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July -September 2021

Chinook at 40




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Welcome

I make no apology for it. We have gone 'full wokka' for this issue. This summer the RAF is celebrating forty years of service from the Chinook CH-47 helicopter and we are delighted to celebrate with them. We bring you Chinook memories for all the historians, engineers and the medical evacuation crew fans among us, and more. The serving and retired personnel who gave us their stories are mostly in awe of the machine and its capabilities – and what it has allowed them to achieve in every international conflict and most domestic civilian emergencies since the early 1980s. So even if you are a fast jet fan, we hope there will be something to interest you.

In between the helicopters you'll find memories from member Vera Ladds, who worked on GEE and Chain Home radar in the Second World War, and a history of Bentley Priory. We also feature RAF fireman Ray Brasier MBE. After years of service his health issues started to have an impact on his life. His doctor contacted the RAF Association to see if we could make life easier for him, and Teresa, a Connections for Life volunteer, came into his life.

Our regular features and the latest news from the Association are all here too – including details about this year's Annual Conference.

Happy reading.

Annie O'Brian
Editor



AIR MAIL MAGAZINE

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Cover image: The Chinook's 40th anniversary special paint scheme on ZD984. Seen here against moody skies at RAF Odiham as it prepares for a routine training sortie, operated by 27 Squadron. Photo by Cpl Tim Laurence. © MOD/Crown 2021

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... your letters and emails



MOD/Crown 2009.

Flat-pack wokkas

Working on the Chinook build team in the early 1980s, we'd take shipment of the new helicopters direct from the Boeing factory in the US. This was in the days of heavily unionised dockyards, so when the cargo ships came into Liverpool docks we couldn't even touch the aircraft and instead had to let the dockers do it, which was quite nerve wracking. They'd take off all of the connections and only then were we allowed to attach the towing arm and tow it off. We would build it right there on the dock and a crew from RAF Odiham would fly it back, minus the build team, who were left packing their tools into a beat-up old Land Rover! CHRIS COTTRELL

RAFA OK

As, hopefully, we are emerging from our long COVID lockdown I feel we must thank the RAF Association for the support they provided. Without fail my wife and I had a call every Wednesday for a chat and to check that we were OK. This was a great comfort not only to us, but to our far away family who knew that we had help at hand if needed. Thank you RAFA! KENNETH STARK

Phone faux pas

In the early 1970s I was posted to the supply control centre at RAF Hendon, working in the project team then the micro film/fiche section of the new ICL 4/72 computer. We were in regular contact with other departments by phone, and on one occasion the person I phoned said he would call back in five minutes with the details I required. We often answered the phone in a light hearted way, so when the phone rang a few minutes later I answered with: "This is the home of the bewildered and the bemused," to which the air commodore and head of the supply control centre replied: "Ah, you've been in my office then!" MIKE HUGHES

Unexpected aircraft

When I was stationed at RAF Northolt in the late 1950s, we used to have an unusual visitor every so often. This was a Lancaster which had an extra wing section mounted vertically from about where the mid-upper gun turret should be. The aircraft was a 'flying test-bed', and the extra wing section was used to test airflow over the wing. I first came across it parked behind a blister hangar, with only the top of the fuselage visible. With the extra wing tip poking up above the impression it gave was that some horrible collision of two aircraft had taken place! Incidentally, this aircraft – PA474 – was later given to the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, and is still their current Lancaster. PAT LELLIOTT



An A-10 Warthog of the USAF 438th Air Expeditionary Group. Public domain photograph by Master Sergeant Cecilio Ricardo, United States Air Forces Central.



Noisy neighbours

While serving as range controller at RAF Nordhorn, 1986 to 1990, it was quite common for the American A-10 Warthogs to come for weapons practice. One day the wives of the Americans from RAF Ahlhorn came to see what their husbands got up to. With them was an official cameraman with a large Beta-Max video camera. Our concrete tower had a very narrow balcony around the control room, and the windows sloped out making the space even smaller. However, the camera was set up on the balcony and the aircraft arrived. First, a 'dry' pass with a wing waggle, then a 'hot' strafe pass. When the sound of 70 rounds per second reached the cameraman he jumped so much he very nearly dropped his expensive camera off the 80-foot balcony! DOUG RENOUF

Overall imposter

At RAF Hednesford in 1956 my colleague Brian and I were on jankers polishing the office of the Commanding Officer, while chaps from a flight a few weeks behind ours were cleaning the corridor. Noticing the CO's overalls – with squadron leader rank tabs – Brian swiftly donned them and marched out to the 'new' chaps in the corridor, who all sprang to attention. He then ordered them to carry out the jobs that he and I had been assigned, before marching back into the office, removing the overalls and hanging them back up. When the drill corporal arrived later on he expressed himself satisfied with 'our' work, and we made a hasty exit. I shudder to think of the consequences had Brian been caught in the CO's overalls! GRAHAM GEORGE

Pick your battles



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One day in the late 1960s, I, a young airframe mechanic at RAF Marham, and my colleagues were on fire picket duty. The station had received an alert that the Palestine Liberation Organization, recently famous for airliner hijacks and an attack on Rome airport, would be targeting our airfield. Taken to the armoury, we were impressed to see substantial quantities of automatic rifles. However, we were directed past these and issued instead with pick-axe handles. Presumably the powers that be were more worried about us shooting holes in the Victor tankers than getting hurt. On receiving my 'weapon' I asked: "If they come at us with submachine guns do we throw the handles at them and run?" This comment very nearly got me on a charge, but I don't think the sergeant could be bothered with the paperwork. CHRIS STACEY

To comment in or contribute to Air Mail, please email airmail@rafa.org.uk. Alternatively, write to Annie O'Brian, Editor, Air Mail, RAF Association, Atlas House, Wembley Road, Leicester, LE1 3UT. Your correspondence should be clearly marked FOR PUBLICATION. The editor's decision on inclusion is final, and longer letters may be abridged due to limited space. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication. The deadline for inclusion in the October-December issue is **6 August**.

From the President

As an Association we enjoyed a close relationship with HRH The Duke of Edinburgh who was our President three times. It was therefore with great sorrow that I wrote, on your behalf, to Her Majesty The Queen expressing our sadness at his passing and our thanks for his support. The text of my letter is in the article about HRH on page 7.

Now, all pilots recall particular moments that occurred while flying; be they the activity at the time, the people involved or the aircraft itself. Consequently, I had several of these flashbacks when being asked to write the foreword to this edition of Air Mail which celebrates 40 years of RAF service for the Chinook.

The Chinook is a wonderfully versatile and powerful aircraft that operates across the world supporting our forces. But it is the comradery and professionalism of the air and ground crews, tactical support, meteorology, mobile catering and aviation medicine units and many other personnel who make the platform work, that makes the RAF's Chinook Force the outstanding capability that it is.

National Presidential Certificates awarded

Outstanding service to the RAF Association has been recognised in three National Presidential Certificates, awarded to coincide with Her Majesty The Queen's Birthday Honours List. The following have been commended:

Moyne Blake of Cheltenham Branch for selfless and sustained voluntary service and commitment over many years to various branch committee duties of the Cheltenham Branch.

James (Jim) Goodfellow of Newcastle-under-Lyme Branch for devoting a lifetime of service to the Royal Air Force family in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

Stanley (Stan) Turner of Kettering Branch, for dedicated service and commitment to 508 (Kettering) Branch of the RAF Association, the ex-RAF community and the local community.

An in-depth interview with Dougie Leighton, who was recognised with a National Presidential Certificate in January 2021, can be found on page 17.

National Presidential Certificate award-winners are entitled to wear the gold lapel badge. © RAF Association.



Sir Baz North flying a Chinook over Pau, Pyrenees in 1995, during 7 Squadron duties. © Sir Baz North's personal collection.

I have been very fortunate to have flown some 2,000 hours in the Chinook across the globe on both operations and exercises. The majority of my flying was on the Special Forces Flight of No. 7 Squadron and I cannot discuss any of those sorties. But of all my time in the RAF, it is perhaps the loss of Chinook ZD576 and the crew of Jon Tapper, Rick Cook, Graham Forbes and Kev Hardie, together with their passengers, on the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June 1994 that is foremost in my mind. The experience has stayed with me throughout my service career and beyond. Containing the raw emotions that one experiences when losing a crew, informing their loved ones and supporting four funerals, followed by the investigation and the inquiry, was just the start.

The RAF and its people excel in operating this magnificent aircraft that is at the vanguard of tactical military delivery around the world. I wish the Chinook Force continued success and on behalf of the Association I congratulate them on 40 years of exceptional service to our nation.

The overall COVID-19 situation remains cause for optimism, but very real concerns remain and I would draw your attention to page 9 where Taff Rees, Chair of the Annual Conference Committee, provides information on the 2021 Annual Conference and the challenges that we clearly still have to manage. I look forward to being able to meet up with branches and members when the situation safely allows. We have been subject to the challenges of COVID-19 for 16 months now, and the ongoing effects will be with us for a while longer, but I wish to thank all those volunteers who have provided such outstanding support to others as part of the Association's response. The RAF community will continue to need your support in order to meet the hugely increased demands for our welfare services.

Air Marshal Sir Baz North
President

HRH The Duke of Edinburgh

RAF Association President 1954-56, 1967-69 and 1993.

It was with deep sadness that the RAF Association learned in April of the death of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh

His Royal Highness played a special role during his three tenures as President and afterwards. To mark his passing, flags at our branches, branch clubs and retirement accommodation were flown at half-mast for the eight days of national mourning. The Association also opened an online book of condolence, which was sent to Her Majesty The Queen after His Royal Highness's funeral.

The Association's condolences to Her Majesty The Queen were led by Air Marshal Sir Baz North, Association President:

"It is my humble duty to express...our great sadness on learning of the death of His Royal Highness The Duke of Edinburgh.

"His Royal Highness served our country with great wisdom and dedication. The Royal Air Forces Association has been particularly honoured in that he was our President three times: first from 1954 to 1956; then from 1967 to 1969 and again in 1993.

"His contributions...were significant and a source of great pride to us all; we have greatly valued and enjoyed his support and interest in our charity."



Above: HM The Queen, with HRH The Duke of Edinburgh, reviews a parade before the presentation of the new Royal Observer Corps Standard at RAF Bentley Priory, 25 July 1991. © MOD/Crown 2019.

As well as numerous honorary ranks in the army and navy, His Royal Highness was also Marshal of the Royal Air Force, Air Commodore-in-Chief of the Air Training Corps, Honorary Air Commodore of RAF Kinloss, and Air Commodore of the University Air Squadron. As part of his own message of condolence, Chief of the Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston, said:

"His Royal Highness [earned] his Royal Air Force wings in 1953; qualifying on 59 different aeroplanes and helicopters and with nearly 6,000 hours at the controls; often flying the Royal Family himself in aircraft of the Queen's Flight.

"We remember his dynamism, his curiosity, his passion for aviation and the technology that drives us forward."

During his three spells as Association President His Royal Highness attended numerous Annual Conferences. Air Mail reported: "His



Above: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh refuelling his Harvard training aircraft (which bore the five stars denoting his rank of Marshal of the Royal Air Force) during his flying training in 1953. HRH had to complete three solo circuits and landings at White Waltham airfield in Berkshire in order to qualify for his wings. An RAF examining unit had described his flying as "thoughtful with a sense of safety and airmanship above average". © MOD/Crown 1953.



Left: HRH The Duke of Edinburgh as he appeared in a 1993 issue of Air Mail to mark his third tenure as President.

leadership... his down-to-earth messages and his public speeches on our behalf, touched with his own inimitable humour, have been an inspiration to us all, and his constant and continued interest in all aspects of the Association has earned our deepest gratitude."

After His Royal Highness attended the Silver Jubilee Conference in 1955, a delegate summed up the feelings of the assembly: "His presence has been a truly wonderful thing. He has abundantly proved himself to be no mere figurehead, but an active and versatile President. He has endeared himself to all with his ready wit in dealing with Conference procedure. More than that, he has shown himself to be a man of deep understanding and truly a man of the people."

Unable to attend the 1968 Annual Conference because of overseas commitments, The Duke sent an apology, in his own inimitable style: "I am extremely sorry that it is impossible for me to be with you", he said. "I was rather hoping to be able to wield that shillelagh again, which was presented to me at the Eastbourne Conference in 1955."

The Association's online book of condolence gathered more than 250 individual messages before it was sent to Her Majesty The Queen, with many members recounting their own happy memories of meeting such a warm and personable man. "His Royal Highness was quietly unique in his leadership, support, energy and creativity for which he will be dearly remembered," said one message. Another noted that The Duke was: "... an example to the nation and the world of a gentleman and statesman."

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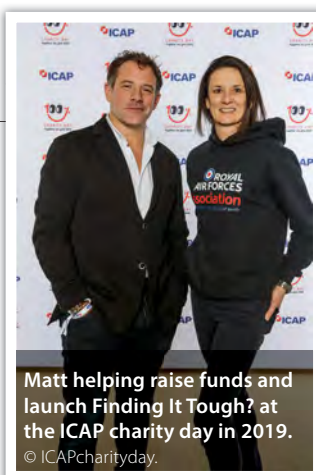
Annual Conference 2021

While the COVID-19 vaccine programme is being successfully rolled out in the UK and restrictions are being lifted, the longevity and efficacy of the vaccines is unproven, and the UK government has announced that is procuring 60 million vaccines for use in a booster programme in the autumn. Moreover, at the time of writing, the prime minister has noted that new virus variants are emerging that could place the improving picture in jeopardy. Council is clearly not able to assess the COVID-19 conditions that will prevail in the autumn but is aware that many of those who attend Annual Conference will fall into the vulnerable category, and is absolutely committed to ensuring the safety of members.

Recognising the ongoing risks and uncertainty, at its 12 May meeting Council unanimously supported a recommendation from the Annual Conference Committee (ACC) that Annual Conference should not be a physical event in October 2021. As such, the ACC is now considering the arrangements for Annual Conference 2021 and by the time this Air Mail is published, details of the Association's Annual Conference business in October 2021 will have been sent to branches.

After the 12 May Council meeting, Chair of the ACC, Taff Rees, said: "The ACC recommendation to not hold this year's Annual Conference physically was not taken lightly. Your ACC recognised that while great strides have been taken in combating the virus nationally and globally, there are still many risks to our members in gathering in such large numbers and members' safety is paramount; and Council wholeheartedly agreed.

"Further information on the details of the virtual Annual Conference 2021 will be communicated throughout the summer leading up to October 2021, including details on resolutions and the process for seeking three candidate nominations for places on the ACC. I look forward dearly to meeting up again with members in person at the 2022 Annual Conference, which will take place over three days during October 2022 in Birmingham."



Matt helping raise funds and launch Finding It Tough? at the ICA charity day in 2019.

© ICACharityday.

Matt Tebbutt becomes an ambassador

TV chef Matt Tebbutt is joining the team of RAF Association ambassadors. He will be well known to many as the host of BBC One's

Saturday Kitchen, as well as Food Unwrapped on Channel 4.

Both Matt's grandfathers were in the RAF Regiment in WWII.

Speaking of his ambassadorship, Matt said: "I am really proud to have been asked to be an ambassador for the Association. I was first introduced to the RAF as a student at Oxford University Air Squadron and I am really looking forward to supporting the RAF community by helping to promote and raise awareness of the welfare services the Association provides."

Rachel Huxford, Director of Marketing, Fundraising and Trading for the Association, said: "We are thrilled that Matt has agreed to become an ambassador for us. He has already shown huge commitment to the RAF Association and our RAF community, through his promotion of our mental wellbeing programme and his involvement in Op CONNECT — helping us to reduce isolation and loneliness. Matt will be a great asset to the Ambassador team and we look forward to working with him."

Matt joins nine existing ambassadors who are passionate about the work we do and give their time and energy to champion us. They are: Air Vice-Marshal Sean Bell, Air Marshal Rich Knighton, Air Commodore Suraya Marshall, Honorary Group Captain Paul Newman, Honorary Air Commodore Vic Norman, John Peters, Amrik Sandhu, Air Vice-Marshal Gary Waterfall and Air Chief Marshal Sir Mike Wigston. Find out more about each on the Association website.

Matt has recorded a video message exclusively for all Association members, which can be watched on a smartphone by using the QR code to the right.



More retirement homes to be available

Council has announced plans to transform Rothbury House Hotel into independent-living accommodation for RAF veterans and their spouses.

The move comes after extensive research into the future use of the Association's hotel sites, Rothbury House, Northumberland, and Flowerdown House, Somerset, following their closure in 2020 amid COVID-19 restrictions.

A survey of almost 20,000 RAF Association members aged 65 and over, carried out during a review of welfare services, revealed significant

demand for good quality retirement housing where residents could share their RAF connection. More than 500 respondents said they would be interested in moving to Rothbury House.

In March, the Association's trustees decided to retain both of the charity's hotel sites, with Rothbury House becoming RAF retirement accommodation, and Flowerdown House being used by a Somerset community charity for housing, training and learning for young people at risk of homelessness.

Subject to planning permission and project plans, Rothbury House will be developed in two phases. Sixteen rooms will be available by autumn 2021. The second phase will be completed between 2022 and 2025.

Once COVID-19 restrictions have lifted, the RAF Association will again offer Wings Breaks at accommodation run by partner organisations.

Members interested in vacancies at Rothbury House or in other RAF Association independent living accommodation in Leicestershire, Moffat or Sussex should email enquiries@rafa.org.uk or call 0800 018 2361 for more information.

Left: Rothbury House in Northumberland, will be repurposed into retirement housing for the RAF community.



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Dutch thank Allied veterans

Allied veterans who served in The Netherlands during WWII are being offered a medal by the Dutch people to thank them for their service.

The Embassy of the Kingdom of The Netherlands in London on behalf of the people of the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the National Committee 'Thank You Canada and Allied Forces' is inviting living veterans to apply.

Speaking at a meeting of embassy staff with British military welfare charities in early 2021, Assistant Defence Attaché Marian van Dijken said: "We will forever remain grateful and will never forget these brave men and women who took part in the liberation of the Netherlands. The Liberators' medal is not an official decoration but it is a token of our gratitude."

Veterans can apply by e-mail to lon-defat@minbuza.nl or by letter to Defence Department, Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, 38 Hyde Park Gate, London W6 0SP. Please send the following

information in your email or letter which will be processed under GDPR guidelines: 1. Full Name; 2. Date of Birth; 3. Military ID; 4. Unit served with during WWII and any additional relevant background information; 5. Home Address; 6. phone number and/or email address or add a point of contact.

The medals can be sent to living veterans only.

Right: "We will remain forever grateful". © Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.



Dementia support extended

Lockdown isolation has caused shocking levels of decline for people with dementia, who have rapidly lost memory, speech, and the ability to dress and feed themselves according to Alzheimer's Society research involving 2,000 people. The RAF Association has responded by extending online support for people caring for someone with the condition.

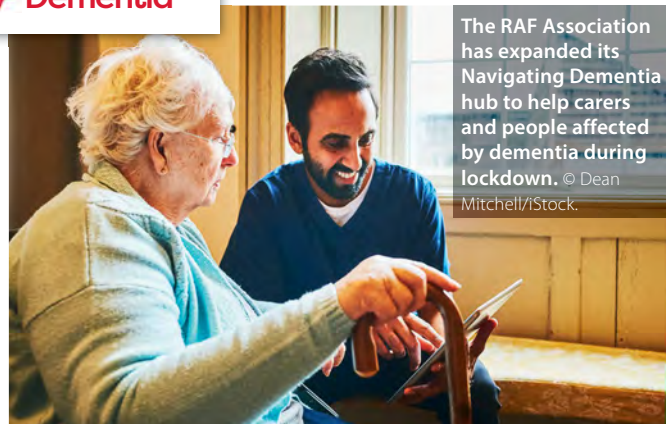
The 2021 report said: "Of those who had seen a decline, around half reported increased memory loss (50%) and difficulty concentrating (48%). More than one in four (27%) said reading and writing has become more difficult, and one in three said the same for speaking and understanding speech (33%). Worryingly, more than a quarter had seen a loss in the ability to do daily tasks, like cooking or dressing (28%)."

Navigating Dementia, the Association's bespoke online hub has now been expanded to provide extra information for veterans and the wider RAF community. It has been attracting around 1,000 visitors a month from the serving RAF family since it was first launched in 2020.

Rory O'Connor, Director of Welfare and Policy at the Association said: "Many members of the RAF community are navigating their journey through dementia every day. Some members have caring responsibilities for someone living with dementia, and others are in the unique position of caring for someone with dementia at a distance. As part of our mission to support the whole RAF community, we're determined to do all we can to ease the situation."

The expanded Navigating Dementia hub is now tailored for anyone with an RAF connection including regulars, reserves, veterans and family members of those who are serving or have served. It is specifically designed to offer information on dementia, identify where additional or specialist support can be accessed and bring people together via a forum.

Log on to dementia.rafa.org.uk for further information, or telephone 0800 018 2361.



The RAF Association has expanded its Navigating Dementia hub to help carers and people affected by dementia during lockdown. © Dean Mitchell/iStock.

Thanked for 41 years on committee



Malcolm and Ricky Mason at an Association dinner. © David Atkins.

In March, Amsterdam Branch said farewell and thank you to its chairman of 24 years, Malcolm Mason MBE.

Malcolm retired after 41 years as a committee member and his final meeting, being held virtually to comply with COVID-19

regulations, had a surprise interruption. Secretary General of the Association, Nick Bunting, joined the online gathering to thank Malcolm for his loyalty and dedication. Committee members also presented Malcolm with a wooden camera engraved with the 213 Squadron and the RAF Association crests.

