



**THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION
NORFOLK BRANCH
NEWSLETTER NO.244 Aug. 2021**

President: Squadron Leader Paul Bruning (Rtd)
Chairman: Squadron Leader Peter Lawrence (Rtd)
Vice Chairman: Mr. Paul Rainbird + Programme Secretary
Secretary: Squadron Leader Peter Lawrence (Rtd)
Treasurer: Mrs. Sue Lawrence.



DEAR MEMBER

BRANCH AGM

We are back in business and on Tuesday 20th July 2021 members met for the first time in 17 months to hold the Branch AGM. The Minutes are included with this newsletter.

There was a good attendance and members followed the rules and it was lovely to be able to socialise again.

NEW MEMBER

We welcome Mr Geoffrey Herschell from Thetford. Geoff served in the RAF Regiment from April 1984 to May 2006 in the rank of corporal.

Geoff served on Squadrons 19, 37 and 16. His postings included Brize Norton, Bruggen, Honington, Training Wing Regiment Accreditation Cell, six tours of the Falkland Isles, one tour of Kuwait and Air Operations Iraq.

Geoff was awarded the GSM

We trust Geoff has a long and happy association with Norfolk Branch.

AUGUST BRANCH MEETING

We welcomed our speaker Sue Pearce, who gave a very interesting talk on 'Captain Cook and the Sourkraut'.

Sue did say what a lovely friendly time she had. But as we know that's Norfolk Branch.

Sue will be back next year with another talk.

SEPTEMBER BRANCH MEETING

Tuesday 21st when our speaker is Richard Mann on 'Odd and Interesting'.

BRANCH MEETINGS

On 19th October and 16th November - speakers details to follow.

BRANCH AUTUMN LUNCH

The Old Rectory Country House Hotel, North Walsham Road, Crostwick, Norwich, NR12 7BG. On Thursday 30th September 2021 12.30pm for 1pm.

If you will be joining us please contact Paul Rainbird on (01328) 856560 for your choice from an excellent menu.

We would like to know numbers please by the 14th September The cost is £24 pp.

Ample car parking and everything is on one level.

BRANCH WINTER LUNCH

This will also be at The Old Rectory on Thursday 16th December 2021.

BRANCH CHRISTMAS BUFFET

Tuesday 21st December 2021 at The Feathers.

BRANCH VISIT TO RAF HONINGTON

Saturday 16th October 2021. For the Association AGM and visit to the Museum.

The Branch are arranging for a coach to take members from Wymondham to RAF Honington. You will be able to park at the Ex-Servicemen's Club Wymondham and then take the coach for the AGM and Museum visit. This will be a very interesting day out and food will be available.

There will be a small charge for the coach travel.

If you will be joining us - please call Paul Rainbird on (01328) 856560.

Remember everyone is welcome at all meetings and events.

BRANCH DONATION

Many thanks to Mary Mearns for her kind donation to Branch funds.

DID YOU KNOW?

What did Churchill reportedly mutter after his 'We shall fight on the beaches' speech?

Accounts vary, but according to Erik Larcon's very readable account of Churchill's year 1940-41 (The Splendid And The Vile), after he sat down the PM growled to a colleague. 'We will fight them with the butt ends of broken bottles because that's bloody well all we've got.'

BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Editor: If you have an interesting story about anything, Regiment or otherwise, please do let me know so that I can share it with your colleagues. Many thanks.

CENTURION 2004

A tribute to Charles Andrew George Eyles by Mr Childs and Mr J Smart, Bristol and Bath Branch of the Association.

Charlie was born on 29 April 1923 in Kensington, London. He joined the RAF on 4 July 1941 as an AC2 earning 1s.6d (7p) a day. He became a ground gunner.

The RAF Regiment was formed in 1942 and Charlie became a Regiment gunner. He joined 2924 Squadron and was posted to Cyprus to guard the airstrip at Nicosia. From there he was despatched to the island of Kos on 16 September 1943 in charge of an ack ack crew. British forces had taken Kos and occupied Antimaschia Airfield. It was defended by units of the RAF Regiment, mainly Hispano gun crews of 2909 Squadron and elements of 2901 Squadron were deployed. This was the first time that a unit of the RAF Regiment had been transported complete with guns by air and the first on Greek territory. This put the Regiment on the map.

