



**THE ROYAL AIR FORCE REGIMENT ASSOCIATION
NORFOLK BRANCH**

NEWSLETTER NO.249 September 2022

President: Squadron Leader Paul Bruning (Rtd)

Chairman: Vacant

Vice Chairman: Mr Paul Rainbird + Programme Secretary

Secretary: Squadron Peter Lawrence (Rtd)

Treasurer: Mrs Sue Lawrence



Dear Member

**RAF REGIMENT ASSOCIATION REUNION
AND AGM - Report by Peter Lawrence.**

Colin Lake, Sue and me attended the RAF Regiment gathering at Northallerton which offered the familiar opportunity to enjoy the close company of those with whom we have over the years, whilst also enjoying a superb presentation of just what the Corps at large has been doing lately.

The latter started with an excellent presentation by Warrant Officer Gaz Elliot presently with Number 1 Squadron, but shortly occupying the post of Corps Warrant Officer at RAF Honington.

1 Squadron having just returned from an 18 week detachment to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. The detachment is a new roulement duty added to the acorns in a development few of those present had even been aware of.

Gaz was followed by the Station Commander, RAF Honington, Group Captain Dutch Holland, whose description of Corps roles, training and future possibilities was easily the most comprehensive and most detailed of all the Annual General Meetings I have attended over the years.

It was especially heartening to those of us who have glanced over our shoulder from time to time, fearing the approach of those bean-counters from the Treasury seeking to hand out the P45's on a grand scale.

The Corps, I would guess, is in good heart.

The weekend reunion was excellent and started with a 1940's evening on Friday and the Gala Dinner on Saturday night with more entertainment (and sore heads the following morning).

It was marvellous that Frank Xavier, the National Secretary, received the Commandant General's Commendation for his dedication and commitment to the Association over many years - all-in-all a brilliant weekend, good food, good

accommodation which everyone thoroughly enjoyed.

Thank you to Tom Magee, now retired as the National Treasurer, for organising which was probably one of the best Annual General Meetings and Reunions of the RAF Regiment Association

Per Ardua

Peter Lawrence

Editor: Many congratulations to Frank Xavier for all his good work, an award most deserved.

BRANCH AUTUMN LUNCH

The Old Rectory House Hotel, North Walsham Road, Crostwick, Norwich, NR1 7BG.
On Thursday 27th October 2022 12.30pm for 1pm.

I know not everyone can attend meetings, so come along and have a great day out - meet friends old and new and enjoy a good meal. Remember - members, family and friends - everyone is welcome.

All facilities on ground level and ample parking. The cost is £26 pp. If you will be joining us please contact Paul Rainbird for choice of menu on (01328) 856560.

Please return your booking form to Paul by the 10th October. Thank you.

Branch Newsletter

As you know I do look to members to tell me about their time in the Regiment and stories of interests. They are always most welcome.

There is still a lot about the Regiment, past and present, that needs to be told. And now that we are on the www we can do this - don't let history pass us by.

You can contact me on (01502) 585079 or c.l.clarke@talktalk.net or 55 Lakeland Drive, Lowestoft, NR32 2QS. Thank you.

RAF REGIMENT - OPERATIONS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN 1942 - 1945.
continued.

The Final Battle in Tunisia.

For the final battle of Tunisia, the Regiment was allotted a particularly interesting task as the escort and fighting elements of a combined services force, with objectives in the Bizerte and Tunis areas, the seizing and safe-guarding of cable-heads and radio stations, German Air Force headquarters, radar equipment and special types of enemy aircraft of special interest to the Royal Air Force Intelligence Branch.

No 2744 Squadron and 4091 AA Flight were allotted to the Bizerte area and were the first British troops to enter Ferryville, which they did on 7 May. No 2721 and 2788 Squadrons with Nos 4098 and 4337 Flights were allotted the Tunis area, entering the city close behind the tanks in the early morning of 8 May.

The detachments separated to their various objectives which were occupied. Minor resistance only was encountered and quickly overcome after a few shots had been fired. Many hundreds of prisoners and much valuable material were captured.