Branch president, Chris Lorraine, said he knows Malcolm as: "completely dedicated to the Royal Air Force, to RAFA and to the members of his branch. He has worked incredibly hard to keep the Amsterdam Branch alive and kicking." Malcolm has also been vice-chairman and vice-president of the Association's European Area Council.

As well as considerable fundraising at the branch, he was involved in the long-running Edambusters cheese drop, attended memorials and commemorations and had run the branch bulletin since 1982. He oversaw the branch's golden anniversary in 2003 and has welcomed a wide range of visitors over the years, including Fraserburgh Branch, Prince Bernhard of The Netherlands and the late Dame Vera Lynn.

His RAF career as an armourer ran from 1955 to 1964, after which he returned to The Netherlands to marry his sweetheart, Ricky, and work in various steelworks and consulate posts. At the final committee meeting, members also remembered Ricky, who had served the branch until her death in February 2021. Member David Atkins said: "She and Malcolm were a team and without their dedication and input the branch would have folded years ago."

GORDON'S

Built by public subscription over a century ago at the insistence of Queen Victoria, Gordon's School is the national monument to General Charles Gordon and is listed as one of Britain's outstanding schools by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector.

A co-educational, non-selective residential and day boarding school, Gordon's boasts a 100 per cent success rate at A Level with 97 per cent of entries graded A* to C, putting it in the top one per cent of schools nationally for progress at A Levels.

But while embracing modern ideas, General Gordon's legacy of traditional values remains. The School's ethos is that high performance without good character is not true success.

To this end, it's not just the classrooms where students excel. Successes are achieved in drama; the arts; debating; public speaking; dance and sport. The School also boasts an enviable record in the Duke of Edinburgh's awards.

While the individual is celebrated, the whole School unites for parades. Since its inception, students have marched and there has always been Pipes and Drums. Dressed in their Blues the students parade around eight times a year and the school is the only one in the country permitted to march along Whitehall – an annual tradition in remembrance of General Gordon.

Set in over 50 acres of beautiful Surrey countryside within easy access

of major airports and roads, Gordon's is home to some 900 students offering Day Boarding and Residential Boarding (weekly and termly).

Around half of the school's Residential Boarders are from service families.

The real judgement of Gordon's is the students. Visitors are struck by the friendliness, discipline and vibrancy throughout the school and the family atmosphere, exemplified by the rapport between staff and students. This is borne from a community striving to live with integrity, courtesy, enthusiasm and diligence, even in adversity.

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Fundraising news

70 magnificent years

Do you remember pushing a Spitfire to RAF Kenley in the early 1980s? Did you ever run from Land's End to John O'Groats? Have you crocheted a record-breaking number of poppies in the 2000s and sold them? Were these feats of endurance or creativity to help raise funds for the Association's Wings Appeal?

September 2021 will mark 70 years since the Wings Appeal was launched in 1951. Head of Community Fundraising, Amy Petterson says: "This year is huge for the Wings Appeal as we celebrate seven decades of amazing dedication. As well as keeping our fingers crossed that COVID-19 restrictions will be lifted to allow 'normal' fundraising this year, we would love to hear your favourite stories and see pictures of fundraising efforts from years gone by."



Above: Newcastle-under-Lyme Branch doing a sponsored run in 1993.
Left: An early Wings Appeal poster. Both images © RAF Association.

Send photos and memories by Friday 6 August to airmail@rafa.org.uk or post them to the address inside the front cover of this Air Mail. We'll feature a selection in the October Air Mail. Please indicate if you need your posted photos sent back.



WADD's 2021 tri-challenge

135 brave souls from across the UK completed 20,632 miles in the 2021 RAF Waddington Triathlon Challenge last winter. The event was organised as a follow-up fundraiser to the successful RAF Association cycle ride in September 2020.

Volunteer organisers Sergeants Ruth Broadhurst and Yvette Medler and Flight Lieutenant Powell set a challenge to complete 84 ironman triathlon distances in each of the disciplines (running/rowing, swimming and cycling/walking), to celebrate 84 years since RAF Waddington became a Bomber Command unit. A JustGiving page to collect a £10 registration fee from participants was set up.

The miles started to accumulate quickly. The organisers decided to increase the mileage target to 100 ironman triathlons, which was also achieved ahead of time. With the arrival of some very wintry weather in January, the event team decided to extend the end date to 21 February 2021. This allowed more of the local community to get involved and children to take part throughout the half term week.

By the end of the event, a total of 20,632 miles had been covered across the disciplines -147% of the increased target. The event raised £1,425 for the Association.

The RAF Waddington team thanked everyone who took part for their support. They hope to run this as an annual event, and say "keep an eye out for the 2022 challenge".

Above and Right: People of all ages took on the challenge of the Waddington Triathlon, in all weathers. © MOD/Crown 2021



I'll run round Wales!

A solo run round the whole of Wales has reached its fundraising target despite having to be cut short because of injury.

Craig Mitchley, an ultrarunner, set off on 9 April to run 1,050 miles round the whole country. He undertook the 18-day challenge for five charities in memory of his brother, Paul, who died unexpectedly of a heart attack.

Craig said: "From flat tarmac to hills, cliffs, bays and mountains, the test of running for so long each day creates a lot of highs and lows. As I ran around Anglesey and near to RAF Valley I got a real treat with a helicopter [from RAF Shawbury] coming out to see me running."

"I had a fabulous and testing six full days of running right along the north coast of Wales, right around Anglesey and down towards the Pen Llyn area. I managed to cover a total of 283.25 miles, climbed a total elevation of 16,438 feet and spent just under 100 hours on my feet."

On the seventh day, despite doing everything to continue, Craig was forced to stop because of a problem with the tendon on the front of his right ankle.

Craig was raising funds for the RAF Association Rhyl and Abergale Branch, where his parents are trustees, and for four other local welfare organisations. He said: "Being able to run for my parents' branch and Wings Appeal gave me the pride of being able to help people in our local area connected to the RAF. The run itself helped me in a personal journey of grieving and I am glad that it has helped to raise funds and awareness for the charities as well."

Craig has raised £1,083 on his JustGiving page, which was still open as Air Mail went to print: bit.ly/runroundwales.

Below Left: Craig gets an uplifting visit from a Jupiter HT1 from RAF Shawbury while running near RAF Valley. Below Right: Craig (right), known as the red trouser runner, with his brother Paul who had taken up running himself before he died. Both images © Craig Mitchley.





Royal Air Force In Concert



Corn Exchange, King's Lynn
3 October 2021 (3pm)

Palace Theatre, Newark
9 October 2021

Winston Churchill Hall, Ruislip
21 October, 4 November, 2 December 2021

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RAF Families Federation: lockdown successes



Though confined to close quarters this spring, the team at the RAF Families Federation continued its hard work through the third lockdown.

- 100 complex issues affecting the RAF community were handled
- As the Defence Estate prepares to introduce new accommodation contracts for the maintenance of service houses and single living accommodation, Families Federation housing policy specialists are heavily involved in this process as critical friends and as the voice of the end user.

- Two different UK Parliamentary Select Committee Enquiries: the Select Committee on the Armed Forces Bill and the Defence Sub-Committee (Women in the Armed Forces: From Recruitment to Civilian Life) benefited from panellist contributions by Director, Maria Lyle.
- A research project into the experiences of RAF children was launched by the RAF Benevolent Fund and the Forces in Mind Trust, with Families Federation education and childcare lead, Louise Briggs, on the panel.
- Hundreds of NHS staff learned how to reach out to military spouses as potential employees, thanks to an online session by communications specialist Caroline Woodward.
- To help and inform doctors caring for service families, health policy advisor Alison Cotton joined the Royal College of GPs in a podcast explaining the challenges of service life for families.
- Hundreds of parcels were sent to RAF families overseas and to personnel isolating in Single Living Accommodation across the UK, thanks to funding from the Annington Trust.

Contact the RAF Families Federation at enquiries@raf-ff.org.uk. To report an issue while serving, please use the encrypted online form at: raf-ff.org.uk/report-an-issue-form.

Pictured: **The RAF Families Federation team. Meet them all at bit.ly/FamFedTeam**

£80,000 for Air Cadets' 80th

The RAF Air Cadets is marking its 80th anniversary in 2021. It has teamed up with the RAF Benevolent Fund to launch a campaign to raise £80,000. The organisations threw down a challenge for people to complete 80 miles in 80 days and raise money for both causes. The challenge began on 1 June and runs until 19 August with funds split between the two organisations.

To coincide with the anniversary, the Fund is also extending its support to the RAF Air Cadets. These members of the RAF family can now access welfare services for emotional wellbeing,



counselling and bereavement. Financial support will also be given if a member is killed, on or off duty, and also applies to staff cadets and uniformed volunteers.

Set up in 1941, the Combined Cadet Force and Air Training Corps are collectively known as the RAF Air Cadets. The groups provide youngsters aged 13 and above with opportunities for adventure, training and skills, including learning to fly a glider.

The Fund is also collecting memories of all those who were cadets to form a commemorative book, with testimonies collected online. To find out more visit rafbf.org/aircadets.

Above: **Gliding experiences – just one of the many opportunities and challenges offered by the RAF Air Cadets during its 80 year existence.**

© Philip Jones. Left: **The Combined Cadet Force and the Air Training Corps are collectively known as the RAF Air Cadets.** © RAF Air Cadets.

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AM 24

National Presidential Certificate winner



January 2021 award: Dougie Leighton, Mosely Branch

"I didn't expect any recognition at all. It was a nice surprise," said Dougie Leighton talking about the day in January when his National Presidential Certificate award letter arrived from Association President Air Marshal Sir Baz North. "I am sure Wings Appeal Officers in other branches do just as much as me," he continued. "But I appreciated it."

Dogie, who recently stood down after 14 years as Wings Appeal Officer at Mosely Branch, believes he raised about £150,000. "It was mostly at Mosely Branch," he said, "but I was also a member at Birmingham Central Branch and Sutton Coldfield Branch before they closed".

Mosely Branch treasurer, Kevin Eldon, said: "I came from quite a dynamic branch overseas. It was immediately obvious that the excellent amounts raised every year [at Mosely] were down to the efforts of mainly one person – Dougie Leighton. He would set targets every year – sometimes seen to be ridiculously high – yet year upon year these were met and, on occasion, exceeded."

Every year Dougie would 'seek out' new targets, writing letters, cajoling members to volunteer for collections, organising rosters, collecting the collection tins, counting the monies donated and paying it into the Branch Wings account. Finally, he would prepare his accounts, presenting them to the Branch Committee monthly, either in person or by mail."

Dogie says: "I volunteered to be a Wings Appeal Officer because I felt I owe so much to the state for bringing me up and ensuring I grew up into a decent citizen." He was raised in a children's home near Kendal in the Lake District after his parents divorced and his father was called away in the Navy.

He served in the RAF for three years, joining in 1950. AT HQ FEAF Singapore he maintained top secret statistics related to RAF stations

in the Middle and Far East Air Command. He says it was relatively peaceful work, though he did travel up country Malaya in an armed convoy in 1951. After that he married and had children, and moved into civilian employment.

"What I enjoyed most about the fundraising was meeting people. Many were, of course, ex-service people who shook me by the hand or gave me a kiss on the cheek. One man in Sutton Coldfield bought a pin badge for £1.50 and paid for it with a £50 note, saying 'put the change into your charity'. I had never handled a £50 note before. I had to check in my bank paying in book to see if there was provision for paying it in".

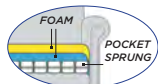
"Unfortunately, I am getting older now and will be 89 this year, and no longer feel capable of doing the job efficiently. I will continue, however, to perform yearly with the standard on remembrance occasions. And I'll be going to the club regularly with everyone when it reopens."

Above: **Dogie will be keeping the standard flying at various RAF Association and military events – here at a remembrance fundraising event in 2019.** © Photo Douglas Mosely's personal collection.
Right: **Dogie Leighton on demob in 1953.** © Photo Douglas Mosely's personal collection.



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Airshows in 2021?

After significant cancellations of airshows in 2020, some organisers are tentatively hoping to put on a display in the summer and autumn of 2021. All arrangements will be subject to changes and cancellation depending on the situation with COVID-19 this year. The RAF Association is planning to be at a number of airshows if we can. We hope to see you at:

July

24 - 25: Duxford Summer Air Show, Duxford, Cambridgeshire

August

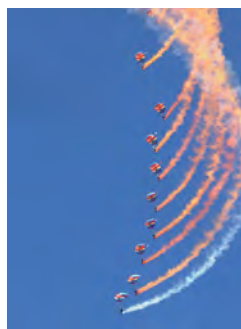
27 - 28: Clacton Airshow - West Greensward, Clacton, Essex

September

2 - 5: Bournemouth Air Festival - Bournemouth, Dorset

11 - 12: RAF Cosford Airshow (rescheduled from June), Lincolnshire

18 - 19: Duxford Battle of Britain Air Show - Imperial War Museum Duxford, Cambridgeshire



Above Left: **The RAF Falcons Display Team at IWM Duxford in 2001.** © MOD/Crown 2001. Above Right: **An A400M at the Royal International Air Tattoo in 2014. RIAT will be held virtually in 2021 as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.** © MOD/Crown 2014.

Pensions ruling should become law in 2021/22

The government has announced a remedy to address age discrimination contained in the 2015 Public Service Pension Schemes transitional arrangements, including the Armed Forces Pension Scheme.

Following a consultation period in which two remedial options were considered, a decision has been made in favour of "Deferred Choice Underpin". The decision was welcomed by The Forces Pension Society which applauded the government and others involved: "for making the right choice in the best interests of those serving and retired Armed Forces people affected."

If you were in service both on or before 31 March 2012 and on or after 1 April 2015 you do not have to do anything right now. Serving armed forces personnel will be able to make a decision on pension entitlements towards the end of your service, with the information required made available to you.

Veterans who have already left the armed forces will be 'retrofitted' with the remedy based on your choice of eligible scheme and known end of service date. Affected personnel will be contacted by Veterans UK in due course.

Further details from the RAF Families Federation: bit.ly/McCloudResult or The Forces Pension Society members' area: bit.ly/McCloudSitrep.

Right: **Ministry of Defence decision is good result for armed forces pensions.** © MOD/Crown.



LGBTQ+ veterans can reclaim removed medals

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is redressing a historical wrong. It has announced that former RAF personnel dismissed from service because of their sexuality can apply to have restored any medals removed from them during that process. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people or, if they have died, their families, can now apply for any honours to be reinstated.

Before 2000, a number of armed forces personnel were discharged from service on the basis of their sexuality. Some received convictions, others were discharged without conviction.

In the course of their discharge, some personnel either forfeited medals directly, or were prevented from continuing to serve and were denied the ability to regain medals that might previously have been forfeited for unrelated reasons.

Individuals can now apply to have their medals restored. Applications for restoration will be considered on the basis of the facts available and submitted for approval to the Defence Council who will exercise the powers invested in them by the 1985 Royal Warrant on the Grant Forfeiture and Restoration of Medals.

Full details of criteria and how to apply are on the Ministry of Defence website: bit.ly/LGBTQmedals.

Right: **A ban on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people serving in the RAF was lifted more than 20 years ago. Transgender people were officially allowed to openly serve from 2014.**

© MOD/Crown.





Ray Brasier saw distressing air crashes and mid-air collisions during his 23 years as an RAF crash rescue firefighter. Now living alone in Chelmsford, confined to a wheelchair with his memories, post-traumatic stress disorder and dementia, 82 year-old Ray has been extremely grateful to the RAF Association and its Connections for Life scheme.

The most serious incident that Ray was involved in was the crash of a civilian airliner in Cyprus in April 1967. Ray and his colleagues had been seconded to the Cypriot government and were on duty at Nicosia airport.

Sometime after midnight a Globe Air Bristol Britannia en route from Bangkok to Basel arrived over Nicosia having diverted from its planned stop in Cairo due to bad weather. There were violent storms at Nicosia as well: "It did two approaches but did not declare an emergency. We were watching its lights as it went round for its third approach," said Ray. "Then there was a mighty explosion which lit up the night. We set off with five fire trucks and came across an horrendous scene."

It had hit a hill on its third approach. The crash claimed the lives of 126 passengers and crew. Four survived, including an air stewardess.

"I was near an open hatch towards the tail of the Britannia when I heard a woman's voice asking if anyone spoke English. I managed to get her clear of the wreckage. It was another six hours before a United Nations helicopter arrived to take her to hospital."

The lady he rescued was air stewardess Veronica Gusin, from Basel in Switzerland. Ray contacted her eventually to see how she was – and they have stayed in contact ever since. Veronica sends him chocolates and jumpers every year.

"She says the RAF did a noble job in rescuing her," says Ray. "She never forgot lying on part of the wing after I got her out of the fuselage. It has been wonderful to stay

noble job



Top: **Ray Brasier (on top of aircraft) during a real rescue.** © Brasier family archive. Above: **Connections for Life volunteer Teresa Stevenson was looking for a role that would keep her busy.** © Teresa Stevenson.

in touch for more than 50 years."

Ray's father was serving on flying boats when Ray was born in the Royal Naval Hospital at Haslar near Portsmouth. As a teenager, he worked on an RAF-run farm at Cranwell where his dad was then stationed. When he was 17 he joined the RAF as a crash rescue firefighter – his first posting after training was Cranwell.

Over the next 22 years, Ray was posted to Innsworth, Shawbury, Hendon, Khormaksar in Aden, Eastleigh in Kenya, Stradishall, Cyprus, Northolt, Wildenrath in Germany, Sardinia, Lissiemouth, West Raynham and Henlow. He and his wife Freda lived in 17 different married quarters over those 22 years.

Ray kept meticulous records of the incidents that he was involved in. On some occasions serious accidents resulted in scarcely any injury but all too many air accidents resulted in a terrible toll of life. He

has written a book titled 'Safety from the Flames – Tales of an RAF Fireman 1955-1978', arguing that people did not usually write about the unsung heroes of the military fire services.

Ray was awarded an MBE for his part in rescuing the stewardess from the Britannia in Cyprus. He was later made an OBE for his long service in the RAF's rescue teams. While serving in Aden, he was awarded a local gallantry medal after tackling a fire in an old warehouse of the Khormaksar base. After he left the RAF in 1978, he worked for an insurance company.

Ray and Freda were married for 56 years before Freda died in 2015. Ray has been left with both physical and emotional scars from his service. However his health issues started to have more of an impact on his life three or four years ago. It was his doctor who contacted the RAF Association to see if it could make life easier for Ray, which is how Teresa came into his life.

Teresa, Ray's volunteer

Teresa Stevenson joined the Association in 2019 after seeing a poster in a supermarket asking for people who could get in touch with isolated RAF veterans. Three years earlier she had left her career as a microbiology lab assistant for the National Health Service to move to the United States with her husband. When they returned, her former laboratory had been privatised. Teresa started looking for flexible volunteering that would work around her husband's new job (he usually commutes weekly from Essex to Cologne). She did some research on the Association website and thought: "that's me all over".

"We set off with five fire trucks and came across an horrendous scene."

Teresa is in her early 50s and was originally from Burry Port in South Wales. She, her husband and her eldest son had been involved with the RAF Air Cadets as cadets, instructors and fundraisers. She put in her application immediately to become a volunteer.

As well as Ray, Teresa also supports Joyce, a 92 year-old former member of the WRAF who also lives nearby. She has regular calls with six other RAF veterans across the UK.

This is an unusual amount of volunteering to take on, but she says: "From my perspective, it's been a godsend since the pandemic started last year. I have gained knowledge and confidence, and it also kept me going as I have been kept busy and feel I am doing something worthwhile. The oldest of my six beneficiaries is 97. It's been an absolute pleasure learning about their lives and, more importantly, building trust and companionship".

Before the COVID-19 crisis, Teresa visited Ray and Joyce once a fortnight. During lockdown she phoned them at least once a week, while also making calls to her newer beneficiaries.

Although Ray has been supplied with an alcove phone, which has a video screen and makes it easier for him to hear, Teresa says: "I am longing for to face-to-face visits again. We have a lot of laughs as we both have the same sense of humour. We used to have jolly jaunts into town with his electric wheelchair for a coffee, or occasionally lunch. We would pass a river and always check on a family of swans that nest there every year".

"I absolutely enjoy it – it's the best thing for me," she continues. "Ray has ambitions to go the Imperial War Museum at Duxford and I hope that, once the coronavirus crisis is over, I can help with that".

Talking about Teresa's support for him, Ray says: "It has proved to be a beautiful partnership – she helps me no end. Nothing is too much for her. I do not see many people and feel quite isolated. I am very grateful to her and the RAF Association which has been absolutely, unbelievably good". AM



Above: Ray and his grandson at their local Remembrance parade in 2019 © Essex Chronicle.
Left: Teresa, her husband and sons after a Spitfire flying experience day © Stevenson family archive.



The Association always has space for any member of the RAF community who would benefit from the Connections for Life service. Also, we are looking for people who can help make support calls – as some of our current volunteers go back to work as lockdown eases. Please get in touch. Call 0800 018 2361 or email friend@rafa.org.uk to find out more. Volunteers receive accredited training and support.