After a brave defence of the airfield the allies were overrun by German forces and prisoners of war were taken. Charlie was among them. After many days being dragged through Greece, Italy and Germany they arrived at Stalag IVB, hungry, cold and exhausted.

At this period of his life Charlie made many friends with servicemen in the same situation, who he maintained contact with throughout his life. They all lived in many parts of the globe but their shared experience formed a deep lifelong bond.

A main highlight of prison life was the arrival of Red Cross parcels and on one occasion, upon receiving a parcel, Charlie shared it among his comrades leaving himself with one slice of bread.

At the camp the PoWs were set to work. Charlie worked in a sugar beet factory and after a time worked for a stonemason.

The opportunity arose for him to escape and with four others they eventually reached an advancing American group of which General Patton was in charge. They were flown back to the UK in a Dakota and landed in an airfield near Watford where they received a heroes' welcome.

Charlie was sent to Grantham (Belton Park) for rehabilitation and soon returned to good health.

He left the RAF and returned to civvy street as a plumber. At this time he met Betty and after talks with her and her father he decided to re-join the RAF. Charlie and Betty were married in 1947 and he wore his uniform for their wedding. He and Betty had two sons, both born in Catterick.

On re-joining he enlisted for 22 years, returning to the Regiment where his career began to take shape with courses and postings to various squadrons and stations, showing man-management and leadership which led to promotion to flight sergeant.

In 1956 he was posted to 11 Squadron in Cyprus, which had moved there from Iraq - at this point Charkie and 11 Squadron became as one. Three months later Charlie's family joined him in Cyprus.

11 Squadron moved to Malta in 1959 where it was presented with its Standard.

A year later he moved to Felixstowe. This part of his life was well documented by him reminiscing over a pint, at branch meetings and writing in national and branch newsletters.

In 1962 at RAF Felixstowe, it was decided to form a paracute squadron in the Wing. As a result, 45 volunteers went to P Company, Aldershot in June 1962. After the course was completed at Abingdon they were left with a total of 12. In 11 Squadron records, the legend of 'The Dirty Dozen' was born.

Charlie was now 39 years old. He had 125 descents logged and being the only SCNO, he had a great reputation to live up to. This he did with dedication and flair.

As the number of paras increased, squadron's commitments also grew with operations in the Middle East, Europe and the Gulf.

Charlie remained with the squadron and was promoted to Warrant Officer. Later in 1962 he was posted to Colerne where he stayed for over ten years. In 1973 Charlie went to West Drayton and finished his Service career on 12 February 1974, completing 33 years. Charlie and Betty settled in Bristol. He worked in a local factory until his retirement.

After his distinguished Service career, he joined many associations including the RBL, where he and Betty were awarded certificates for poppy selling - RAFA, RAF Regiment Association, WO and SNCO Association and other organisations.

Charlie's hobbies included gardening, reading and writing.

At a WO and SNCO reunion in 2001, Charlie had a stroke. Following a stay in hospital, he and Betty went into a nursing home. They had celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary in 1997 and were inseparable. Betty passed away in September 2002.

If we mentioned all the facets of Charlie's life we may not be allowed space. Much more could be written but still would not do justice to his many qualities.

He was an outstanding ambassador for the Corps. His professionalism, sense of duty, loyalty and friendliness made it a privilege to know him.

He fulfilled his dream by having a plaque mounted at the airport at Kos as a tribute to 2909/2901 Squadrons who fought and defended the airfield in September 1943.

A large gathering of family, friends Associations members, ex 11 Squadron members, Standard Bearers, RBL members and RAFA members attended Charlie's funeral.

As we came out of the chapel, two military helicopters flew low across the chapel gardens, Charlie had his own flypast. A coincidence or a fitting tribute to Charlie? We prefer to think it was the latter!

