved to come back in one piece," he added.

SAC Roberts only joined the RAF last year and this was his debut tour of duty. "It was my first time in a war zone, and being back home was really strange at first. Normal things like being with my girlfriend or shopping at the

supermarket were surreal, but a couple of good nights out and I soon got used to normality again."

"Everyone knows about the conflict and are curious about what's going on out there," added SAC Roberts. "Friends asked a few probing questions but they appreciate there are things I don't really want to talk about." He expects to return to Afghanistan in 2010.

RAF Regiment Recruitment

Recruitment is at an all time high for the Regiment with only one hundred places left to fill this year and as there are at least one thousand applicants, only the very best will be chosen.

Flight Lieutenant Mark Bowden has been selected as the RAF's new recruitment poster boy, after his football skills helped out in Iraq. Mark, a former star player for Third Division Elgin City, is at the forefront of a Roy of the Rovers-style campaign which has seen his image appear in dozens of magazines.

The top brass chose him after his exploits in Iraq helped to break down barriers with the locals. Mark and his team-mates from 51 Squadron RAF Regiment, then based at RAF Lossiemouth, took time off from guarding Basra Airport to play a local team from the village of Imam Anas. The game marked a breakthrough in relations with the Iraqi population and ended in a 5-4 victory for the Regiment after Mark saved the day during a tense penalty shoot-out. He said:

"I didn't really mention the adverts to anyone because I wanted to sit back and see what would happen. It has been really interesting as I have been getting emails and calls from friends who have seen them all over the place. I was honoured to be asked to take part in the campaign. I think things like this will help recruitment. People will be able to see that the forces are not just about a job. People get to see the world and play sport to a high level. With operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, I think people have lost sight of that." Inverness Caley fan Mark, originally from Wiltshire and now based in Suffolk, added he was missing Scotland and its football. He said:

"We were spoilt with all the scenery and the people were great. Before I went to Scotland, I was a sceptic about the quality of the football but having experienced it first hand, the Scottish Third Division is as good as League Two in England. People assume that because the crowds

are not huge, that the football isn't up to much but they couldn't be more wrong."

Inquest on SACs Gary Thompson and Graham Livingstone, Wednesday 11th November

Recording a verdict of unlawful killing the coroner Masters made a veiled criticism of the technology gap saying the "reduced performance" of the older Ebex detectors was "distinct" from that of the more modern Vallon devices that have now been drafted in. Earlier, he had been told by Wing Commander Tony Bull, who led the MoD inquiry into the deaths, who said the correct numbers of hand-held metal detectors; either Ebex or Vallon types might have made a difference.

"The Board of Inquiry concludes that had more hand-held metal detectors been available, there is an unquantifiable probability that the patrol might have found the device. Owing to the insufficient number of Ebex the squadron could not fully comply with Op Barma (bomb-checking) drills, thereby reducing their IED (Improvised Explosive Device) detecting capability."

After the verdicts, Mrs Thompson, flanked by three of her daughters, Kelly, Aimee and Jordan, spoke of a "difficult few days". "I would like to say how full of praise and admiration I feel for those lads after these last couple of days. I'm lost for words listening to their commitment and professionalism and to do their duties on such limited resources." The metal detecting shortages have since been addressed, with patrols now having four of the superior Vallon kits. Patrols are not allowed to leave base without the requisite number of kits.

Did a Shortage of mine detectors contribute to troops' deaths?

Jacqui Thompson, the wife of Senior Aircraftsman Gary Thompson, spoke, after a senior RAF officer told the inquest that had more modern metal detectors been used, the roadside bomb in Afghanistan that killed her husband and another airman might have been found. The hearing had already been told that a lack of metal detectors meant that the six vehicle patrol of RAF Regiment personnel only had one between them. But it has also emerged that the device they had was outdated and unable to detect bombs with low metal content. This meant that a vulnerable river crossing was not exhaustively scanned for Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). Senior Aircraftsmen Gary Thompson, 51, a father of five daughters, and Graham Livingstone, 23, died after

their Land Rover was blown up after it drove through a river crossing that had not been checked with the bomb detecting devices. Flight Lieutenant Andrew Costin, who commanded the patrol and was wounded in the incident, told the court that the patrol should have had two Ebex metal detectors but one was broken and yet to be replaced. He said; "We put in for a replacement which was never received. One was borrowed from other patrols." The fatal explosion happened after the convoy was re-crossing the river having regrouped from performing split missions.

