



MiniFLASH

THE REVEREND WILLIE DOWNIE

It is with much sadness that we advise you of the very sad passing of Willie Downie.

The funeral service for the Rev Willie Downie, Chaplain to the RAF Regiment Association, who died suddenly on Tuesday 18th November 2008, will be held at St Machan's Church, Church Road, Larkhall, ML9 1EZ at 12.00 noon on Thursday 27th November 2008. It will be followed by cremation at the South Lanarkshire Crematorium at Blantyre, with a reception afterwards.

All members will be greatly saddened to learn that Willie Downie died suddenly on 18th November 2008.

He had only recently decided to retire from the active chaplaincy of the Association for "a second retirement" after many years of service and he will be greatly mourned by all members of the Association.

Willie Downie is survived by his wife, Sarah and their four sons, Robert, Fraser, Samuel and Craig. The Association extends its sincere condolences to the family.

Letters of condolence may be sent to Mrs Sarah Downie at 21 Pentland Crescent, Larkhall, South Lanarkshire, ML9 1UP.

Family flowers only but donations, if desired, may be made to the British Heart Foundation c/o the Funeral Director, Henry Dorricott, 10-12 London St, Larkhall, DL9 (tel 01698 882170).

The Chairman, Steven Brereton Martin, will attend the funeral with the RAF Regiment Secretary, Martin Hooker. Branch Standards and members of all Branches of the Association, are welcome, but please advise Roy Evans, Secretary of the Scottish Branch of your intention to attend. Roy can be contacted at 01698 420484 or by email at robertevans39@btinternet.com



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

www.rafregt.org.uk

ESSEX & NORTH EAST LONDON BRANCHES NEWSLETTER

November 2008



National Chairman and Members attend the Banner Service



BANNER SERVICE - THE FOLLOWING IS REPRODUCED WITH THE KIND PERMISSION OF DR RICHARD CHARTRES, BISHOP OF LONDON

ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL – OPERATION BANNER

The Prime Minister in 1969 was Harold Wilson. It's said on good authority that when the Cabinet was deciding whether or not to deploy troops to Northern Ireland, Harold Wilson went round the table twice asking each minister for their views, because as he said "if we go in, it will take many years to get out".

It was an accurate prediction. Operation Banner was the longest deployment in British military history and involved more than 300,000 personnel.

The troops went in to protect society in Northern Ireland and its legal and democratic structures from being overwhelmed by para-military violence. Force cannot in the end resolve social conflict but can offer a vital breathing space in which the normal processes of democratic debate and decision making can re-assert themselves. Military intervention can hold the forces of chaos at bay while people learn again how communities with different histories and aspirations can live together and do business with one another. Operation Banner kept open that vital pass through which a more hopeful future for Ulster could enter.

In his poem, "The Second Coming", William Butler Yeats saw a time when "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity ... things fall apart; the centre cannot hold". But the centre **did** hold and mere anarchy was **not** loosed upon the world. Mistakes were made but the British Armed forces proved that they had the discipline and the resilience to stand firm until there could be a political settlement.

The people of Northern Ireland and their community leaders, having suffered so much, want to move on now and are at work building a new future. Much remains to be done in healing memories and embedding hope but the military phase, Operation Banner, has been brought to a conclusion and we can give thanks for it.

But how we remember what has happened is vital if we are to learn the lessons and understand the cost of what we are asking our servicemen and women to do on our behalf.

I have listened to many veterans of the 38 years of the operation. Here are some of their voices -We slept in all sorts of places – the attics of RUC police stations, in bunkers at the border watch towers, in ditches. You never knew where or when an attack would come. Sometimes teenagers shouting abuse or throwing stones would be a come-on to lure the patrol into the firing line of a coffee jar grenade attack or a sniper. The big challenge was staying disciplined and not reacting to provocation. The times when the threat was high were matched by periods of intense boredom.

What was required was not just high professional skill but also the ability to understand that fire fights might be won but the battle for hearts and minds lost. I have been able to see in other theatres how the lessons of Northern Ireland have entered the DNA of the British Armed Forces who combine to a remarkable degree military efficiency with a capacity to engage in a humane way with the civilian population. I have been given many examples of humour which defused tension but the jokes I have been told are perhaps best enjoyed in the bar and would fall flat in the pulpit.