He will be sorely missed by the Bristol and Bath Branch of the Association of which he was Chairman, ex-members of 11 Squadron and all who knew him.

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue.

Or walk with kings - not lose the common touch.

If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you.

If all men count with you but none too much.

If you can fill the unforgiven minute.

With sixty seconds' worth of distance run.

Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it.

And - which is more - You'll be a man my son!

Rudyard Kipling,

Editor: We have a lot to thank Centurion for and the staff who produced this excellent publication - including our own President Paul Bruning. Paul was editor for many years.

Centurion has provided much history about the Regiment which otherwise would have gone untold. Sadly it is no longer published.

CENTURION 1987

THE SERGEANT PTI

Mention of the dreadful initials PTI invariably fills AC Plonk with alarm, loathing and a strong desire to get in a far corner and look too busy for words.

For they stand for Physical Training Instructor - though Plonk thinks the 'T' should really be for torture. The Sergeant PTI - with his assistant Torturer, the Corporal PTI - is the fellow whose job is to keep the troops fit, whether they want to be kept fit or not.

The PT Sergeant is invariably bursting with rude health and a gloating offensiveness cheerfulness which is in full spate about dawn, when he meets his victims. They look like a gang of early Christians waiting in a Roman arena to play opposite a team of Nubian Lions, They feel like them too - except that if they had any say they'd prefer Nubian Lions.

The Sergeant PTI earns his ill-gotten pay - not so much because he's conscientious but because he has an inhuman streak which likes to gloat over the suffering of others.

At times, AC Plonk wonders why being kept forcibly fit was apparently overlooked by the Spanish Inquisitors. At other times, he realises that perhaps they considered there were limits of brutality beyond which a self-respecting inquisition could not go.

The raw material for these early morning orgies is provided by the PT Sergeant's commissioned counter part, another Nice Type generally -

The Sports Officer

About once a month the Sports Officer institutes a high-powered purge of the Station to find out why the numbers attending the early morning class have been slowly dwindling. As a matter of fact the reason is obvious, but he is really more concerned with getting the numbers up again. His aim is to drag back into the fold all the elusive and shrinking types, who, pleading an intense desire for duty, have managed to drift themselves away.

He is undeterred by the fact that every room into which he puts his head is, at once, mysteriously empty.

He methodically tackles all the departments and sections in the Station one by one, and though with tears in their eyes they

protest that they can't spare a single man,
they eventually have to produce a few
sacrificial lambs for the slaughter, so that
the rest may live.'

Thus, once more the PT Sergeant can give
full play to his sadistic yearnings, when he
holds, in the cold light of dawn, his PT class
or Torture Sessions.

The Sports Officer meanwhile, who has used
the full weight of his commissioned rank to
detail the airmen class to the Sergeant, has
gone off to take the PT class of WRAF's.

He says he doesn't really want to do it, but
it's the more responsible job.

Editor: Yes, I expect like me you remember
those days when we were young and fit.

We used to go to the gym - and throw the
medicine ball about - now it's just medicine.
The parallel bars - now it's chocolate bars.
Forward roll - now a sausage roll.

Pres-ups - If I get down I cannot get up.

Vaulting horse - now it's a hoarse throat.

Handstands - Pass.

Knees bend - arms raise - creak, creak.

But we can still lift a glass - So Cheers!

CENTURION 1993,

A poem by P E Parsons, Summerston, Glasgow.

CATTERICK DEPOT 1949

A lonely night
Dark as pitch
Beside the A1
Feet in the ditch.

Is there anyone there ?
Am I all alone?
Can't see a damn thing
And I'm chilled to the bone.

Why did I join?
The Regiment of my choice.
I could have been an 'Erk'
And just one of the boys.

NO, I'm a Gunner
And Gunners you know
Have a lot more to give
Ready to fight the foe.

The COs not aware
That it's me that's out here
To keep him safe
To sleep with no fear.

I'm still frozen stiff.
Not a thing has passed by
Not a sound stirs this night,
Has the world passed me by?

I could be in bed
Dreaming sweet dreams
Of that nice Danny Gourd
And his Demo Flight Team.