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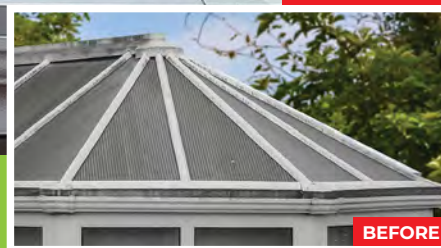
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100th birthdays

Ben Dixon

Ben Dixon joined the RAF aged 18 in 1939 and trained as a wireless operator/air gunner. A posting to 150 Squadron at RAF Newton soon followed, and in late 1940 he was posted to RAF Lindholme to join 50 Squadron flying Hampdens. On his third sortie, Ben's aircraft was damaged by flak and crash landed in sand dunes near Bordeaux. Ben broke his ankle and was soon captured. After receiving medical treatment he was imprisoned for the duration of the war. In 1945 the advancing Russians liberated his camp and he was demobbed later that year. Ben re-joined in 1946 and served in the Middle East and at RAF North Coates until the early 1950s. Ben was 100-years old in April 2021, receiving a birthday card from Her Majesty The Queen and certificates from RAF Association President Sir Baz North and from Hartlepool Branch. The branch also presented Ben with an Association tie pin and a pilot bear.



Ben Dixon. © Family archive.



Hubert Jones. © Family archive.

Hubert Jones

Hubert was called up in 1941 aged 20, and joined the RAF as a radio mechanic with the Telecommunication Research Establishment. After two years in the UK he was posted to India, joining a Mobile Signals Unit in Bombay before landing in Malaya. Here, Hubert lost touch with the comrades he had landed with and travelled alone for many

miles by land and river using only the sun and a compass. Travelling south, Hubert was near Kuala Lumpur when he heard civilians talking of the Japanese surrender. Going into Kuala Lumpur he took a truck and drove overnight to Singapore where he was absorbed into 2 Base Signals Radar Unit. With this unit Hubert helped to establish a landing strip on the beach at Changi; today Singapore Changi Airport. Hubert arrived home in Swansea upon demob in late 1946. He celebrated his 100th birthday in April 2021, and is looking forward to celebrating properly with his family in the summer.

Ken Simpson

Ken joined the RAF at Cardington in 1941. He was posted to Skegness for basic training before further training to become an armourer. Initially posted to 85 Squadron, two weeks later Ken answered the call for volunteers for overseas service. He was posted to 80 Squadron in Egypt, and stayed with the squadron until demob in September 1946, at which time it was based at Lubeck in Germany. Ken celebrated his 100th birthday in May 2021, and thanks to the Association's Cranwell and Armourers' branches, was delighted to receive over 100 cards.

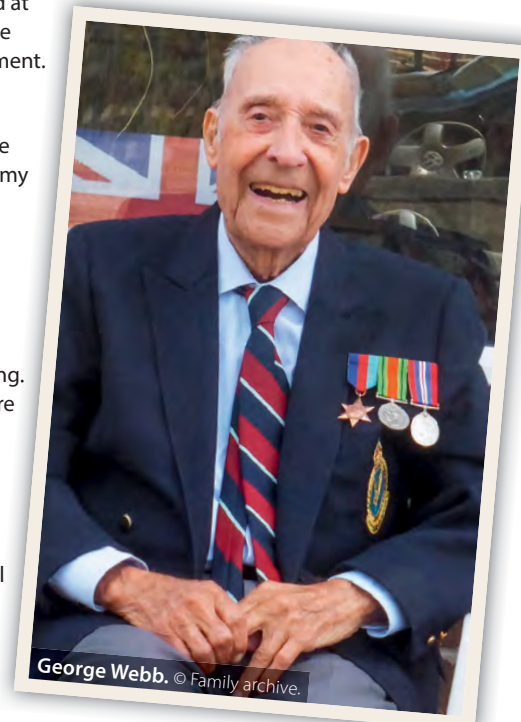


Ken Simpson. © Family archive.

George Webb

Having joined the RAF as a Boy Entrant in 1937, George was stationed at the School of Photography, Farnborough, where he trained in all aspects of photography including air to ground photography, printing of negatives and stereoscopic images. At the outbreak of the war George was based at RAF Waddington in the photographic department. In 1942 he joined the Photo Interpretation Wing at Matlock where he helped train the Army Intelligence Corps in printing, copying and reproduction of map enlargements. He was also involved in demonstrations of air cameras and processing. It was at Matlock where he met his late wife Prudence, to whom he was married for 72 years. From here, George went to RAF Medmenham's Central Interpretation Unit to develop and print stereoscopic images under Constance Babington Smith.

In total, George spent twelve years in the RAF before spending 30 years at Rolls-Royce. He celebrated his 100th birthday in February 2021.



George Webb. © Family archive.

BELGIAN WATCHMAKER SALUTES BRITISH MILITARY

Col&MacArthur, a world leader in the creation and design of commemorative watches, has commercially released the latest in its collection of quality timepieces that honour the British Military and its impact on the world.

The **Battle of Britain Watch** is an entirely unique timepiece created to celebrate the 80th anniversary of this year of the crucial Battle of Britain in World War II.

"The **Battle of Britain Watch** celebrates bravery and sacrifice and reminds us how much we all owe to so few," says Col&MacArthur Chief Executive Sébastien Colen. "For 113 days the world watched on as Britain fought off wave after wave of German air attacks before the RAF and its heroic pilots finally prevailed."

The **Battle of Britain Watch**, which has unique design features that mirror the dial designs of the iconic Spitfire fighter plane, is the second of a special range of commemorative watches that Col&MacArthur are marketing as part of its Historical World War II Collection. The first is the **Dunkirk 1940 Watch** and can be seen on the company's website.

The **Battle of Britain Watch** replicates a speed indicator from the interior of a Spitfire cockpit. The watch dial pattern, structure and colour are based on a Spitfire tachometer. In addition, there are additional details that pay homage to the Spitfire and the Battle of Britain such as the Spitfire target finder used as the hour indicator and the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary



Air Force) block turning around the inner dial to provide the minutes.

Col&MacArthur watches are all exquisitely crafted and created to include Swiss Movement, superb technical aspects, and high-quality precision. Col&MacArthur is unique among quality watch-making houses in having rights granted by the UK Ministry of Defence to incorporate British Military Regimental and Organisational cyphers in the design of Col&MacArthur watches.

In addition to the Battle of Britain watch that honours the Royal Air Force, Col&MacArthur also produce the official Royal Marines Heritage Watch, and official watches for British Army Household Division Regiments.

"The watches in our collections celebrate achievements, heritage and human values, says Colen." The British Military is built on a bedrock of values and a collective ethos dating back centuries. We are proud to be associated with these regiments and service organisations". The sale of every Battle of Britain Watch in the UK will generate a donation to support the Royal Air Forces Association.



The Col&MacArthur brand was created by Sébastien Colen in 2013.

Following his master's degrees in engineering and management, Colen gained extensive international business experience within the global energy industry. After five years working on four continents, Colen left high-level management to

pursue a lifelong dream: to creating watches that promote humanity's noble values and heritage. His vision was to create a watchmaking house and design timepieces that uniquely reflect humanity's ability to perpetually change the course of events. The commemorative collections celebrate Humanity achievements, heritage, and shared values. To achieve this aim, Col&MacArthur delves into the collective imagination and create an emotional dimension for each of its collection pieces. Each watch created by Col&MacArthur tells, through time, our common History.



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BATTLE BRITAIN

LIMITED EDITION

The design of this watch is inspired by a Spitfire cockpit speedometer





To celebrate 40 years of continuous service by the Chinook CH-47, **serving and retired RAF personnel** share their best memories and recall what they have achieved with the help of this magnificent machine.

It deserves to be an icon

Demand for the Chinook is just as insatiable now as it was in the 80s, 90s and noughties. In the last two years the personnel and aircraft of 7, 18, 27 and 28 Squadrons have been dam fixing in Whaley Bridge, relieving floods in Doncaster, supporting coalition partners in Africa and involved in the recent successful resolution of a merchant ship hijack in the Solent. And of course the Chinook starred during the pandemic, transporting frontline NHS staff around the country and conducting life-saving medevac missions.

Named after the North American Chinook Indians' word for great south wind, the aircraft was brought into service in the UK on 22 November 1980 and has operated in every major conflict since.

Forming up, the Falklands and Beirut – 1980-1989

"The team stood up at Odiham in Number 1 Hangar which was in the process of being prepared for the Chinook Operational Conversion Unit, with classrooms added to the back of the hangar and the lifting points in the hangar reinforced", says Wing Commander Dick Forsythe remembering those early days from January 1980 to May 1981. "Our primary tasks were to decide the Chinook crewing as all previous experience was with single pilots and crewmen. Then we set up the Chinook ground school course and flying syllabus."

There were also regular trips to Boeing Vertol (vertical takeoff and landing) in Canada and the United States where the team got to know the new aircraft: "The Chinook did not seem to notice being at 10,000 feet in the Rockies," Dick

recalled. "And water landings were interesting. If you land too fast the water level comes right up the windscreen." They also learned a few special manoeuvres from their North American colleagues: "They had a neat trick of cracking the ramp and letting the water up to the dam; then closing the ramp, flying back with around two tons of water in the aircraft and the cyclic right forward - to drop on the ground crew!"

Once back in the UK, the team started a very intense training period to bring 18(B) Squadron into existence, with two student pilots per sortie. "If you did two sorties in a day you were looking at eight hours of solid briefing, flying

Above: The Chinook's 40th anniversary commemorative livery was unveiled on 5 May to start a season of events and displays. © MOD/Crown 2021.

and debriefing," Dick recalls. They moved on immediately to train 7 Squadron, and soon after the first Chinook display team was set up between 1981 and 1982. The first display pilot was a very experienced Australian and "it was quite a shock to see what a Chinook was capable of," Dick remembers, "... and to authorise it!"

By 1982 the storm clouds were gathering in the Falklands Islands. Dick Forsythe was appointed Officer Commanding Chinook Tasking cell and deployed to the South Atlantic on Operation Corporate: "The main focus was to provide the myriad military sites on both islands with overhead cover before the winter and to set up the radars on Mount Kent and Mount Alice. It was very Chinook-dependent – needing endless buckets of liquid concrete."

In testament to the Chinook's strength and tolerance of extremes, Wing Commander Mike Dudgeon, then second in command of 18(B) Squadron, recalls one night on the high seas on the way south: "I was baulked by the Royal Navy from flying the 450 miles from *MV Contender Bezant* to the Falkland Islands. So I had to land the fully-loaded Bravo Papa (22,700kg) on *MV Europic Ferry* (known locally as the Epileptic Fairy). During the night a Force 11 South Atlantic gale blew up. We had no covers, and the only tie-downs were nicknamed 'elephants' feet', designed to secure lorries in the North Sea; these kept breaking. At one point we wrapped cargo nets round the wheels while the tyres squealed with the rolling of the ship. Blades had been secured to guardrail stanchions and, as I watched, one of these pulled free. The blade flew up to the vertical and slammed down before we could secure it again. Pitching and rolling was ferocious; North Sea ferry *MV St Edmund*, in company with us, reached 67 degrees. Overnight I heard almighty crashes and thought BP had gone over the side. We discovered later a spare anchor had broken free in the hold and was sliding across the deck into the hull. The next day, the sea was calmer and the aircraft was still there, though covered in salt spray. We could find no damage. We started her up. Everything worked perfectly apart from one altitude indicator erecting 90 degrees out, so we took off on a single advanced flight control system, no problem. It corrected later and we re-engaged the other."

Chinooks have sometimes been able to help ships, often in unconventional ways. Squadron Leader Mike Snowdon, then of 7 Squadron, remembers seeing one 'unwinding' the Merchant Navy in Stanley Harbour, soon after he arrived: "I was intrigued to see a Chinook hover at the rear of a moored merchant vessel. The odd thing was there was no helipad on its stern. Were they trying to winch somebody from the vessel? If yes, they were not doing a very good job as every time they got close

they blew the vessel away. The old hands on my crew explained to me what was going on. The vessels were held in place by two anchors from the bow and, depending on the tide and wind, it was possible for a ship to rotate through 360 degrees, twisting the anchor cables. One observant seaman had seen how strong the downwash of the Chinook was and asked if one would hover at the stern of his ship and use the downwash to push the ship through 360 degrees, untwisting the anchor cables and unwinding the Merchant Navy."

Group Captain Gordon Woolley joined the helicopter force via No 4 Chinook Course in October 1981. He was Flight Commander and Executive Officer UK Chinook Flight for 7 Squadron from May 1982 to Dec 1984.

"In September 1983, Operation Hyperion, quickly renamed Operation Pulsator, called for the rapid deployment of Chinooks to Cyprus to provide support, resupply and, if necessary, emergency pullout of the more than 100-strong British Force in the Lebanon, known as BRITFORLEB. In the deteriorating situation in the civil war, the airport was too dangerous. Three Chinooks self-deployed via Brindisi and Rhodes, arriving in Cyprus less than a week after the initial warning order. Operating out of Akrotiri, our flight profile was to route to the United States Marine Corps (USMC) Helicopter Carrier Iwo Jima, refuel and await clearance from the Marine Amphibious Unit forward observers at the airport. They were monitoring the ongoing local shooting wars, then [we would] route at low level to the landing site. There we'd offload, load, and depart as fast as possible before potential enemy factions could target the aircraft.

"Operating on United States Navy and USMC ships was an interesting experience. Invariably,

Above: Chinooks have been landed on all kinds of ships, lashed down and transported around the world. © MOD/Crown.

Below: Assisting the Royal Navy and Army by delivering sand to Pewit Island in Portsmouth Harbour, part of a project to help the National Trust bring more wildlife back to the island. © MOD/Crown 2021.

despite all the pre-flight notifications and clearances, we were challenged by the ships, and locked-up by their Phalanx close-in weapons systems. The high-pitched tone of our radar warning system was quite a shock the first couple of times," he remembers.

By the late 1980s the Chinook was firmly part of highest priority British Army exercises. Dick Forsythe again: "Throughout 1989 we trialed the Airmobile concept; moving 1,000 troops and 200 tons of stores 85km by night, to be dug in with overhead cover within 24 hours, all in radio silence - to create a blocking position to stop a Soviet armoured thrust."

Kurds, Kosovo, first Gulf war, Sierra Leone – 1990-1999

Woolley was Officer Commanding 18(B) Squadron ME in Iraq, on Operation Granby. It comprised 18(B) Squadron and engineering support for 7 Squadron who were 'off doing their own →

The Chinook is the UK's go to military helicopter.





left the aircraft the Mobile Air Operations Team managing the evacuation said, due to the [record-breaking] efficiency of the crews there were no more refugees on the hills. The crew then had to return to base and tell the detachment commander that his moment in history was no more. They did not feel it appropriate to tell him of the record that had just been set."

While still operating in the Middle East, the UK supported NATO forces in the Balkans and, for 78 days from March 1999, the RAF flew

Left: **Chinooks from 1310 Flight on Operation Newcombe in the Hombori Mountains, Mali, supporting the French in Operation Burkhane.**

© MOD/Crown 2020.

Below: **British troops and military working dogs start a sortie in Afghanistan, after delivery by Chinook.** © MOD/Crown 2017.



Above: **A Chinook overflying the 'bermed' op base during Op Granby/Desert Storm.**

© From Gordon Woolley private collection.

Right: **The Chinook Squadron ME shoulder patch with desert background, 'invasion' stripes, US VII Corps inverted V, the 7 and 18 Squadron crest symbols, and the 'tandem-rotor camel' used as the unofficial logo.**

© Gordon Woolley.



thing: "We had 18 Chinooks and about 480 personnel from all over the RAF.

"The base for the operation was about 20km from the Iraq border, near the tri-border zone. The ground war was won very quickly, and our anticipated tasks - logistic and ammunition resupply and casualty evacuation - weren't much needed. Instead, the aircraft were busy moving Iraqi prisoners of war back to treatment and prisoner-handling centres in Saudi Arabia. After the ground war, the Chinook Force helped with the withdrawal operation, taking parties to survey the burning oil wells and oil spill effects on the turtle breeding islands along the coast, and taking visitors to the captured enemy weapons parks. The last detachment to be pulled out of theatre was diverted via Cyprus to Diyarbakir in Turkey to support Operation Provide Comfort/Haven, delivering humanitarian aid to Kurdish refugees in the mountains."

Dick Forsythe was Officer Commanding 240 Operational Conversion Unit on Op Provide: "The road system into the mountains astride the Iraq/Turkey border stopped about 60 to

100 miles from where the Kurdish camps were - hence the Chinook requirement. The Turks would not let [the Kurds] into Turkey and the Iraqis mined the approaches to the camps as they left. We sent two Chinooks forward. The local Kurdish population in Hakkari province provided staples such as water and rice but, in return, starving mothers were throwing infants onto the ramp of the helicopters as they were unable to feed them. There was no lack of motivation to help. The detachment grew to 14 Chinooks after some heroic work by Odiham engineers taking Chinooks off the roll on roll offs on their way back from Kuwait in Cyprus and sending them to Diyarbakir."

Mike Snowden remembers another side of the same operation: "A Chinook crew asked the detachment commander if he would like to fly the last serial of the evacuation. Of course he said yes and the crew, who thought they had just gained lots of brownie points, planned to pick up the boss when they dropped the refugees already on-board at the reception centre. As the last of the refugees

1,618 sorties, of which 600 were not fast jet strike missions. The Chinook Force operated alongside the Sea Kings. Later that year Joint Helicopter Command was formed bringing together all of the UK's helicopters from the Royal Navy, Army and RAF.

Wing Commander Martin Sharpe, by then Officer Commanding 7 Squadron, describes the breadth of the Chinook support needed by the end of the decade: "The RAF was deploying forces for operations in the Falklands and in the Balkans, as well as trying to maintain the capability to support exercises worldwide: all kinds of places from South America, Africa and Asia at various times, and frequently up to the north of Norway; in all kinds of climatic conditions. It's an incredible machine, operating from minus 32 to plus 40 degrees."

Operation Palliser was initially helping evacuate foreign citizens from west Africa. British involvement then expanded to military support for the United Nations Mission and the Sierra Leone Army. For the evacuation, the Chinooks of Number 7 Squadron had

deployed from Odiham at just a few hours notice. Their flight was the longest in the history of the aircraft, and took them three days to travel 3,000 miles. Some had flown an extra 500 miles, having been recalled from exercise in the north of Scotland.

Martin Sharpe remembers it well: "It was early May 2000. I had been listening to the BBC news that morning. I was aware there was trouble brewing in Sierra Leone. At about 11 o'clock I got a call from my contact at the Special Forces Headquarters in London, saying: 'Would it be possible for you to deploy Chinooks to Sierra Leone in west Africa?'"

"At Odiham we didn't at that stage have maps going to west Africa. We had west Germany. We had north Norway and wherever else we might be deploying but west Africa was not amongst them. I had been given a little Westlands pocket diary and in the back of there was a map; you know these world maps. So I use that as a scale to draw lines and work out whether or not we have the range and where we might need to refuel. Everybody used their own initiative to get what equipment they could and see how we could make this happen."

Iraq again, and Afghanistan – 2000-2015

The aircraft saw action in the Middle East once more in 2003 when it was called back to support the invasion of Iraq and the joint task force of Operation Inherent Resolve that followed.

Desert conditions and insurgency were also the order of the day when the UK and NATO joined coalition forces in Afghanistan in

2003 to help form the 40 nation-strong ISAF (International Security Assistance Force). The Chinook underpinned action there for the next eleven years, until the British formally ended combat operations in October 2014. From the initial hunt for Bin Laden in 2001, to the move to Helmand Province in 2006 and then finally on to Kabul in 2014 and handing over its duties to the Puma force in 2015, the Chinook was involved in every aspect of the UK's fight against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The aircraft was continuously employed for resupply, troop movements and battlefield casualty evacuation. The lives and work of the crews on those Medical Emergency Response Teams are described in our special feature on page 38.

MACA and Mali – always and currently

The aircraft is as reliable in the wet and windy, or frozen United Kingdom as it is in desert conditions and temperatures of more than 40 degrees Celsius. The Chinook's heavy lifting, big load and ability to quickly reach extraordinarily inaccessible areas make it a regular feature in requests for Military Aid to Civil Authorities. It may be for that reason that it is regularly cited as the UK public's favourite aircraft. In March 2013, during Northern Ireland's worst winter for 30 years, 48 inches of snow had fallen, temperatures were not rising above freezing and winds

Below: Delivering agricultural aid to stricken farming communities around Northern Ireland in 2013, during the worst winter storms for 30 years.

© MOD/Crown 2013.

were strong. Snow had formed drifts up to ten feet high. Squadron Leader Andy Waldron takes up the story: "The rural areas of the UK and agricultural sector were hit particularly hard and the government tasked the Chinook Force with assisting. On the morning of 26 March 2013 a Chinook and aircrew flew to Belfast and set up an ops centre to begin the planning and positioning bales of animal feed across the County Antrim hills which were cut off from normal support routes." As usual, this was a short notice task and involved aircrew, engineers and Joint Helicopter Support Squadron personnel from RAF Odiham and Benson, and members of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development.

"The Chinook was uniquely placed to support," Andy continues. "With its roller conveyor internal cabin, ability to roll pallets and bales of feed easily off the ramp from the ground, and the low hover if unable to land. In

several areas, the steep slopes and valleys made landing the 99 foot long

aircraft impossible, so we used

the rear wheel landing and

balanced the aircraft

on the ground while

the crew deployed

the bales to flocks of

starving sheep cut off →

The flight was the longest in the aircraft's history: three days to travel 3,000 miles.





from farmer support.

"There was no additional specialist training other than an updated briefing for the crew; the operation's success is testament to the highly skilled personnel and the workhorse that is the Chinook helicopter," he adds.

While UK-based flights continue to perform in the cold, wind and rain, overseas work has resumed in sub-Saharan Africa. Since July 2018 RAF Chinooks have been supporting the French forces in Mali on Operation Barkhane, countering an ongoing insurgency.