On 11 May a detachment consisting of a troop of armoured cars and a Flight of 2788 Squadron with 4337 AA Flight in the role of lorried infantry, was ordered to occupy the German landing ground at Korboos in the Cap Bon peninsula. This operation was carried out with great dash and determination, which enabled the airfield to be taken with a number of enemy aircraft undamaged and many prisoners.

On 12-13 May the detachment continued mopping up operations in the surrounding hills, there were several sharp engagements with parties of Germans in which 4337 Flight particularly distinguished itself.

Monotonous Tasks.

Before concluding the record of the Regiment in the Northwest Africa campaign mention must be made of the many officers and men of the Regiment who performed the monotonous duties of ensuring the security of many vital Royal Air Force radar stations and other installations.

They were formed, shortly after arrival in Northwest Africa, into 24 AA Flights, numbered 4337-4360, to the same establishment as the other five.

They rendered valuable service, and immediately after the conclusion of the campaign, in order to give increased efficiency and flexibility of control, were formed into eleven AA squadrons numbered 2860-2870.

Reformation of Squadrons into Wings.

The period that followed cessation of hostilities was a busy one. The field squadron organization had stood the test of active service with but minor modification, but the lack of decentralized control of squadrons was felt seriously, and at this time was evolved and tested out the organization of Regiment squadrons into wings, which has now been adopted as the standard at home and in other theatres. The first Wing Headquarters, known as RAF Regiment Wing (North Africa) came into being officially on 30 May 1943.

Rescue off Lampedusa.

Some squadrons were early on the move, No's 2744 and 2864 sailed on 17 June to occupy the island of Lampedusa and 2862 embarked on 23 June to go to Gozo (Malta) for the operations preliminary to the invasion of Sicily, while on Lampedusa the following rescue was carried out by 2744 Field Squadron.

Shortly after midnight on 10 September 1943, the night patrol of the squadron reported an aircraft circling the island at about 10,000 feet. It disappeared but returned half an hour later and almost immediately crashed on the western end of the island. The squadron was quickly turned out, organized into patrols, and searched for and located the wrecked aircraft, but found no sign of the crew, until two hours later the navigator was found in hiding, as he believed he was in enemy territory.

From him it was learnt that the aircraft was a Mitchell of 487 Bomber Squadron USAF returning to its base in Tunisia from a raid on Italy and that the crew of five had baled out. As it seemed probable that the rest were in the sea, Squadron Command mobilized the local fishing fleet and as a result two of them were rescued about dawn.

Amongst its other activities, the squadron CO operated with the NOIC and versatile as always, had salvaged and made sea-worthy an ex-Italian naval launch, which was manned by two AC's of the Regiment with an Italian prisoner of war as engineer.

The Squadron Commander sent his launch out, it having a greater range than the fishing boats and at approximately 0900 hours they picked up the co-pilot about a mile off the northwest coast of the island. He was exhausted, but revived and was brought in.

The same crew put the launch to sea immediately, continuing the search throughout the day and did not return until 1700 hours, having found the last member of the crew at 1600 hours, unfortunately dead, some five miles from land.

As a result of this experience, there being no operational RAF personnel on the island, the CO had the old runway cleared, made a landing 'T' and organized an emergency flare-path which could be run out in a few minutes.

This was kept manned until the squadron left the island and though a similar emergency did not arise again, it was of considerable assistance to visiting aircraft.

Visit of HM The King.

During the visit of HM the King to North Africa the Regiment had the distinction of mounting a Sovereign Guard of Honour, on the occasion of His Majesty's visit to Headquarters, Northwest Africa Tactical Air Force at Grombalia airfield on 19 June.

The Guard was formed from personnel of 2721, 2771, 2788 and 2825 Field Squadrons and the opinion was expressed by several senior Royal Air Force officers present that the standard of turn-out and drill achieved had not been surpassed in the RAF, even in peacetime.

In Sicily

The Regiment's part in the Sicily campaign has already been dealt with in an earlier issue (No 4) of the Review.