Up at dawn
Refreshed and ready
Slept like a log?
Not me, I'm a little unsteady.

Still, it's all to the good
I keep telling myself.
I'll be a real gunner
Not left on the shelf

But ready to act
And practised in stealth
I'd still like a 'cuppa'
And a good night in bed

But when the time comes
And we're on 'Alert Red'
I'll be the one you can rely on
To keep a clear head.

You'll be glad that you paid me
My twenty eight bob
If things get tough
I'm the man for the job

There's a flash on shoulder
That proclaims, I'm the Best
There's not many of us
Just me..... And the rest.

I'll be able to look at the World
And ask 'What were you?'
You've not been a Gunner
Then I'm One Up on You.

CENTURION 1994

Mr P Barraclough, a former peacetime gunner
joined up just after the 2nd World War. He
recounts in detail his time spent at the Depot
under training, and he felt the need to share
those memories now that RAF Catterick is
due to close. This is the first instalment of
life in the RAF Regiment - Winter 1946.

REMINISCENCE OF A PEACE TIME
GUNNER

With the closing of the Depot at RAF
Catterick, I have no doubt that many serving
and ex members of the Regiment have voiced
their memories. I hope I may be permitted
to add my own memories of my early days of
service with this Regiment of ours. I should
also like to add the memories of some years
later when I served briefly on the Depot
Staff.

In my youth I was posted to the Depot for
Basic Training as a gunner.

However, in those days, before proceeding to Catterick we had to report to a holding unit based at RAF-Skipton-on-Swale. This was a much disused airfield close to the town of Thirsk.

I have often wondered if the place was designed to make or break any future Regiment Gunners. The living conditions and the treatment by some members of staff were the worse than anything I have ever had to experience.

On arrival at Topcliffe railway station late in the evening and having been on the move for some ten hours, I telephoned the Guard Room at Skipton-on-Swale asking if it was possible for transportation to my new base. I was told in no uncertain manner, 'That they didn't run a Taxi Service and I had better start walking'. So fully laden with all my kit I marched long miles to RAF Skipton-on-Swale.

The Guard Room at Skipton was not normally manned by RAF Police as was usual but by RAF Regiment Staff. In the Guard Room was the SNCO i/c sat warming his feet in front of the 'Pot Bellie' stove. He wished me a pleasant 'Good Evening' and carried on warming himself. His partner, a Cpl then took charge and gave me a very long ear-bashing, and informed me amongst other things, 'That I was a scruffy little sod, and that the only people who counted around RAF Skipton-on-Swale were those who had badges on their arms, the rest of us were crap'.

At this I wondered what I had landed myself in. Shades of the recruiting for the French Foreign Legion passed through my mind. In fact had it been possible and had I the will power, I should have there and then told the friendly Cpl what to do with his stripes and the Regiment.

However, common sense prevailed and I was too tired to have any spirit of rebellion and simply wanted to sleep. In any case I believed that things could only improve, so I said nothing. I was then ushered to the accommodation which was to be 'home' for the next two weeks.

The accommodation had to be seen to be believed. The building was a corrugated iron 'Nissen Hut'. This hut contained as far as I could see about ten iron beds. From the ceiling a single very low wattage light bulb which gave barely enough illumination to see the whole of the hut floor area. The remnants of a lampshade, more black than its

original colour white was still attached to the wire holding the fitting.

In the centre of the floor was the usual 'Pot Bellied' stove, which was of course stone cold and surrounded with a pile of coke. The beds were un-sprung having strips of wire in place of springs. These were to give support to a body using the bed for its intended purpose. The mattress was made up of three separate pieces called biscuits. In fact hard tack issued in emergencies was a very good way of describing the mattress.

However, having had a long and tiring day, I made myself as comfortable as possible and settled down to sleep. As my eyes closed. I thought, 'What have I let myself in for'.

Next morning I was awoken by the guard who pulled off my covering of blanket exposing my semi-nude body to the chilled air of a North Yorkshire winter. Half asleep I followed the throng of bodies to what the Service called the Ablutions. The washing facilities like the rest of the facilities at RAF Skipton could at best be called 'Basic'.