The first group crossed the two foot deep river in an area known to be vulnerable to mines, without having the spare device. It had conducted some checks at the water, but it had not been able to carry out complete "Operation Barma" drills because the only metal detector was with the other team. Sergeant Christopher Pacey, the patrol's deputy commander, told the court:

"The only thing you could do was use other equipment at our disposal - binoculars and thermal imaging equipment to check for disrupted ground. We checked to the best of our ability with the equipment we had and found nothing at that time." The coroner asked: "Would you have preferred to have undertaken the drill with a metal detector?" Sergeant Pacey replied: "Yes, sir." Mr Masters continued: "Were you concerned that you weren't able to conduct it with a metal detector?" "Yes, sir." When the two sections of the patrol joined up to come back over, a decision was taken for "tactical reasons" not to conduct a full sweep of the river again. When they re-crossed the device exploded under the Land Rover throwing out SAC Thompson, who at 51 became the oldest serviceman to be killed on operations in Afghanistan in April last year. It was not known if a metal detector could have picked up the device, which was made largely of plastic. The inquest was also told that despite a medical rescue helicopter being 900 metres away at Kandahar airfield it was delayed by 15 minutes because of radio programming fault meant the crew could not talk to the troops on the ground. As a result the aircraft made three passes over the scene before the men could be put through to the pilots by controllers back at the airfield.

Shortages Played No Part

A shortage of metal detectors played no part in the deaths of two servicemen in Afghanistan as the anti-tank mine they hit was

made of plastic, a coroner said on Wednesday. At the time, the patrol had only one Ebex metal detector between six vehicles, meaning a vulnerable river crossing was not exhaustively scanned for Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs). But, summing up the case, Wiltshire and Swindon Coroner David Masters said: "The IED would have been unlikely to be detected by the use of the Ebex had Barma drills (scanning for mines) been implemented in full on either or both of these crossings due to the minimal metal content and reduced performance of the Ebex as distinct from a Vallon (a more effective metal detector in modern use)."

At Trowbridge Town Hall, Mr Masters recorded verdicts of unlawful killing in the case of both men, ruling that they were killed by an unknown insurgent. The deaths are being treated as murder and the Taliban responsible will be tried if caught. SAC Thompson, from Sherwood, Nottingham, became the oldest serviceman to die in the conflict when the device detonated on 13th April last year. SAC Livingstone, from Glasgow, was also killed in the blast, which injured two other men.

Reacting to the verdict, Air Commodore Steven Abbott said: "The coroner's verdict recognises and reinforces the actions that have already been implemented as a result of the Service Board of Enquiry. The RAF Regiment now has the improved Vallon hand-held mine detector for operations in Afghanistan, training to counter the use of IEDs has been improved and the regiment has access to a range of vehicles in which to conduct operations, all of which offer enhanced blast protection." He also paid tribute to the "professionalism and commitment" of the two men.

RAF reservists head off to Afghanistan

At the end of last month, a team RAF Regiment Reservist Gunners from Nottinghamshire left for operations in Afghanistan. The ten part-time personnel from 504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron will be heading out with 504's full-time sister unit, 3 Squadron RAF Regiment. They have spent the past three months together in full-time pre-deployment training.

Once in Afghanistan, they will patrol the area around air bases – working as a visible deterrent to insurgents. Reservists, who augment and support regular RAF Regiment Squadrons, can expect to be called up on operations for one

year in every three. The deployment overseas is for six months but, by the time they have completed pre-deployment training and taken post deployment leave on return, the team will have been away from their civilian jobs for 12 months. The RAF reservists from 504 (County of Nottingham) Squadron are based at RAF Cottesmore in Rutland.

Searching For Former Regiment Colleagues – by Hughie Cooper

Since I joined the RAF Regiment Association nearly twenty years ago, as well as making many good friends, I have been endeavouring to locate former colleagues, unfortunately without much success. (I think it must be me or my past !!)

Although I did make contact ten years ago with one who has now sadly passed on. Notwithstanding that I have carried on and on receipt of the Summer Flash, No. 7 2009 I saw a new member (D. Harris) had joined and I remembered a Dave Harris who had joined at the same time as me as a National Service recruit for eighteen months in June 1949.

This was then increased to two years when we only had less than three months to serve. I therefore contacted him and was pleased to find he was the one I remembered. Two days later he came to see me and so we had a really good old natter and whilst we did not have many cameras in those days he brought several photo's with him. We had been at RAF Bridgnorth for recruit training before going on to Skipton-on-Swale (which closed about two weeks later) for a few days and then to on 5th October 1949 to Catterick for our Regiment training. On completion of our field craft training, Dave was selected to go on a JGI course at Catterick and remained there for the rest of his service as an instructor.

I went on to Germany and 20 LAA Squadron initially at Sundern and finally to Gutersloh where I completed my service and was demobbed via RAF Hednesford. Dave was demobbed from Catterick and that is why we never came into contact until now 60 years later.

So the main object of this message is there is always hope in finding former colleagues if you keep searching, but hoping you can find more than I have. Enclosed are photos of our meeting and two I have reproduced from our service days. Kindest regards Hughie.

Branch Meeting Venue

As you all know we currently meet at the Windermere United Services Club, 110 Wake Green Road, Birmingham but like many ex-service clubs it is having difficulty in paying its way. Despite the best efforts of the Stewards Mick and Liz, the Club continues to struggle and is now not taking enough money over the bar to pay for the running costs. The Club needs at least £1,800 per week to break even but for the last few months the average takings have only been £1,200 per month. This cannot continue of course.