The Chinooks have transported more than 700 French military personnel to the forward operation bases and moved more than 70 tonnes of supplies and equipment.

The RAF Chinooks from 1310 Flight are based at Goa in Mali and previously operated in the Homborix Mountains region. Officer Commanding, Squadron Leader Matthew Wight-Boycott said: "Supporting French operations against violent extremists is an important and satisfying mission. Our aircrew, engineers and support staff are making a big impact: whether moving large numbers of troops and equipment to remote bases, or re-supplying a patrol in the desert, we are playing a vital part in this operation and protecting ground troops from roadside improvised explosive devices.

"The job calls for flying heavy payloads over long distances, in intense heat and above some pretty inhospitable terrain. In many respects the environment is a greater threat than the enemy. "The 'fat [fuel] tanked' Chinook Mk 5 is perfect for this role. Even performing in this extreme environment and operating towards the edge of its performance envelope - it always delivers."

The future

Squadron Leader Samuel Hodgkinson of 28

Squadron at RAF Benson was originally a Royal Navy helicopter pilot. Deployed on the Sea King Mark 4 in Afghanistan in 2008/9 he remembers: "quietly admiring, if not being a touch jealous of, the Chinook's impressive power margin and out-of-wind handling characteristics. Fast forward a few years, I had 'swallowed the anchor' and transferred to the RAF. Converting onto the Chinook is a humbling experience. It is extremely capable, if not eager, to do all it is asked with no complaints. That it is still as relevant today as it was 40 years ago (and more) and will continue as such into the future is a testament to the original designers and those who continue to develop it. And of course, to the operators."

Group Captain Nicholas Knight, currently Officer Commanding RAF Odiham and the Chinook Force, considers the helicopter's achievements and the future.

"The Chinook's versatility has impressed since its introduction during Op CORPORATE and throughout the plethora of campaigns and interventions that followed.

"Equally impressive are the people that constitute the Chinook Force – as resourceful, committed, professional, engaging and humble in 1981 as they are today. The addition of generations X, Y and Z have enhanced the Force's potential through an increasingly diverse, intelligent and innovative approach. The infamous Chinook Room walls in the RAF Odiham Officers' Mess are adorned with pictures of those recognised for their outstanding contribution.

"You also won't be surprised that many of today's aircraft hail from the original Mk1 fleet, have surpassed 10,000 flying hours and, courtesy of BELVEDERE and

the Rotary Wing Estate Optimisation study, are stored in the original 1930s buildings. Like Trigger's Broom, the fleet has been under a continuous state of upgrade, currently sporting a blend of Mk 5, 6 and 6a – going from analogue to digital, from paper to moving maps, and adding fat tanks. Defensive aides to counter the latest threats, and hold functionality which delivers pinpoint precision in the desert have replaced the 'wing and a prayer' dust landings of old.

"The Chinook, like fine wine, has matured over four decades and established itself as the UK's go to military helicopter. It has forged a special place in many peoples' hearts – a distinctive sound of freedom, instantly recognisable silhouette and unrivalled operational pedigree. I suggest it is deserving of iconic status and, thanks to the recent Integrated Review, the future looks bright." *AM*

Above: A CH-47 from 18(B) Squadron pauses between training sorties at Caernarfon Airport, North Wales. © MOD/Crown 2017.

Below: A busy dispersal at RAF Odiham, with six Chinook from 18 (B) and 27 Squadron lined up. © MOD/Crown 2020.

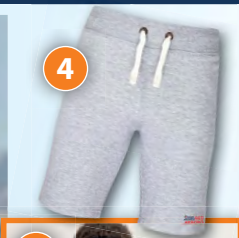
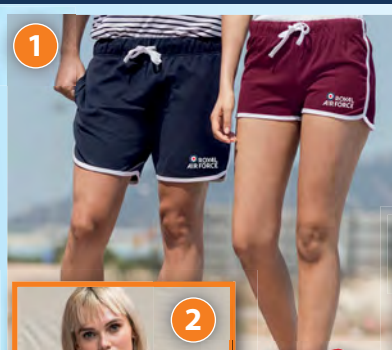


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The Saving Grace

There were 13,000 battlefield casualty evacuations in 13 years of operations in Afghanistan. Time and time again, specialist medical evacuation Chinook crews flew directly into the action to rescue injured British and coalition personnel, pushing themselves and their aircraft to their limits.

The Chinook aircrew's story

"A crew was always on standby at 15 minutes notice to move by day and 30 minutes notice to move by night, so we could sleep. These were limits not targets. I don't think it ever took a crew longer than 10 minutes to get airborne, even from the deepest sleep; the norm was around five minutes. This was because the Medical Emergency Response Team (MERT) aircraft was the flying ambulance that recovered our wounded soldiers and we treated it with the greatest respect," says former Flight Sergeant Liz McConaghy.

Liz was the longest serving female aircrew member working on Chinooks on 18(B) Squadron and had also been the youngest to see action, in Iraq, aged just 21. She served as a weapons systems operator on MERT in Afghanistan.

"We had a team of four medics and four force protection

personnel that held the duty with [the four of] us. We had a Chinook with a full rubber mat floor and the most amazing medical kit, all strapped and stowed in its exact place so it could be located instantly, in the dark while trying to save lives. In the early days we held it as a crew for a week at a time from our tent beside the Ops room. The bosses decided to reduce the duty to 24 hours at a time as it became so traumatic, with days of relentless high octane flying and carnage. And carnage it was. By 2007 the war had become more kinetic, with soldiers being killed or injured an almost daily occurrence. It became the norm to arrive back at the flight line to shut down and have to wash the blood off the floor of the aircraft.

"When a soldier was injured, his colleagues would get on the radio to Battle HQ with what was called a '9 liner'. A 9 liner was a

clearly laid out list that all soldiers used to pass the details of the incident such as location, call-sign, number and type of injuries, enemy threat etc... It was so important that we all used this format as inevitably adrenaline was high when these messages were being passed. Even if the radio had interference or a call came over the top you would be able to gather the main details as you were expecting them to come in this precise order. The first line was the nature of the casualty in the form of T1, 2, 3 or T4. T1 was the worst casualty with severe life-threatening injuries, T2 would be slightly more stable, T3 walking wounded and T4 was deceased or killed in action. These 9 liners would sometimes come to us over the radio while already airborne, or via Bastion Ops if we were sat in the tent. We had a green field phone mounted in the corner. They were very basic, so it had the

same ringtone for all calls.

The way the system was set up though, is that if it rang once it was an admin call and if a second ring followed it was a 'shout'. When it did ring adrenaline spiked and we all stopped and waited for the second ring, if this didn't happen, back to watching TV. If it rang a second time it was all systems go. Everyone would scream 'shout' at the top of our lungs and the engineers would ring a large bell. This was done so we could alert as many people around us as to what was happening. The medics would get the same call, as did the force protection personnel.

"What happened next was a sea of people sprinting towards the aircraft, sometimes while throwing on their shirts etc. The engineers would help get us ready to lift, the medics would be prepping their equipment and the force protection guys would

Firing flares. The Chinook Force flew 41,000 hours in Afghanistan. Its crews received numerous gallantry awards, including 23 Distinguished Flying Crosses for bravery in the air. Medical teams were also recognised with Royal Red Cross medals.

© MOD/Crown 2015.



be putting on their headsets. It was co-ordinated chaos, but everyone knew exactly what they should be doing, resulting in the slickest aircraft start every time. While all this was happening one of the crewmen would stay back by the phone that had originally rung and take the 9 liner details then catch up to crew in. Sometimes even I was in awe of just how quickly we could lift. One minute watching Game of Thrones, four minutes later departing Bastion and loading the weapons. Bonkers.

"On landing at the casualty, the ramp would go down. The force protection team would run off to surround the aircraft with fire positions while the combat medic made their way to the casualty. The stretcher or walking wounded would then be carried up over the ramp, followed by the force protection personnel

climbing back on board, a quick headcount to make sure we had everyone and lift. We would ask the medics if they wanted us to fly as fast as possible - but this could mean bumpier - or high and smooth depending on the nature of the injuries. As we raced back to Bastion, we would be on the radio to Ops to let them know any updates on the casualty's condition so they could relay to the hospital and the doctors could prep for what was coming. If blood was required, which happened a lot, we would pass the call 'Op Vampire'. We would then land on Nightingale helicopter landing site right next to Bastion hospital. The landing site was also really close to the cook house, so if you were walking to and from the food hall you would see the aircraft come in to land and your heart sank.

"Bastion was the most advanced field hospital in the world at that

time. It was said you had more chance of surviving a non-survivable injury in Afghanistan than anywhere else at one point. On touchdown the aircraft would be met by the ambulances and the fire crew who would help offload the casualties for the 20-metre journey into the hospital and to be put back together again by the most amazing med staff in the British military.

"In all of the above I have described using the term casualty as singular, but more often than not it was multiple casualties. The 9 liner could be two T1s, three T2s

and one T3 or a mix. Sometimes en route to the pickup point we would fold up all the seats against the wall to fit as many stretchers

in as possible. We could fit seven in with all the extra medic kit stacked around the walls.

When I say some days resembled a scene from the TV series M.A.S.H, I am not exaggerating.

A casualty at war usually has resulted from an incident with the enemy. This could be a gun fight or an improvised explosive device (IED) that had blown their vehicle to pieces. It was usual to see stretchers coming over the ramp reflecting these mechanisms of injury, from head wounds to legs

"Sometimes even I was in awe of just how quickly we could lift"

and arms missing.

“Watching the medics at work saving lives and limbs down the back of our aircraft is something that I remain in awe of forever. They were the absolutely the best in their field and unflappable. They would run off the ramp into the battlefield to collect casualties, they would put cannulas into arms while being thrown around as we evaded bullets and they would bring back those who were on the brink of death right in front of my eyes. All of this sometimes done in the dark while holding a torch in their mouth as, for tactical reasons, we couldn’t put the cabin lights on. The Op Herrick MERT medics were flying angels.

“One particular day we amassed a total of 14 shouts. It was relentless. We landed at Nightingale and offloaded one casualty just as another 9 liner was coming through on the radio. At one point we were being informed of incoming 9 liners while still 10 minutes out from Bastion with a cabin full of injured. There were troops in contact all day and I have never known anything like it. There was also one job where five British soldiers had been killed in one incident up at Forward Operating Base

Below: **An ambulance waits to receive a casualty from a Chinook helicopter at Camp Bastion.** © MOD/ Crown 2012 Air Historical Branch.



Whishtun. Each stretcher had a flag over the body, I remember the Union Jack, the Rifles flag, and a Liverpool flag. Still to this day I really struggle to see a Union flag without getting overwhelmed with memories. The thing that stayed with me most though was this, the love our British soldiers have for their brothers in arms. Watching them carry their best mates over our ramp, who had paid the ultimate price, while trying to hold their emotions together was the hardest sight of it all —above all the blood and gore. Knowing that in that instant there are no words or smiles you can give them that will take that pain away, and you know they must go back into the fight and carry on regardless. Once I watched as our medics fought to



Above Left: **Weapons Systems Operator Liz McConaghy in a rare quiet hour for the Chinook MERTs in Afghanistan.** © personal collection.

Above: **A Medical Emergency Response Team recovering a casualty from operations in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Chinooks were fitted with special rubber floors for MERT duties but personnel still describe seeing pools of blood that had seeped out under the aircraft after missions.** © Public Domain.

save a young soldier’s life at my feet. His mate had been injured too but was T3 and sat on the seat next to me. You know the moment that a life has slipped away from a soul, as the medics’ heads initially fall, then they look up at one another. I knew he had gone, and so did his friend who was watching. That moment all I wanted to do was hug him and tell him it was ok to cry as I saw his eyes glaze. But he did not, and I wondered if he had no emotions left after what they had been through. Making the radio call back to Ops to update them that

a T1 was now a T4 was the worst part of my job and was always done with a lump in my throat.

“Crewing the MERT aircraft was an honour. It was a privilege to be part of our soldiers’ final journey and it will remain with me forever as the greatest purpose of my career. However, I often look back now since we have pulled out and wonder if it was worth it for the lives lost. I have discussed it with many Herrick veterans. They all say that actually being at war was the one time they felt alive. They joined to do a job, and some fell, but they died doing the job they loved. I can take some comfort in this.

“After a heavy day on MERT I used to get a coffee and go and lie outside on the concrete blast wall beside the tent. In the summer it was always warm and comforting on my back, so I almost melted away in my thoughts while processing the day’s events. The desert has a unique smell to it as the day passes to night. You can almost tell when the sun has slipped away even when your eyes are closed. And then ‘call to prayer’ breaks the silence. It is weird but this became strangely familiar and relaxing in this far away land. At the going down of the sun and in the morning, I will always remember them.”

Fear of failure – the nurse’s experience

Wing Commander Charlie Thompson ARRC, served as





Above: A Loadmaster aboard an 18(B) Squadron Chinook embarks the MERT for another mission from Camp Bastion over Helmand, Afghanistan. © MOD/Crown 2009.

an RAF Nursing Officer in Afghanistan from 2006 to 2014. For her: "The camaraderie of this one team, IRT and MERT joined together, will never be forgotten; unique and powerful in so many different ways.

"I've had so many people say to me over the years 'Wow, what a cool job, I'd have loved to have done that...'. And so many times I've wanted to say 'Really? Would you really if I told you what it was actually like?'. I can tell you now, it was far from being exciting or glamorous. While the perception of flying around on a CH-47 retrieving wounded soldiers from the battlefields of Afghanistan may seem very exciting, the realities were very different.

"You can simulate and practice as much as you like back in the UK, what you can't replicate is the smell, I'm not talking about the smell of fuel or the dust from Afghanistan, I'm not even talking about the smell of sweat, tears, blood and flesh, I'm talking about the smell of fear.

"People would be lying if they weren't occasionally scared of doing IRT/MERT. We were a huge, expected, flying target. Our enemy knew that if any of our soldiers were injured, no matter what, we would come and rescue them. This gave them plenty of time to position themselves and their weaponry and give us their best shot, and that they did. These were the things that you didn't write home about. Every time

you crossed the wire for another rescue mission, you wondered whether you'd be back.

"From the moment you heard that emergency siren at the flight line in Camp Bastion, to the moment you launched for a medical mission you'd have this fear in the pit of your stomach. The activity of the ground crew running around getting the helicopter ready to launch, from the aircrew doing their pre-flight checks, to us, the medics and force protection donning our heavy body armour waiting to hear what had happened and how many had been hurt.

"Sometimes, you didn't get any information as to what or how many casualties to expect, you just prepared for the worst.

"The urgency of our mission wasn't lost on anyone, you'd feel the aircraft shuddering as it was forced at top speed. You'd get your medical kit ready while listening to the crew via a headset in your helmet. You'd hear a bang and the aircrew swearing about how close 'that' was, you'd feel the extreme banking of the aircraft weaving in out, left to right so 'they' couldn't take aim. You'd see the glitter of the chaff and flares being activated, it was as though even the aircraft felt the danger below. You'd see the pop of friendly smoke on the ground, the 'help us' smoke, 'Please land here, we need you'.

"On landing, you'd see the gold

Above: Each MERT consists of a doctor, an emergency department nurse and two paramedics – often operating by torchlight when cabin lights would be a danger. The RAF Regiment and the Chinook crews make sure everyone gets there and back safely. © MOD/Crown Air Historical Branch

flickering from enemy muzzles, their bullets flying towards you, you'd hear them hit the side of the aircraft, you'd hear the angry shouts of the friendly ground troops desperately trying to suppress fire while

trying to carry their wounded colleagues and friends onto the helicopter. You'd see the fear in their eyes as they looked at you: 'please save my friend'. Other eyes would say: 'please take me with you?' So many times, I wanted to bundle them on with us to get them away from danger but their loyalty to Queen and country saw them retreat back to the battlefield.

"But is this the fear I'm talking about? No, we all knew this part of the job; all too well.

"The fear I'm talking about is the fear of failure, the immense pressure of letting the whole

team down and ultimately letting the patients and their families down. What if we didn't get there in time? What if we couldn't save them? What if we missed something? What if we couldn't

stop the bleeding or re-start breathing?

They're all looking at us now to work some kind of miracle. The aircrew got us here safely, the Force Protection protected us on the ground and now this young soldier's life is hanging on

by a thread. Exhaustion would be a normal occurrence for the entire crew, with six, seven, eight missions a day, an hour's sleep in 24, no chance for food, and eyes and mouths would be dry from the heat, dust and dehydration. Bodies would be aching from kneeling and bending over with heavy body armour and kit, and you would undoubtedly be covered in blood. But this goes

"What was the saving grace in all this? Undoubtedly the CH-47 helicopter and crew"



wider story with his colleagues.

"The fact that he could have this experience in the cold light of day rather than pumped full of morphine helped clarify his memories and reinforce how amazing the Chinook and the people involved in getting it to the right place, at the right time are." AM

Left: "We need you". 'Extraction'. 5131 (Bomb Disposal) Squadron on Operation HERRICK, Afghanistan.

© MOD/Crown 2011 Air Historical Branch.

Below: A helicopter from 1310 Flight at Camp Bastion. As well as MERT duties, the aircraft delivered personnel and essential supplies to forward operating and patrol bases across Helmand Province.

© MOD/Crown 2011.

unnoticed by all of us; we now have a young life to save.

"The pilots are waiting for information to relay back to the hospital as they are hammering the aircraft back to base, the rear crew and force protection witness these barbaric injuries; something which now seen, can never go unseen.

"Yes of course it was exhilarating when we were able to save a life, but you could never shrug those feelings at losing someone else. You could never delete those pictures or feelings or smells. I've seen too many medical friends and colleagues, aircrew and force protection struggle with their mental health, struggle with those natural mortal feelings undertaking this role, memories that will be with them forever.

"So, no, it wasn't a 'great job', there was definitely no glamour, and it will haunt many of us forever. But we played a vital role, despite the horror; one I am glad to have been part of.

"What was the saving grace in all this? Undoubtedly the CH-47 helicopter and crew. The versatility of this helicopter and its crew — its speed, ability to fly in heat/cold/sand and at night, its ballistic protection, the ability to carry multiple stretchers or walking wounded — is without doubt the reason why we could save so many. This is why I always felt safe."

The survivor

In his six years operating the Chinook in four continents there is one memory that really brings

the emotion of flying in a Chinook to the forefront of Sergeant Chris Hillman's mind. And the story didn't even involve the aircraft being airborne.

"The Veterans' Garage at Manchester Barton airfield is owned and operated as a charity by a tight knit group of military veterans - supporting their fellow veterans through any struggles of post-service life. On a day in 2020 our 18 Squadron A Flight Chinook was refuelling at the airfield. For one of their staff, seeing us arrive was particularly powerful. The last time he had been on the back of a Chinook he was being recovered by MERT in Afghanistan after being injured in battle. The last thing he can remember before waking up in hospital in the UK was being stretchered onto the ramp and seeing the bottom of the aft transmission while heavily sedated.

"Our visit brought his experience of the Chinook full circle as he finally got to have a good experience of being in the aircraft, without the fear and pain of the day he was injured. He spoke so happily about seeing the rest of the aircraft and the cockpit while regaling us with the events leading up to his injury and sharing the

"How amazing the Chinook and the people involved in getting it to the right place at the right time are"





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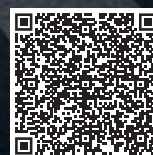


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Wokka

Do Chinooks have autopilot? Which part would you really *not* want to go wrong mid-air? And where does the famous 'wokka wokka' sound actually come from? To find out, Air Mail talks to the engineers and personnel with first-hand experience of working on, and in, the Chinook over the last forty years.



Above: **RAF Technicians working on an RAF Chinook during a pre-Afghanistan exercise.**
© MOD/Crown 2009.

Left: **"It's very complicated. There are lots of different components, both mechanical and electrical, all working in sync"** – Squadron Leader Sam Hodgkinson. © MOD/Crown 2011.

"We'd drive up to Liverpool on a Sunday night and on the Monday the aircraft would be there," remembers Technician Chris Cottrell of the early Chinooks that were shipped in pieces to the UK. Chris, who served with the RAF from 1977 to 1986, worked on the Chinook build team, which assembled the helicopters on Liverpool and Southampton docks when they arrived from the Boeing factory in the United States. "They were always reluctant to start because the engine hadn't been run for ages. When they did start they smelled of paraffin – no different to a camping stove. They didn't have dust filters, just a big wire mesh screen on the front of the engines, so would blow massive blue smoke rings out

the back."

As well as assemble the aircraft, Chris and the rest of the build team had to 'Europeanise' the compass system to ensure it showed the right longitude and latitude.

Flying was rarely a smooth experience in a Chinook. "They vibrate a lot," Chris recalls. "Behind the instrument panel and under the pilot seat there's a mass balance device which physically swings the other way to the aircraft vibrations. Otherwise, you can't see the instruments and the pilots vibrate so much they can't fly it properly. It's a bit like travelling by concrete mixer."

These vibrations also have an effect on the aircraft itself, as attested by Tony Barker, former Warrant Officer Engineering with

27 Squadron and now Sustainment Engineer with the Chinook Delivery Team. "It's a million parts rattling around in the sky, and things work their way loose over time," he says. "But we do our best to damp the vibration; to tune it out".

With so many pressures acting on the Chinook, is there one component in particular that needs frequent fixing? "The landing lamp bulbs!" laughs Tony. "We also have a lot of problems with the wiper system. They're not used all summer, so when they're turned on in the rainy season the motors burn out." And is there a part of the Chinook you really don't want to go wrong mid-air? "The aircraft hangs off of two head nuts," says Tony. "They hold the heads to the forward transmission and to the aft vertical shaft, and are torqued to 6,000 pounds per square foot. They're known as the 'Jesus' nut, because if one comes undone... Jesus!"