In fact what could have quite easily have been mistaken for a cow shed stood a long line of taps over a trough. Along the trough were drain-holes through which the waste water splashed into a floor gutter. One could have ones feet washed by a fellow occupant whilst in the process of shaving. Of course there was the usual lack of sink plugs and mirrors. Having been round the world a little, I came prepared for such a possibility and carried my own plug (one which would fit most sinks), and I also had my own mirror.

I did however make the mistake of asking one of my fellow ablutionites where the showers were. A look on his face answered my question. The showers were a half mile distant and would be ice cold as was the water in the ablutions.

I soon discovered that hot water was provided by means of a single boiler which had to be stoked by the night duty guards. If the guards on duty forgot this task as often happened, the boiler fire went out and then on the next morning one had the choice of cold water or cold water. The guards were not too bothered as they would boil sufficient water for their needs on the ever glowing Guard Room fire.

On this particular morning, my first at Skipton, I found that the guards had not been amiss so I decided a shower was a definite non-starter.

The holding unit was used by all personnel attending courses at the Depot who had no base unit. The occupants were mainly aircraftmen who were either on their way to basic training or those who had completed the training and were of course quite 'old soldiers' where as those of us awaiting were 'sprogs'.

All the new recruits like myself were fitted up to kill at RAF Regiment scales. We were shown how to fit and assemble webbing equipment and how to clean kit as expected of a Gunner.

I remember having to hand in my only pair of issue shoes to be replaced for a pair of boots AP. I often wondered if this was done to prevent us going out in the evening. After all who would wish to go to a village hop in a pair of boots AP. If this was the case then little did the authorities know that most of us were broke and could not afford to venture out.

Another item I had to exchange was my RAF type mess tin. This mess tin was so well polished that the lid could have been used as a mirror. All so I had to hand in my nice round mess tin for a rectangular one made of steel which was made to fit correctly in the small pack.

With a few exceptions the names of the Staff escape. Other than the Guard Room Cpl, one person I could never forget there was a Flight Lieutenant who seemed to delight in making airmen's lives a misery. His favourite trick was to order a parade in full marching order, on inspection he would then proceed to find fault with everyone and everything. He would then order the Squad to jump up and down on the spot with their full kit on and heaven help any individual whose equipment became loose.

Names of the more approachable members of Staff I remember, were the SWO - Warrant Officer Ted Harman and the then F/Sgt Frank Sylvester. In those days Frank rode a motorcycle which was quite a useful item of transport in the spread out area of Skipton.

We recruits for the Regiment spent two rather miserable weeks at Skipton-on-Swale prior to being drafted to the Depot at Catterick. However, as we were keen to

learn something from all life's experiences, the stay at Skipton taught me that there was a lot of difference between strict discipline and out and out bullying.

It was therefore with some delight that we recruits noted the arrival of Troop Carrying Vehicles which were to take us to the Depot. Things seem to improve straight away and even the officer who came with the vehicle seemed to have an entirely different attitude compared with the Staff at Skipton. Full of expectation we climbed aboard the vehicles clad in our 'Full change of Station Order'. This meant wearing full webbing and carrying ones kit over the top of the large pack.

Editor: Brings back a few memories. Part 2 to follow in the next newsletter.

THE FUNERAL OF RAY BAKER - A LOVABLE ROGUE - AND THE INVOLVEMENT OF NORFOLK BRANCH OF THE RAF REGIMENT ASSOCIATION.

Sadly a former Corps member has marched into our Roll of Honour.

Roy Baker of East Barsham near Fakenham, died at the age of 87 on 12th June 2021. Ray was born in Guist, south of Fakenham, and was eventually one of fourteen teenage boys that lived in the village. Branch member Alan Codman was one of those fourteen boys and recalls some fascinating tales of the things he and Ray got up to, not to be printed here, but the next time you see Alan ask him about the things he and Ray got up to in their youth - wonderful stories.

Ray served in the RAF Regiment from 1950 - 1952 on Number 2 Armoured Car Squadron and saw service in many overseas locations.