Originally, six squadrons from North Africa were detailed for this invasion of which only one, 2862 AA Squadron, actually took part, together with five from the United Kingdom, (Nos 2855-59) and three from Middle East (Nos 2904, 2906 and 2925). In addition, 2864 and 2868 took part in the later stages of this short campaign, moving across to Palermo on 12 August, advanced detachments having already been flown to the island for protection of radar stations.

Into Italy

From Sicily the next step was, of course, into Italy, the first squadron to cross being 2856 on 10 September. Noteworthy was the move, complete with their guns, by air of

three AA squadrons, Nos 2862, 2925 and 2859, in that order, between 15 and 21 September from Sicily to occupy aerodromes for the Desert Air Force on the east side of Italy.

Thereafter squadrons moved in steadily to their various stations and employments under Tactical and Coastal Air Forces and by the end of 1943 all squadrons of the Regiment except one had left Africa and were deployed on European soil, in Italy, Sardinia and Corsica.

Early in 1944 the necessity arose to send squadrons back to the United Kingdom and six squadrons including the last one from North Africa, sailed in February.

At Cassino

The slow progress of the war in Italy gave an opportunity of action to the Regiment units during the winter. There was no Luftwaffe for the AA squadrons to shoot at and the Field squadrons had little but routine airfield duties. But the Regiment was not idle, it lent a hand on any and every job it could to help the RAF war effort, from making airfield roads to bombing-up aircraft, all while training and getting ready for the next task.

In February many squadrons were inspected by the Commandant, Major-General (later Sir) Charles F Liardet KBE, CB, DSO, TD, DL during his visit to this theatre.

Continuing the policy of giving squadrons experience in action, 5/6 April Nos 2771 and 2788 Field Squadrons took over a sector of the line on the Belvedere mountain at Cassino under 4 (Br) Div and from 16 April under 2 New Zealand Div, where they both took part in the opening stages of the final battle for Cassino which began on 11 May. No 2771 returned to RAF duties on 27 May and 2788 on 6 June.

Close Co-operation

Another task which has taken the Regiment forward with the Army is a special one which cannot yet be detailed. A joint Army-Royal Air Force task to ensure the closest co-operation between tactical aircraft and forward troops.

It was started experimentally at the end of 1943 by 2906 Field Squadron, continued by 2857, then 2856 and finally 2744 Field Squadron, which took over on 5 May 1944 just before the battle for Cassino began. The squadron has since taken part in every battle fought by the Eighth Army up to date.

The Fall of Rome

Meanwhile, in anticipation of the fall of Rome, a joint British-American force was assembled to occupy special points in this city as was done in Tunis. No 2721 Field Squadron joined this force and had the dual distinction of being the only Regiment unit to enter the Anzio bridge-head and the first to enter the Eternal City. Incidentally, this squadron capture intact the original Caproni jet-propelled aircraft at Guidonia airfield on 7 June

During the summer of 1944 the Regiment contingent in Italy was reinforced by nine LAA and three Field squadrons which had been formed in the Middle East and except for the AA squadrons, for whom the Luftwaffe never provided a target, the Regiment entered on a busy period in the autumn, although with the diminished threat to airfields it was the Army which provide the opportunities.

Help for the Eighth Army

When the Eighth Army wanted the help of a squadron for a difficult sector in the central Apennines in mid-September 2771 Field Squadron undertook the task.

The time is not ripe yet to tell in detail of their successful patrol actions there against the Germans, with famous British and Indian Cavalry Regiments and Italian partisans; of how they crossed over the Apennines and thence down to the plain of Lombardy, where they met and captured prisoners from their German opposite number - the 721 Jaeger Regiment.

Of how on 19 November, with the 27 Lancers, they took the sugar factory at Classe Fuori, for long, with the adjoining tower of the ancient church of St Apollinare, a German OP dominating the flooded area of south Ravenna; and then went on to be, with the Lancers, the first British troops to enter the city.

After three months of continuous service on the front 2721 Squadron reached the river Lamone. They were relieved just before Christmas by 2788 Field Squadron.