Despite the niggles, the Chinook is an incredibly advanced aircraft, with modern developments in technology adding to its effectiveness. "[It] is extraordinarily capable," points out Martin Sharp. Martin is a former

flight commander with 18(B) Squadron, was Chinook desk officer with the MOD, a Gulf War veteran and former Officer Commanding 7 Squadron. If anyone is qualified to speak about the Chinook's capabilities it's him.

"People assume that because it's big it's also lumbering," he continues. "You see a sports car, small and highly manoeuvrable, and you assume a big truck can't move. It's different in helicopters; it is power that makes helicopters manoeuvrable, and the Chinook has a power to weight ratio that is almost unrivalled."

The image of the Chinook as a powerful yet technically complex aircraft is one shared by Squadron Leader Sam Hodgkinson of 28 Squadron's Chinook Flight. "They're hugely more complicated in terms of controls, gearboxes and hydraulics than a normal aircraft," he says.

"There are lots of different components, both mechanical and electrical, all working in sync to keep the thing airborne. They use the same principles of flight, but in a slightly different fashion to a fixed-wing aircraft. With a helicopter, the rotor blade is essentially the wing, so you're driving it through

"The power to weight ratio is almost unrivalled"



Above: A Lycoming T55-GA-712 turboshaft engine on a CH-47 Chinook. Image by 'MrZ-Man', CC BY-SA 3.0.

the air. Unlike fixed-wing though, it's not 'clean' air, as each of the Chinook's six

blades are passing through air which the previous blade has just gone through, which makes things more complicated."

With such factors at play, is it even technically possible for helicopters to have such aids as autopilot? "Yes," says Sam. "Though autopilot is the civilian term; we use Automatic Flight Control System (AFCS), which does two things: firstly, it feeds minor inputs into the controls to help with stability; secondly it gives you 'holds', so it'll fly you at a certain height or speed."

Even here though, new technology is increasing capability. "We recently got something called DAFCS, with the 'D' standing for 'digital'. This gives us far more in the way of holds. There's 'positional hold' where the aircraft itself will hold a hover, it can also maintain a height, and fly a low-speed flight envelope. This looks like a gentle manoeuvre – but is performed via the DAFCS."

Another feature of the Chinook is its robustness. "In 1984 one of our Chinooks had a blade strike from its underslung load," recalls Chris Cottrell. "It was carrying a container off a 110 foot line, which snapped off and went over the top of the aircraft, through all six blades, round the tunnel and round the front head – yet the crew still managed to land it on Victory Green in Stanley."

The Chinook's ability to carry on regardless has its genesis in the design stage. "The fuel tanks have fire suppressant, so if a bullet were to hit the fuel tank it'd self-seal," says Martin Sharp. "If you crash-land the tanks break off and away then self-seal so as not to burn the whole aircraft. Most of the control systems

are duplicated, and there are only a few very isolated points where the hydraulic systems come very close together. You could have bullets go through all sorts of areas. The blades can take great chunks out of them and still continue to function, it could fly successfully on one engine at most weights, if you were to lose the fuel system on one side the other side can feed both engines, and the engines themselves will run with virtually no oil."

However, perhaps the most recognisable feature of the Chinook is the sound. So exactly what does cause the distinctive and much-loved 'wokka wokka'? "It comes from the compression of the air between the two overlapping rotor discs," says Sam Hodgkinson. "But the really weird thing is that you don't hear that when you're in the aircraft, not at all – it's masked by the internal noise!" [AM](#)

Below: Inspecting the rotor head on an RAF Chinook during a pre-Afghanistan exercise.

© MOD/Crown 2009.

Bottom: An RAF engineer conducting routine servicing and cleaning on the exterior of a Chinook. © MOD/Crown 2011.



Spec: Boeing Chinook HC Mk 6

Powerplant: two Honeywell T55-L-714A turboshaft engines, each rated at 4,168shp maximum continuous power

Length: 98 feet 10½ inches (30.14 metres)

Height (rotors turning): 18 feet 11 inches (5.77 metres)

Rotor diameter (each): 60 feet (18.29 metres)

Maximum cruising speed: 160 knots (296 kilometres per hour)

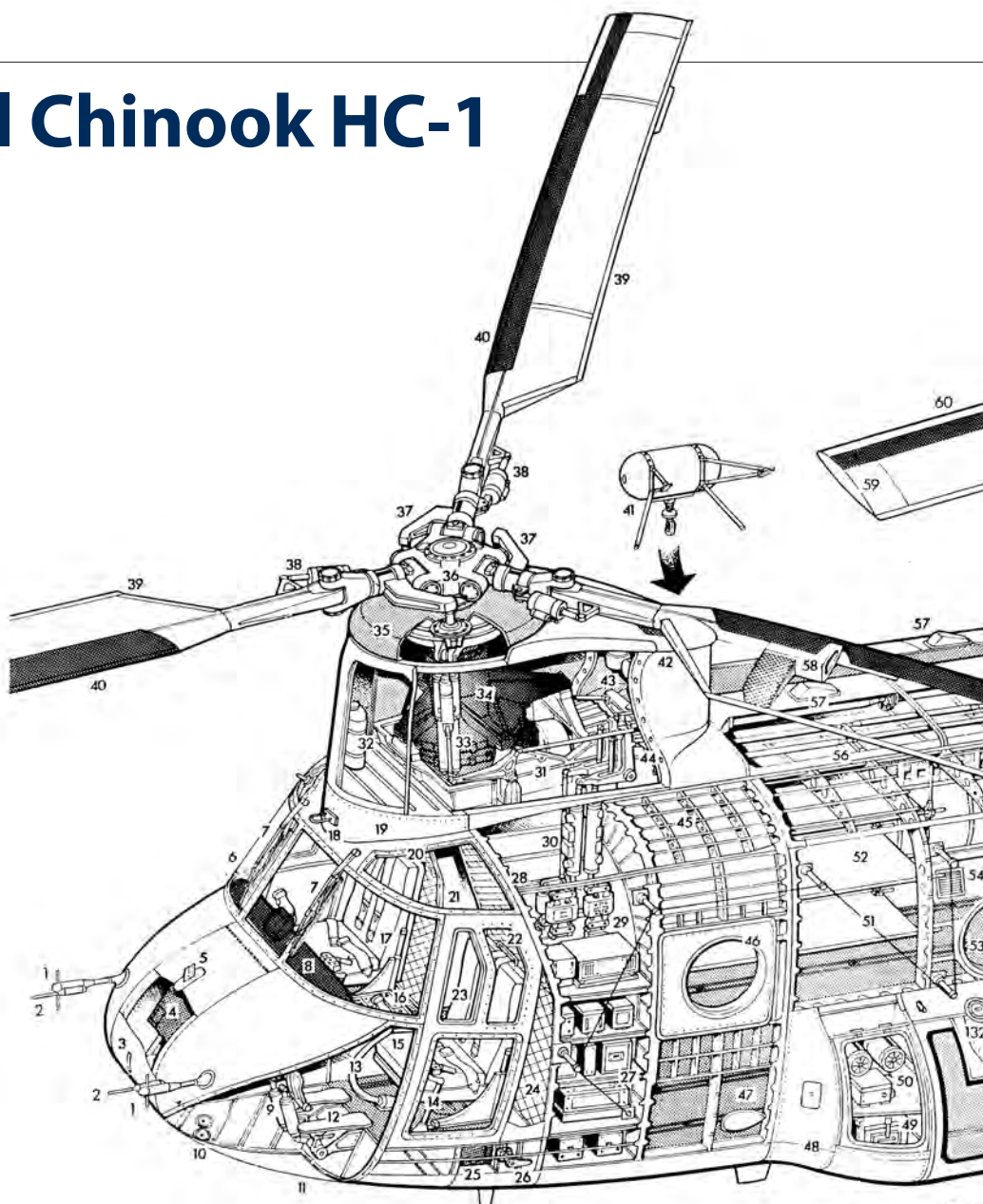
Maximum density altitude: 15,000 feet

Payload: up to 55 troops or around 22,000lb (10,000kg) of freight

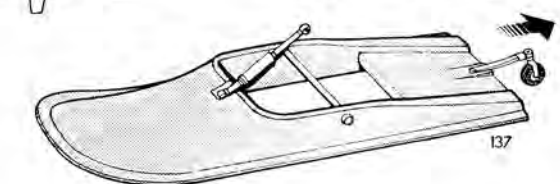
Armament: two 7.62mm M134 Miniguns and one 7.62mm M60D machine gun

Boeing Vertol Chinook HC-1

- 1 FM homing aerals
- 2 Pitot tubes
- 3 Nose compartment access hatch
- 4 Vibration absorber
- 5 IFF aerial
- 6 Windscreen panels
- 7 Windscreen wipers
- 8 Instrument panel glare shield
- 9 Rudder pedals
- 10 Yaw sensing ports (automatic flight control system)
- 11 Downward vision window
- 12 Pilot's footboards
- 13 Collective pitch control column
- 14 Cyclic pitch control column
- 15 Co-pilot's seat
- 16 Centre instrument console
- 17 Pilot's seat
- 18 Glideslope aerial
- 19 Forward transmission housing fairing
- 20 Cockpit overhead window
- 21 Doorway from main cabin
- 22 Cockpit emergency exit doors
- 23 Sliding side window panel
- 24 Cockpit bulkhead
- 25 Vibration absorber
- 26 Cockpit door release handle
- 27 Radio and electronics racks
- 28 Sloping bulkhead
- 29 Stick boost actuators
- 30 Stability augmentation system actuators
- 31 Forward transmission mounting structure
- 32 Windscreen washer reservoir
- 33 Rotor control hydraulic jack
- 34 Forward transmission gearbox
- 35 Rotor head fairing
- 36 Forward rotor head mechanism
- 37 Pitch change control levers
- 38 Blade drag dampers
- 39 Glassfibre rotor blades
- 40 Titanium leading edge capping with de-icing provision
- 41 Rescue hoist/winch
- 42 Forward transmission aft fairing
- 43 Hydraulic system modules
- 44 Control levers
- 45 Front fuselage frame and stringer construction
- 46 Emergency exit window
- 47 Forward end of cargo floor
- 48 Fuel tank fuselage side fairing
- 49 Battery
- 50 Electrical system equipment bay
- 51 HF/SSB aerial cable
- 52 Stretcher rack (up to 24 stretchers)
- 53 Cabin window panel
- 54 Cabin heater duct outlet
- 55 Troop seats stowed against cabin wall
- 56 Cabin roof synchronising shaft
- 57 Formation keeping lights
- 58 Rotor blade cross-section
- 59 Blade balance and tracking weight socket
- 60 Leading edge anti-erosion strip



- 61 Fixed tab
- 62 Fuselage skin plating
- 63 Maintenance walkway
- 64 Transmission tunnel access doors
- 65 VHF/AM - UHF/AM aerial
- 66 Troop seating, up to 44 troops
- 67 Cargo hook access hatch
- 68 VOR aerial
- 69 Cabin lining panels
- 70 Control runs
- 71 Main transmission shaft
- 72 Shaft couplings
- 73 Centre fuselage construction
- 74 Centre aisle seating (optional)
- 75 Main cargo floor: 1,440cu ft (40.78m³) cargo volume
- 76 Ramp-down 'dam' for water-borne operations
- 77 Ramp hydraulic jack
- 78 Engine bevel drive gearbox
- 79 Transmission combining gearbox
- 80 Rotor brake
- 81 Transmission oil tank
- 82 Engine drive shaft fairing
- 83 Engine intake screen



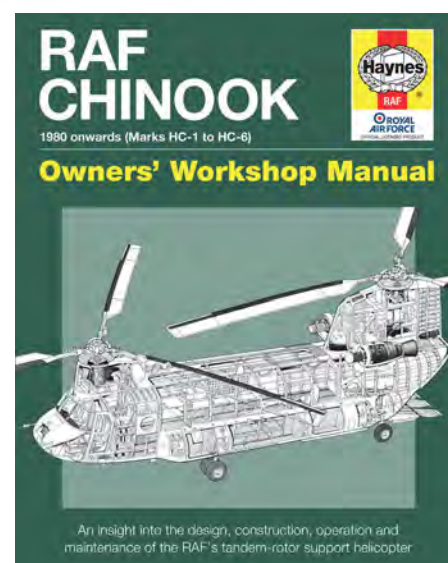
- 84 Starboard engine nacelle
- 85 Oil coolers
- 86 Cooling air intake grilles
- 87 Oil cooling air fan
- 88 Fire extinguisher bottles
- 89 Fan drive shaft
- 90 Cooling air outlet louvres
- 91 Maintenance step
- 92 Aft pylon construction
- 93 Swash plate fixed link
- 94 Aft rotor drive shaft
- 95 Aft rotor bearing mounting
- 96 Rotor head fairing
- 97 Aft rotor head mechanism
- 98 Main rotor blades, glassfibre construction
- 99 Rotor control hydraulic jack
- 100 Hydraulic filters and reservoirs



Drawing by Mike Badrocke. © Haynes.

- 101** Pylon aft fairing construction
- 102** Blunt trailing edge section
- 103** Tail navigation light
- 104** Solar T62-T2A1 auxiliary power unit (APU)
- 105** APU-driven generators
- 106** Maintenance walkways
- 107** Engine exhaust duct
- 108** Lycoming T55-L-11E turboshaft engine
- 109** Detachable engine cowlings
- 110** Rear fuselage frame and stringer construction
- 111** Rear cargo doorway
- 112** Ramp extensions
- 113** Cargo ramp, lowered
- 114** Ramp ventral strake
- 115** Fuselage side fairing aft extension
- 116** Ramp control lever
- 117** Ramp hydraulic jack
- 118** Rear undercarriage shock absorber
- 119** Undercarriage leg strut

- 120** Single rear wheels
- 121** Rear wheel optional ski fitting
- 122** Maintenance step
- 123** Rear crashproof fuel tank
- 124** Fuel tank interconnections
- 125** Ventral strake
- 126** Main crashproof fuel tank; total system capacity 3,944 litres
- 127** Floor beam construction
- 128** Fuel tank attachment joint
- 129** Fuel system piping
- 130** Fire suppression bottles
- 131** Forward crashproof fuel tank
- 132** Fuel filler caps
- 133** Fuel capacity transmitters
- 134** ADF sense aerial rail
- 135** Front undercarriage mounting
- 136** Twin forward mainwheels
- 137** Forward wheel optional ski fitting
- 138** Triple cargo hook system, forward and rear cargo hooks: 20,000lb (9,080kg) capacity
- 139** Main cargo hook: 28,000lb (12,712kg) capacity



The image and information on this page have been provided courtesy of Haynes, and is taken from their *RAF Chinook Manual*. The full 160-page manual is available at Haynes.com.

finding
it tough?

~~MENTAL WELLBEING~~ COURSES

Okay.

So if you really want to know - yeah - things are a bit tough at the moment. I'm a 27 year old mum, and sometimes I look at my friends whose partners come home every night, regular as clockwork, and I do feel a bit envious.

I'm so proud of Simon but I do have moments when he's away when it all gets on top of me a bit. Trying to juggle kids, work - I feel just a bit overwhelmed sometimes I guess. I know it's stupid - he's always there on the end of the phone and he's so supportive -

I just can't help how I feel sometimes.

He's due back next week. I can't wait for him to get home and everything to be normal again. We just need to get through the first few days of all living in the same house together again - he'll be tired, the kids will be over the top excited and I'll be in the middle....

But I'm not moaning. There's plenty worse off than me. Si's a great husband and a great dad. I just need to be positive. Get on top of things.

Then I'll be fine.

Promise x

"No
it's

+



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really, ~~it's all good~~" too much!

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Forewarned, forearmed

Following initial experiments, in 1936 the Air Ministry began a secret project at Bawdsey Manor Estate which resulted in the world's first early warning radar network. To mark the 85th anniversary of this event, Association member and former radar operator **Vera Ladds** spoke to Air Mail about the vital work she and her colleagues undertook during WWII.



Above: **Chain Home radar station. An oil painting by William Thomas Rawlinson.** © IWM Art.IWM ART LD 5735.
Right: **Vera at RAF Clee Hill, 1945.** © Vera Ladds.

When war started I was living in Cambridge with my parents and younger brother. I worked in Lloyds Bank, but wanted to join the RAF on day one. I also served in a forces canteen where I met many airmen, and very much wanted to be 'one of them'. My mother said no, and in those days one obeyed one's parents until the age of 21.

I worried my mother every day for almost two years, and when she finally said she'd 'think about it' I suggested to a friend that

we join up on the way home from work. My mother was not at all pleased when I told her I had joined, but as I was 20 there was nothing she could do about it since parental permission was not needed after the age of 17.

I heard about radar at my interview for the WAAF when we were told about the various trades we could choose. We called it 'RDF' (Radio Direction Finding) until we adopted



the American name 'radar'. I decided then that radar was what I wanted to do. I thought it was the most important skill I could learn, and would allow me to make a bigger contribution to the war effort.

The selection interview was primarily to discover our level of education and general character. I passed, but my friend failed and became a plotter which was one grade lower. When I said I would also like to be a plotter to stay with my friend I was told I had to be a radar operator as I had the necessary skills for it.

Chain Home

I did my training at RAF Yatesbury, a large radio station in Wiltshire. I was there several weeks and it was certainly a very complicated course. We were taught about the speed of light and sound, radiofrequency, the workings of the cathode ray tube and how the equipment functioned. When training was over I was eager to start work in earnest, and my first posting was to RAF Scarlett Point, Isle of Man.

Finally getting to work on Chain Home (CH) was exciting. However, I was also apprehensive at first, knowing that people's lives depended on the work I did. I soon became used to the idea though, and was determined to give it my best.

The CH stations were dotted on high ground all around the British Isles. A transmitter block sent radio waves out which hit incoming aircraft and were reflected back to a receiver block, where the aircraft were seen as blips on a cathode ray tube. By pressing a goniometer and several knobs we could report the number of aircraft, height and grid reference to a filter room. Here it was assessed, and each aircraft given an identity and a grid reference before being passed to the plotters.

Whenever radar is shown in films it's always these plotters who are seen busily moving the numbered pieces around the table, but without our information they would have had nothing to plot.

To distinguish whether the aircraft were hostile or friendly we relied on IFF



(Identification Friend or Foe). Our own aircraft had IFF fitted, which would send a flash of light down the screen. If they had any wounded on board it sent a broader flash which we had to report to the filter officer who then arranged for the ambulances to be waiting when they touched down.

As the station had to be operational 24/7 we worked a watch system: 0000 to 0800hrs; 0800 to 1300hrs; 1300 to 1800hrs; and 1800 to 2400hrs. Initially we worked on a four-day watch cycle, then had 36 hours off. After that we started the four-day cycle again. There were six operators and six mechanics on each watch. When some operators were posted overseas after D-Day we were put on a three-day cycle because there were fewer people to do the work. Our off-duty time was also reduced, but apart from church parade we didn't have any drill, or 'bull' as we called it.

We were kept so busy that I don't remember being anxious even when German aircraft approached our position. Luckily, my station was

never bombed but several were. When Liverpool was bombed the cathode ray tube was saturated. The only way we could report such high numbers was by saying there were "100 plus".

Down time

Because of the watch system we had variable free time. I did a lot of crochet and embroidery. We didn't have coupons so couldn't buy wool but a van used to visit radar stations bringing crochet cotton and various items to embroider. We'd congregate in the NAAFI and play darts or visit the nearby town when time would allow; there was always someone to go into town with. We'd go to the cinema, the shops, or have an occasional meal when funds allowed. We sometimes had an ENSA concert, and each watch organised a dance on Sunday evenings. Very occasionally we went to dances at other RAF stations, and sometimes met other RAF personnel at the local pub.

I don't remember too many people asking what I did. After three months we put a sparks badge on our arm and I think people assumed →

"It was vital to maintain extreme secrecy."



Top: RAF Cleve Hill, winter 1944. © Vera Ladds.

Right: WAAF radar operator Denise Miley plotting aircraft on the cathode ray tube of an RF7 receiver in the receiver room at Bawdsey CH. Her right hand has selected the direction or height-finding and her left hand is ready to register the goniometer setting to the calculator. May, 1945.

© IWM CH 15332.

it was radio communication. Our work was certainly very secret – that had been drilled into us on our initial course – and we were all smart enough to see for ourselves how vital it was to maintain extreme secrecy.

I liked to keep up with what was going on elsewhere too. I grew up with three male cousins and two went into the forces, though the third was too young to join up. One was in the 8th Army, a 'desert rat', and when things were going badly in Africa it was a very worrying time. The other was a navigator in Lancasters, which made me more determined than ever to do my best.

GEE

When the blitz ended, German activity over England lessened and tracking our own aircraft was no fun. Luckily, I was posted to a 'GEE' station. This pleased me no end, as I felt it was more important at that stage of the war.

GEE was a navigation aid which allowed the navigator of an aircraft to fix its position by reference to three transmitting stations. The base transmitter sent out two radio signals and measured the time delay between the two. This gave an accurate fix and produced a 'corridor' for the aircraft to fly down. The radar operators monitored the two radio signals to

ensure they did not move from their bearing, thus ensuring a great degree of accuracy for the bombers of up to a few hundred metres at a range of 350 miles.

This work needed absolute concentration, because the smallest margin of error on the screen could result in the target being missed completely. This was a great strain, therefore we were only allowed to do it for half an hour at a time before having a 30-minute break. We would then work for another 30-minutes, and so on.

