



ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION

www.rafrege.org.uk

ESSEX & NORTH EAST LONDON BRANCHES NEWSLETTER Feb/Mar 2009

Dear Members and Friends,

We begin this newsletter by advising you of the very sad passing of Louisa Connor. As most of you know, Louisa has been ill for some considerable time. A card was sent on behalf of members to the family.

Dave and daughter Francis, would like to thank everybody who sent cards of condolence and floral tributes.

Eleven members and friends joined other mourners and attended a service of thanksgiving for Louisa's life at St Andrews Church, Hornchurch, Louisa and Dave were married there 66 years ago.

At the Crematorium music from Louisa's favourite ballet was played and Nat King Cole's famous "Unforgettable". Anyone who knew Louisa, will never be able to forget such a friendly, loveable, genuine, caring, fun loving and elegant lady.

An extremely emotional and moving day.

Since then Dave has been in hospital with symptoms of a mini stroke – a scan was arranged and Dave came home the same day. His son-in-law, Colin, is helping by getting shopping etc. Dave spoke to Denise and he sounded cheerful enough on the phone. Dave attended the Help for Heroes event and seemed in good spirits.

Founders Day Lunch

The Founders Day lunch at the Liberty Bell in Romford was attended by only six members/friends, this was probably due to the bad weather that we were experiencing at the time. Those who did attend enjoyed themselves.

Memories from Frank Newman who has just celebrated his wedding anniversary on Founders Day writes.... We had forgotten the other anniversary when we became Rockapes. Though we didn't know it then. In those days we used to collect a lot of salutes from Army people, because we wore collars and tie with our battle dress (khaki) uniforms, and the lies that we told to local girls who thought that we were Parachutists or Commando's 67 years ago.

Now of course we don't need to pretend that we are special, our Squadrons have proved that in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Rockapes are somebody special.

NE London and Essex Branch celebrates 20th Birthday with Help for Heroes Fund Raising Evening

Hornchurch Conservative Club 6.3.09

The birthday party to celebrate 20 years of the Royal Air Force Regiment (Comrades) Association and to raise funds for "Help for Heroes" was only a glint in our eye when it was suggested during our Branch Sunday lunch last autumn that we organise it. What a great idea!

The booking of the hall was no problem; the three piece band and singers were personally known to us so they soon came aboard; getting the publicity from "Help for Heroes" and the production of the tickets was time consuming but run of the mill. The real problem showed itself with only three weeks to go – only eight people had bought tickets to come and they mainly were either family or branch members!!. It obviously wasn't a viable number and it looked as if the band would need to be put off and the whole shooting match cancelled. It was make or break time but we decided to grit our teeth, carry on lobbying and promoting the evening to get "bums on seats".

Our efforts succeeded, the numbers increased and a last minute surge brought ninety plus to the event. With the increased interest involving local councillors and business people of Hornchurch, raffle donations flooded in and eventually there were 50 prizes (including vouchers for meals at local restaurants) plus two pictures to be auctioned.

On the evening, there was a great feel good factor right from the start, with helpers decorating the venue, wives and friends bringing food and helping prepare the buffet, the band setting up and the bar getting ready for a busy night. When the guests arrived this vibrant atmosphere continued.

The official start to the evening was marked by the Branch Standard being paraded and the National Anthem being played. The Standard Bearer placed the Standard in its plinth - we all paid it due respect. The Branch President then made a short speech welcoming everyone, outlining the aim of "Help for Heroes" and the RAF Regiment's place at the cutting edge of hostilities in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To say this Help for Heroes occasion was a success is to underplay what happened in the hall that evening. The amalgam of positive vibes, involvement with a worthwhile charity, excellent band and singers, participation of RAF Regiment and local Hornchurch people alike, and good food made it an exceptional event people that won't forget for a long time to come. Thanks must also be offered to the two Association members and their wives who made the trip from Cambridgeshire and Northamptonshire respectively to be with us.

Dave Connor and George Stout were presented with a gift - both being the longest serving members of our branch.

The evening raised £1522.36 for Help for Heroes and marked our 20th birthday in style!

We would like to thank everybody who contributed to the Help for Heroes event.

Tom Craig

New Members

We have had two new members join the Branches; firstly we welcome back Len Milledge to the North East London Branch. Len has been away for a few years.

We would also like to welcome Dean Gentles to the Essex Branch, Dean lives in Saffron Walden. He served twice from 1990 – 1996 on the Defence Force at RAF Brampton, he then moved to 2623 at Honington and 2620 at Marham. He joined again in 1998 – 2001 again on 2620 at Marham. Hopefully Dean will manage to get to one of our meetings at Witham

News of the Association

Steve attended a National Executive Meeting on Saturday 17 January at RAF Scampton. It was a 5.00 start as the meeting was starting at 10.00. The meeting was well attended and many items were covered during the meeting.