Other Adventures in 1944

Many and varied were the adventures of units of the Regiment in 1944. They ranged from No 2788 Squadron's participation in the invasion of Southern France, from the beaches of St Raphael, to Belford from the web-footed five months activities of No 2825 Field Squadron on and off the coast

line of Yugoslavia in boarding parties on light craft of the Navy, and raids with the Commando units against German garrisons of the Dalmatian Islands, to the re-occupation of Greece.

Another sea rescue episode occurred in February 1944 from the island of Ponza in the Tyrrhenian Sea, where a Flight of 2867 LAA Squadron was stationed for the protection of an RAF Radar Station against German raiding parties. The story is once again characteristic of the ubiquity of the Regiment's engagements.

The sentry on duty on the morning of the 26th reported just before dawn that a ship was on the rocks in a raging gale and extremely violent sea. The OC Flight with an officer of the AMES and a party of NCOs and men set off in a three tonner to investigate, arriving near the scene at 0715 hours.

The position was so desperate that the OC sent the driver back immediately to fetch every available man and to organize hot food and drinks, clothing and medical attention for survivors.

It was then raining hard and blowing a full gale. The ship, an American LS, had been driven onto the rocks, broadside on, at the foot of a 20-ft cliff. The ship was returning to Naples from Anzio and had on board over 200 men, including a number of German prisoners of war.

The Regiment party at considerable personal risk climbed down the cliff, where they found that about twenty of the ship's company had got ashore over a scramble-net which they were lashing to the rocks and others were jumping for it as the ship surged in on the pounding waves.

This timely arrival of fresh help speeded up the rescue, which had been very slow, but after some 160 men had been saved the ship broke up amidships with still about thirty men on the stern and sixteen in the bows. The former were all rescued just before the stern sank, and those in the bows had to jump to a large rock to which a line had been fixed, and get thence through the sea to the shore

Unfortunately this rock was swept by great waves and a number of ship's officers and men, as well as some prisoners of war, were washed off.

Gallant and in some cases successful rescues of some of these were made by an officer of the AMES and a Sergeant and LAC of the Regiment, who plunged into the raging sea. Unfortunately, in trying to rescue a German prisoner of war this officer was himself washed out and drowned.

It was not until about noon that the rescue work ceased when all but fifteen or sixteen had been saved. The American authorities later awarded their Soldiers Medal to the Sergeant and LAC and a further six members of the Regiment were Commended in Command Routine Orders.

The same Flight of 2867 Squadron was also concerned in another unusual venture, when it was detailed in the summer to provide AA defence in Yugoslavia for Marshal Tito's Headquarters, a task which entailed man-handling its guns up on to the mountain crags around the caves where the Headquarters was situated.

The Liberation of Greece

As already mentioned, the Regiment was involved in the liberation of Greece in the Autumn of 1944. The squadrons taking part in the main landings in October were Nos 2902 and 2924 Field and No's 2923 and 2926 LAA, while No 2908 Squadron formed part of the combined force that carried out preliminary operations in September against Arazos and Patras.

Following the capture of Patras in early October, No 2908 Squadron split into three parts, shared in the operation such wider that originally planned - that paved the way for the main landings at Piraeus on the 15 October. One section of this squadron joined the force that was harassing the enemy's withdrawal to the north and had the misfortune to lose the Flight Commander during a skirmish near Kozani on 28 October.

On reaching Piraeus the other RAF Regiment squadrons deployed to their various stations, mainly airfields. When the ELAS disturbances came to a head at the beginning of December, units of the Regiment were involved in a good deal of street fighting in which their armoured cars, six-pounders and mortars played an effective part.

The stiffest fight, however, occurred at Kifisia, where AHQ Greece was attacked on 18 December by strong ELAS forces with artillery and mortar support.

In spite of the spirited defence by No 2923 LAA Squadron, the headquarters was forced to surrender after an action lasting 30 hours and after all ammunition was exhausted - only four hours before the relief column arrived. Casualties were eleven killed and 46 wounded.

Honours and Awards

During the course of the campaigns in Northwest Africa, Sicily and Italy the awards carried by officers and men of the Regiment have been; MC - four, MM - eight, OBE - two, MBE - three, BEM two, - Mentions in Despatches 82, Commendations in Command Orders - nine, Bronze Star (USA) - one, Soldiers Medal (USA) - two.