The Club Committee has been considering various options and has come up with the following solution. We meet in the upstairs function room and it has been decided by the Club Committee to close this room and to attempt to rent it out as office space to generate extra revenue. As a consequence of that decision, another room will have to be provided for the various clubs and societies that meet at the club on a regular basis.

This will require the division of the Snooker Room with the loss of two tables. The back part will then become a smaller meeting room. The Club Committee realise that this will give some members who play snooker a problem, but by being a little bit flexible when choosing which night to play, for example, Thursdays, Saturdays and Sundays are usually quiet, the disruption should be kept to a minimum. As you would expect, the Snooker league players will have priority to play their matches during the season. The Club Committee hopes that all members will accept the necessity for this action.

NATIONAL MEMORIAL

ARBORETUM (NMA) UPDATE

Duke of Wessex marks Remembrance Day at Arboretum

On 11th November, more than 1,200 people joined the Duke of Wessex in remembering thousands of fallen soldiers in a moving Remembrance Day Service at the National Memorial Arboretum. A parade of standards and a fanfare from The Band of the Royal Marines, Plymouth, welcomed Prince Edward into the memorial of towering, Portland stone walls which bear the names of fallen servicemen and women, including 66 men lost in 2008.

They came to remember the fallen – their minds lost in silent tribute to the young men and women who gave up their lives for the freedoms we hold dear. In both Birmingham and Staffordshire, as across the rest of the country, the distractions of modern life were put to one side yesterday as young and old stood shoulder-to-shoulder to remember the fallen of past and present conflicts. The Duke laid the first wreath at the memorial, followed by Quentin Davies MP, on behalf of the Government as the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at the Ministry of Defence responsible for Defence Equipment and Support.

Three senior representatives from the Army, Navy and RAF, Vice Admiral Sir Alan Massey, Lieutenant General Chris Brown and Air Marshal Iain McNicoll, followed suit before John Farmer and Lady Apsley laid wreaths on behalf of the Royal British Legion. Three serving combat medical technicians from the Royal Army Medical Corps who had just completed a 120 mile fundraising walk of remembrance from their HQ in Camberley to the Arboretum also laid wreaths for the three soldiers recently killed in Iraq.

At the end of the service, the Duke of Wessex paused for a short time at the inscription walls watched by the 600-strong congregation of guests invited to sit in the memorial for the service and another 600 people watching from a big screen outside the visitor centre. He then took the salute during a march past on Millennium Avenue following a Hercules fly by. Former Birmingham Mayor, Sir Bernard Zissman, who is a member of the appeal's council for the development of the arboretum, was one of the invited guests in the memorial congregation. He said: "I think it was a very moving ceremony, and I think we all need to say that we forget our past at our peril. The Armed Forces Memorial is a dramatic memorial. It's hard to believe that so many names have been added since in the Second World War, and sadly, are being added all the time."

He was joined by Tamworth Mayor, Councillor Gerard Pinner, who said: "I thought it was a wonderful and uplifting service. I was very pleased to be invited and to have the opportunity to lay a wreath for the people of Tamworth, especially in memory of our local hero, Colin Grazier."

Dr Liam Fox visits the National Memorial Arboretum

On 13th November, Dr Liam Fox MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Defence, today met staff and volunteers at the National Memorial Arboretum and toured parts of the 150 acre site. Dr Fox was shown footings for the Basra Wall, which is being re-erected at the Arboretum following the drawdown of Her Majesty's Armed Forces from Iraq earlier this year.

The Wall will be re-dedicated in May 2010. He also took the opportunity to pay his respects at the Armed Forces Memorial, the nation's tribute to the 16,000 Service men and women who have died on duty, or as a result of terrorism, since shortly after the end of the Second World War. The towering Portland Stone walls of the Memorial are added to annually, and include the names of the 66 men and women lost in 2008. Following his visit, Dr Fox said:

"My visit to the Arboretum has been both poignant and spiritually uplifting. It's a fascinating place and I've been bowled over by how much has been achieved since it opened in 2001. This is a place where the Nation comes to remember and the public's strong support for our Armed Forces has been witnessed here with the rapid rise in visitor numbers to the 300,000 a year mark. I support the Arboretum's urgent £8 million Appeal, which will see the redevelopment of the visitor centre and the creation of new education and interpretation facilities. I'm particularly keen to see the construction of the Veteran's Pavilion, a striking building in which over 200 Remembrance events can be held throughout the year."

National Memorial Arboretum unveils initial visuals for world-class remembrance centre

The £8 million redevelopment includes an Armed Forces Pavilion, a 'Heroes' Square' and an Education Centre

Following the launch of the £8 million NMA Future Foundations Appeal in April, the National Memorial Arboretum has now unveiled initial drawings for the new buildings which will transform the 150 acre site into a world-class Centre for Remembrance.



An impression of how the arboretum's new entrance could look

With consistently strong public support for Her Majesty's Armed Forces, and increasing recognition of the heroic sacrifices made in Iraq and Afghanistan, annual visitor numbers to the Arboretum have increased fivefold to 300,000 in just two years. This number is predicted to rise to nearer half a million a year as word about this unique national memorial spreads and the Nation wishes to remember and pay homage to all those who are giving their lives for their country.