There wasn't much technical training for GEE – we more or less learned on the job. The basic radio training had already been covered when learning CH, and GEE was relatively easy compared to CH, but we had to be absolutely precise with no room for error at all. If the transmitter went off air the mechanics would reset it, but we had to learn to re-tune the equipment ourselves.

One evening, we went on watch at 2359hrs and the controller came on the line: "I know you always give 100 per cent commitment," he said, "but tonight it must be 110 per cent." We thought it meant a very important raid was taking place, but as the course information we were providing was available to any aircraft fitted with GEE it made no difference to us if it was used by one squadron or twenty. It didn't make extra work, but it did require more concentration.

"It had to be absolutely precise with no room for error."

When we finally came off duty and found that we had played a part in the initial hours of D-Day we were amazed and delighted.

Flight in a Lancaster

One afternoon when I was on GEE duty a party of RAF navigators came to look around. "We know what goes on in the air," they said, "now we want to see what happens on the ground". We showed them around to provide a better understanding of how the complete system worked, and just before leaving they offered to return the favour: "Would like to see what goes on in the air?." Needless to say we jumped at the chance.

A visit was arranged, and although it was a large aircraft I remember it being very cramped inside. We had to sit either side of a low rectangular structure which I assume was the bomb bay. I was also given a parachute – and was glad to be wearing 'battledress'. They flew us to our radar station and round the pylons; it felt absolutely fabulous. My first flight had been from the CH station on the Isle of Man to Liverpool in a small six-seater, so the contrast couldn't have been greater.

Returning to base we had lunch in the sergeants' mess. That day was the highlight of my RAF career. Afterwards, I found that I thought about aircrew and what they had to do each night differently. I realised how cramped and uncomfortable they must be on long flights. The air war, and my part in it, felt more real from that moment onwards.

Post-war

Having worked on Chain Home and GEE, and been posted to stations from the Isle of Man to Barkway, and from Stenigot to Clee Hill and Swanage, I finally left radar – and the RAF – in November 1945.

As I get older, and since being widowed, I often think of the war and the part I played, the people I met, the good times we had and the tough ones. I loved my time in the RAF, and if I could go back in time I'd certainly do it all again. As a radar operator I felt I was making an important contribution to the war effort, which appealed to the deep sense of patriotism I held at the time – and still hold to this day. [AM](#)

Vera, now 100, spoke to Air Mail in early 2021 from her home near Lowestoft where she still lives independently. Our thanks go to Vera and her daughters, Julia Ladds and Sange Wilson, for helping us with this article.



Left: Vera (left) and friend at RAF Clee Hill's Doddington Lodge, 1945. "That's not a glass in my hand," says Vera, "It's a dog biscuit!" © Vera Ladds.
Below: Chain Home Mark 3 Console as installed in a receiver room of an East Coast station. © CH 15178.

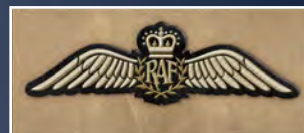


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Egalité, fraternité et transparence

Sud-Ouest Branch is proud of its approach to equality, fraternity and openness. While getting to know its work, we'll also cover its connections with RAF history in south west France and its subtle understanding of the appeal of a good chateau and vineyard to ensure the AGM is always quorate and that welfare funds are always raised.



“We believe in a very open way of running things,” say Beryl Dennett Stannard, Chair of the branch. “Transparency and sharing knowledge helps our membership fulfil their potential. So we’ve always shared as much as possible with our members and also spend a lot of time on email conversations and phoning members for a chat. In fact, when the Association asked us to phone all the over 70s and then over 65s to see how lockdown was affecting everyone, we already knew! We also have good welfare support network in place.”

Within its 155 members, the branch has two welfare officers and six Connections for Life volunteers and assistant welfare officers. “We generally look out for each other,” continues Beryl. “Living in rural France can be very isolating. If someone is in hospital, their partner or friends have to travel long distances to support or visit them. So, if there is a need for financial welfare aid, we try to help with fuel expenses. This is especially true as some people are living on very low incomes – so occasionally our support extends to quietly paying their membership, so we are staying in touch. There is great reward in making even small life-changing differences for our beneficiaries.”

“And it is not just our members who volunteer. Our families and friends also contribute their time and effort as well as money, to help our Association” she adds.

Sud-Ouest Branch officially covers the area from the Loire Valley down to the Spanish border, and from the Atlantic coast in the west to



Above: The lure of a Grand Cru Classé vineyard at the Chateau du Pressac saw 47 members and guests attend the branch AGM in spring 2020 – just a few days before lockdown was implemented in France. RAF numbers in the region are high because of Anglo-French military co-operation from WWII onwards

Left: Branch honorary member Paul Bogaert, also chairman of the Members and Friends of the RAF French Heavy Bomber Group, was invited to unveil a memorial to French air crews killed in action. More than 500 people from France and The Netherlands attended.

Limoges or Toulouse further east. It’s larger than England and Wales. “But we get contacts from all over France,” continues Beryl, “mostly about people trying to track ancestors or asking about crash sites and memorials. We work closely with our contacts in consulates and embassies to try to help.”

Many members live permanently in France, others channel hop when pandemic restrictions allow, and some are based in The Netherlands and Portugal. A significant number are aged over 100 and all but three members use email.

Officially the branch is 35 years old; it was re-formed in 1986. But there is evidence that it was set up much earlier by the Marquis de Amodio et Moya. He was a former President of the Association’s European Area who served in the RAF in WWII with the French heavy bomber squadrons, 346 (Guyenne) and 347 (Tunisie) at RAF Elvington. Many French and British personnel joined the branch in its early days in the Bordeaux area.

RAF personnel also served in the region as part of the Anglo-French Jaguar aircraft supply chain at Merignac-Bordeaux until 2006 and there are still strong links with the local French military and with civilian flyers. “Recently our branch members helped the French Air Force improve their English,” says Beryl. “There had been some difficulties in Libya during a combined operation between the French and British air forces. So some of us visited the French l’Armée de l’Air NCO Academy twice a week for a year to speak English with air force personnel. Apart from aviators from mainland France, we were very pleased to meet young people from France Outre-Mer such as Reunion, Nouvelle



Left: Celebrating the 100th birthday of the late Honorary President, Henri Laronge in 2018, RAF100 year. Mr Laronge flew for the French l'Armée de l'Air and the RAF, and was involved in the branch since he first helped form it. Monthly branch lunches like this one are on hold until lockdown restrictions are lifted, but the branch hopes to be able to meet again in summer 2021.

Caledonia and Wallis et Fortuna. It was great fun and we built a strong relationship with our local French air force bases and continue to attend graduation ceremonies.

South western France has more than 1,000 RAF war graves, often in small towns or villages and community graveyards. The numbers of people buried range from whole crews to single aircrew. "The local communities take the duty of looking after these war graves very seriously," explains Beryl. "I have had spine-chilling moments when French villagers have held both my hands and looked straight into my eyes and told me that the RAF saved them. They talk about living in German-occupied France and the only way they knew someone cared about them was when our aircraft flew overhead." This means the branch is invited to represent the RAF and the Association at large numbers of commemoration ceremonies. "We go to around 33 a year," says Beryl. "The French people are not going to ease up either. In local schools their young children are still taught the history of both world wars and the sacrifices made by locals and the strangers who fell from the sky." About ten years ago, the German High Commissioner in Bordeaux invited the branch to the annual remembrance services at the German Cemetery at Saintes where there are 8,295 WWII war graves.

Additional welfare advice and assistance has been offered to Sud-Ouest members in the last 18 months because of Brexit. "Again, our close liaison with the British Embassy and consulate means we could tell members what to expect and when – and how to do what they needed to do to remain in France," Beryl explains. "We have also spent up to an hour and a half on the phone helping people through online residency applications. There are also changes to healthcare entitlements, driving licences, pet passports, banking and private pilot's licences. Applications are complicated even if you are fluent in English and French. And we also help people travel to their prefecture to provide their photographs and digital fingerprints which are needed for permanent residency cards."

Fundraising is one of the smaller elements of the branch's work. "We are set up under UK and French law. In France we are treated like churches and other voluntary or benevolent organisations, and governed by the Bureau des Associations, under a law dating from 1901. Working under two countries' laws is mostly straightforward; we take a sensible middle ground, and then opt for the country of residence if there is any insurmountable clash," Beryl says. "Even before COVID-19 the branch was not allowed to do street collections," she continues. "So we used to have one big event a year to raise money; such as a spit-roasted lamb lunch or a speaker and vineyard tour at a local chateau. Under normal circumstances, we

would also meet for lunch each month in Bordeaux with a raffle each time. That would help us raise us the €600 to €1,000 we needed to keep our welfare support going."

The branch was still affected by the French semi-lockdown and curfew when Air Mail spoke to them. "Until 2 May we will have to carry our attestation papers at all times, present them to the gendarmes and not travel more than 10 kilometres," says Beryl. "16,000 people were stopped by the police yesterday across the whole of France," she added. "But the infection rates in this part of the country are lower than elsewhere, and the vaccinations are going well. As soon as the restaurants and bars open again and the members have all been vaccinated, we'll relaunch our lunches and do some socially-distanced meetings. Perhaps they will run the Cognac air show in the summer too."

"Even after early retirement, I never really left military service behind me," says Beryl. "I have remained an active part of the RAF family and it is really satisfying to help serving personnel, veterans and their families. Over the years, I have been honoured to meet many people all over the UK and Europe who hold the RAF in very high regard. The great thing about the RAF Association is that it doesn't matter what rank we were – we are an egalitarian organisation used to team-working and it is important to keep supporting each other while we serve, and afterwards." *AM*

Right: Sud-Ouest Branch Chair Beryl Dennett Stannard (right) with Branch Secretary Terry Dennett (centre) at Annual Conference in 2017, with Sarah Waugh, then Overseas Director.

Below: In normal times, branch get-togethers involve people of all generations and a broad range of activities – here a competition for the paper aircraft which travelled the furthest.

All images © Sud-Ouest Branch archive.





Bognor Regis Branch.



Ryedale Branch.

Armourers' Branch

In April the Armourers' Branch was contacted by Cranwell Branch for assistance in organising a surprise for one of their members. Ken Simpson, a WWII armourer was turning 100 on 8 May and the branch was asked if it could spread the word in the armourer community to send birthday cards as a surprise for Ken. This was duly done and 100 cards were sent to Ken from all over the globe. The branch also arranged for an armourers' tie and lapel pin as a surprise birthday present. (For more on Ken's birthday see page 23).

Bognor Regis Branch

Branch officers were able to pay their respects to the crew of a Hampden bomber that came down at Bognor in April 1942. Branch Chair Cliff Mewett laid the wreath, assisted by Standard Bearer Keith Arnold and Club Chair Leslie de la Mare. Thanks to an Armed Forces Covenant Fund Trust grant the refurbished and upgraded club reopened in late May. A full programme of events is planned, with the return of short mat and carpet bowls, line dancing, Friday night and Saturday entertainment and more. Details can be found online at rafa381.co.uk.

Caduceus Branch

Branch officers would like to thank all members who participated in the online AGM, Ron O'Hare for stepping forward to help with the Wings Appeal, and all serving and veteran RAF Medical Service and Princess Mary's RAF Nursing Service personnel for their continued efforts in the fight against COVID-19.

Cranwell Branch

During lockdown, contact has been maintained with members via phone and email, with the latter including morale-boosting messages, news items, quizzes and humour. These are sent to both members and non-member organisations for their own use, and are relayed around Britain, Europe, California, Australia and New Zealand. The branch has also undertaken a garden-based committee meeting, two virtual meetings and the AGM.

Falmouth Branch

A commemorative service was held in Falmouth in April to mark the anniversary of the St Nazaire Raid (Operation Chariot). Carried out in March 1942, the RAF provided reconnaissance, diversionary bombing raids and protection to withdrawing survivors. The service was attended by The Lord Lieutenant of Cornwall and the town Mayor. Branch Chairman Lance Smale laid a wreath on behalf of the Association, and the Cornwall Region Standard was also on parade, carried by Standard Bearer Robert Ash. The service was followed by a prayer of thanks for the life of HRH The Duke of Edinburgh.

Fraserburgh Branch

After a lifetime of service to the branch and club, Duncan McIntosh has decided to step down as chairman. Branch President Stanley Green MBE presented Duncan with a collection of memorial coins on behalf of all associated with Fraserburgh Branch for the years he has devoted to its service.

Hartlepool Branch

Over Easter, Social Secretary Hazel Davis organised a members' competition for the best decorated eggs and bonnets. Entries were submitted by email and prizes given for the winners - delivered by Hazel dressed as the Easter Bunny. Throughout the pandemic, Hazel has also been busy keeping members informed, in touch and well provided with craft activities.

Leigh Branch

The AGM was carried out online and the branch would like to thank Jack Boardman for his tenure as treasurer and welcome Helen Palmer to the role. Mark Rahaman is also now the branch's welfare officer, and the committee is completed by Stuart Bonner, Marcus Pollard, John Bullock and the newly promoted Flying Officer Steven Nash of 1471 (Horwich) Squadron RAFAC. The branch is especially pleased to welcome members from 611 Squadron. Members will shortly be receiving a branch newsletter as work commences with local councils around Armed Forces Week.



Moray Branch.



Rushden and District Branch.

Leuchars Branch

Branch member James Cassidy successfully completed the Scottish Kiltwalk 2021 Challenge, walking the 10 kilometre coastal path in Fife from Elie to Pittenweem and raising a total of £417 for the Wings Appeal. He prepared for the challenge by going on short walks to gradually build up his strength and stamina. On his journey he encountered wild swimmers, several picnicking families and a variety of unusual wildlife. From all at the branch – well done Jim! Hearty congratulations.

Moray Branch

On Remembrance Sunday in Elgin, the branch complied with the council's request for individual wreath-layers, spaced at 15 minute intervals. The ceremony was accompanied by a single piper from RAF Lossiemouth, piping a lament throughout the day. A small wreath-laying service was also held at Dallachy on ANZAC Day.

Romsey Branch

Throughout the pandemic the branch has maintained contact with members as part of the Association's outreach programme. A successful postal/email/virtual AGM was also held, at which the committee was returned in full with an additional two new volunteers. After a long tenure as chairman, Bob Sankey retired from the role but remains on the committee as membership secretary.

Rushden and District

A year in lockdown did not mean the branch stopped being a presence in the community, or lost touch with its members. A monthly newsletter was sent to all members, with each one also receiving a birthday card. In addition, all members currently serving received a letter of appreciation for their efforts during the pandemic. A small ceremony was held on Battle of Britain Day, and representatives were able to lay wreaths throughout the area on Remembrance Day. Goody bags comprising RAF Association gifts were sold through Facebook, raising £193, and the committee held monthly meetings as well as the AGM – all online.

Ryedale Branch

New Standard Bearer Allan Jones performed his first duty in April, though sadly at the funeral of RAF veteran and Ryedale Branch Honorary Vice-President Trevor Schofield at St. Peter & St. Paul's Church, Pickering. Allan will share this role with Jonathan Fawcett.

Sud-Ouest Branch

Despite ongoing restriction in France, the branch continues to raise funds for the Association. Before Christmas, it ran a remote Christmas RAFA Bear tombola. 51 members participated, raising over 1,000 Euros. A second tombola at Easter raised 625 Euros, with the winners receiving gifts of chocolate from London chocolatier Charbonnel et Walker.

WRAF Branch

Earlier this year, branch member Nicola Willis-Jones was presented with an Antarctica Service Medal from the US Government for supporting the National Science Foundation in Antarctica. Nicola credits her past RAF training for helping her prepare for the role. "The community living was like being on an RAF base," said Nicola, "and I had no trouble going back to dorm living for four months." "WRAF Annie", the unofficial knitted doll mascot of the WRAF, accompanied Nicola and went on her own adventures to the South Pole, the dry valleys via helicopter and even sledged down a glacier.

We welcome all submissions for Branch News, preferably by email to BranchNews@rafa.org.uk. Word count should be no more than 100 words. You may submit one accompanying photograph. Please abide by all social distancing regulations active at the time when taking photographs, as failure to do so will prevent publication. If sent via email, please attach as a separate image file and at a size of at least 1MB and 300dpi. Send postal submissions to the address on the inside front cover. Unfortunately photographs sent by post cannot be returned. Low quality pictures may not be published. Submission does not guarantee inclusion and where there are too many reports for an issue, the editor reserves the right to edit. Only submissions made by email will be acknowledged before publication. The deadline for inclusion in the next Branch News is 6 August 2021.



Bentley Priory Museum. © Bentley Priory Museum.

Directing the Battle of Britain

With visitor attractions now reopening, **Christina Avramakis** explores Bentley Priory Museum, and tells the story of the site's pivotal role during the Battle of Britain.

High on the hills of Stanmore, overlooking Harrow-on-the-Hill, sits a beautiful Grade II* listed mansion house; a building with an exceptional history. An Augustinian priory from 1170 to its dissolution around 1546, it was rebuilt as a sumptuous private residence in the late 1700s. Later it became a lavish hotel, home to the dowager Queen Adelaide and a prestigious girls' school; roles which all left their mark on the rooms and architecture of this impressive building. In 1936 with war looming, the house took on its most important role – as headquarters of RAF Fighter Command.

In the 1930s it was here that Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding paced the rooms, looking for a way to stave off Nazi attack. In preparation for war Dowding oversaw two developments which would become vital to victory during the Battle of Britain. He supported the development of fast fighter aircraft – the Spitfire and Hurricane – and provided funding for the first experimental radar stations on the coast.

At RAF Bentley Priory, Dowding also oversaw the development and implementation of the world's first integrated system of air defence, which became known as 'The Dowding System'. This combined radar reports with the essential

work of the Royal Observer Corps (ROC) to give a clear picture of what was happening in the skies above Britain, all to ensure that squadrons were scrambled to the right place at the right time.

The museum tells Dowding's story using the very office from which he worked, with the sights and sounds of the time brought to life through an award winning 10-minute film. But the museum doesn't just tell the story of one man; its Rotunda Gallery also describes the courageous actions of The Few who took to the skies to defend Britain.

Fought between 10 July and 31 October 1940, the Battle of Britain involved 2,936 British, European and Commonwealth airmen, with 544 losing their lives during the battle. It was the events of that summer that inspired British Prime Minister Winston Churchill to note that: "Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."

The vital work of The Many is also presented in the reconstructed Filter Room, which highlights the tireless work of men and women of the RAF and WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) who worked long shifts under great pressure, and were pivotal cogs of the Dowding System.

"The plots were coming through from the radar stations, they were very quick,"



Above Top: King George VI (centre) and Queen Elizabeth with Air Chief Marshal Sir Hugh Dowding at RAF Bentley Priory, 6 September, 1940. © Air Historical Branch.

Above: WAAF plotters at work in the underground operations room at HQ Fighter Command, Bentley Priory. © Air Historical Branch.



Visiting

Following government guidelines, the museum was delighted to reopen to visitors in May this year. To ensure the safety of both visitors and staff, the museum initially reopened on Wednesdays and Saturdays only, and will gradually increase its open days. Please check the museum website for up-to-date information about open days and admission prices. Visitors are also asked to pre-book their timeslot via the museum website: **bentleypriorymuseum.org.uk**. Current and former HM Forces service personnel receive a discounted admission rate of just £5 when visiting. The museum can be contacted on **020 8950 5526**, or at **enquiries@bentleypriorymuseum.org.uk**.



Above: Part of the museum's reconstructed Filter Room.
This image: Bentley Priory Museum and Italian gardens.
© Bentley Priory Museum.

Above: The museum's Rotunda Gallery. © Bentley Priory Museum.

The online experience

During the museum's lockdown-enforced closure, a special online temporary exhibition called Battle of Britain Illuminated was created, showcasing iconic images of the battle brought to life in colour. This is available at **bit.ly/Bentley-images**. Speakers have also been presenting interesting topics via a series of online talks available at **bit.ly/Bentley-events**. These are open to all but need to be pre-booked through the website. In addition, volunteers have created a podcast series featuring oral history interviews about the underground bunker used in WW2 and the Cold War. This can be listened to online by visiting: **bit.ly/Bentley-Pod**. AM

Special Offer: free tea or coffee

Present this voucher to exchange for one free tea or coffee per person (up to a maximum of four people) in the museum's vintage café.

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Valid from 1 July to 31 October 2021.

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remembers Gladys Eva, who was stationed at RAF Bentley Priory during the Battle of Britain and whose memories form part of the exhibition. "I always say they were the key people, their accuracy was absolutely of the upmost importance... naturally it was stressful all the time, emotionally, physically... you couldn't make a mistake."

Thanks to the amazing work of the radar operators, the ROC and women of the WAAF, who worked assiduously to plot the incoming raids night and day, crucial intelligence was passed to operations rooms throughout the country, enabling fighter squadrons to accurately intercept the enemy.

The Cold War and the nuclear age

A very different and much less well-known history has recently been exposed: RAF Bentley Priory's role during the Cold War. An underground bunker was completed in haste in 1940 as Germany threatened to invade Britain. This was developed for use throughout

the Cold War period as political tensions across the world remained high. Personnel in this new bunker at Bentley Priory were responsible for identifying enemy encroachment of British airspace and co-ordinating the RAF's response.

The memories of RAF, WAAF and ROC personnel employed in the top secret bunker have been recorded for a temporary exhibition. Sue Gower worked at the bunker from 1970 to 1971, and has added her own memories to the exhibition:

"With regard to my family during a nuclear attack, I knew that by doing my job I was keeping them as safe as I possibly could. I knew that as they were tucked up in bed, I was watching the sky above them. Sounds dramatic, I know, but it was true."