The Squadrons that came to North Africa in November 1942 and those that joined them later can look back on this record with pride. Some are still in the Central Mediterranean, some have been transferred to Western Europe, others elsewhere. They have passed the test of battle and have proved themselves to quote the verdict of the Eighth Army, 'dependable and well trained troops'.

TIME FOR A SMILE

I let my husband have the last word in an argument, as long as it's 'You're right!'

A policeman gave me a sheet of paper and a pencil. He said; 'I want you to trace someone for me.'

There was a knock at the front door. The little boy went to answer and shouted back: 'Dad, there's a man at the door with a bald head.' His dad called back; 'Tell him I've already got one.'

My husband is so lazy that the only exercise he gets these days is when he is pushing his luck.

I put my weighing scale in the bathroom corner, and that's exactly where the little liar will stay until it apologises to me.

A wig thief is on the loose.... Police are combing the area.

My husband and I go 50:50 on expenses. He does the money, I provide expenses.

I'm going to order a load of bubble wrap, just to see what it's delivered in.

What did the football manager do when the pitch flooded? He sent on his subs.

It's said money talks, but mine doesn't - it goes without saying.

I first published this article in the Newsletter in the 1990's but as there have been some developments recently this will bring you up to date.

The Dumfries Sausage

You may have read recently that the great British sausage is now back in favour with the public. After a steady 15 year decline, consumption has leapt 11 per cent with Britons eating 580 million more than in the previous year.

The article took me back to 26th May 1954, and my arrival at the great Regiment training ground RAF Dumfries, Scotland. Not everyone could be so lucky!

It was the following morning that, along with others who had been promised the good life. (I had only casually mentioned to the Careers Officer that I was interested in working in the open air - he soon arranged that) we arrived at the cookhouse.

I was surprised there was no 'A La Carte' menu displayed, but never mind I thought they didn't bother with one for breakfast, so made my way to the serving hatch.

It was there that I set eyes on it! It was displayed with others in a large flat square tin and set, and by set I mean stuck to the bottom of the tin in a liquid substance which I concluded was the forerunner to super glue! It was a sausage!

Prizing one out of the tray I placed it on my plate next to 'swimming egg' and 'floating' bacon. I paused at the baked beans container, baked they were and looked more like 'has beans'. There was little trace of the traditional tomato sauce and I concluded the beans had been washed more than once. They remained unmolested. I later heard that the beans were eaten as an anti-dote to the rest of the meal.

Next the fried bread, this could be consumed but the advice was, if you had any teeth fillings then chew on the opposite side of your mouth. Sometimes a slice was put out for the birds to eat. Those who succumbed to the temptation were immediately recognised by their inability to become airborne.

Of course being in Scotland there was - porridge. Today, the description of this mixture as porridge would have constituted an offence under the Food Description Act. It consisted of lumps of fused 'something' with added salt (plenty) and served in cold chunks.

I have no doubt that had this been available south of the border, independence for Scotland - no problem.

Hoping for a nice cup of tea, then this was the place to avoid. You have all heard about a good strong cup where you could stand a spoon up in it. Not here, this tea was brewed to make sure nothing stood up!

I diverse, so back to the sausage. Shaped like a 303 bullet and with similar exterior properties it could be fired from any service rifle. If you did manage to whittle it to a point then is served you well as an emergency bayonet. Care was needed when cutting as 'flying sausage' was a reportable accident.

Who made the sausages? This was confidential information and the recipe remains a secret. However, the Ministry of Defence has just announced the successful completion of trials of what they describe as 'an unusual versatile device' which was first tested in 1954. For the present it will be known by its code name The D.S.

Colin Clarke

31 LAA Squadron and SODS (Survivor of Dumfries Sausages).

SODS Update

It has just been announced that under the Ministry of Defence 65 year (National Security Regulations - Restricted) as amended. That those who trained for 10 weeks at RAF Dumfries in the 1950's and partook in eating of sausages can now apply for compensation. For more information go to internet www.MOD.Sausage.SODS. There you can obtain a voucher for 70 sausages (one for every day at Dumfries). If you prefer chipolatas, then 2 for every sausage.