The goal of the NMA Future Foundations Appeal, of which HRH Prince William is Patron, is to create a Remembrance Centre which will include an Armed Forces Pavilion and a 'Heroes' Square' – fitting venues in which the Arboretum's 200 a year remembrance events can be hosted.

General Patrick Cordingley, who commanded the Desert Rats in the first Gulf War and is Chairman of the NMA Future Foundations Appeal, said: "The Arboretum has become a place in which the Nation comes to remember and pays tribute to our Armed Forces. I've met no-one who has failed to be incredibly moved by their visit here, especially when seeing the massed ranks of names on the towering Portland Stone walls of the Armed Forces Memorial. Such is the popularity of the Arboretum, especially around Remembrance time, that we're now forced to hold major events on a muddy field and host veterans in semi-permanent marquees. It's not good enough and we must better honour the memory of those that have gone before us. I'm fearful too, that having completely outgrown our educational facilities, and with schools clamouring to book a visit, we are failing to adequately spread a vitally important message to future generations."

Donations to the Appeal can be made via www.thenma.org.uk or by sending cheques payable to the "National Memorial Arboretum" to: The NMA Future Foundations Appeal Office, 1 Fitzgerald Road, London, SW14 8HA.

Call for war cemetery alongside National Memorial Arboretum

There is a growing demand for the creation of a national cemetery for war heroes. Bereaved families, veterans, charities and politicians have all backed a campaign to have a special place of rest for Britain's fallen troops similar to Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, USA. And the campaigners believe that the right place for it would be next to the National Memorial Arboretum.

The former commander of British soldiers in Afghanistan has called for the introduction of a war cemetery alongside the National Memorial Arboretum near Lichfield. Brigadier Ed Butler said that the need for a National War Cemetery was apparent following the continued loss of life in Afghanistan. He added that the introduction of a burial ground at Alrewas could provide a "sense of pride" and "national honour" similar to that achieved by the Arlington National Cemetery in the United States. He said:

"We owe it to our brave servicemen and women, who have paid the final price, to provide them with a fitting and permanent resting place and memorial where not just their families, but also the ordinary public can pay their respects and express their gratitude. A National Cemetery alongside the National Arboretum in Lichfield would, in my view, go some way in providing this. As the drum beat of British servicemen killed in action continues relentlessly is it now time to consider a National War Cemetery?"

Mr Winston Churchill, president of the UK National Defence Association, said he "fully endorsed" the proposal. I most strongly commend this idea most particularly because we live today in a wholly different world where we buried our dead where they fell and it would be entirely inappropriate to bury them in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore it would be wholly appropriate for us to have in Britain an equivalent to Arlington National Cemetery and this idea needs to be looked at as a matter of urgency."

Lord Slim, the son of the Second World War commander Viscount Slim of Burma, said: "I think the British public would like this and it

needs some deep thought and examination to see what people think."

There are also concerns that military graves can become "lost" in large civilian cemeteries where there is none of that almost palpable sense of sacrifice and everlasting comradeship. Major Rupert Follett, a company commander in the 2nd Battalion The Rifles, who lost thirteen men during a tour in Halmand this summer said: "I have been in the army for fifteen years and it's a pretty transient lifestyle so having a single place where you could be put alongside your military brothers seems entirely appropriate".

I think that this is a wonderful idea even though it has been said that it could face opposition from bereaved relatives who want loved ones buried in local churchyards or family plots. This could easily be resolved by allowing relatives to have the final choice of burial place.

Prisoner of war's legacy

On 1st November, the Worcestershire Bewdley and the Rock and Far Forest Branches of the Royal British Legion travelled to the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas to present a blanket which was donated by the son of the late Evan Jasper. Evan served with the Cambridge Regiment during the Second World War and was captured by the Japanese when Singapore fell. As a prisoner, he worked on the railway from Thailand to Burma.

When he was liberated he was given the blanket by a Japanese officer in the hope that he would say he had been well treated. He told the officer what he thought of him but kept the blanket. Together with the blanket, a thirty-page autobiography of Evan's life from when he was born in Quarry Bank in the Black Country, to his years as a Japanese prisoner of war and to the end of the war entitled "I was a guest of the Emperor" was also donated to the Arboretum.

On page seven of last month's newsletter, I published an e-mail from Brian Thornally of Loughborough, Leicestershire in which he gave me information about his service with Sergeant Cyril Nicholas Henty-Dodd who in his later media career became known as the 1960's TV and radio personality "Simon Dee". Following that article, Brian has sent me another e-mail with interesting information about his service in Cyprus in the 1960s.

From Brian Thornally of Loughborough

Hi Malcolm. More about Cyprus. Downtown Limassol was a danger spot, rather than "Akrotiri", which was the RAF station and airfield on Akrotiri peninsula, in a protected zone of the Western Sovereign Base Area, inaccessible to Cypriot malcontents carrying knives. 'Hero's Square' in Limassol and Ledra Street, known as 'Murder Mile', in Nicosia were places to be avoided during "The Troubles", leading up to the Island's Independence in 1960.