Unfortunately other than his two daughters, Joanne and Olga, Ray had very little family remaining to give him the send off that he deserved.; so the Norfolk Branch of the RAF Regiment Association stepped up to the plate.

Branch member Ken Thomas, a neighbour of Ray, said that after seeing how upset Joanne and Olga were he decided that it was especially important to make sure that Ray received a big turnout at the funeral in the Church at East Barsham.

Ken posted the situation on various Social Media Sites and also got in touch with Branch Secretary Peter Lawrence to see what could be done.

Peter suggested that Ken could parade the Branch Standard at the funeral and received permission from Vice Chairman Paul Rainbird to release the Standard to Ken. Ken was a former British Legion Standard Bearer and therefore knew how to correctly parade the Standard at the funeral and subsequent burial.

In the meantime, so many former veterans from all three services committed to attend the service. At least twelve former Rockapes from various parts of the country, travelling from as far away as Leicester attended the funeral. Some had a shorter journey such as Branch member Cam Falla from Aylsham.

The funeral was held on the 1st July and Peter estimated that there was at least ninety veterans smartly turned out in Blazer. Regimental tie and medals. Moreover, as well as the Norfolk Branch Standard there was six Royal British Legion Standards on parade along with the President of the Norfolk British Legion Lord Charles Townsend.

Peter Lawrence informed Air Commodore Scott Miller, the Commandant General of the RAF Regiment, of the situation and the Commandant General asked Peter to read the following words on his behalf at the funeral.

'Because of its comparatively small size, the RAF Regiment's exceptional professionalism and its high reputation as a fighting organisation have always been founded on the efforts of a small number of people.

'There is no doubt that the National Service intakes served the Regiment well in the troubled days of the 1950's and without them the front-line squadrons would have been unable to carry out their many overseas tasks.

'Rays Service with Number Two Armoured Car Squadron marked him as one of those giants on whose shoulders the current RAF Regiment stands. It is with great sadness that we mark Ray having marched into our Roll of Honour, but his legacy as a warrior legend amongst legends will live on in the very essence of the RAF Regiment.

'Ray, as Commandant General and on behalf of the RAF Regiment family, serving and retired, I salute you, your achievements and all that we have inherited from you.'

Peter also laid a wreath at the burial with the words 'The Commandant General and the entire Regiment Family, both serving and

Retired - Per Ardua'.

All in all, it was a truly marvellous send off for one of our own. Whilst talking to the undertaker after the funeral, she said that in all her time she has never witnessed such a turnout with everyone looking so smart. We did our best to pay our respects to a kind and helpful man who loved the company of people.

As described by Ken Thomas - Ray was a loveable rogue, and I will miss him coming round for a cup of tea and biscuits.

Editor: We cannot take away the sadness of the loss of a loved one and the day of their Funeral. But Rays daughters, Joanne and Olga will also remember that his friend and neighbour, Ken, decided to see that Ray had a good 'send off'.

Ken, sincere thanks, to you and the Norfolk Branch and Association members, the many veterans from all three services of the military and the Royal British Legion Standard Bearers. Some of the veterans attending having travelled good distances.

This shows the comradeship and respect for all those who have served their country. Joanne and Olga, thank Ken and all the ninety plus congregation for their support, dignity and kindness. You will always be remembered.

AND FINALLY

From the Daily Mail May 2021.

Sir Keith Starmer recalling his successful legal battle to save a Jamaican woman from the death penalty after she was jailed for poisoning her abusive husband's chicken curry, tells Piers Morgan: 'She wrote to me saying. 'Thank you for all you did in my case. Next time you are in Jamaica you must come round for dinner.'

To the thief who stole my glasses. I will track you downI have contacts.

A man complained to the farmer that his horrible goat had eaten his hat... 'I'm sorry' said the farmer, 'but it's just your attitude.'

That's all for now folks! I look forward to the pleasure of your company on Tuesday 21st September 2021 - 12 noon at the Feathers Inn, Wymondham.

Best wishes,

Colin
(01502) 585079.