The following is just a run down on some of the items discussed:

1. Purchasing a new National Standard to replace the present one at a cost of £650.00. It is hoped to consecrate the new Standard at the RAF Regt Chapel Commemoration St Annes Church Catterick on May 10. At the same time it is hoped to lay up the two old National Standards from the two old Associations. Martin Hooker has donated a finial for the top of the new National Standard in the form of Crossed Rifles.
2. The autumn reunion is proposed to be held at the Britannia Hotel in Coventry. This hotel has been used before when it was called the De Vere. It is opposite Coventry Cathedral were on the Sunday it is hoped to have the Association photograph taken. It was agreed to invite Guests of Honour for the weekend. Hopefully should they be available members of the Regiment will give an operational brief as to how the Corps is getting on operations. We will be joined by the Warrant Officers and Senior NCOs Association at the reunion, they will be holding there AGM at the same time. The cost of the weekend is around £140; Fred Ringham is looking in to the possibility of a shorter stay for members.
3. The RAF Regt Memorial Commemoration will take place on 27 June at the National Arboretum at Alwres in Staffordshire. If you have not been before it is a good day out, especially having a look at the Armed Forces Memorial along with all the other memorials. It is hoped that the new Queens Colour will on parade along with a basic gunner course route lining.
4. This year the positions on the National Committee for the Secretary and Treasurer are up for re-election, as agreed it will be a postal ballot with the result given at the AGM in October.
5. With the passing of Willie Downie as the Associations Chaplain, it was agreed that we would ask an ex-serving Chaplain if he would be interested in taking on the role, if he is interested he could be taking the service at St Anne's Church.
6. The Al Waki Painting, this has been done and all money for the cost of the painting has been covered by donations. The Association had put by a further £500 to help should the costs have not been met. It was agreed that we purchase a copy of the painting which is very similar in appearance to the original and donate it to the training wing at RAF Honington (this part is still known as 'The Depot') to hang in the foyer of the building. *See item below*
7. The Association has donated two cups to Training Wing for the FT1 and FT2 courses. With the introduction of the new L/LCpl rank it was agreed to donate a third trophy. The trophies have been named after Operations that the Corps has been involved in. The FT1 SAC – LCpl Operation Banner (Northern Ireland) FT2 LCpl – Cpl Operation Telic (Iraq) FT3 Cpl – Sgt Operation Herrick (Afghanistan). It is hoped that the presentation of the Painting and the third trophy can be done at a Gunners Graduation Parade at RAF Honington. I will let you know more when I hear anything about a date. **See item below**

8. The Treasurer felt that he did not have enough scrutiny over how he carried out his duties as National Treasurer; he felt that the books needed to be looked at more closely than they are at present, we would need an audit sub committee. It was also agreed that the members would be local to Derek to save time and the possible loss of paperwork.
9. The Association has now its own merchandising section, items were on display at the meeting. It was mentioned that the items sold well at the reunion last year. Pictures of items for sale will be on the Associations website.
10. The Associations website is now the first one when you as the search for the Association. Members had mentioned that the website was very good but that the home page was too cluttered with too many items. This is being looked into and hopefully de-cluttered.
11. The Flash magazine, the Chairman mentioned that he had been asked why he was involved with the Flash. He pointed out that he was only involved as he knew the printer were we had it printed. It was asked why the application form was not put in the Flash anymore, after discussion it was agreed to put in a block giving information on where to apply.

News of the Regiment

With thanks to the RAF Regt Secretary

1 Sqn RAF Regt – Rockape Ale Project

The Essex Branch made a £30 donation to this. It was noticed that at our AGM in February that a copy of a letter advertising this from 1 Sqn was on the notice board at the RAFA Club, on the bottom it was mentioned that the Club had sent a cheque for £200.

Corps Chapel Annual Commemorative Service

The Annual Commemoration Service at the RAF Regt Chapel in St Annes Church, Catterick Village, will be held on Sun 10 May 09. Details will be issued shortly, if you are interested in attending please get in touch so Catterick Branch will know how many to cater for. We will be laying up the old Association Standards and dedicating a new one.

Annual Corps Commemoration

The Annual Corps Commemoration Service at the RAF Regt Memorial in the National Memorial Arboretum (NMA), Staffordshire, will be held on the morning of sat 27 Jun 09. National Armed Forces Day and Veterans Day. More details when available.

II Sqn RAF Regt 87th Anniversary Celebration Day

II Sqn RAF Regt intend to hold their 87th Anniversary celebration at their hanger at RAF Honington on Thu 14 May 09. The event will be open to past and present Sqn members. More details when available.

OPERATIONAL HONOURS AND AWARDS

The following Corps personnel have been named in the Operational Awards List No 32 dated 6 Mar 09.