There were many RAF and Army National Service personnel in Cyprus during those dangerous years, no doubt with tales to tell. When I lived there in the 1960s, as a teacher in Schools for Service Children (Berengaria and St. John's), the times were peaceful and the Cypriots, Greeks and Turks, lived alongside each other, though with separate cultures.

The Princess Mary's RAF Hospital at Akrotiri was expert in three things: treating gunshot wounds, mending broken bones and delivering babies. Almost everything else was subject to a 'casevac' flight to UK. The British birth-rate per 1000 head was higher than that of China -- due, probably, to the 'Siesta Factor'!

By the time I left in 1970 (with two daughters), trouble was already brewing between the Greek and Turkish communities, which sadly ended in the Turkish invasion and the division of the Island in 1974. The NATO 'Green Line' remains to this day. Yours etc., Brian T.

With our Regiment having a history of serving in all the world's trouble spots there must be millions of stories out there that ex-members of the Regiment have to tell. I've asked Brian if he has any more stories for me to publish in these newsletters and I hope serving Rocks and recently demobbed ex-Rocks will pick up their pens and or pencils and send me more of them. If we do not record them now they may be lost forever.

RAF Regiment Books

I am often asked for information about books about the RAF Regiment. The following list is of the books that I know of that I am regularly adding to. If anyone knows of any other books about the RAF Regiment, please let me know. All the books are listed by their date of publication.

Books about the RAF Regiment

"**Khaki and Blue**" the early ground defence of the RAF in WW2 by Colonel Ronald Sherbrooke-Walker TD DL. Published in **1952** by The Saint Catherine Press Ltd. Now out of print. No ISBN.

"**A Short History of the RAF Regiment**" from 1942 to 1970 with a brief account of the approach to the problems of airfield defence in the RAF from 1918 to 1942 by Kingsley M Oliver. Printed by Thanet Printing Works in **1969**. No ISBN Number and now out of print.

"**The Royal Air Force Regiment – A Short History**". A 40th Anniversary edition. An updated short history of the RAF Regiment from 1942 to 1982 with a brief account of the approach to the problems of airfield defence in the Royal Air Force from 1918 until the formation of its own defence Corps in 1942. By Group Captain Kingsley Oliver and Wing Commander Keith Batt. Published in **1982** by Adlard and Son Ltd, Bartholomew Press, Dorking, Surrey. No ISBN Number and now out of print.

"**No Tigers in our Jungle**" about life in the RAF Regiment in South-East Asia Command 1943/45. By ex-Flight Lieutenant Harry Homer. Service number 127613. Published in 1982 ISBN 84 398 8656 X.

"**The Edges of War**" An RAF Regiment Story by Tim Hillyar. About 2804 Armoured Car Squadron, from landing in France at the end of June 1944, through the fighting in Europe to the British Victory Parade in Berlin on 21st July 1945. Privately published in **1992** by Tim Hillyar. I have no contact details.

"**The Blue and Khaki Hunters**" Privately published in a Limited Edition of 500 copies in **1993** by D F Sampson through Newton Publishers. ISBN 1-872308-34-1. Can be obtained directly from Mr D F Sampson, 17 Shelley Close, Highcliffe on Sea, Christchurch, Dorset, BH23 4HW. Telephone number 01425 279206.

"**Below the Bottom Rung**" the RAF Regiment in Palestine by Edward Grocott. Published in **1996** by J and K H Publishing. ISBN 1 900511 57 6.

"**Through Adversity**" the History of the RAF Regiment 1942 - 1992 by Kingsley M Oliver. Published in **1997** by Forces and Corporate Publishing Ltd. ISBN 0 9529597 0 4.

"**In Adversity**" Exploits of Gallantry and Awards to the RAF Regiment and its Associated Forces 1921 - 12995 by Nicholas G Tucker. Published

in **1997** by Jade Publishing Limited. ISBN 1-900734-08-7.

"The RAF Regiment" History, Colours, uniforms and Equipment of the RAF Regiment. Edited by Stuart Asquith. Published in **2000** by Nexus Special Interests Ltd. Book Number 001772. Foreword by Air Commodore R C Moore, MBE, RAF, Commandant General, RAF Regiment. But now out of print.

"The RAF Regiment at War" 1942 - 1946 by Kingsley M Oliver. Published in **2002** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN 0-85052-852-6.

"On the Road to Mandalay" featuring the life of the author Randle Manwaring focussing particularly on his time with the RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign. Published in **2006** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN 1844154971.

"Constant Vigilance" the RAF Regiment in the Burma Campaign by Nigel W M Warwick. Published in **2007** by Pen and Sword Books Limited. ISBN: 9781844155002.

Books containing references to the RAF Regiment

"The Lost Lady" all about the American Bomber "Lady Be Good". No publication date available. By Mario Martinez. Published by Leo Cooper at £19.95. Mentions 2926 Squadron RAF Regiment.