It is through personal stories like those of Sir Hugh Dowding, Gladys Eva and Sue Gower – stories of leadership, courage and technology – that the museum tells the closely entwined stories of Bentley Priory and the RAF during some of the nation's darkest moments.

NEWS FROM THE RAF

by Mike Curtis



A C-130 Hercules taxiing at Gioia del Colle. The last aircraft will be taken out of service by 2023. © MOD/Crown 2008

The RAF is losing several types of aircraft as part of an integrated defence review and reassessments of changing technology. Hawk T1 trainers, C-130 Hercules transports and the British Aerospace 146 will be phased out – and the Sentinel R1 battlefield surveillance aircraft has already flown its last mission.

The Defence Command Paper stated: “The Royal Air Force will retire equipment that has increasingly limited utility in the digital and future operating environment. This will include rationalising older fleets to improve efficiency, retiring Typhoon Tranche 1 by 2025, and the Hawk T1. We will enhance the new military flying training system with further investment in synthetic training that will deliver more capable pilots more quickly and more efficiently.”

The RAF and the Royal Navy

have a total of 76 Hawk T1s. Their role will gradually be taken over by Hawk T2 which is already used for training fast jet pilots at RAF Valley. The Fleet Air Arm will lose all its Hawks, with the fleet requirements duties being picked up from September by the Hawks of the RAF’s 100 Squadron at Leeming. The Red Arrows team, which also flies Hawks, is not affected by the changes.

The RAF will also say an early goodbye to its BAe146 and C-130 Hercules transports. The review stated “The Royal Air Force will retire the BAe146 as planned by 2022 and take the C-130 Hercules out of service by 2023. The A400M Atlas force will increase its capacity and capability, operating alongside C-17 Globemaster and Voyager transport aircraft and tankers.”

The C-130J variant, which was favoured by the special forces,

first entered service with the RAF in the late 1990s. Some of the C-130s have been retired in recent years but the remaining 14 had originally been due to keep flying until the mid-2030s. The Hercules first entered service with the United States Air Force in 1956 – and the RAF first used them in 1967.

The RAF Sentinel R1 operations ended on the 25th February with a final mission by ZJ694 out of RAF Waddington. It meant the disbandment of V (Army Cooperation) Squadron, which was first formed in 1913 and has a rich history that includes service during both World Wars, and the Gulf War. The squadron has operated aircraft such as the Avro 504, Lightning F6 and Tornado F3 and has been awarded many Battle Honours from all over the world.

Its Sentinels have flown around 32,300 hours, conducting approximately 4,870 sorties during its service life. The Ministry of Defence says the UK continues to invest heavily in NATO ISTAR capabilities, not least Maritime Surveillance (Poseidon), Airborne Early Warning and Control (E-7 Wedgetail), Armed ISTAR (Protector), Rivet Joint and Shadow aircraft. The E-3D Sentry will be retired this year and the order for its replacement, the E-7 Wedgetail, has been cut from five airframes to three. However the RAF is expected to get 14 more Chinook heavy-lift helicopters.

F-35B Lightnings from 617 Squadron at Marham embarked on HMS Queen Elizabeth early in May as part of the Carrier Strike Group deployment to the Far East which will last six months. In its maiden

Sentinels were retired in February 2021 after flying 32,300 hours, on approximately 4,870 sorties. © MOD/Crown 2019



The first of eight F-35B Lightning IIs from 617 Squadron landing on HMS Queen Elizabeth in May, ahead of Exercise Strike Warrior. © MOD/Crown 2021



A Hawk T1 going vertical over RAF Valley. The aircraft will be gradually replaced by T2s. © MOD/Crown 2011



deployment, the aircraft carrier and the supporting ships will travel over 26,000 nautical miles from the Mediterranean to the Red Sea, from the Gulf of Aden to the Arabian Sea, and from the Indian Ocean to the Philippine Sea.

An RC-135W Rivet Joint aircraft from 51 Squadron at Waddington has taken part in a major US-led demonstration exercise in Europe with other European NATO Allies. The Rivet Joint aircraft joined other aircraft from the US Air Force, US Navy, and The Royal Netherlands Air Force to conduct two exercise scenarios. The US-led exercise was designed to test and demonstrate the ability of the US forces and their NATO allies, including the UK, to integrate the command-and-control procedures needed to work together.

General Jeff Harrigan, the United States Air Forces in Europe commander, said: "Conducting a complex and real-world focused Joint All-Domain Command and Control Demonstration allowed our joint and allied team to find areas where we can innovate with

systems we already have and also to identify areas where our warfighters need assistance from the Air and Space Forces' Chief Architect's Office."

The RAF and Qatar Emiri Air Force have expanded their Defence Partnership which includes a joint Typhoon squadron at Coningsby. The agreement will see a joint RAF & Qatar Emiri Air Force (QEAF) Hawk training squadron established at RAF Leeming in Yorkshire, and regular RAF Voyager deployments to Qatar to provide air-to-air refuelling opportunities for the QEAF.

The joint Hawk training squadron at RAF Leeming is expected to stand up in September this year. The squadron will deliver Advanced Jet Training to QEAF and RAF pilots and will be home to Qatar's recently acquired nine Hawk T2 Mk167 aircraft, which are currently being built by BAE Systems at Warton in Lancashire.

The formation of a second UK-Qatar joint squadron will provide additional flying hours



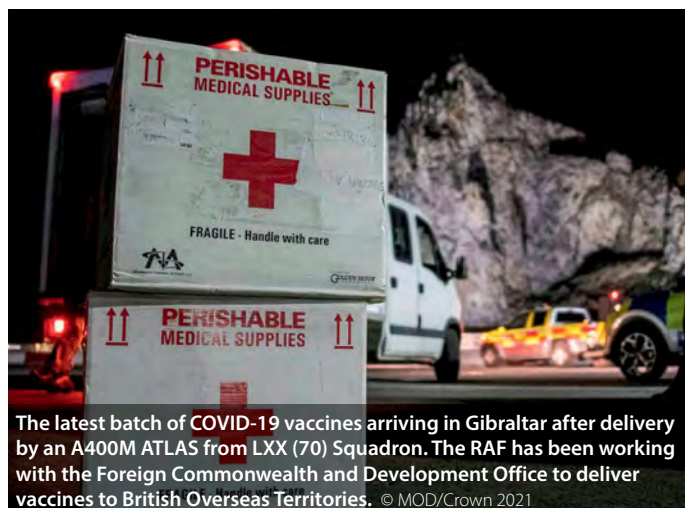
An Emiri Force pilot from Qatar in the cockpit of a Typhoon at RAF Coningsby. The partnership has been expanded to include Hawk training at RAF Leeming and Voyager refuelling. © MOD/Crown 2020

for RAF pilots and see long-term international investment in new infrastructure and training facilities at RAF Leeming. This will include a Hawk training simulator, and the refurbishment of existing facilities. The decision to base the new squadron at RAF Leeming represents a long-term commitment to the base, which provides a strategic and operational Main Operating Base for the RAF.

The RAF's transport fleet has been delivering the COVID-19 vaccine to Britain's overseas territories. A Voyager from Brize Norton delivered the first consignment of the Oxford AstraZeneca vaccine to RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus. A few days earlier, an A400 Atlas of LXX (70) Squadron flew the vaccine to Ascension Island. Due to its remote location and small population of just over 800 contractors and military personnel, it became the first island to be fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

Wing Commander Lee Roberts, Officer Commanding 70 Squadron, said: "The role of the RAF is multi-purpose. From the moment that the vaccines arrive at the front of RAF Brize Norton, the Brize Norton machine kicks into gear. The RAF is well placed to deliver and manage this vaccine delivery, and we're extremely proud to be a part of providing this support to our Overseas Territories."

An Atlas also delivered six cold cases of Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine to RAF Gibraltar, enough for nearly 6,000 life-saving jabs. Flown again from RAF Brize Norton on behalf of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, the vaccines were handed over to members of the Royal Gibraltar Regiment to rapidly transport them to St Bernard's Hospital. A total of 5,850 doses of the vaccine were kept in the minus 70 degree centigrade in temperature-controlled packaging with 10kg worth of dry ice on board the A400M. AM



The latest batch of COVID-19 vaccines arriving in Gibraltar after delivery by an A400M ATLAS from LXX (70) Squadron. The RAF has been working with the Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office to deliver vaccines to British Overseas Territories. © MOD/Crown 2021

Lucky blighter

A trip to the 1954 British Grand Prix left an indelible mark on **Vic Norman**, and he went on to own some of the most coveted road and racing cars of all time. He also founded Rosso Racing, which restored and prepared competition Ferraris. But in the early 1980s his passion for aircraft took over and he became one of the UK's top aerobatic pilots. His new autobiographical book, *Norman Conquest* has just been published. We saw an early copy and spoke to Vic, an ambassador for the RAF Association, on the eve of its publication.



Fast cars, fast aircraft and motorbikes. Anything mechanical fascinates Vic Norman. © Andy Cubin.

"The thing I'm most proud of about the book is that I taught myself to type with two fingers," he says, laughing. Vic had set out to tell his story just for his children and grandchildren – but couldn't read his own handwriting. 85,000 two-digit-typed words later he had a document of his highly unusual life. Now it's a 200-page book, packed with stories and photographs of 1960s London high life, rock and roll friends, and a highly technical love of cars, motorbikes and aeroplanes.

Don't skip a line or you might miss the bit about the pair of lion cubs that a friend had been given by a maharaja, or the impromptu endurance competition in the south of France where 10-year old Vic outlasted Stirling Moss and Donald Campbell on a 30 mile water skiing trip.

Vic says: "Every family, I think, is slightly dysfunctional. And my family definitely was. I was totally spoiled really. I had a nanny looking after me and was driven

to school in a Bentley by the chauffeur. My dad was very much 'not there'. He was a workaholic; he was definitely a playboy. He wasn't a great dad, but he gave me enthusiasm for all the things that he was very enthusiastic about and that happened to be virtually everything mechanical. And I adored him.

"I remember him coming home on one occasion; on a Vincent motorcycle. It must have been about 1952, and I would have been about five. The next morning he said: 'Do you want to come with me?' And he just lifted me up – I mean, frightfully dangerous – and put me on the front of the seat. He said: 'Hold on there. His workplace was about four miles away from where we lived and I still remember I had no crash helmet on. I just remember the sound and the thrill of being on that motorbike."

Vic spent much of his youth taking the lawnmower to pieces and working out how to get it going again. A go-kart started his love of racing. In the book,

the fascinating tales of his East London family history and businesses and of his schooldays blend into sporty teenage years and move on to early Rolling Stones concerts – where he met Anne, the love of his life and his wife of the last 50 years. He left school to be with her, studied at Chelsea College of Aeronautical Engineering because it was near her, and then started a paid job in an engineering factory. Then, when a friend asked him to be a team member at Le Mans, he began a professional passion for cars and racing.

"I'm very much a believer that things just come along in your life and you come to a crossroad, and you go left or right or straight on. It's up to you what you do. And I personally think for 90 per cent of life it is luck whether you have a good life or a bad life.

"I eventually had a Ferrari restoration business and became the local dealer for Ferrari cars in the 1970s. But by then you couldn't sell a Ferrari; it was when the petrol crisis was going on."

Then one Sunday Vic and Anne were flown in a historic aircraft, a Stampe, "and I just fell in love with it. Totally. And then by chance – literally within a week of having that flight – I met Richard Goode, who had one of these biplanes and wanted to sell it. So I said there and then: 'OK, I'll buy it.' It was as cheap as buying a second-hand Ford car. But then I had to learn to fly."

Vic had held a private pilot's licence since he was 17, "but I didn't want to be an airline pilot and they would never have accepted me in the RAF, without a shadow of a doubt. Richard Goode said: 'Fly the biplane and come to the airshows and I can display it for and you know, you'll probably get paid £250.' I thought: 'Wow! I've never been paid to go motor racing, this sounds fantastic.' And that's how it started.

"After a year I thought: 'I've got to learn to fly this so I can display it myself. So then I spent a lot of time practicing and practicing and practicing. And then I really got hooked. It took me six months



Just one of many wingwalking displays that make up the average season for AeroSuperBatics. © Darren Harbar.



Vic in a Cooper-Bristol with his first Zlin-50, photographed at Kemble Airfield © Mitsubishi promotional shot

to stop being sick, but I was desperate to do it and had lost interest in the car stuff. And I thought if I don't do something, I'm going to go completely broke. I've got to make this work! Mitsubishi became the sponsor of my Zlin 50 single seater in 1982 and I kept them on board for eight years - and that's how I made my living.

"I'm not a collector; I'm a user. Because I don't want anything that I can't use. So the passion for me is not owning it, it's being able to jump in and start it up and do something. And I never have any money. If I've got any money I buy something that's mechanical, so I never have any savings."

Vic built up his aerobatics business and has logged 1,500 displays around the world. Then on a trip to America in 1986 he saw a wingwalking display. "And I realised that the high performance aircraft were getting more and more high performance; with very high-G manoeuvres of plus nine-G, minus seven-G. And I thought wingwalking would be more fun. With my monoplane I was going everywhere on my own. What I'd really like would be if I could get a team of two aircraft and do wingwalking displays."

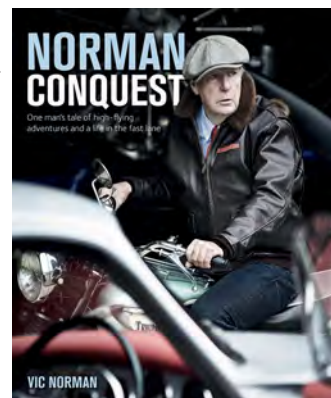
The road to getting a Stearman aircraft and a wingwalking rig that was approved for use in the UK was long and hard. It took Vic across America, via the late Art Scholl, who did all the filming for the Top Gun film aerobatic sequences. Getting the wingwalkers was the easy bit. "We used to get two or three

letters every week from people saying they wanted to be in the team. Any who said they're not scared were straight in the bin, because we're scared stiff of hurting ourselves and each other and we wanted people who were scared too." He ended up with a team of five aircraft and five wing walkers who toured the world in the only professional wingwalking display team in existence – AeroSuperBatics.

While still running the wingwalking, Vic found, bought (with the help of friends including Nick Mason, drummer for Pink Floyd) and brought back to life a WWI airfield at Rendcomb in Gloucestershire – right down to researching the type of grass seed mix used in the 1910s. "I do love that period of aviation because those early flyers before the First World War, they are like superheroes to me. You had people like Charles Rolls, and the guy that bought Hendon aerodrome, Claude Grahame-White. They used to get huge crowds watching flying. And when the Wright brothers first came to France, to Lamar, all the royalty from every country in the world went to see them - and they were superheroes."

The chapters on typical display days for the AeroSuperBatics team and what Vic has learned are as thrilling as the tales of world records, getting lost in cloud without instruments over France, and flipping a new aircraft on the way to Silverstone for a vintage car race. Liberal sprinklings of how he ended up being involved

with RAF personnel and teams, superstar rock bands and some of the best civilian aviators in the world really add spice. As you'd expect from an engineer, pilot and display aviation examiner for the Civil Aviation Authority, there are scrupulous records; which means even the book's appendices are fascinating – listing the aircraft, countries, world records and everyone who has ever worked for AeroSuperBatics. There are also amazing amounts of wonderful photographs – of people, but



mostly of magnificent machines.

The last words are Vic's from the book, describing going to an airshow in an open cockpit aircraft: "Some of those early morning sunrise flights can be magical, with a wonderful feeling of freedom that you get from being up in the sky and rushing along at 500 feet above the ground.. what a lucky blighter." *AM*

Competition – Wingwalking Experience

Win an AeroSuperBatics wingwalking experience.

Email airmail@rafa.org.uk. Put 'Wingwalking Competition' into the subject line. Answer the following question in the main part of the email:

What is the name of the WWI airfield where Vic Norman and the AeroSuperBatics team now operate?

One entry per person. Entries must arrive by 10am on Tuesday 31 August 2021. Competition terms and ALSO wingwalking terms and conditions apply. Find terms and conditions at bit.ly/WingWalkTerms. Anyone who does not have email but wishes to enter can call 0800 018 2361. Postal entries cannot be accepted.



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Over South Vietnam



Tom Hopkins explores one Chinook's journey from the USA to the RAF Museum - via the bullet-filled skies of Vietnam.

Development of what would eventually become the Chinook was begun by the Americans in the 1950s. In US service the Chinook first saw combat in Vietnam, where it served alongside the much more numerous Bell UH-1 'Huey' helicopter. Chinooks were able to transport heavy equipment, including vehicles and artillery, into otherwise inaccessible locations

such as mountaintops or wetlands. They were also able to recover other helicopters that had crashed or been lost to enemy action.

The US enjoyed air superiority during the Vietnam War, which was the first conflict to see widespread use of helicopters. However, the Americans and their allies were ultimately unable to prevail over the tenacious guerrilla forces opposing them.

Despite its current RAF livery, the Chinook at the RAF Museum is actually a veteran of the US Army. Built in February 1965 with the serial number 64-13115, it was sent to South Vietnam in October 1966 to serve with the American 228 Aviation Battalion (Assault Helicopter) until January 1968. By April it had returned to the US for maintenance, but was back in Vietnam in October as part of the 180th Aviation Company.

On 29 June 1969, during a logistics support mission over

South Vietnam, its main rotor system was hit by small arms fire. The Chinook was able to continue its mission and was repaired in theatre. A few months later, on 17 October, it again suffered combat damage; hit twice in the aft fuselage by small arms fire while descending to lift troops. Again however, the robust nature of the aircraft allowed it to continue with its mission and be repaired in theatre. Chinook 64-13115 left Vietnam for good in March 1971.

For the next almost 30 years it remained with the US Army, being rebuilt as a CH-47D along the way. By 22 June 1998 it had accumulated a total of 4,172.7 flying hours.

After being retired from US service the airframe was stripped and cut-up. In January 2007 the forward fuselage was flown on a USAF C-17 Globemaster from the US to RAF Mildenhall. From there it was transported to the RAF Museum London by road.

Replacements for numerous missing parts, such as forward pylon, rotor head and rotor blades were provided by the RAF, while other parts were fabricated in the museum workshops at Hendon. The pylon fairings were taken from a wreck, and crew seats fabricated at RAF Odiham's station workshop.

Finally restored and on display at the RAF Museum London, the fuselage is painted with the colour scheme and 'Bravo November' code to represent the RAF's famous, and still serving, Chinook ZA718; the only survivor of the sinking of the *Atlantic Conveyor* during the Falklands conflict in 1982. [AM](#)

Left: The restored Chinook on display at RAF Museum London.

© RAF Museum.

Below: United States Army CH-47 Chinooks in support of ground troops in South Vietnam, 1967.

© RBM Vintage Images / Alamy Stock Photo.



Encoded quotes

from the RAF Association Puzzle Book

Here's another brain teaser from the popular RAF Association Puzzle Book - and it's a little different from the previous number-based puzzles.

The RAF Association Puzzle Book's five chapters cover cognitive challenges, survival skills, visual abilities, memory tests and knowledge training, and are perfect for keeping your mind active.

If one page ends up not being enough and you can't wait for your next issue of Air Mail, then you can buy a copy of the whole 256-page book from bit.ly/RAFApuzzle or by calling 0800 018 2361.

Briefing

Encoded quotes: Decode these sentences to reveal six quotes about aviation, by shifting each letter backward by a fixed number of positions in the alphabet, wrapping around from A to Z. For example, the text CXKCVG, shifted back by two, would become AVIATE. Each quote uses a different shift, of one to six places.

Encoded speakers: Once you have decoded the quotes, you must match each one to the name of the person to whom it is attributed. The six encrypted names are given below, and the size of shift used to encrypt each name is the same as that used to encrypt their quotation opposite.



Solutions to the puzzle are on page 65.

Encoded quotes

Mission 1: Decode the letter-shifted quotes

Ezmexmsr mw tvssj xlex, kmzir xli ampp, ai lezi xli getegmxc
xs eglmizi xli mqtswwmfpi.

Fanfynts nx ymj gwfsbm tk jslnsjjwnsl ymfy nx qjfy
ktwlnansl tk rnxyfpjx.

Uif bfpqmbob ibt vovfjmfe gps vt uif usvf gbdf pg uif fbsui.

Vjg ckt ku vjg qpna nceg htgg htqo rtglwfkegu.

Voruz yzqk tu yvkiogr pue ot cgrqotm. Voruz roqk lreotm.

Wkhu'h v qr vxfk wklqj dv d qdwxudo-eruq slorw.