At last something for us old SODS.

CANAL ZONE NEWS 1997/98

From a National Serviceman.

The strongest memory from the Canal Zone in the 50's is the appalling food that was dished up - 3 meals a day 7 days a week! Fried eggs never had one unbroken yolk, boiled potatoes powered like chalk, sausages were meatless - cold ungarnished corned beef was a welcome treat. We kept alive by boiling tinned steak and kidney puddings (bought from a meagre £1.50 per week pay) over paraffin stoves, in our tents.

Master Chef - where were you?

A SAD DAY AT RAF OLTON AUGUST 1940
by late Branch member Norman Hunt.

I was trained as a ground gunner at Bassingbourne in 1939 and early in 1940 was posted to France with the BEF on 114 Blenheim Squadron.

We waited for the Germans to pay us a visit which they did early one morning with Dorniers. As we only had one anti-aircraft gun there was not a lot we could do about it. We did shoot down two planes but they came off best, destroying all our aircraft and the petrol dump.

A few days later the C.O. told us that no replacement aircraft would be sent and we had to pack up and return to England.

It was no easy matter to get to the coast as all roads were full of people fleeing from the fighting. We were three days on the road before finally making it to Dunkirk. Being among the first to arrive we managed to get a ship but we could not take any of our kit, so we set fire to all the lorries and equipment and arrived home at Dover in just the clothes we had on.

We then went by train to Norwich and finally to Horsham St Faith. After a spot of leave we returned to camp.

The RAF were now training more airmen to be ground gunners. Our numbers soon increased from a dozen to thirty and we had to wear a badge (Ground Gunners) on our right arm. At this time the RAF Regiment had not been formed so we did not have a Squadron, instead we were known as Defence Ground Gunners.

One day we were told to pack our kit and found ourselves at RAF Olton which is four miles from Aylsham. It was a grass field with a control tower and nothing else. Us gunners had to bed down in some farm buildings at Green Farm and the other RAF chaps had to live at Blickling Hall which was two miles away.

Our new Blenheims arrived, but as our gun pits were not ready we had to patrol around the airfield with rifles. Amongst our other duties was assisting aircraft needing to land at night. Two of us would light all the lamps and make a flight path and then when the plane had landed, put them out and return them to the store shed which took a lot of time.

Soon our gun pits were completed and they

had to be manned 24 hours a day. We had a 15 cwt Ford truck which had a flat body and at the back of the cab was a concrete box with a Lewis gun mounted on the top. This had to be manned on a Red Warning. We also used the lorry to carry meals round to the boys in the gun pits.

Our cookhouse was a small wooden building and on this sad day the lads were lined up waiting for the grub to be dished out when a Red Alert warning sounded. One of the lads waiting for dinner jumped onto the lorry and took up position on the gun, his mate looked to him and said, 'What are you doing, you couldn't hit a barn door with that thing'. 'Oh no' said his mate, 'I could hit you' and he jokingly pointed the gun at his best friend. As he did this the gun went off. The bullet passed right through his mate and into the cookhouse wall. We had to call an ambulance from Blickling Hall but by the time it arrived his mate was dead.

The two gunners who lived in the same street in Birmingham, had joined up together and done all their training together.

The gunner who shot his friend was taken to RAF Horsham St Faith and we never did know what happened to him, but how do you live with the fact that you have killed your best friend and how can you face up to his family.

To this day, I still wonder how he got through his life having to live with that sad moment for evermore.

Well that's all for now folks! Remember at Branch meetings - everyone - members, family and friends all welcome. Enjoy a cup of coffee, good company and an excellent speaker.

AND FINALLY Page 8.

With apologies if you have no interest in football. Looking through my archives I found a sports page from the Daily Herald newspaper (now The Sun) for 15th October 1945 which may interest you.

Please note Charlton Athletic (my team) won at Aston Villa. Those were the days. How were your team doing in 1945?

Best wishes,

Colin
(01502) 585079