"Flugplatz Gutersloh". A Short History 1937/87 with references to the RAF Regiment. Published in **1987**. By Gerry Lewis. Published **1987**.

"The Battle of the Airfields 1st January 1945" by Norman L Franks. About "Operation Bodenplatte" when the Germans attempted to destroy the advanced Allied Airfields. First published in **1982**. ISBN 1 898697 15 9. Republished by Grub Street in **1994** in an updated version.

"Britain's Modern Royal Air Force" which contains a complete chapter on the RAF Regiment. Published in **1994**. By Peter F Guiver. ISBN 1 85260 4328.

"The Autobiography" by Brian Clough. Mentions his service at RAF Watchet. Published in **1995**. ISBN 1 85225 198 0.

"The Royal Air Force" an Illustrated History by Michael Armitage. Published by Brockhampton Press in **1995**. ISBN 1 86019 8511. Contains several references to the RAF Regiment.

"Esprit de Corps" by Walter Archibald Elliott. A Scots Guards Officer on Active Service 1943 - 1945. Published in **1997**. In Chapter 7 it's about

the Transfer of RAF Regiment Personnel to the Scots Guards. ISBN 085955 220 9.

"Sunset in the East" by John Hudson published by Leo Cooper in **2002**. ISBN 0 85052 846 1. It briefly mentions The RAF Regiment on page 43. Its main interest is the fact that to maintain order and to control the nationalist in Java, the author employed captured Japanese army personnel. It also gives a lot of detail about the war in Burma.

"Joint Force Harrier" by Commander Adrian Orchard, with James Barrington. The true story of a Royal Navy Fighter squadron at war. Published in **2008** by Penguin Books and Micael Joseph. ISBN 9780718153991.

I have been reading an old Hammond Innes thriller called "The Doomed Oasis". The book was first published in 1960 which means it must have been researched and written in the latter half of the 1950s but apart from being a bit dated it is still good read. It is a story about two men and their fight to save an oasis from the encroaching sands of the "Rub al Khali" or "The Empty Quarter".

The "Empty Quarter" is a world of harsh extremes that may rank as both the least, and most, hospitable place on Earth. Taking up a fifth of the Arabian Peninsula, the Rub al Khali (literally, "quarter of emptiness"), or the Sands for short, is the world's largest sand sea. At more than 225,000 square miles it takes in substantial portions of Saudi Arabia, as well as parts of Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirates to create an arid wilderness larger than France. Because of these sandy expanses, not to mention its profound heat, the Sands have long been judged too unforgiving for all but the most resourceful humans, considered more a wasteland to cross than a landscape to settle in. Still, along its edges—and venturing across it from time to time—the dozen tribes of leathery and enterprising Bedouin, also known (especially in Arabia) as Bedu, have survived here since before recorded time. So what is this all about you may well ask? Well I was surprised to see in a book as old as this one that on page 146, at a time when "the tribes are revolting", the RAF Regiment send in Bren Gun Carriers to pacify them. It's only one line about the RAF Regiment so I'm not going to include the book in my list of books referring to the RAF Regiment but it deserves a mention all the same.

New Members

We welcome John Kearney of Melton Mowbray, Leicestershire. John enlisted in October 1953 and served in Cyprus, Malaya, Aden, Bahrain, Germany, Hong Kong, Zambia and Ireland until his discharge as a SAC in October 1975. He was awarded the General Service Medals for Cyprus, Malaya, Aden and Northern Ireland and the Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.

NEWS OF THE RAF REGIMENT



FROM THE RAF REGIMENT SECRETARY DEATH NOTICES:

BUTLER HARRY. Former RAF Regt Sgt Harry James Butler died on 24 Oct 09 following a long illness. He joined the Regt in 1949, serving at RAF Celle, Innsworth, Bruggen, Aldergrove, Church Fenton, Akrotiri, Sealand, Upwood and in Aden. His last two tours were at RAF Catterick from 1965-69 on Trg Wg and then 1969-71 on the GDT Section. The funeral has taken place. He is survived by his wife, Odette, of 81 Millbank Lane, Thornaby, Cleveland, TS17 8JT, to whom the Corps extends its sincere condolences.

DIDCOCK LAURENCE. Former RAF Regt LAC Lawrence Didcock, born 24 Dec 27, died on 6 Nov 09, aged 81. He was a National Serviceman in the Corps from 1946-48 and served in Palestine and Jordan and on RAF Regt armoured car sqns in the UK and Germany (RAF Guetersloh); he also participated in the Berlin Airlift in 1948. The funeral took place at 13.00 on Tue 17 Nov 09, at St Mary's Church, Streatley, Berkshire. Family flowers only were requested but donations may be made to the RAF Regt Assoc, c/o the Oxfordshire Branch. He is survived by his wife, Peggy, of 31 Park Road, Didcot, Oxfordshire, OX11 8QL.