People from all over the United Kingdom were involved and some were especially vulnerable as members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Irish Regiment operating on their own home turf. More than a thousand members of the armed forces died and more than 6,000 were wounded in the 38 years of Operation Banner. Reflecting on the death of a friend in an attack on a vehicle check point one veteran said "At the time I just had to keep going". It was only after he had left the army that he realised the extent of the emotional and spiritual impact that the death of his friend had made. He had to confront anger, a desire for revenge, unresolved grief and sometimes an irrational fear which came from being constantly on edge.

So this is also an occasion for paying tribute to all those individuals and organisations who are concerned with the emotional and spiritual health of servicemen and women and who offer practical support to families. The work goes on of course among veterans as they establish their own inner peace and stability.

We honour the memory of those who were killed by never forgetting them and never forgetting what they were fighting for when they died. It is fitting that all the names of those who were killed in the course of Operation Banner are recorded on the Armed Forces Memorial in Staffordshire. We shall show our respect by caring for and comforting the bereaved and doing what we can to help the needy in the world. The Act of Commitment led by Field Marshall Inge at the conclusion of this service will give us all an opportunity to pledge ourselves afresh to this most creative way of remembering.

Civilisations perish invisibly in the night when no one is prepared to risk their lives for them. In 1969 the Prime Minister had a sense that the deployment would last for many years but probably not even he suspected that it would be 38 years. Operation Banner has been a test of faith and resolve.

We may have had a brief period after the fall of the Berlin Wall when we believed that it might be possible to take a holiday from history but we all know now that we face a challenging century, full of both promise and peril. The demands we are making on our armed forces are currently very great indeed and most of us can think of young men and women who are risking their lives as we assemble here. We honour and pray for them as they face their test of faith and resolve.

If we come to believe that there is no more to life than looking after “number one” and being as comfortable as possible until the end of our mortal span then the centre will not hold and the world as we know it will dissolve. Christians believe that the pioneer of our faith, Jesus Christ, has given us a new birth into a living hope by sacrificing his own earthly life. All the faiths represented in this Cathedral believe that we have access to a truth which Christians see in Jesus and which gives meaning and depth to our lives. The Christian faith expressed in our first lesson points to that realm beyond death where all that has turned to love in our lives will be united to the truth, whom we call God.

God is our hope and strength: a very present help in trouble. Therefore will we not fear though the earth be moved and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea.

Amen

NORTHERN IRELAND REMEMBERED

HRH Prince of Wales, Prime Ministers (present and past) and Defence chiefs attended a commemorative service, at St Paul’s Cathedral, to remember the 300,000 personnel involved in Northern Ireland’s 38 year Security campaign called *Operation Banner*, the longest British military deployment ever.

Denise Speight and I attended the solemn service and a reception afterwards at the Guild Hall London. We were delighted to meet our Association’s National Chairman, Steven [Brereton-Martin](#) and about half a dozen other ex-rocks. We were unable to get their names.

During the very moving church service, Dr Richard Chartres, Bishop of London, spoke to the congregation about the reasons for military intervention in Northern Ireland, and the inevitable and costly sacrifice made by security forces. The Bishop’s inspiring address caught the mood of the veterans, and a full transcript is published above.

At the end of the service, the Last Post was sounded as the congregation remembered the 1,000 Service personnel who lost their lives in the troubles. After the formal service, mood changed to joviality as veterans of all ranks mingled and remembered their days in Northern Ireland with pride, and reuniting with old friends, formed up behind the Cathedral, for a march-past.

His Royal Highness The Prince of Wales, flanked by the Chiefs of Defence Staff took the salute as the 700-strong parade marched past the dais in front of the Cathedral and then made its way to a banquet of food and drink at the reception at London’s magnificent medieval Guild Hall. At the reception we met many senior officers and politicians, including the former Northern Ireland Minister, Peter Bottomley and the then Defence Secretary Des Brown. All a far cry, from the mindless terror and sectarian killings which had to be dealt with by *Operation Banner*.

Praising the hundreds of Northern Ireland veterans, and their families at the city's historic hall, Chief of the Defence Staff Air Chief Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup said:

"There were deeds of great valour, certainly. But there was also a hard won professionalism - a sophistication of approach crucial to progress. There was a remarkable display of leadership from the most senior to - crucially - the most junior ranks. And there was an unrelenting and dogged determination in the face of danger and discouragement".