Encoded speakers

Mission 1: Decode and match the speakers

Tkor Gxsysxutm

Ihmi Vmgoirfegoiv

Dguukg Eqngocp

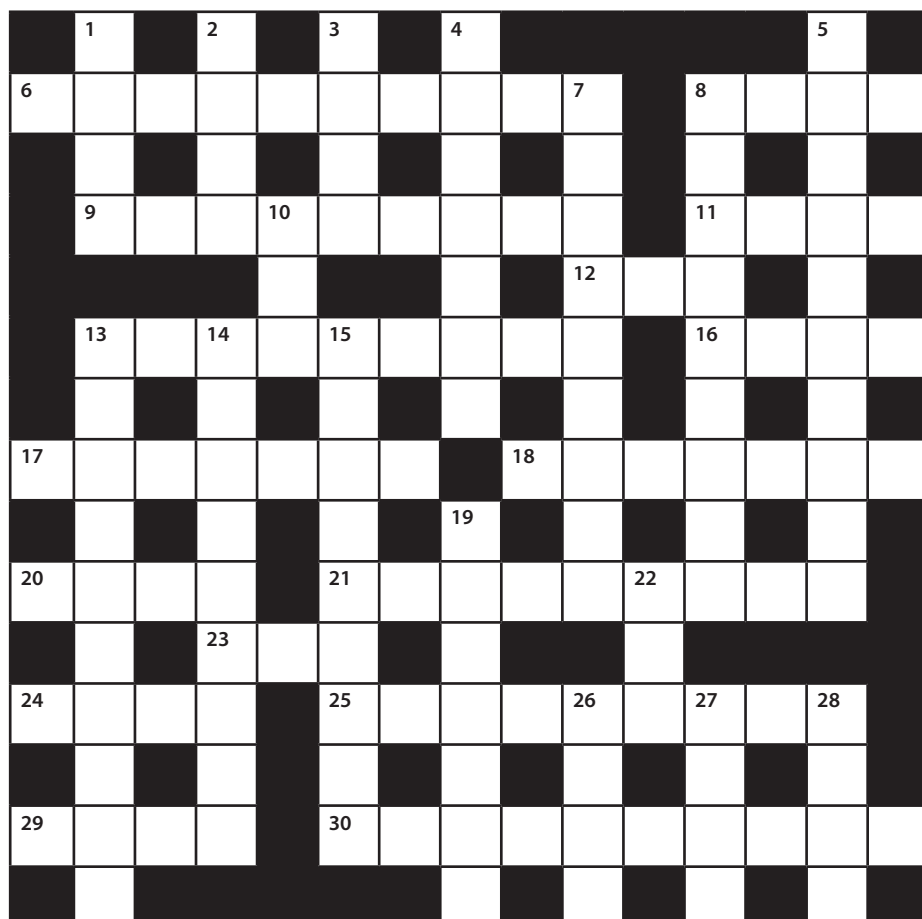
Kwjrrfs Idxts

Fkxfn Bhdjhu

Boupjof ef Tbjou-Fyvqfsz

About the author: Described as "The king of puzzles" Dr Gareth Moore has produced more than 100 puzzle and brain-training books for children and adults, including *The Mindfulness Puzzle Book*, *The Mammoth Book of New Sudoku* and *The Ordnance Survey Puzzle Book*. He is also the creator of the daily brain-training website *BrainedUp.com*, and runs popular puzzle site *PuzzleMix.com*. Find him online at DrGarethMoore.com.

by Enigma



- 6 Home of RAF Association HQ (5,5)
- 8 Hard, durable wood (4)
- 9 Location of 6ac (9)
- 11 Express pain when Tory falls off the sofa (4)
- 12 Eat or drink it (3)
- 13 Use money (3,2,4)
- 16 Rene's tree houses a den (4)
- 17 Devour exhaust (7)
- 19 Main decade of The Beatles (7)
- 20 Tennis ace sounds like he might yield (4)
- 21 Devoted to a higher, unseen god (9)
- 23 French king (3)
- 24 Happy with good boy (4)
- 25 All around England, Scotland and Wales (9)
- 29 Some extra yoghurt on the platter (4)
- 30 Not right-kicked (4-6)

- 1 Harrier's ability to modify lots (1,1,1,1)
- 2 Levy I paid for a cab (4)
- 3 Where the old lady lived (4)
- 4 Lonnie's song 'My old man's a ?' (7)
- 5 Four-engined WWII bombers (10)
- 7 Someone living on our planet (9)
- 8 4 (3,3,3)
- 10 22nd letter of Greek alphabet (3)
- 13 Shafts with spiral blades (10)
- 14 Song sung by 18 group, but not today (9)
- 15 Expressed in numbers (9)
- 19 He twice finds a plant (7)
- 22 Perhaps 15,050 are not well (3)
- 26 It alters with very loud quarrel (4)
- 27 Fe (4)
- 28 We're changing pitcher (4)

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2021 AIR MAIL | 61

"In friendship and in service one to another, we are pledged to keep alive the memory of those of all nations who died in the Royal Air Force and in the Air Forces of the Commonwealth. In their name we give ourselves to this noble cause. Proudly and thankfully we will remember them."



AD ASTRA

We record with sadness the passing of the following members of the RAF Association.

Mr J Ackerman
Mr A Andow
Mr V Archer
Mr C Ashford
Mr D Ashmore
Mr R Atkinson
Air Vice-Marshal D Attlee
CB DL LVO
Air Marshal Sir R Austen-Smith
CB CVO DFC KBE
Mr D Balfour
Mr J W Barber
Mr A Bates
Mr B Baxter
Wing Commander W J
Bendyshe-Brown
Mr G S Bennett
Mr A J Bentham
Mr A Bilham
Mr C Bonham
Mr R Boocock
Mr J Bowman
Mr C Brereton
Mr R Brown
Mr K Burton
Mrs G Camus MBE
Mr J J Carpenter
Mr R Christian
Mr S Christian
Mr R Conner
Mr J Cook
Mr A Cooke
Mr P Cottam
Mr W Court
Mr R A Cutting
Mr F Davies
Mr P Davis
Mrs A Dick

Mrs O Downes

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 Melton Mowbray
 Headquarters
 Headquarters
 Oldham
 Biggin Hill RMG

 Burnham-on-Sea

 Sheringham and District
 East Fife RMG
 Nottingham
 Haverfordwest
 Rushden

 High Wycombe
 Barry
 Leigh
 Hythe and Romney Marsh
 Northampton and District
 York
 Hythe and Romney Marsh
 Headquarters
 Barnsley
 Rutland
 Ile-de-France
 Headquarters
 Romsey
 Wrekin and Wellington
 Formby
 Coningsby and District
 Headquarters
 Headquarters
 Abbots and Kings Langley
 Bury St Edmunds
 Coventry
 Knighton and District
 Sturminster, Newton and
 Gillingham
 Birstall (Leicester)

Mr V Dredge
Mr K Duddell
Mr W Eames
Mr D Edgar
Mr C Eighteen
Mr J English
Mr M English
Mr J W Eyre
Mr A Falzon
Mr H Fane
Mr M Fawbert
Mr M Firth
Mr C Fling
Mr T Freeman
Mr T Furness
Doctor R P Gadd MBE
Mr A Galan
Mr T George
Mr R Gilliam
Mr E Gissing
Mr J Goulding
Miss W Graham
Mr C Gullen
Mr R Gunn
Mr J Heatherley
Mr G Helm
Mr E B Hickman
Mrs D Higgins
Mr P Hiles
Mr P H M Hirst
Mrs S Hogg
Mr A Holt
Mrs P Holtom
Mr G Howden
Squadron Leader J Jarmy
Mr D Jones
Mr A F Jones
Mr K Jones
Mr D Jones
Mr M R R Kay

1066
 Wrekin and Wellington
 County Fermanagh
 Weston-super-Mare
 Wokingham and Woodley
 Brighton and Hove
 Kings Lynn and District
 Alnwick
 Malta GC
 Kenley and Caterham
 Formby
 Chelmsford
 Mid-Somerset
 Headquarters
 Plymouth
 City of Bristol
 Malta GC
 Torquay
 Dunksell (AC) and Honiton RMG
 Coningsby and District
 Headquarters
 York
 Headquarters
 Christchurch
 Birstall (Leicester)
 Preston
 Neath
 Melton Mowbray
 Cheltenham
 Headquarters
 WRAF
 Burnham-on-Sea
 Aphrodite
 Ryedale
 Carlisle and District
 Ellesmere RMG
 Headquarters
 Llandaff and Ely
 Neath
 Bedford

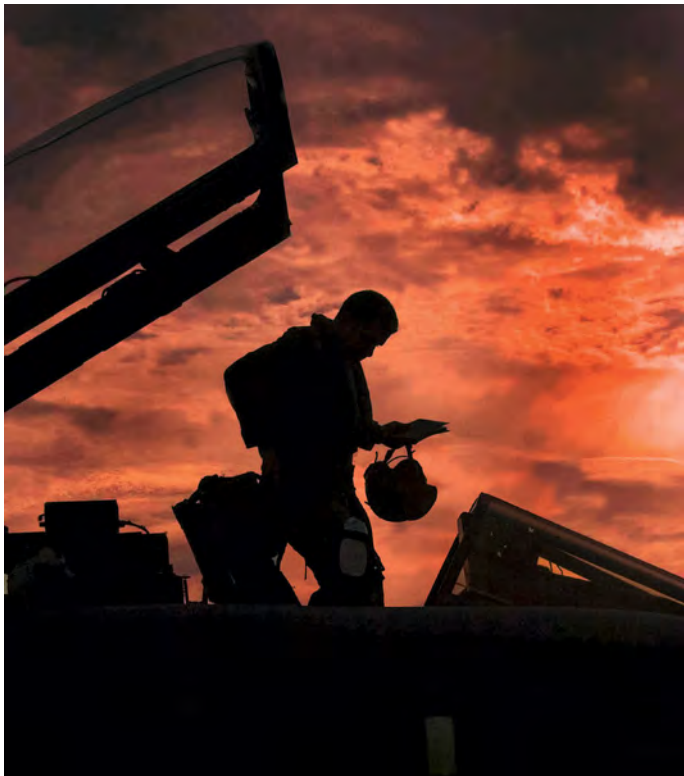
Mr D B Kennedy	Stockton and Thornaby
Mr D Kinninmonth	Headquarters
Mr D Kirby	Hull
Mr C Lavender	Grimsby, Cleethorpes and District
Sir A Lawrence	Headquarters
Mr E Lawton	Headquarters
Mr H Ledger	Oldham
Mr J Lee	Whitstable and Tankerton
Mr B Leisk	Worthing
Mr J Lock	Bromsgrove and Redditch
Mrs J R MacDonald	Nairn RMG
Mr G Mackay	Grimsby, Cleethorpes and District
Mr F MacQuire	Northampton and District
Mr D Maguire	Sudbury
Squadron Leader R Mahendran	Harrow District
Mr C Mallia	Malta GC
Mr D Martin	Headquarters
Mr C Matthews	Swindon and District
Mr D May	Christchurch
Mr R C McNally	Birkenhead
Mr E Meddings	Headquarters
Mr A Meggs	Global
Mr I Mohammed	Coventry
Mr J Moren	Dudley
Mr D R Morgan	Swansea
Mr D Moss	Dunstable
Mr D Moyes	East Fife RMG
Mr E Murphy	Bexleyheath and District
Mrs J Norman	1066
Mrs J Paice	Bognor Regis
Mr T Payne	Aylesbury and Halton
Mr B Plowright	Rotherham and District
Mr P Price	Weymouth and Portland
Mr D Pritchard	Headquarters
Mr J Pulman	1066
Squadron Leader G Quick	Letchworth and Hitchin
Mr R Radford	Huddersfield
Mr H Reid	Edinburgh, Lothians and Borders

We specially remember those members who had reached or passed their **100th birthday**

100

Mr W Bird	City of Bristol
Mr A Hornby	Headquarters
Mr R Leatham	Cranbrook and Hawk RMG
Mrs W M Lloyd	Solihull and District
Mr G Staggs	Wolverhampton and District
Mrs D Stupples	Yeadon

Mr I H J Richards DFM MID	Worthing
Mrs B Rogers	Aldeburgh and District RMG
Reverend C Rolfe	Salisbury RMG
Mr P Ruffles	Headquarters
Mr D Salmon	St Davids and Solva
Mr G Sanger	Alresford and District
Mr T Schofield	Ryedale
Mr R Sheppard	Penrith
Mr T Smalley	Worthing
Mr D Smith	Coventry
Mr B Smith	Falmouth
Mr A Smith	Northwich
Mr J Stevens	Harrow District
Mr W Stigle	Maidstone
Mr R Stokes	Whitley Bay
Mr L Stonelake	Towyn and Aberdovey
Mr P Sutherland	Stockton and Thornaby
Mr A E Taylor	Headquarters
Mr W Taylor	Lisburn
Mr J Taylor	Oldham
Mr P Thackeray	North Cotswolds
Mr W Thomas DFC	Coventry
Mr A Thompson	Roe Valley
Mr A F Thomson	City of Bristol
Mr L Tierque	Swiss
Ms E van Gilst	Amsterdam
Mr J Vaughan	Eastbourne
Mr F Ward	Bedale and RAF Leeming
Mr B R Watts	Frome
Mr R Watts	South Fylde
Mrs H Welsford	Plymouth
Mrs M Westley	Headquarters
Mr A Wheeler	Bedford
Mr R S White	Lisburn
Mr D Widdick MBE	Witham and Rivenhall
Mr K A Wiggins	Tamworth
Mr B Wilkins	Dudley
Mr J Williams	Anglesey
Mr G J Williams	Headquarters
Mr F Williams	Bognor Regis
Mr C Wilson MBE	Leek
Mr I Witter	Birkenhead
Mr B Wood	Bognor Regis
Mr A S Woolf	Headquarters
Mrs J Wotherspoon	Castleford
Mr D Wright	Hartlepool
Squadron Leader J Yates	Huntingdon and District
Mr C Young	Birmingham Moseley



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To notify the RAF Association of the death of an RAF Association member, please contact their **branch**, email membership@rafa.org.uk or telephone our contact team on **0800 018 2361**. The Air Mail office regrets that we cannot directly accept notifications of a member's passing.

Notices

© Mike Edwards



OLD COLLEAGUES

Mike Edwards is looking for **Dave Evans** (above photo, back row, far right) and **Paul Lewis** (back row, third from right). The picture is of Mechanic Air Field 21, taken in 1982 at No1 Radio School RAF Locking. The two men named are sought for the next reunion. Please contact Mike Edwards at mike.a.edwards@live.co.uk with any information.

Does anyone remember me, **Roy Sims**, from my three years in the RAF from January 1957 until demob in 1960? I did my square-bashing at RAF Bridgenorth: A Squadron 3 Flight. From here I was posted to RAF Patrington near Hull as an MT mechanic driver. From here I was sent to RAAF Edinburgh Field in South Australia just north of Adelaide, serving in the RAF section as a mechanic driver. My best mate while in Australia was an MT driver named **Tom Donnelly**. If anyone remembers, please contact me at roy.sims@btinternet.com or on 01747 863 328.

Royston Macaulay would like to contact SACW **Jeanne Wade**, who was a WAAF at RAF Finningley in 1965. Please call 01777 869 527 with any news.

Former medic **Peter Stenning** is looking for old comrades pictured in this photograph (right) of 107 Maintenance Unit, taken in 1953 at RAF Kasfareet in Egypt. In the photo are, back: Ginger Dunne; Maurice Kellner; Ron Nottingham; Taffy Leonard; John Plant; Tom Haynes; Stan 'Scouse' Moses; Taffy Evans. Seated: Terry O'Connor; Peter Stenning; Alan Rose; Peter Gardner; Smudge Naylor. Front: Bert Pye (?). If anyone recognises themselves in this photo, Peter, who is now 86, would love to hear from you via email at des_k52@hotmail.com.



© Peter Stenning

© Robin Copping



Are any of the chaps in the above photo still going strong? It shows armourers of the Canadair Sabre-equipped 71 (Eagle) Squadron at RAF Wildenrath, Germany, in 1954. In the photo I am the Corporal seated centre, looking at the camera, with Corporal Buckle seated on my left. Should anyone identify themselves and wish to get in touch, please call me, **Robin Copping**, on 01733 245 339.

Norma Bearblock (nee Germain, WRAF 1958-1963) would like to trace former WRAF officer **Eveline Cowden**, who was in her OCTU at RAF Hawkinge and whose last station post was RAF Leuchers. Please contact Norma at nl72@hotmail.com with any information.

REUNIONS

304 Craft Apprentice (RAF Cosford). This year's reunion will hopefully be at Redditch on the 8/9 September 2021. For details please contact Nigel Wright on nwright484@btinternet.com.

The **237 OCU** 9th annual reunion will take place on 4 September 2021 at The Compleat Angler, 120 Prince of Wales Road, Norwich NR1 1NS, from midday. All ex-members of 237 OCU welcome; any era, any trade, any branch. For further details, see our Facebook page '237 OCU' or email Si Roberts on 237OCU@gmail.com.

230 Sqn RAF Association Annual Reunion. Are you or did you serve on 230 'Tiger' Squadron? If so, why not join us on 23 to 25 September 2021 at a hotel near RAF Benson and meet up with old friends and new. We'll be celebrating Puma 50 as well and may visit 230 at Benson. Email Rod at 230assocreunionsec@gmail.com for details and availability.

RAF Boy Entrants Association. The final reunion of the RAFBEA will be held at Harper Adams University in Shropshire from 10 to 12 September 2021. This really is the last ever reunion, so contact Rod at rafbeareunion@gmail.com for details and availability.

Did you serve at RAF Seletar, Changi, Tengah, Butterworth, Penang, Labuan, Kuching or Tawau? The 50th anniversary of the closure the **RAF stations in the Far East** will be held at the NMA in Alrewas Staffordshire on 17 October 2021. For further details contact Mick Smith at fossesmith@gmail.com.

OTHER

Were you involved with the **B-29 Washingtons** at RAF Marham in the early 1950s? My interest is with **Radioplane Drones** launched from the **Whirligig at Stiffkey**. If you were there please contact John Lewis at a2asv@btinternet.com or on 01263 711 536.

RAF Changi Association welcomes new members to join its 700 current members. Email Malcolmflack@outlook.com or call 01494 728 562 for a free new member info pack.

Dr Trevor Stone is currently writing a book about the support of **2nd Tactical Air Force (TAF)** from D-Day to VE Day. Reminiscences would be welcome from anyone who served in 2 TAF during this time, either in the UK or overseas. Contact would also be welcome from relatives of veterans who are in possession of memoirs of those who served. Please email TrevorStone88@gmail.com with any information.

Submit your notices – free for all members

Notices is a free members only benefit to help you keep connected with people and places from your time in the RAF or the RAF Association, or to announce news of births, marriages, christenings, engagements, and more. For inclusion in the next issue, email your text to **notices@rafa.org.uk**, post it to the address on the inside front cover or call **0800 018 2361** by **6 August 2021**. Make sure to include an email address and/or telephone number within your message so readers can contact you. Please also include the words 'FOR PUBLICATION' on your notice.

SOLUTION: SUMMER 2021 CROSSWORD

Across:

- 6 Atlas House; 8 Teak; 9 Leicester; 11 Ouch; 12 Tea; 13 Pay in cash; 16 Nest; 17 Consume; 18 Sixties; 20 Cede; 21 Religious; 23 Ro; 24 Glad; 25 Coastline; 29 Tray; 30 Left-footed.

Down:

- 1 STOL; 2 Taxi; 3 Shoe; 4 Dustman; 5 Lancasters; 7 Earthling; 8 Two and two; 10 Chi; 13 Propellers; 14 Yesterday; 15 Numerical; 19 Alfalfa; 22 Ill; 26 Tiff; 27 Iron; 28 Ewer.

SOLUTION: BRAIN TEASER

Encoded speakers:

The names of the speakers are given in order from top to bottom, with the size of shift and their quote:

Neil Armstrong (Shift: 6 – Pilots take no...)
 Eddie Rickenbacker (Shift: 4 – Aviation is proof...)
 Bessie Coleman (Shift: 2 – The air is the only...)
 Freeman Dyson (Shift: 5 – Aviation is the branch...)
 Chuck Yeager (Shift: 3 – There's no such thing...)
 Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (Shift: 1 – The aeroplane has...)

Encoded quotes:

The decoded quotes are as follows, with the size of shift given:

Aviation is proof that, given the will, we have the capacity to achieve the impossible (Shift: 4)
 Aviation is the branch of engineering that is least forgiving of mistakes (Shift: 5)
 The aeroplane has unveiled for us the true face of the earth (Shift: 1)
 The air is the only place free from prejudices (Shift: 2)
 Pilots take no special joy in walking. Pilots like flying (Shift: 6)
 There's no such thing as a natural-born pilot (Shift: 3)



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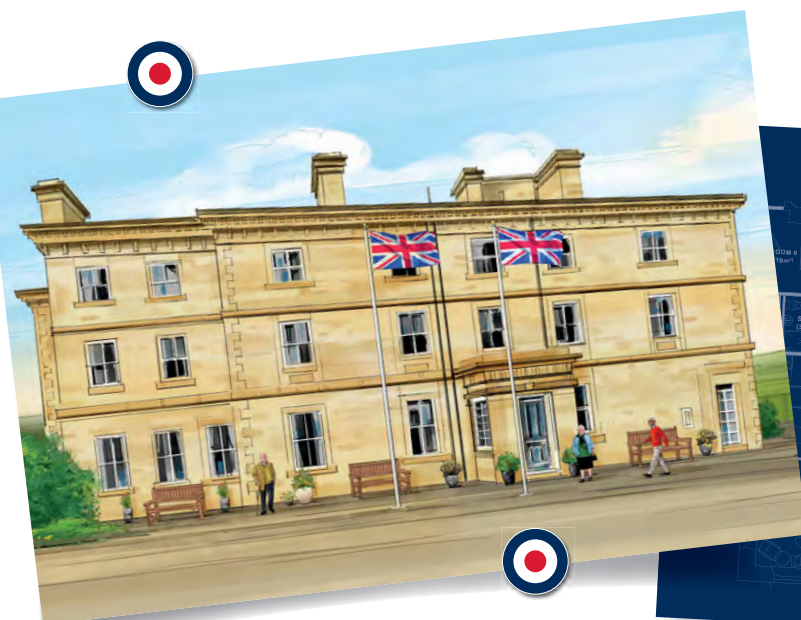
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