YOUNG ALEXANDER. Former RAF Regt Sgt Alexander Young, born 28 Aug 27, died on 31 May 09 aged 81. He served from 1941-45 in both India and Burma, when his unit was attached to the 14th Army. The funeral has taken place. He is survived by his wife, Edith, to whom

the Corps extends its sincere condolences. Further details will be provided once received.

ROBINSON ALFRED. Retired RAF Regt Flt Lt Alfred Thomas Robinson, WWII veteran, died on 18 Sep 09. He enlisted as a Gnr and was then commissioned. Served in the Africa Campaign and, in the post-war years won shooting medals at Bisley as one of the 'RAF Hundred'. He was also a notable athlete, winning many track medals and was the RAF 440 yards Champion for some time. The funeral has taken place. He is survived by his son, Mr A T Robinson of 13 Broad Close, North Molton, Devon E36 3JD, to whom the Corps extends its sincere condolences.

FINNIE ALEXANDER. Retired RAF Wg Cdr Alexander (Alex) J Finnie, born 23 Jun 30, has died at the age of 79. Commissioned 8 Feb 52, he was promoted to the rank of Wg Cdr on 1 Jan 75 and retired in 1978. The Corps extends its condolences to the surviving family. Further details will be provided once received.

WITTS LESLIE. Former RAF Regt WO Leslie M Witts, born 25 Dec 20 died on 16 Nov 09 aged 88 following a long illness. He enlisted on 2 Jan 40, serving as a Ground Gunner at Biggin Hill during the Battle of Britain in 1940, joining the RAF Regt on its formation in 1942. He served in an armoured reconnaissance role in France and Germany until 1946, when he moved on to serve in Cyprus, Malaya and Borneo, and Singapore. He was on TQCS in 1967, before becoming the Sqn WO and Adjt 1968-69. He was the Queen's Colour WO until he retired in 1970. The funeral took place at West Suffolk Crematorium, Risby, nr Bury St Edmunds at 12.00 on Fri 27 Nov 09. Family flowers only were requested but donations may be made to the SESAW Animal Shelter, Idamo, Stoke Road, Leavenheath, Suffolk CO6 4PP. He is survived by his son, Mr Ian Witts of The Island House, Lower Road, Lavenham, Suffolk, CO10 9QJ, to whom the Corps extends its sincere condolences.

GENERAL NOTICES:

68 MILES FOR 68 YEARS

Commencing on the Sun 7 Feb 10, after the Corps Foundation Dinner 2010, Sqn Ldr Pete Hawtin and Flt Lt Merv Ashe will begin walking the 68 miles from Holkham Hall to RAF Honington to mark 68 years since the formation of the Corps. To make the walk a bit more of a challenge, Sqn Ldr Hawtin will be dressed in

early RAF Regt battledress and webbing, and Flt Lt Ashe will be wearing the modern desert equivalent.

Both will bivvy out over two nights, utilizing only what they can carry in their period battle kit. For more information, please visit their webpages at the following links. These pages will be updated regularly with photographs and messages as the pair prepare, train and undertake their walk. They are doing this walk to raise money for Service-related charities (namely RBL and Hope for Heroes) supporting our wounded, their families and those bereaved. Webpages: <http://www.justgiving.com/H2H4H4H> and <http://www.justgiving.com/H2H4RBL>.

CORPS FORMATION DINNER 2010

The next annual Corps Formation Dinner for officers will take place on Fri 5 Feb 10 at RAF Honington. The day will be marked with the handover of responsibility as CG RAF Regt by Air Cdre Abbott to Air Cdre La Forte and a FP Symposium will also take place that day at the RAF FP Centre. All RAF Regt officers of the RAF FP Force Element are expected to attend unless deployed or on essential duty, while all other serving RAF Regt offrs are encouraged to attend. Up to 30 veteran officers will also be invited. A calling note will be issued shortly by the Project Offr, Sqn Ldr Barry Moss, RAF FP Centre. Serving officers should await the issue of the calling note, but retired officers should register their interest with the Regtl Sec so that he can issue the calling note to the interested parties.

CORPS DIARY DATES:

16 Jan 10 - RAF Regt Assoc NEC Meeting - RAF Scampton/Sgts' Mess
 5 Feb 10 - Handover-Takeover of CG RAF Regt appointment.
 5 Feb 10 - Officers' Corps Briefing, Study Day and Formation Dinner 2010 - RAF Honington.
 7 Feb 10 - 68 Miles for 68 Years Services' Charity March - Holkham Hall to Honington).
 16 -19 Apr - RAF Regt Assoc Spring Reunion Weekend (Alvaston Hall, Cheshire)
 8 May 10 - Annual RAF Regt Chapel Commemoration - Catterick
 18-21 May 10 - Regt-USAF Exchange Offrs 'British Invasion III (Washington DC)
 11 Jun 10 - RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Reception (House of Lords) - incl Palace of Westminster Tour.