Sadly as with any such reunion, the occasion was short lived, and as Denise and I walked out of the grand Guild Hall, and into the busy London streets, we could see the City was far too busy with it's routine and totally oblivious to the terrorist threats and attacks the City endured over those 38 years.

Per ardua

Frank Xavier

POSTAL SCAM

We thought you may like to be aware of the following, received via email from the Trading Standards:

A card is posted through your door from a company called PDS (Parcel Delivery Service) suggesting that they were unable to deliver a parcel and that you need to contact them on 0906 6611911 (a premium rate number). **DO NOT** call this number, as it is a mail scam originating from Belize.

If you call the number and you start to hear a recorded message you will have already been billed £15 for the phone call. Please advise family members and friends.

MUSIC CD

In the record charts at the moment is a music CD from the finalists from the show X Factor called Hero. Proceeds from the sale of this CD will be split between Help for Heroes and the RBL. The Prime Minister has said that all VAT from the sale of this CD will be split between the two Charities. It costs £3.99 from most record shops.

THANK YOU

Jean and George Stout would like to thank everyone who sent good wishes on their recent birthdays and Jean's illness.

Dave Connor would also like to thank everyone who sent good wishes following his short stay in hospital.

Hopefully everyone will be well enough to attend the Christmas lunch to be held at the Liberty Bell, Romford.

RAF REGIMENT SHOP

Branches will wish to know that a new appointment has been made as Officer i/c Regiment Shop. Flight Lieutenant Jon McNish is aware that the reputation of the Shop, in terms of its service to would-be customers, is at an all-time low and is determined to restore it.

He has written:

I am new in post as the Shop's OIC and intend to integrate it fully into the world of the Association and indeed other areas. The Shop has received bad press recently as it has not been run in order that it can reach its full potential. With the profile of the RAF Regt at a high, and the wish of all members, both serving, affiliated and ex-serving wishing to raise it further, the Regt Shop can be instrumental in achieving this. I make no promises that these changes will be of immediate effect, but I can promise that the Shop will now have more direction and will serve all of those who wish to use it. I will be handing over the role of OIC Shop in the New Year but rest assured the new incumbent will have an RAF Regt Shop Directive to take forward and fulfil my intent.

Kind regards, Jon McNish

It is clear that Jon has a massive job to do – and, inevitably, it is a secondary duty – so it would indeed be unreasonable to expect changes and improvements overnight. He is also away from his desk quite a lot, so cannot respond to emailed or telephoned orders for items. As things stand, he doesn't yet have an e-mailable catalogue!

It does look, however, that at last we have the prospect of an improved service from the Regiment Shop. In the short term, however, please be patient.

RAF REGIMENT BRIEFING TEAM

I raised the question of the RAF Regiment Briefing Team's programme around the UK with Honington, so that Branches could be aware when the Team was going to be appearing in their vicinity. As it happens, Flt Lt Jon McNish is also responsible for the RAF Regiment Briefing Team. He writes:

Our schedule for trips across the UK ceased towards the end of September. We are currently in the process of planning for next year. I will be sure to forward the plan and the RAF Regt Recruitment team's directive to you when complete in order that you have a full understanding of where we will be and thus how we can integrate wit the RAF Regt Association accordingly.

SPRING REUNION

We have been advised of a Spring Reunion taking place 17 - 20 April 2008 at Warners, Littlecote House Hotel, Berkshire. The weekend will cost £209 per person. If you would like more information, please send a stamped addressed envelope to Jim Scott of the Somerset & Dorset Branch at 36 Trent Close, Yeovil BA21 5XQ

If you would like a copy of the National AGM Minutes, please let us know and we can send them to you.

Dates for your Diary

Nov 30 Christmas Lunch - Liberty Bell, Romford - 12 for 12.30

Dec 3 Essex Branch Meeting (Buffet)

Feb 4 Essex Branch AGM

Apr 1 Essex Branch Meeting

March 6 Party Night (details in next newsletter, PROMISE)

May 10 Annual Service Catterick Village

May 17 Tower of London

With all good wishes for Christmas and the New Year

Steve and Denise

RAFFLE PRIZES ALWAYS WELCOME

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