Mentioned-in-Despatches

FS AJ Smith	Gnr	Now of Trg Wg - RAF Honington
Cpl S Oswald	Gnr	3 Sqn RAF Regt – RAF Wittering

Queens Commendation for Valuable Services

Wg Cdr SM Miller OS (Regt) 1 RAF FP Wg HQ – RAF Wittering

Wg Cdr PT Lester OS (Regt) 3 RAF FP Wg HQ – RAF Marham

Joint Commanders Commendation – Op Herrick (Afghanistan)

Cpl HS Patel Gnr 3 Sqn RAF Regt – RAF Wittering

SAC SJ Smalley Gnr 3 Sqn RAF Regt – RAF Wittering

SAC JD Toghill Gnr 4001 Flt – Trg Wg – RAF Honington

Joint Commanders Commendation – Op Telic (Iraq)

Sgt SJ Rockett Gnr 3 RAF FP Wg HQ – RAF Marham

RAF Regiment decorated for its defence of Kandahar

Newspaper Article

Members of No1 Squadron RAF regiment, who have been responsible for the defence of Kandahar airfield and its 12000 multinational personnel over the past six months, have received their International Security Assistance Force Medals in acknowledgement of their difficult task.

In conditions ranging from sweltering heat and blinding sandstorms to rain, mud and freezing cold, the 144 members of the squadron have given the airfield a high degree of security thanks to innovative and aggressive tactics.

These have included mortar counter firing, with targeted illumination which has reduced the frequency and intensity of attacks from insurgent rocket teams. The squadron has now handed over the defence of Kandahar to No63 squadron RAF Regiment (QCS).

'Band of Brothers' family in the same RAF Regiment Daily Express 31/01/09

A family became a true band of brothers when an RAF Sergeant watched his youngest son graduate as a gunner in the same Regiment as his two elder brothers.

Ben Brown, 16, became the fourth member of his family to join the RAF regiment – passing out as a Leading Aircraftman. He joins brothers Sam 18, and Matthew, 23 both SAC's – and dad Andy 44 a Flight Sergeant. Ben's family turned out in force to see Ben pass out at RAF Honington in Suffolk where he completed the gruelling 23-week trainee gunner programme. Oldest brother Matthew flew back for the occasion from Afghanistan where he is currently serving a six-month tour of duty at Kandahar Air Base.

Ben paraded past Air Vice Marshall Tim Anderson, assistant Chief of the Air Staff, before receiving his "mudguards" – the coveted shoulder strip badges worn by graduates. He was the youngest to complete the training, which involved exercises and exams. Only 28 of the original 60 recruits made it to graduation. Ben was nominated as "senior man" by fellow recruits to act as liaison between trainees and staff. He said that joining his dad and two brothers at RAF Honington was a dream come true.

"I have always wanted to join the RAF because I have been around it all my life. I was really pleased to be senior man. You are chosen by the other guys and they can take it off you at any time" he said.

Andy who joined the RAF in 1984 said "I am really, really proud. It seems to have snuck up on us, the momentum of suddenly having all three of them through training and part of the Regiment. It's been a struggle holding Ben back until he was old enough to join. He went to recruitment fair the moment he was old enough."

Presentation of Op Banner Trophy and AI Waki Painting

I previously mentioned that the above items would be presented at a Trainee Gunner Presentation Parade. The next convenient one is on **Friday 24th April 2009**.

If you are interested in attending, numbers will be limited because the families of those passing out will be given priority, please let me know as soon as possible. I have to get the names in by 1st April, please ring me on 01702 296397 after 6pm. I will need your name, address and email (if applicable) also the make, registration number and colour of the car that you will be travelling in. This will be on a first come first served basis, balanced by the need to ensure a fair representation of the Branches let me know ASAP. If members have not received such notification by 15th April 2009, it will mean that, sadly, their application was not successful.

Branch Subscriptions

Please remember that your Association and Branch subscriptions fall due on 1st April. Your total subscription will be £15.00 that is £10.00 Association Subscription and £5.00 Branch Subscriptions. If you have not yet paid could you please send the subscriptions to Bill Smith Branch Treasurer along with your membership card? If you will be attending the next Essex Branch meeting you will be able to pay then.

Please make the cheque out to RAF Regiment Association and send to Bill at

330 Haynes Park Court, Slewins Lane, Hornchurch, Essex, RM11 2DQ

Just to let you know that Denise will be taken a few months out from helping with the newsletters and Branch work. I would like to thank Denise for all the help and support that she has given over the past years.

If you have any items for the newsletter, please send them in.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2009

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| Apr 1 | Essex Branch Meeting Witham |
| Apr 17 – 20 | Spring Social Reunion (Berkshire) |
| May 10 | Annual RAF Regt Chapel Commemoration (Catterick Village) |
| May 24 -25 | Southend Air Show – Sea Front Southend |
| Jun 8 | Essex Branch Meeting (Buffet) Witham |
| Jul 12 | Tower of London Service |
| Jun 27 | RAF Regt Memorial Commemoration Alwres (Veterans Week) |
| Oct 2 – 4 | Association AGM & Reunion Weekend – Venue Britannia Hotel Coventry |