26 Jun 10 - RAF Regt Annual Memorial Commemoration (NMA Alrewas).

27 Jun 10 - National Armed Forces Day (NMA Alrewas and nationwide).

29 Oct 10 - RAF Regt Officers' Dinner Club Annual Dinner (RAF Club, London)

RAF Regt Golf Society 2010 Calendar

31 Mar - RAF Regt GS AGM - Thetford GC.

28 Apr - RAF Regt GS v Jt CBRN Regt. Thetford GC.

19 May - RAF Regt GS v RAF Police - Venue TBC.

16 Jun - RAF Regt GS v Royal Artillery - Mentmore GC.

6 and 7 Jul - RAF Regt GS Championships - Mentmore GC.

28 Jul - RAF Regt GS v Royal Marines - China Fleet GC.

8 Sep - RAF Regt GS v Royal Signals - Thetford GC.

29 Sep - RAF Regt GS 4-Way match & AGM - Greatham Valley GC.

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS

A very happy Christmas and a prosperous New Year to you all. At this time of the year when Christmas is almost upon us, we look forward to the festive season when we will gather together with family and friends to celebrate Christmas. Valerie and I wish everyone, members and their families – and all my readers who are not members – a wonderful, joyful and merry Christmas, and a happy and prosperous New Year. May the coming year bring peace to the world. May all your dreams come true and may good health and happiness be yours.

As we do on every Christmas Eve at 9.00 p.m., Valerie and I will raise a glass and drink a toast to “Absent Friends”. This includes each and every one of you for you’ll all be in our thoughts, particularly those who have lost someone this year. Christmas will be a very sad time for them for their loved ones will be sadly missed and will never be forgotten. Words cannot heal their pain but we hope that time will help to heal their loss.

At a time when our servicemen and women are fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq - in Afghanistan, the hardest fighting since World War Two - it is easy to forget that members of HM Armed Forces are serving in hostile situations all over the world. Apart from permanent commitments in such places as the Falkland Islands, Ascension Island, Gibraltar, Cyprus and

of course in UK Air Defence, the Royal Air Force and the Army, supported by the Royal Navy, are also serving in such potentially hostile areas as Kosovo in the Balkans, Georgia, Sierra Leone, the Congo, Liberia, Nepal; and Qatar, Oman, Kuwait and Bahrain in the Persian Gulf. Nearly 16,000 members of HM Armed Forces are actively engaged in operational duties across the globe, ranging from war fighting to peacekeeping, and providing humanitarian aid. From enforcing anti-terrorism measures to combating the international drugs trade. They too are all in our thoughts and we hope that they will all have a happy Christmas wherever they are serving.

STOP PRESS:

I've just received a copy of a great new 2010 calendar filled with Regiment cartoons priced at £12.99 and worth every penny. For the time being, it can be ordered from the RAF Regiment Shop at RAF Honington. I've also received a copy of a great Regiment cartoon book "Gunner's Tales Warts and All" by Ron Taylor based on the Giles cartoon books, priced at £10.00 with all the money to be shared between "Help for Heroes" and squadron funds for all the squadrons currently listed in the Regiment. In the preface, Ron expresses his thanks to Giles for the inspiration and MAC from the Daily Mail for his very kind advice. This book can also at present, be ordered from the RAF Regiment Shop.

I say that they can be ordered from the RAF Regiment Shop for the time being for an on-line shop is currently being set up. Until the on-line shop is up and running, they will have to be ordered from the Shop. If you would like either or both, give the Shop Manager Liz Ramsay a call on 01359 237521 to order them. As the money for these two items will be going into separate accounts, if ordering both, please make your cheques out separately.

Well that's all for now, keep smiling if you can and stay happy.

Malcolm

DATES FOR YOUR DIARIES



16

Thursday 14th January 2010 Branch Night
 Monday 1st February 2010 68th Ann RAF Regt.
 Monday 1st February 2010 Branch Service NMA
 Friday 5th February 2010 CG Changeover
 Thursday 11th February 2010 68th Ann RAF Regt.
 Thursday 11th February 2010 **Branch AGM**
 Thursday 11th February 2010 Branch Subs Due
 Monday 1st March 2010 St David's Day
 Thursday 11th March 2010 Branch Night

Wednesday 17th March 2010 St Patrick's Day
 15th - 30th March 2010 65th Ann Battle of Meiktila
 Monday 5th April 2010 9th Ann Ded of Mem.l
 Thursday 8th April 2010 Branch Night
 Fri 16th-Mon 19th Apr 2010 Ass.n Spring Reunion
 Friday 23rd April 2010 St George's Day
 Sunday 25th April 2010 ANZAC Day
 Sunday 9th May 2010 Runnymede Mem Service
 Saturday 8th May 2010 Regt Chapel Comm Service
 Thursday 13th May 2010 Branch Night
 Thursday 10th June 2010 Branch Night
 Sunday 13th June 2010 Cosford Air Show
 Wednesday 16th June 2010 **22nd Ann of Branch**
 Saturday 26th June 2010 Reg.t Comm NMA
 Sunday 27th June 2010 National Service Day
 Thursday 8th July 2010 Branch Night
 Thursday 12th August 2010 Branch Night

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